

# MICHAEL BIBERSTEIN

## SEEING

March 7th - September 19th, 2020

Jeanne Bucher Jaeger | Paris, Marais



Untitled, undated.  
Watercolor and ink on paper,  
30,3 x 45,5 cm  
Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris

Following the major retrospective dedicated to Michael Biberstein at *Culturgest Lisbon* in 2018, the gallery Jeanne Bucher Jaeger is pleased to present *SEEING*, a new exhibition of the artist's paintings and works on paper. Born in 1948 in Solothurn, Allemannic Switzerland, the Swiss-American artist had chosen Portugal as his adopted country where he lived for forty years and where he died in 2013.

A selection of works by the artist is currently presented on the *Art Paris Digital* website with focus this year on artists from the Iberian Peninsula.

This exhibition gives a deeper insight into the various stages of Michael Biberstein's artistic life from the deconstruction in his paintings in the 70s, when the very structure of his art was perceived as a system of signs, to his long and meticulous pictorial research starting at the end of the 80s: installations composed of bamboo in which spaces and cracks of thin layers of canvas alternate, installations exploring the polarized relationship between floor and wall or the outline of a shape, or again the *Prospect/Refuge* series from the 1980s, or that of the predella (in a reference to Medieval painting), monochromes reinforcing contemplative landscapes. He then studied the very medium of painting, oil and acrylic, the declension of possible syntaxes until he achieved painting as a spatial and temporal experience "*based on a physiological, emotional and intellectual response that colour, shape and medium trigger in the observer.*"

Biberstein labelled his paintings, which are admiring reminiscences of Vernet, Friedrich, Turner, Monet, Cézanne and Rothko, but also secret imprints of eastern landscapes, as “seeing machines.”

As the art historian Delfim Sardo, who curated a recent retrospective of Biberstein’s work, writes, *Michael Biberstein forged in his œuvre a rare link between the practice of painting, the use of a conceptual language coming from analytical philosophy, and a focus on landscape coming from the very process of painting, emanating from an educated and historically-engaged perspective, through the rehabilitation of a very specific understanding of contemplation.*

Biberstein systematically includes the viewer in the space of his work, either so that he/she amplifies the work and gives it a new horizon, or, on the contrary, so that he/she finds shelter and feels safe therein. The artist was entirely focused on the physiological and psychological effect of the sublime on the human. This inquiry was indissociable from the experience of his own artistic creation, which culminated in the painting of his 900m<sup>2</sup>, suspended, bright Sky, created for the majestic ceiling of the baroque Santa Isabel church in Lisbon. Biberstein dedicated the last four years of his life to this work, which was finally completed in 2016, three years after his death.

Marked as much by German romantic painting as by the noblest tradition of Chinese painting and the revelatory discovery of the work of Mark Rothko, Michael Biberstein left his native Switzerland in the 1960s to study the History of Art in the United States with the British critic David Sylvester in Philadelphia, where he paradoxically came to realize that the experience and the language of pictorial practice took precedence over theory.

Biberstein was also interested in Paleochristian art, in the architecture of Roman churches, and in Baroque painting, more specifically that of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo.

In Portugal at the end of the 1970s, first in Sintra and then in Alentejo (where he would reside for more than 40 years), Biberstein found the atmosphere conducive to his practice of painting.

Beyond any temporality, his painting is a metaphysical quest. There are no specific shapes to be made out, no hint of reality, just a sublime elsewhere and everywhere that fixes or identifies nothing and guides the observer into a space both near and far, interior and exterior, intimate and distant, which lets us glimpse how impossible it is for us to perceive the limits of the universe, or those of our being. We barely get a few hints in the painting titles that echo the mysteries of the universe and the artist’s major interest in astrophysics. Our silent gaze does not rest on the landscapes of his canvases, but instantaneously and mysteriously conjures up our inner historicity, our intimate landscapes.

“A work that takes its sources in the History of Art but which becomes a metaphysical quest and makes man a human being,” Michael Biberstein confided to Véronique Jaeger in 2006.

The new exhibition *SEEING* invites you to penetrate even more deeply into the heart of the scale of looking, beyond all temporality, into the magnetic fields of the act of Seeing.



*Glider*, 2007,  
Acrylic on canvas  
200 x 290 cm  
Courtesy Jeanne Bucher Jaeger, Paris