

VOL 5 ISSUE 6, JULY/AUGUST 2011 FREE

KILLER TEXT ON ART

# artillery

OUR 5th ANNUAL LA ISSUE

# OUT OF BOUNDS

ANNE MARTENS on  
Young Projects

CHRISTOPHER MICHNO on  
Inland Empire

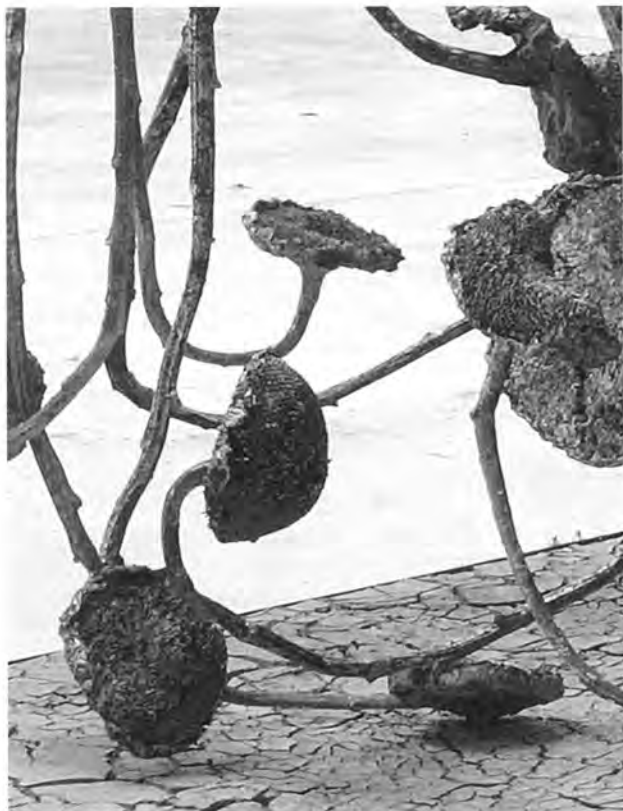
SCARLET CHENG on  
Christian Marclay

EZRHA JEAN BLACK on  
Michael Arata



+ GUEST LECTURE MARK BRADFORD





Anselm Kiefer, *La berceuse (for Van Gogh)*, 2010, detail

## AMSTERDAM

### ANSELM KIEFER

Rijksmuseum

LEAVE IT TO GERMAN ARTIST Anselm Kiefer to create a new work supposedly inspired by Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642), but instead deliver *La Berceuse (for Van Gogh)* (2010). Kiefer's monumental sculptural triptych, the same scale as Rembrandt's painting and placed within three massive glass and steel vitrines, uses resin casts of gangly sunflowers hanging upside down on either side of a rickety wood and metal chair that looks like it could have been exhumed from Van Gogh's time. Unlike Kiefer's prodigious solo presentation at Gagosian Gallery's massive 24th Street space in New York in 2010, this new work, installed directly opposite Rembrandt's masterpiece, doesn't overwhelm the viewer, but instead creates a meaningful dialog with Van Gogh, whose art is also in the Rijksmuseum collection.

In the current configuration of the galleries at the Rijksmuseum, which is under renovation, one must walk through many rooms of magnificent paintings from the Dutch Golden Age, coming face to face with masterworks by Vermeer, Hals and others, before crossing an elevated glass covered walkway that leads to the gallery where *The Night Watch* and *La berceuse (for Van Gogh)* are both located. Whether or not Kiefer had this planned or not, the glass walkway itself can be seen as a complementary architectural feature to Kiefer's new glass-enclosed creation.

If *La Berceuse (for Van Gogh)* is a direct response to *The Night Watch*, the only obvious correlation is that it mirrors the size. The lances held by the men of the militia company in *The*



*La Berceuse (for Van Gogh)*, detail, 2010

*Night Watch* also have some visual parallel with the lanky sunflower stems of Kiefer's sculpture, and the coloration of Rembrandt's most famous commission is somewhat in tune with Kiefer's tribute to Van Gogh as well. Although predominantly gray, the bottom portion of *La Berceuse (for Van Gogh)*, which resembles cracked mud, has a subtle gradation blending from white to red that parallels hues in *The Night Watch*.

Beyond its physical appearance, however, Kiefer's new work relates to the importance of the Rijksmuseum itself, since after Van Gogh visited it in 1885 he realized he had to beef up his drawing skill to be considered a great artist, with Rembrandt making a heavy impact on him.

In addition, Kiefer's work has some connection to the 17th century Dutch engraved and carved cabinets in the museum's collection that exhibit floral motifs, as well as Rembrandt's *Still Life with Peacocks* (1639). The latter work shows a girl calmly watching a recently slaughtered bird hanging upside down, while the blood flows from another resting on a table, and could be compared to Kiefer's casts of upside down sunflowers, whose death and decay is shown clearly by their ashen color.

Kiefer, who has been inspired by historical and spiritual themes throughout his career, seems to be channeling Van Gogh like a psychic medium, giving him one last view of his fellow countryman's masterpiece. So, while a straightforward relationship with Rembrandt's tour de force is tenuous, Kiefer should be lauded for making a visually stunning work that goes beyond merely influence into a poetic, site-specific tribute that bridges art history to the present day.

—Chris Bors