



Obra Social
Fundación "la Caixa"



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BARCELÓ'S SEA

**IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND ALLIANCE OF
CIVILISATIONS ROOM OF THE UN IN GENEVA**

Press Dossier

CaixaForum Madrid

From 4 February to 17 March 2009

In CaixaForum Madrid, "la Caixa" Social and Cultural Outreach Projects reveals the creative process employed by the Majorcan artist in his work on the dome of the United Nations headquarters in Geneva

Barceló's sea

In the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room of the UN in Geneva

A singular, unique work in contemporary art. An ambitious and complex intervention on a colossal canvas measuring a thousand square metres, with a result of captivating beauty that seizes spectators and transports them to a sea that emerges with awe-inspiring force. The creative work of Miquel Barceló (Felanitx, Majorca, 1957) undertaken by commission of the ONUART Foundation to refurbish the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room in the Palace of the United Nations in Geneva and already an artistic point of reference, is the objective of the exhibition *Barceló's Sea*. Three months after the dome's inauguration, "la Caixa" Social and Cultural Outreach Projects is showing in CaixaForum Madrid for the first time ever the creative process employed by Barceló, through a model of the work, photographs, audiovisuals, preparatory works and the artist's own notebook. All of which will enable the spectator to become submerged in the sea created by Barceló, as well as to discover the technical innovations that were necessary to develop the project. It will also provide an insight into the artist's frame of mind during the eighteen months that he was working on the United Nations' commission. The exhibition, organised by "la Caixa" Social and Cultural Outreach Projects, can be visited in CaixaForum Madrid until 17 March and will subsequently travel to CaixaForum Barcelona.

The exhibition *Barceló's Sea in the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room of the UN in Geneva*, organised by "la Caixa" Social and Cultural Outreach Projects, can be seen in CaixaForum Madrid (Paseo del Prado, 36) from 4 February to 17 March 2009.

Madrid, 4 February 2009. This exhibition, organised by "la Caixa" Social and Cultural Outreach Projects, shows the passionate work process of Miquel Barceló (Felanitx, Majorca, 1957) on the dome of the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room in the Palace of the United Nations in Geneva. Undertaken throughout 2007 and 2008, the project proved to be an awe-inspiring explosion of shapes and colours with a captivating beauty that evokes both the origins of the world as well as the bottom of the sea.

The display may be seen in CaixaForum Madrid until 17 March and will subsequently travel to Barcelona, with the clear intention on the part of "la Caixa" Social and Cultural Outreach Projects to publicise the innovative creative process employed by Barceló in undertaking this masterpiece. From the very outset, the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room was transformed into an artistic and architectural point of reference, as well as a reflection of the value of multilateralism, with the visualisation of distinct colours from different angles.

The exhibition includes preparatory work and a wooden model of the dome made by the artist, a mock-up which helped the team of workers carry out the project in Geneva. Also on display is the oil painting *Marejadilla* (2002), Miquel Barceló's starting point in approaching this colossal work and the piece in which he first experimented with the idea of a sea of stalactites. He painted this large-scale work from below, as if the canvas were stuck to the ceiling, so that the dense paste of pigments would form "stalactites" that cause a three-dimensional effect reminiscent of the back-and-forth movement and crests of ocean waves.

Another of the elements making up the exhibition is the *Cuaderno de Ginebra* (2008), the artist's notebook containing watercolours, texts and drawings in which the painter's different states of mind may be noted, along with his successes, frustrations, doubts and satisfactions during the dome creation process. An audiovisual production created expressly for the occasion enables visitors to leaf through the pages of this book.

A wide selection of photographs by Agustí Torres, Miquel Barceló's photographer and colleague, taken in Geneva during the months it took to create the work show the painter hard at work and present previously unseen viewpoints: the attempts to consolidate the monumental ceiling, techniques used to break its surface and create contrasts of light and shade and the artist's movements along the scaffolding, which have been compared to the dance of a shaman. Along similar lines, a selection of digital photographs is included that were produced by the artist himself, together with a reconstruction of the various stages in the work's creation that simulate lunar phases. Finally, a four-minute video will be screened, also the

work of Agustí Torres, offering a synopsis of the process that led to the creation of *Barceló's Sea*.

A singular work, unique in contemporary art

Work by Miquel Barceló on the dome of the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room in the Palace of Nations in Geneva started in spring 2007 and over the following two months the room's original interior and plaster dome were dismantled. A structure of reinforced aluminium especially designed for the dome was then fitted. Miquel Barceló began work on 10 September. Inauguration of the mural for the dome of Room XX of the Palace of Nations in Geneva, which has since been officially named the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room, took place last 18 November.

This is a singular work, unique in contemporary art, which changes and transforms depending on the perspective from which it is viewed, emphasising a polyhedral wealth of reality in tune with the multilateralism that characterises the United Nations Organisation. With the involvement and assistance of a multidisciplinary team, Barceló applied industrial techniques to his painting for the first time ever, developing a new method of interacting on huge architectural surfaces.

To carry out this ambitious, complex undertaking on the 934-square-metre dome, Barceló devised an organic project aimed at achieving the effect of sea surf which would be transformed depending on the influence of light and space, combining serenity and movement. As the author himself explains, the work "generates various perceptions which, due to its internal dynamics, transmit a positive, constructive and optimistic effect".

From the outset, Barceló's idea was to use that enormous space to *project* a sea-like surface, transferring to fresco a motif that had first appeared in recent works such as his *Marejadilla*. To do so, he covered the dome with 737 pieces of aluminium held in place by a radial steel frame. He then used 6,000 kilos of epoxy resin to create the reliefs and stalactites, which were located in the spots Barceló had previously marked by means of a paintball gun, using different colours to indicate the desired length. Some 6,500 screws were employed to fix the stalactites to the support.

In the first pictorial phase, Miquel Barceló and his team of 16 specialised assistants used approximately 8,000 kilos of paint of a wide variety of colours. To apply the final coat of three colours in the next stage, some 9,000 kilos of paint paste were projected onto the dome by the artist, secured by a safety harness, using a powerful paint discharge machine. The last pictorial phase, putting the final

touches, was undertaken by Miquel Barceló alone, spraying white paint and finishing off some areas in the same colour with brooms.

Miquel Barceló's work for the dome of the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room of the Palace of Nations in Geneva is entirely coherent with the course he has followed over the last twenty-five years, and has its most distant precedent in the dome he designed for the Mercat de les Flors in Barcelona. He has thus remained faithful to his vocation of experimenting with new materials and artistic procedures, as he also demonstrated in another of his recent monumental works, the chapel of St. Peter in Palma cathedral.

In the United Nations dome, Barceló addressed one of his most fundamental and recurring themes: perdurability in contrast to permanence, or what amounts to the same thing in Geneva, the sea in continuous movement in comparison with the cavern. Thus, the dome evokes a multicolour planet outlined by seas and surf: the union and dialogue necessary in the international sphere to confront, with creativity and consensus, the challenges and obstacles of the 21st century.

"la Caixa" Foundation and Miquel Barceló, a lasting relationship

In 1982, "la Caixa" Foundation organised in Barcelona and Madrid the exhibition entitled *26 Painters, 13 Critics: Panorama of Young Spanish Painting*, in which Miquel Barceló played an outstanding part. It was a key year for both parties. Shortly afterwards, the artist presented his work in the Documenta exhibition in Kassel and started out on his international career, leading him to become one of the most valued and influential artists on the artistic scene in the passage from the 20th to the 21st century. This was also a decisive moment for "la Caixa" Foundation, as it represented the initiation of its Contemporary Art Collection, aimed at bringing contemporary creation closer to the wider public while acting as a stimulus to artists.

Today, more than 25 years later, the "la Caixa" Foundation Contemporary Art Collection can boast over 750 artworks and its holdings feature pieces by the most significant artists of the last thirty years from a variety of backgrounds and generations. The Collection has continued its commitment to creators at the beginning of their careers, which has required a rigorous monitoring of contemporary aesthetic evolution, necessary to ensure continuance of its open, innovative spirit. Throughout this time, the "la Caixa" Foundation Contemporary Art Collection has also followed the Majorcan artist's evolution and has acquired, over the years, some of his most important works from different periods, such as *L'Amour fou* (1984), *Une poignée de terre* (1987), *Taula dibuixada* (1991) and *Six figues chines* (1997).

"la Caixa" Foundation, patron of the ONUART Foundation

Barceló's Sea is a donation of the Spanish State to the UN in the framework of the comprehensive refurbishment of the new Room XX of Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations in the Palace of Nations. The ONUART Foundation, in which private initiative, civil society and the central and autonomous administrations have all joined forces, has been responsible for undertaking this initiative.

Creation of the ONUART Foundation was motivated by the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation with the support of private and public partners in March 2005. That same year a request was received from the United Nations for Spain to make a second artistic contribution (following that made in 1936 by José María Sert in the Council Chamber of the former League of Nations) in the Palace of Nations in Geneva.

Barceló's Sea

In the Human Rights and Alliance of Civilisations Room
of the UN in Geneva

From 4 February to 17 March 2009

CaixaForum Madrid

Paseo del Prado, 36
28014 Madrid

Times:

Monday to Sunday, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Admission free to the exhibitions

Information service

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Multimedia press release

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