

PRESS RELEASE

JANNIS KOUNELLIS

Presented by Sprovieri Gallery London
At Ambika P3, University of Westminster, London

23 April – 30 May 2010

Press View: 22 April 2010

Admission free

Greco-Italian artist Jannis Kounellis, a key figure in international contemporary art for over forty years, will create major new works, especially conceived for Ambika P3. Using the unique characteristics offered by the spaces of Ambika P3 as his canvas, this major new exhibition, presented by Sprovieri Gallery, will be the first solo presentation by Kounellis in a public London space since the Whitechapel Art Gallery exhibition in 1982. Jannis Kounellis was initially associated with the Italian Arte Povera of the late 1960s, a movement that tried to free art from the conventions, structures and the market place restrictions of the day, and also (through the nature of the materials used) to make an art much closer to the everyday life of people. In 1969 he was made famous by a work he presented in Rome in which he temporarily turned a gallery into a stable for twelve horses. Since then, through his continued pushing of the boundaries of what is considered art, Kounellis has remained at the forefront of developments in contemporary art.

While his works are perhaps best known for their frequently epic scale, it is in the details of their making that they are at their most human. Always made from a gathering of everyday materials (such as wool, sacking, used clothing, old musical instruments or pieces of steel), when grouped together these disparate ingredients take on new meanings and associations. In one famous untitled work from 1967, Kounellis cut a sheet of steel into the shape of a flower, and inserted a gas flame at its centre – the hard, metallic cold of the steel contrasting with the form of the inanimate flower, which in turn gave forth a hot, (life and death giving) lick of fire. In another piece from 2004, installed in a space filled with oriental carpets and covered by an army of falling steel crosses suggesting the encounter of two different cultures, he again contrasted the textures, strengths and uses of the materials, while reconnecting them to man through their histories.

Starting his career as a painter, Kounellis still describes his practice as painting. His first paintings were exactly the size of one of the walls in his house. Physical space then became his canvas and in this respect the actual making of his works also becomes something of a performance, in which the space is articulated by the placing of the objects within it. It is no surprise therefore that Kounellis works only within carefully selected spaces.

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Jannis Kounellis

Born in the Greek port of Piraeus in 1936, Kounellis has lived in Rome since 1956. A key protagonist of Arte Povera, he is one of the world's leading contemporary artists, with a career spanning more than forty years. He has exhibited all over the world, and is represented in major museum collections internationally. His first exhibition in Rome, in 1960, was entitled *Kounellis' Alphabet*. Arising from a compositional relationship between living and inert materials, Kounellis' new artistic language was intended to provoke a critical attitude towards society and the creative process. He chose to substitute canvas with steel, to which he applied his alphabet, made up, among other things, of fire, earth, coal, wool, plants, and living and dead animals.

Since his earliest works Kounellis has charged certain signs with metaphorical values and symbolic functions. Never restricting his 'paintings' to two dimensions, his works are an integration of different artistic forms: painting, sculpture, music, theatre and poetry. Solo exhibitions by Kounellis at UK public venues since the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1982 have included the Henry Moore Studio, Dean Clough, Halifax 1991; Modern Art Oxford, 2004-5 and a joint exhibition at Edinburgh College of Art and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh. 2005.

In 2002, *Untitled 1969*, in which horses were tethered to the gallery walls, was briefly re-presented at the Whitechapel Art Gallery. An Artist Room of important works from throughout Kounellis' career is on display at Tate Modern until March 2010, and a solo exhibition will open at ZKM (Museum for Neue Kunst), Karlsruhe in 2010.

Recent solo exhibitions by Kounellis include HEART Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Herning, Denmark (2009); Fundación Caixa Galicia, Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2008); Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin Germany (2007) and MADRE Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples, Italy (2006).

Ambika P3

Ambika P3, formerly known as P3, is a 14,000 square foot triple height subterranean space in central London, converted from the vast former concrete construction hall for the University of Westminster's School of Engineering. Built in the 1960s, its dramatic and impressive scale and its many retained industrial features offer opportunities for a range of creative activities and provides an inspiring venue for the exhibition of art. The Ambika P3 programme is dedicated to innovation, experimentation and learning and, supported by the Ambika Paul Foundation, has been conceived as a laboratory and meeting place for practitioners, industry and academia, aimed at both specialist and general public enthusiasm for architecture, design, media, fashion and visual and performing arts.

Sprovieri Gallery

Sprovieri Gallery will celebrate its tenth anniversary in London in 2010 by presenting this major exhibition of new work by Jannis Kounellis at Ambika P3. The gallery has a long-term history of working with Kounellis, including organizing a large scale solo exhibition at the Central House of the Artists in Moscow in 1991, presenting three shows in the London gallery in 2001, 2004 and 2007 and inaugurating a new space in Rio de Janeiro in 2008 with a solo exhibition of site specific works by Kounellis. The gallery is also supporting the preparation of Kounellis' 'Complete Works' with a provisional publication date of Autumn 2010.

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