



GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA

Via del Castello 11, San Gimignano (SI), Italia
tel. +390577943134 | info@galleriacontinua.com | www.galleriacontinua.com

JANNIS KOUNELLIS

Re di picche

Opening: Saturday May 2nd 2015, Arco dei Becci 1, 6pm-midnight
Until 05.09.2015, Monday-Saturday, 10am-1pm, 2-7pm

Galleria Continua is pleased to present, for the first time in its gallery spaces, a solo show by one of the leading exponents of Italian post-war art, **Jannis Kounellis**, who has been a prominent figure on the international art scene for around thirty-five years, working across five continents and in some of the most prestigious art collections and museums in the world.

The work of Kounellis was distinguished from the outset by the search for a new spatiality. He identified a hundredweight of coal heaped on the floor of his studio as an element for a different conception of artistic practice. The use of materials considered to be non-pictorial, directly and from real life, introduced him to forms, colours and distinctive smells of natural primary or technological elements, to be transformed into poetic energies through mechanisms of the imagination, of myth, of culture, of classical and religious ideals, of passions. The abandoning of the traditional concept of pictorial representation with a radical *"exit from the picture"* offered him a language with which, since 1967, he has

articulated a spatiality carved out each time from different places and contexts.

Kounellis' journey stems from the libertarian and visionary impulse of an art based on an extreme dialectic mobility with places, people and signs. The dimension of time was and still is one of the principal concerns of the artist's work, elaborated through a constant engagement with history, with something that goes beyond the present and always stimulates a tension between past and future. In this context, his work does not seem to be influenced by actuality, but by the tragedy that goes beyond time. *"I look among the fragments, emotional and formal, for the deviations of history,"* says the artist, *"I am dramatically in search of a unity, however unachievable, utopic, impossible and, precisely for these reasons, dramatic"*. After contributing to the founding and development of Arte Povera, more recently Kounellis has dwelt upon issues regarding the role of the artist and the artist's civil mission in contemporary society.

The artist's works are infused with a high lyricism and have an austere form. The lexicon of his language stems from everything associated with perceptible

phenomena, with life and with the legacy of humankind, and reaches out to touch the intrinsic aspects of experience, the atavistic signs of places. The artist works with "structures of resistance" that have their own weight, and elude what is vague and suggestive; structures which restore sovereignty and power to the common substrate. Sometimes they are doors and broad windows filled with stones or books, occupied by fragments of sculptures or columns of stone. On other occasions they form tin walls with shelves on which empty or full sacks sit. In the case of the work at San Gimignano, we find an imposing beam, a kind of cross, which supports a sack pierced by a knife. To grasp the meaning of the materials employed by Kounellis, and likewise to emphasize their esoteric implications, it is always worth observing their evocative capacity, the possible literary recollections their presence may trigger. *"Clay is matter, iron is matter, paper is matter. We need to extend the concept of matter: matter is giving form, matter that takes on meaning, matter that becomes significant. A hundredweight of coal, not plastic painted like coal, not an abstract weight. A weight is what it hides, its history, its morality. Things become more real, more true,"* affirms Kounellis.

Jannis Kounellis was born in Piraeus in 1936, and has lived and worked in Rome since the end of the 1950s. In the paintings of those years, the artist traced words, letters, numbers and directional signs on monochrome surfaces, bringing the visual signals of the urban context into pictorial language. In 1968 he took part in the exhibition *Arte Povera + Azioni Povere* at the Antichi Arsenali in Amalfi. In 1969 he presented his celebrated work with twelve live horses, and showed at *Arte Povera* in Genoa. He began to produce large installations using natural elements or objects referencing the everyday, such as real people and live animals, stones, cacti, instant coffee, carded wool, empty or grain-filled jute sacks, the flame produced by oxyhydrogen torches, fragments of copies of classical sculptures, oil lamps, shelves of iron, and tracks. From the start he also did set designs and other projects for the theatre. Recurrent elements in his more recent installations, besides the fragments of copies of classical sculptures positioned on shelves, are items of furniture and everyday objects, which he arranges in monumental assemblies. Since 1972 Kounellis has taken part in the Venice Biennale seven times (and one of his works will be in the Italian Pavilion this year), and was at Documenta in Kassel in 1972 and 1982. He showed at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1980; the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, in 1990; the Museo Nacional Centro Reina Sofia, Madrid, in 1996; the Ludwig Museum, Cologne, in 1997; the Museo Pecci, Prato, in 2002; the Museo Madre, Naples, in 2006; the Neue National Galerie, Berlin, in 2007; the Museo Heart, Herning, in 2009; the Today Art Museum, Beijing, in 2011; the Museum of Cycladic Art, Athens, in 2012; and the Musée d'art contemporain in Saint-Etienne in 2014.

For further information about the exhibition and for photographs:

Silvia Pichini, Communication Manager press@galleriacontinua.com, mob. + 39 3474536136