

# Michael BIBERSTEIN

— *Paysage en apothéose*

## OPENING

Saturday May 21, 2016, 3-7 pm  
Marais Space

## EXHIBITION

From May 21 to July 23, 2016

## INAUGURATION OF THE « SKY OF MIKE »

scheduled in Lisbon during the week-end  
of July 14, 2016

Michael Biberstein had been working actively for four years on the creation of a 900-square-meter sky for the ceiling of the Eglise Santa Isabel (1742) in Lisbon, when he suddenly passed away in May 2013. An artistic committee was then formed in order to complete what is now called *The Sky of Mike*. Thanks to the follow-up of the Architects *Appleton e Domingos*, the support of the *Santa Casa Misericordia* of Lisbon, the continual support of the gallery, and the donations of numerous international patrons as well as the collaboration of *Factum Arte*, the *Sky of Mike* will be unveiled in Lisbon in July 2016.

In connexion with the completion of the ceiling of the church in Lisbon, the gallery is presenting an exhibition entitled *Paysage en apothéose (Landscape in Apotheosis)* dedicated principally to the presentation of previously unseen works on paper, rarely or never shown publicly. It is the very first presentation, and the most exhaustive to date, of Biberstein's works on paper, from the end of the '70s to his death in 2013; a few paintings will round out the exhibition, allowing us to understand the path of the artist through his drawn and painted works. This presentation will be enriched by a forthcoming catalogue dedicated to the graphic works of the artist with a text from the English art historian Nicholas Turner, former Chief Curator of the Department of Prints and Drawings of the *British Museum* in London and Curator of Graphic Works at the *J. Paul Getty Museum* in Los Angeles.



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

View of the advancement of the construction, April 2016. Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris.



Michael Biberstein, *4-teilige Auflösung Einer Horizontalen Richtung Landschaft*, 1983. Oil pastel on paper, 29,2 × 42 cm. Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris. Photo: G. Poncet

Since the 1970s, Michael Biberstein has concentrated on the notion of **Landscape in Painting**, connected to its **historic dimension** of images reproducing a landscape, as the multiple investigations that the artist made into the possible syntaxes of the *genre* testify, visible in the numerous conceptual studies of the 1980's, which distorted landscapes, such as *double-champs*, 1980; *La malheureuse histoire du dessin en 2 parties*, 1982; *Quatre parties d'une direction horizontale du paysage*, 1983; and the *Série des paysages à l'encre de chine* and the multiple studies of *Prospect-Refuge Image* in the late 1980's, which echoed his reading of Wittgenstein, whose philosophy of language Biberstein obviously knew. Nevertheless, beyond their historical dimension as reproductions of a visible Nature, Biberstein's multiple landscapes are also, in the words of the artist, "...landscapes of multiple fields offered to the medium of painting" which the artist would not cease to explore, be it through his **different mediums** (oil, acrylic, pastel, ink, crayon, watercolor...) or again through his **questions of scale** that would be tested in its broadest spectrum, in his paintings as well as his drawings.



Michael Biberstein, *Untitled*. Watercolor on paper, 22,9 × 30,9 cm. Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris. Photo: L. Castro Caldas.



Michael Biberstein, *Untitled*, 1984. Indian ink on paper, 29,6 × 20,9 cm. Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris. Photo : L. Castro Caldas.

After his more analytic and conceptual phase of the act of painting a landscape in the 1980s, in the 1990s Biberstein became more obviously interested in the work of art as spatio-temporal experience founded on a **sensual response of the observer** since, for the artist, "*the contemplation of a work of art can lead to an apotheosis of the spirit. That which a rational thought no longer allows, painting authorizes— just as with music.*" Biberstein's landscapes make reference as much to the landscapes of Vernet, Friedrich, Turner, Monet, Cézanne and Rothko as to, for some, the grand Chinese pictorial tradition that, according to the artist "... are the most advanced landscapes for attaining the quietude and the interior calm, whereas Western art excels rather in dynamism. It interests me to explore all those possibilities." The absence of contours suggests forms, and the constant flux of colors is in perpetual movement depending on the light. Biberstein being a passionate admirer of astrophysics, his landscapes often draw from that field their names and echo the great enigmas of the Universe: *Grand Attracteur*, *Grand Large*, *Amas stellaire* or *K3*.



Michael Biberstein, *Study for a Sky*, 2010-2013.  
Ink on paper, 57 × 76,7 cm. Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris.  
Photo : L. Castro Caldas.

Ever more ethereal, like vibrations of space or chromatic respirations where silence resonates, the landscapes of Michael Biberstein become, over the course of his oeuvre, landscapes of a sublime *elsewhere and everywhere* which fixes nothing, identifies nothing, and represents nothing, as if he guided and projected his observer into a space that is at once near and distant from him, interior and exterior, intimate and faraway, leaving glimpses of our impossibility to perceive the limits of a universe where we evolve as much as the being we are since, in the words of Heraclitus, “...in roaming over all the paths, we could not find the limits of our soul, so profound is the knowledge it possesses.”

The works of Michael Biberstein plunge us even beyond our own experience and our intuitions, into the space of the sublime, where that which we feel has neither body, nor shape, nor temporality, nor its own space, fluctuating ceaselessly at the whim of the light, without here nor there, like an indivisible and multiple Whole where, at the same time, we are and we are not. We will also discover for the first time the artist's study-works for the ceiling of the Santa Isabel Church in Lisbon to be unveiled next July: this is without doubt his *Landscape in Apotheosis*, where the human is totally present without ever being figured within.



Michael Biberstein, *Untitled*. Indian ink on paper, 61,3 × 46 cm. Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris. Photo : L. Castro Caldas.



Michael Biberstein, portrait. Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris. Photo : Ricardo Quaresma

Born in Solothurn in Switzerland in 1948, Michael Biberstein left Switzerland in the 1960s in order to study art history in the United States under the British critic David Sylvester at Swarthmore College in Philadelphia. He was strongly affected by an exposition of Mark Rothko which decisively oriented his pictorial path. He then turned his interest to Paleochristian art and the architecture of Roman Churches as well as Baroque painting, and in particular Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. The sacred spaces of our planet that the artist visited tirelessly, as well as the landscapes of nature in all its beauty and the openness that they trigger in our spirit, became one of the major subjects of his oeuvre. The artist was fully open to the effects they produce in our consciousness, beyond all dogma or militants. Extremely erudite, Biberstein distinguished himself by his great knowledge of the history of landscape painting from the Baroque era to today, by his unswerving love for music, as well as his insatiable interest in different theories of astrophysics that he applied constantly to his oeuvre.