

A SKY FOR

MICHAEL BIBERSTEIN

1948 - 2013

March 1st > May 3rd, 2014

GALERIE JAEGER BUCHER

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EXHIBITION - FUNDRAISING

« A precious stone kept inside a black box with a dark grey lid. »

A Sky for Santa Isabel

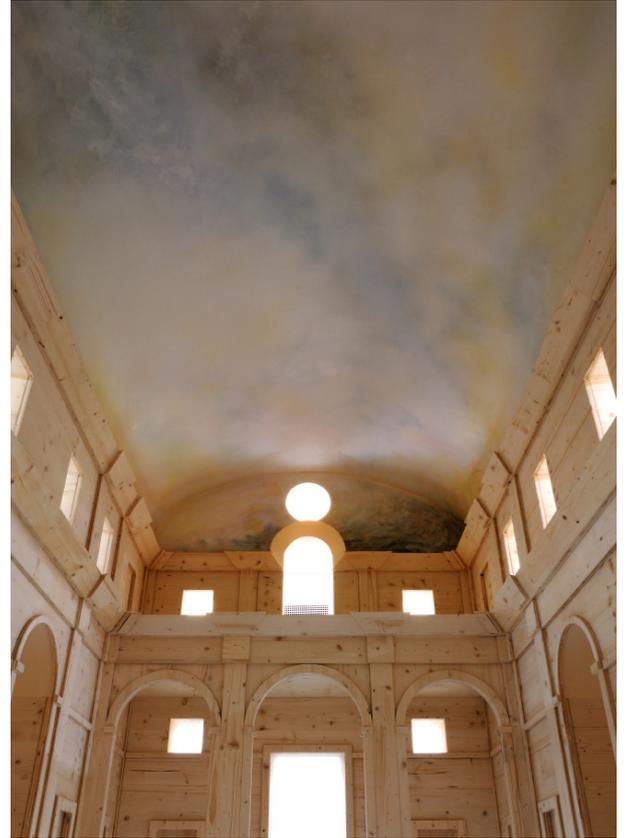
When he suddenly passed away on May 5th, 2013, Michael Biberstein had been working on a project for several years for **the creation of a ceiling or 'Sky' for the Santa Isabel Church in the Campo de Ourique district of Lisbon**, a project which is currently being realized for the artist. When talking about this Church, which was completed in 1741 except for a ceiling that remained unpainted due to lack of finances, Michael Biberstein described it as a « **precious stone kept inside a black box with a dull, dark-grey cover** ».

Faithful to Leon Battista Alberti's rules, the architectural elements of the Santa Isabel Church are, visually, heavier and darker in the lower part of the church and gradually draw our eyes upwards. There is, therefore, no doubt that the Church ceiling is supposed to complete this feeling of movement towards light, with a view to reflecting and uniformly distributing this light to the space below. Starting from this, Michael Biberstein worked tirelessly with a view to giving this Church ceiling its original meaning. In order to replace the dark, cold and suffocating roof with a warm and vibrant sky, opening onto the cosmos, Michael Biberstein created a ceiling whose vibrating colours extend those of the church's marble walls, in a progression from cold to warm tones. This opening of indigo sky is intended as a dive into deep space, much like his paintings that turn towards the sublime, dedicated to introspection as much as contemplation.

Through numerous drawings, studies, watercolours and notes, Michael Biberstein took up the challenge of this project : the conception of the ceiling for the Church upon a 1:8 scale model, presented at the Lisbon Architecture Triennial then, in 2010, in the Santa Isabel Church itself, allowing a projection, on a reduced scale, of the creation envisioned for the Church ceiling. This allowed all parties involved to appreciate the perfect match between Michael Biberstein's ceiling and the Baroque and Neo-Classical ceilings of Catholic churches. His death, unexpected and premature, led to the general mobilisation of all participants in the project — the Parish, the architects, the engineers, the gallery owners representing his work, the technicians as well as the restorers and museums' directors who have a profound understanding of his work. The committee, created after he passed away, decided, after consultation and an extended study of the ceiling Michael Biberstein conceived for the model of the Santa Isabel church, to pursue the completion of this major work, which deeply resonated with his presence.

Michael Biberstein was going to paint the ceiling pro bono, considering this final work his *Opus Magna*. The artist no longer being there to finish the ceiling himself, this exhibition plans to help find the necessary financing to complete, more than 250 years after the church's construction, its ultimate phase ; what Michael Biberstein called "**my ceiling**" and what his friends and admirers are now calling "**Mike's ceiling**".

Numerous tests have been realised by *Factum Arte*, in Madrid, to define how the painting of the Church is going to be made, while remaining as faithful as possible to the artist's creation inside the model. It was decided that the ceiling would be realised first on a canvas and not directly on the Church's ceiling in order to lower the costs of the project. The ceiling's painting on canvas would start in April and, according to current tests and if everything goes as planned, should be installed by next October.



Inside view of Michael Biberstein's model of Santa Isabel Church, Lisbon © Michael Biberstein Estate. Courtesy Galerie Jaeger Bucher / Jeanne-Bucher, Paris. Photo : Rui Semedo da Luz.

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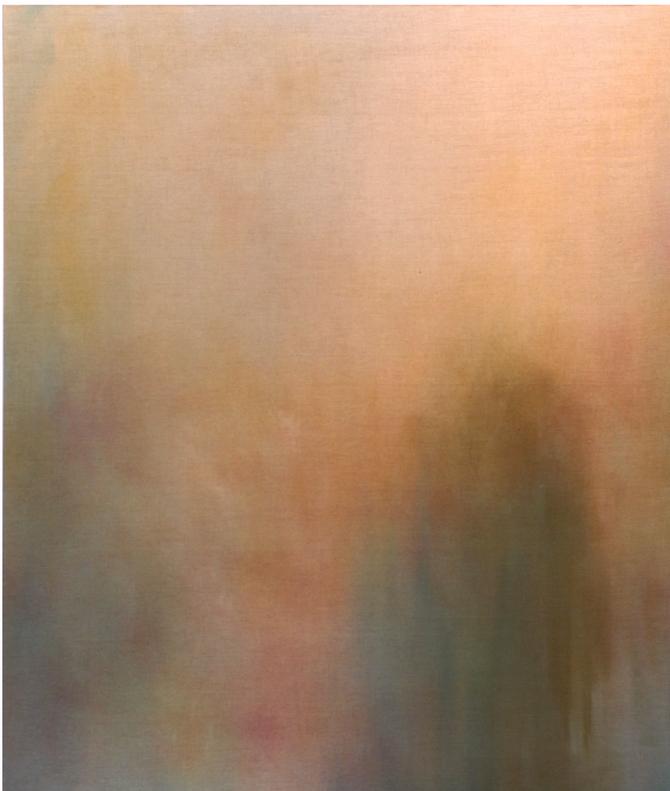
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His career as a self-taught painter as well as his innate ability for landscape painting gifted him an understanding and a sensibility uniquely suited to a project of this kind, a project which suited his nature as much as the large format painting that he practised and mastered.

The artist was marked very early by a Mark Rothko exhibition which would convulse his life and lead him to take a much greater interest in painting. During his studies in Art History — including a year spent with British critic David Sylvester at Swarthmore College, Philadelphia, USA — the artist became interested in Early Christian art and the architecture of Roman churches, as well as Baroque painting and, specifically, Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. His self-taught career as a painter began when David Sylvester declared that Art History would not be enough for him and if he really wanted to understand painting he would have to experiment it himself.

Every Michael Biberstein painting has a very strong spiritual dimension. His paintings describe neither a precise place nor a precise landscape. They are, rather, the reflection on inner landscapes. These contemplations which take form on his canvases are at once evocations of the Nature that surrounds us, but also of our own thoughts, memories, intimate emotions experienced in our daily lives. In them we find, through an evocation that is more metaphysical than formal, Vermet's landscapes (alongside which he was exhibited), Casper David Friedrich, Turner, Monet, Cézanne and Rothko, as well as influences from Eastern landscape painters across the Chinese dynasties. Curiously, he never travelled to Asia.

In his paintings, The numerous thin and impalpable layers create a movement of colours, like a chromatic breath. This universal, perpetually moving, perpetually changing landscape resembles vibrations in space and resonances in silence. The imperceptible movements created by the veils of colours transform the canvas into a visual field which extends throughout the depth of the painted image. Confronted with this work, the spectator is thrust into a world without necessarily being conscious of the physical limits imposed by the canvas. Michael Biberstein believed deeply in the possibility of an apotheosis of the human spirit before while contemplating a landscape.



Michael Biberstein in his studio in Portugal in 2008 © Michael Biberstein Estate.
Courtesy Galerie Jaeger Bucher / Jeanne-Bucher, Paris. Photo © ricardoquaresmasvieira.com

Poly-glider, 1996. Acrylic on canvas, 190 x 160 cm
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