*Halston Brash*

*Professor Vincent Baldassano*

*Art History 101*

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*The work of art I chose to write about is called Die Ungeborenen (The Unborn) and was created by the German artist Anselm Kiefer. It was made in 2001 with oil, acrylic, and plaster on lead on canvas. It hangs in the Yale Art Gallery and its accession number is 2004.80.1*

*The first thing that caught my eye about this piece was its scale. The largeness struck me and I was drawn to it. This work consists of two panels, so it is a diptych, and takes up a good portion of the wall. I feel like that was intentional and done by the artist on purpose, because of the controversy of his piece. It is very “in your face.” I would characterize this piece as having unflinching willingness to confront a culture's dark past, which is why it was done on a large, confrontational scale well suited to its subject.*

*Something that I began to ponder was what compelled the artist to make this piece? The piece is very gray, almost lonely looking and forlorn. It is painted with different scales of gray and is speckled with dots of black and white. The piece is very macabre, tragic, twisted (in the tree, which is the focus point), and very dark. The theme of this piece is German and Jewish history and the horror of The Holocaust. There are also themes of national identity (how Jewish people are perceived as the dresses and symbols like this like numbers on their arm), collective memory (how a whole people remember this issue), and occult symbolism (the tree represents a family tree or the tree of life), and mysticism (how Hitler was able to get away with this mass genocide by using religion and creating a cult). In this work he focuses on the trauma experienced by an entire society, and the continual rebirth and renewal in life.*

*I enjoyed the repetition of the cosmic dots and him recreating natural beauty. It adds a special air to the piece. The balance is asymmetrical considering it is not a perfect mirror reflection, nor is it perfectly symmetrical, but there is a balance of weight of things on both sides. The focal point is the tree, with its convenient placement in the middle and it’s bright white color that contrasts with the greys, but there is still movement in the picture where the tree brings your eyes out with the branches to the articles of clothing.*

*The material value is very interesting. This painting is physical, and features unusual textures and materials. Anselm Kiefer used some fragile materials for the dresses and it looks almost like a dress for a paper doll. The fragility of the dresses contrasts with the stark subject matter in his painting. He also worked with lead, which my assumption would be, that not only is it difficult to work with but rather dangerous. The layering of these materials gives it the effect almost like an impasto.*

*I believe that to some people, especially a Jewish person, this piece would have religious value. The Holocausts main purpose was to wipe out an entire religion. There is a possibility that art can heal a traumatized nation. The fact that this was brought to light through this piece is moving and sacred.*

*It also has a nationalistic value, because it is pointing out the faults of Germany and the German people, which is interesting considering the artist himself is German. He argues with the past and addresses a taboo and controversial issue, which leads me into its next value: The psychological value is very present because, it's a very in-your-face way of addressing a topic that many people feel guilty about. The Holocaust is something that people don't like to talk about and some people claim that didn't even happen!*

*I like his use of familiar objects to express ideas. The stylized tree is a great example of this, because it is not just a physical tree in the painting; it has a representational style. The tree stands for the family tree of the lost people and for all of the family ties that were cut off, because of the executions that occurred in concentration camps. Also it is very beautiful that the “people” are depicted as star points in the universe. To me it represents the idea that these people are still in a sense with us and that we are all connected.*

*I also noticed that the edge is frayed and doesn't have a distinct end point. There is no clean-cut or frame and I believe that this stands for the idea that the number of people who we lost is monumental and could not be captured even on such a large piece of canvas. Their family tree could have also been limitless. At one point someone’s life was cut off, they never had kids, and then their kids couldn't have kids, meaning the number of unborn never ends.*