

# MICHAEL FORSTER

(1907 – 2002)

*"The only subject left to explore is the inner landscape, the fertile imagination of the spirit, where there is complete personal freedom." Michael Forster*

an inner landscape



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3. Tintagel, 1989

acrylic on canvas

93 x 123 cms 36 x 48 ins

atelier no. 101

signed and dated lower left; inscribed with monogram, date and title verso

# The Life and Work of MICHAEL FORSTER



Photograph taken by Michael Forster while at school in India



Calcutta: Eden Gardens with Burmese Pagoda and Lake, c. 1890  
(W.W. Hooper; © The British Library)

This exhibition celebrates the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Michael Forster, one of England's most significant twentieth-century painters. Forster spent much of his long career in isolation, away from the centres of aesthetic fashion, creating a body of work that establishes him as an original and evocative interpreter of English landscape. In the tradition of Cotman, Palmer and Turner, Forster abstracted the essence of the earth, sea and sky with a fresh vision. Through his concepts of space and radiant colour we are introduced to a fresh way of viewing our universe.

Michael Forster was born in Calcutta, but spent his early childhood in the northern Indian city of Meerut, where his English-born father, Edward, was a senior civil servant of the British Colonial Government. An important trading centre and a major junction for the national railroad, Meerut is located on the vast flatness of the Ganges plain that covers most of Uttar Pradesh, the country's largest province.

The northwest of India is a land of dramatic visual contrasts. The constant sun of summer that scorches the earth is followed by a sudden black velvet curtain that fails to cool the air. Overhead, by day, the skies are in constant change, caused by the winds from the Himalayan Mountains that form the northern border of the province. This was Forster's first experience of the sky patterns that later inspired many of his most memorable canvases.

At home, the world that confronted young Michael each morning presented a dazzling array of sight and sound. The garden of the family bungalow held a fluorescence of native growth, rhododendrons, jasmine, clematis, blue poppies, amarantha and musk rose, interspersed with familiar souvenirs of England, lilac, tulips and delphiniums. It was this garden that provided the inspiration for Forster's glowing series of canvases executed seventy-five years later, *To Celebrate A Childhood*, that included such titles as *Kay Plays in my Garden*. Kay was his older sister Kathleen, who played with Michael every day, watched over by their ayah, their native carer.

When Michael was taken about Meerut by his ayah, they would walk beneath the silk cotton and pink casia trees, which grew beside the almond scented oleander and hibiscus bushes that ornamented the city streets. Peacocks perched on the black limbs of the giant banyan trees that loomed over



4. To Celebrate a Childhood, Entally, 1986  
acrylic on canvas  
86 x 122 cms 34 x 48 ins  
atelier no. 572  
inscribed with monogram, date and title verso