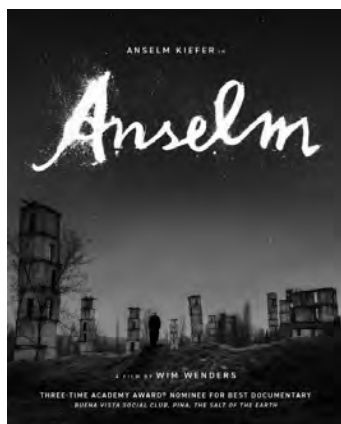


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Wim Wenders, *Anselm - Das Rauschen der Zeit*, Germany, 93' – 2023



In 1949, Theodor W. Adorno stated that after Auschwitz, no poetry, no art form, no creative statement was possible anymore. How can beauty be conceived after the fall of Hitler and the discovery of the massacres committed? In the tabula rasa in which the country lies after the war, in the land of great men of culture, but also the wretched home of Nazism, the fate of art becomes a central theme for German artists: this is the fate of the poet Paul Celan and the painter Anselm Kiefer.

Wim Wenders' documentary *Anselm* is dedicated to the civil commitment of Kiefer's work. The film was presented in 2023 at the Cannes Film Festival as a special screening, in the same edition in which Wenders also presented his fiction film *Perfect Days* in the main competition.

Anselm presents itself as a sensory journey to the places of Kiefer's artistic production and exhibitions, going all the way back to his childhood,

which took place in the ruins of World War II. The burden of time in the 20th century, the historical memory – individual and collective memory – are at the heart of Kiefer's work and Wenders' film.

Both Wenders and Kiefer were born in 1945, the year in which Celan wrote *Todesfuge*, the lyric that became the tragic symbol of the holocaust. Celan is remembered as the Jewish poet who escaped extermination and was haunted by grief to the point of committing suicide at the age of 50. Twenty-five years after him, the young Kiefer ideally continues Celan's work and investigates with the figurative arts the dimension of pain, anger and the memory of the crimes committed by the fathers. Kiefer's work aspires to the poetic elaboration of grief initiated by Celan, confronting itself with the different mediums/media of the figurative arts.

From the 1960s, Kiefer began a series of artistic actions that he would call *Besetzungen* (occupations): photo-paintings in which Kiefer himself provocatively portrays a Nazi in military uniform and with his arm raised, in places that have historical significance for him. This personal revision of the Hitler period is for Kiefer the entrance to the abyss of history, a plunge into the chasm of Nazi horror and the assumption of the burden of post-war silence.

The work is a denunciation of the collective removal of the darkest chapter of the 20th century for the Germans. However, the publication of the photographs sparked significant controversy among artists and critics, ultimately leading to the closure of *Interfunktionen*. The journal had been founded in 1968 by Friedrich Heubach and, by 1975, was under the direction of art critic and historian Benjamin Buchloh, who decided to terminate its publication precisely when issue no. 12 provoked a scandal. The polemical debate is reconstructed in: Christine Mehring, *Continental Schrift: The Story of Interfunktionen*, "Artforum", vol. 42, n. 9, 2004, p. 179.

In the 1980s, Kiefer approached the monumental dimension: the work began to go beyond the two dimensions, moved out of the walls and began to invade space.

The climax of his research is represented by monumental works on an architectural scale, which he develops in his huge studios in France. The

latter are structures that incorporate the landscape and in which architecture, canvases and statues, created by the artist in the company of a large group of craftsmen, live. The three-dimensional effect that can be experienced when walking through these atelier-parks is conveyed by Wenders with the most technologically advanced expedient known to cinema: 3D. The director returns to use a technique he had already experimented with in *Pina* (2011), which has been perfected thanks to technological advances, more than a decade later. The use of 3D is not just a matter of aesthetics, but a functional choice to immerse the viewer in the space and allow him to approach Kiefer's work in an intimate way, as if invited to touch his works, to feel the physical density and the architectural emptiness of some of his works. The images are never just visual, but tactile: there are shots that almost make one feel the weight of the materials Kiefer uses (lead, wood, ash), and others that emphasise the vastness of the spaces. The spectacular character of the crossing is strongest when the spectators approach the many towers made of concrete and lead. It is impossible not to think of Celan's verse "ein Grab in den Wolken" (a grave in the clouds), which composes the poem *Todesfuge*. The most famous installation featuring these towers is the one made in Italy in 2004, as a permanent site-specific installation at the Hangar Bicocca in Milan. This work, titled *The Seven Heavenly Palaces*, consists of towers that each weigh 90 tonnes and reach heights of up to 19 meters. Between the levels of these reinforced concrete towers, from floor to ceiling, are placed books and lead wedges that compress under the heavy load of the concrete. The work achieves several levels of symbolism. Firstly, lead holds significant alchemical value, as it is traditionally associated with melancholy. Secondly, the towers are the materialisation of the *Sefer Hechalot*, the *Book of Palaces/Sanctuaries*, dating back to the 5th-6th century AD. This text describes the symbolic journey of spiritual initiation for those seeking to draw closer to the presence of God. While the treatise aims to guide the Jewish people on their path to God, the towers themselves are in ruins, constructed of reinforced concrete that has been literally torn to shreds. These works represent a culmina-

tion of the artist's entire *oeuvre*, synthesizing his main themes in a new dimension outside of time. They explore the interpretation of ancient Jewish religion, depict the ruins of the West after the Second World War, and project visions into a possible future. The film allows for the coexistence of different time periods: the events following World War II, the collective consciousness that emerged in the second half of the 20th century, and the material and intangible legacy that persists into the new millennium. The protagonist's embodiment is also threefold: he exists as a man in the present, as an artist who conveys the suffering of his people, and as a child navigating through the devastation in a country that is being rebuilt. The film acts as a reflective interplay between Kiefer and Wenders, both witnesses to Germany's past and interpreters of its present.