



Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945)

Die Sieben Himmelspaläste (The Seven Palaces of Heaven), 2002

Oil, emulsion, acrylic, lead objects, and steel traps on canvas

110 by 130 inches (279.4 x 330.2 cm)

Creative Space - 1 | First Floor Hallway



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Provenance: Gagosian Gallery, New York
Private collection, California

Exhibition: New York, Gagosian Gallery, *Anselm Kiefer: Merkaba*,
November 8 - December 14, 2002, pp. 72, 73, illustrated

Literature: Kuspit, Donald, "The Spirit of Gray," *ArtNet Magazine*,
December 19, 2002, illustrated.
Celant, Germano, *Anselm Kiefer*, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao,
2007, p. 382, illustrated.

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Rendered in Anselm Kiefer's famously colossal scale and somber tones, *Die Sieben Himmelspaläste*, 2002, captures the artist's unique sense of esoteric lyricism. Kiefer's distinctly poetic understanding of composition and visual rhythm is superbly displayed in the present painting's furrowed and tactile surface. The work comes from a series of eight large-scale paintings and two enormous sculptures inspired by Kabbalist literature dealing primarily with the afterlife. Drawing from the school of early Jewish mysticism, this

work traces the mysterious and revelatory ascent to heaven as explored in the ancient Merkaba and Hekhalot texts. The inscription *Sefer Hechaloth* is a term Kiefer frequently incorporated into works from this series, roughly translated as "Book of Palaces" in reference to a group of early Jewish texts predating Kaballah. *Die Sieben Himmelspaläste* is Kiefer's personal exegesis of the Hebrew prophet Ezekiel's journey by chariot to the gates of heaven and the seven palaces that mark the ascent to eternal paradise, offering a haunting, dreamlike reflection on humankind's perception of – and preoccupation with – life after death.

Fascinated by mysticism and the spiritual world, Kiefer considers humanity's unceasing attempts to rationalize mortal life through structured systems of order – ranging from religion to science. Having conceived of a world of endless fluidity, metamorphosis, and interconnectivity, Kiefer's vision breaks down concrete entities to reveal the beauty and power of disorder. He explains: "Artists are like shamans, who when they were meditating would sit in a tree in order to suspend themselves between heaven and earth. The palette can transform reality by suggesting new visions... [Y]ou could say that the visionary experience finds its way to the material world through the palette" (A. Kiefer in conversation with M. Auping, 'Heaven and Earth', Exh. Cat., Bilbao, Museo Guggenheim, *Anselm Kiefer*, 2007, p. 338).

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In *Die Sieben Himmelspaläste*, Kiefer unites heaven and earth in a dreamy, muted palette with pensive blue-greys and rust colored hues; the composition foregrounds an emotional response to the natural and spiritual worlds. Tarnished steel animal traps adorn the canvas, with rocks enclosed in their prison-like interiors, representing the seven palaces. Formidable and haunting in their severity, they further complicate notions of clarity between heaven and earth, good and evil. Numbered as if at random, their ostensibly illogical ordering further obfuscates humanity's attempts to rationalize life and death. Shifting between the sacred and the profane, the celestial and the ruinous, the beautiful and the barbaric, the present work exudes a sense of stillness and silence that intoxicates the viewer with heady melancholy.

Similar Anselm Kiefer works can be found in museums around the world, including *Die Sechste Posaune (The Sixth Trumpet)*, 1996, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and *Die Argonauten*, 1990, Städel Museum, Frankfurt.



Die Sechste Posaune (The Sixth Trumpet), 1996, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art



Die Argonauten, 1990, Städel Museum, Frankfurt