

RIDGEFIELD, CONNECTICUT

Anselm Kiefer

Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum

Anselm Kiefer's *Velimir Chlebnikov* creates, for the viewer, authenticity, passion, and new ways of experiencing life and art. Entering through double doors into a tall, narrow, concrete and corrugated metal shed with a central skylight (all designed by the artist), the viewer sees a floor-to-ceiling grid of 30 weathered seascapes with ships, markers, radar, barbed wire, fierce waves, phrases, calculations, and sunflowers jutting out from gritty undulating surfaces. The palette is intense, mostly black, umber, and white. Within this shed, two opposing walls of water are formed from layers of paint and weathered found materials. These seascapes are not the silent masterstrokes of Turner but waves that contain straw, sand, lead, and rust, that have danced with real lightning and thunder, waves with thick impastos and embedded histories.

Sandwiched between the facing walls, the viewer experiences the individual mystery of each work. A brown workman's glove high in one panel seems to represent the common man, elevated, showing the god-like role of the human will. A white glove appears in the opposite field of paintings. The two grids have a subtle pyramidal substructure, with climactic symbols at their apexes—a spray of white-painted sunflowers and sprays of barbed wire, which place us in the midst of a pitched battle between life and death.

Harry Philbrick's catalogue essay pulls together a complex narrative web. He collapses the time frames and geographies of New England expressionist sea painter Albert Pinkham Ryder, who died during World War I, and Kiefer, born in Germany at the end of World War II. Philbrick talks about correspondences in their workmanship, style,



Top and above: Anselm Kiefer, *Velimir Chlebnikov*, 2005. Oil, emulsion, and acrylic on canvas, concrete, and corrugated metal, exterior and interior views.

and passion for the sea. Ryder once sailed on the *Aphrodite*, a steam yacht built in Maine in 1899 and leased to the Navy for service in World War I. This ship sailed within 10 nautical miles of a famous German battleship, the *SMS König*, which was one of 51 ships weighing 400,000 tons lost on June 21, 1919 in Scapa Flow, "the largest single loss of ships ever." Kiefer's suite of work centers on ships lost in roiling seas, rusted, sinking. Some are submarines. This is an excavation into history, as well as a commentary on the present—an exploration of hubris, loss, and the human condition.

The title *Velimir Chlebnikov* refers to this loss. Chlebnikov, a Russian

Futurist poet (1885–1922), determined that climactic naval battles take place every 317 years. In his paintings, Kiefer includes some of the poet's calculations and delicate string navigational charts that look like tethered umbilical cords moored with tiny nails.

Signs of Eros, the ship *Aphrodite*, the word "Aurora," and a ship named for lovers *Hero and Leander*, as well as the sunflowers, provide signs of love, hope, and fecundity in the midst of war. Seeing this work renewed my faith that contemporary art can take its place alongside the old masters without seeming less significant.

—Jan Garden Castro

SARASOTA, FLORIDA

John Sims

Mack b Gallery, Crossley Gallery, Greene Contemporary Gallery

John Sims's conceptual work in "Projects: The Sarasota Exhibition" included several gallery shows and artist talks, panels, and discussions. At the Mack b Gallery, "Square Root of Tree/Pi: Notes of a Math Artist" explored Sims's fascination with mathematics through the use of digital prints. He relates the subject of these prints to the dynamics of racial politics and numbered theoretical mixing. In *Pi sans Salt and Pepper* and *Civil Pi Movement*, the titles help the viewer connect with Sims's mathematical concerns;