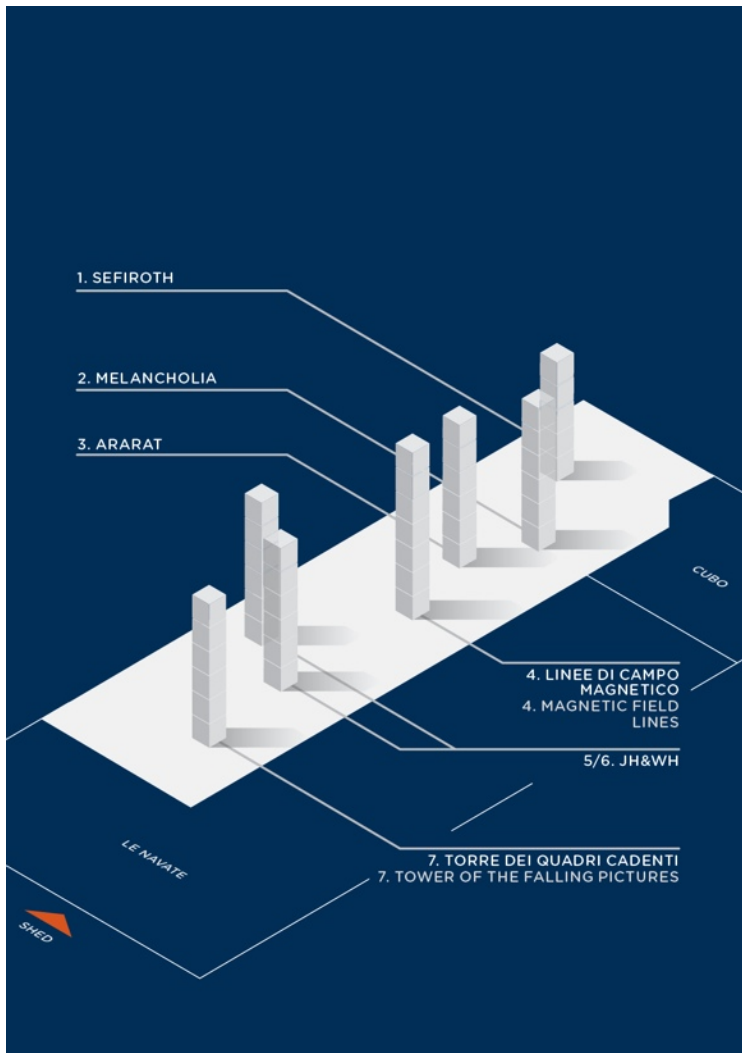


# THE SEVEN HEAVENLY PALACES

## THE EXHIBITION



The site-specific installation The Seven Heavenly Palaces, created for HangarBicocca for the occasion of its first opening in 2004, owes its name to the Palaces described in the ancient Hebrew treatise Sefer Hechaloth – the Book of Palaces/Sanctuaries dating back to the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD – which narrates the symbolic journey of spiritual initiation of he who seeks the presence of God.

The seven towers, weighing 90 tonnes each and with heights varying between 14 and 18 metres, are made in reinforced concrete, using as building blocks corner units taken from the containers used for transporting goods.

The Seven Heavenly Palaces represent the highest expression of the artist's entire opus and sum up the main themes, projecting them into a timeless new dimension. They encapsulate in fact the interpretation of an ancient religion (Judaism), the representation of the ruins in the West after the Second World War and the projection into a possible future from which the artist invites us to consider the ruins of our present. Each of the Seven Heavenly Palaces is topped with structural elements and features decorative details that vary according to the theme of the individual tower.

## 1. Sefiroth

The first of the seven towers to be built, Sefiroth is also the lowest (14 metres). The tower ends with a stack of seven lead books and has ten neon lights with the Hebrew names of the Sefiroth, which in the Hebrew mysticism of the Kabbalah represent the ten expressions or instruments of God. The ten Sefiroth which make up the scheme of the Tree of Life and the essence of creation are: Keter (Supreme Crown), Chokhmah (Wisdom), Binah (Understanding), Chesed (Love), Gevurah (Power), Tiferet (Beauty), Netzach (Patience/Tolerance), Hod (Majesty), Yesod (Foundation of the World) and Malchut (Kingdom).



## 2. Melancholia

Melancholia is distinctive above all in the finish of the final slab, a polyhedron taken from a very famous engraving from 1514 by the German artist Albrecht Dürer which became one of the most famous representations of the figure of the artist.

According to 16<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, in fact, artists were referred to as “those born under Saturn” since it was thought that the planet of melancholy represented their contemplative and ambivalent nature. At the feet of the towers are the so-called “falling stars”, small pieces of glass and strips of paper marked by sequences of numbers corresponding to the classification of the heavenly bodies used by NASA.

### 3. Ararat

Ararat takes its name from the mountain in Asia Minor where traditionally and according to the Bible Noah's Ark ran aground. The ark is represented by a small stylised model in lead at the top of the tower to symbolise a means for conveying peace and salvation and yet at the same time a warship, a vehicle of destruction and desolation.

### 4. Magnetic Field Lines

The most impressive tower of the entire installation stands 18 metres tall and features a film of lead which runs across it until resting at the feet of the construction, alongside a reel of film and a cine camera made from the same metal. The choice of lead, a material which repels rays of light and therefore does not allow any image to be produced, lends itself to different interpretations: from the Nazis' attempt to wipe out Jewish culture and ethnic minorities to the iconoclastic struggle which periodically runs through Western culture from the Byzantine era up to the time of Luther, and the idea put forward on several occasions by Kiefer that every work of art cancels out the previous one.

### 5/6. JH&WH

These two towers, have numbered and irregularly shaped meteorites in molten lead scattered at this base, the symbol, in the myth of the creation according to some writings in the Kabbalah, of the pieces of the vases in which God was to infuse life, generating the races of the Earth and the Jewish diaspora. The two towers are also complementary in the top part, ending with writing in neon bearing the letters JH and WH respectively which, if joined together according to the rules of Hebrew phonetics, form the word Yahweh, the name which is unutterable for Jews.

### 7. Tower of the Falling Pictures

The Tower of the Falling Pictures once again owes its name to the objects at the top down to the feet of the construction: a series of iron picture frames containing sheets of glass often shattered unevenly. Contrary to what we might expect, the frames do not display any picture.

