



# GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING **LES MOULINS** HABANA

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# JANNIS KOUNELLIS

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Opening Sunday 18 October 2015, noon – 6 pm  
Wednesdays to Sundays, from Noon to 6 pm

GALLERIA CONTINUA is proud to present for the first time at the Moulin de Boissy a solo exhibition by one of the chief protagonists of postwar Italian art, Jannis Kounellis. Kounellis has been a major international figure for the last forty-five years, present on five continents and in many of the most prestigious collections and museums in the world. This exhibition brings together the artist's most recent works.

Kounellis' work stood out from the beginning for its search for a new kind of spatiality. He identified this new conception with the hundreds of kilos of coal he piled up on the floor of his studio. This material became for him the means of a new pictorial conception. The use of materials long considered to be non-pictorial brought him face to face with forms, colours, and smells distinctive to natural, primary, and technological matter, which then, reinvigorated through the mechanisms provided by the artist's imagination and his passions, as by myth, culture, and classical and religious ideals, underwent a transformation into poetic energies. The abandonment of a traditional concept of pictorial

representation along with a radical 'escape from the canvas' provided Kounellis in 1967 with the language that he has been using ever since to articulate a spatiality he extracts from different places and contexts.

Kounellis' voyage has its origins in the libertarian and visionary impulse of an art founded on an extreme, dialectical mobility in respect to places, individuals, and signs. The dimension of time has always been one of the principle concerns of his work, worked out through a constant confrontation with history, overstepping the present and ceaselessly stimulating a tension between the past and the future. In this context, his work seems not to be influenced by current events, but by universal, timeless themes. 'I look among emotional and formal fragments for deviations from history', the artist affirms. 'I am desperately searching for unity, even if this is inaccessible, utopian, impossible, and, precisely for this reason, dramatic.' Having contributed to the birth and development of Arte Povera, Kounellis has in more recent years come to orient his work around the problems associated with the role of the artist and the social mission of art in contemporary society.

Jannis Kounellis' works are infused with a profound lyricism and take on austere form. The lexical field of his visual language relates to the sensible, to the life and legacy of Man: he touches upon the most intrinsic aspects of human experience, the ancestral signs of places. Kounellis works with 'structures of resistance' that have their own weight and elude everything that is vague and suggestive. Whether doors, large

windows filled with rocks or books, fragments of sculptures or stone columns, these structures restore sovereignty and power to common matter. At other times, they may take on the form of thin metallic walls, supporting shelves laid with bags, by turns empty and full.

The centre of the exhibition space is occupied by a large installation specially conceived for the Moulin de Boissy. The wardrobes in this piece have been used by the artist before, having appeared in other important works and exhibitions, including in the Piazza del Plebiscito in Naples in 1996. Wardrobes interest Jannis Kounellis for their capacity for receiving, for containing, while evoking the simple universe of common people. Here he uses the wardrobes to describe a circle, traversed in its centre by a line of coal, another material that has been present in his work for many years. This 'corridor' cuts the circle, introduces a straight, geometrical division into the agglomeration of bodies. The cut evokes the rapidity of the unerring, precise gesture of a painter. Strong and clear, it separates out a body made up of memories and intimate, human histories.

Beneath the mezzanine, one finds a number of panels that together form the word NOTTE (Night), evoking a particular atmosphere, a moment of hesitation. The word appears without either positive or negative connotation: it is, rather, an observation, a realisation. It is indicative neither of a frozen condition, nor a flat chromatism. The work, on the contrary, acts as a sort of theatre.

The exhibition also brings together a series of works each the same size and made with metallic materials and black coats. Industrial beams, sheet metal and clothing inform one another in a contrasting poetry of matter. The size of the paintings, 180 x 200 cm, marks them with the measure of Man, something Kounellis is continually communicating to his work. Appearing likewise in his use of doors, windows, and wardrobes, this measure is perhaps the clearest statement of Jannis Kounellis' humanism.

Jannis Kounellis was born in Piraeus in Greece in 1936. He has lived and worked in Rome since the late '50s. His paintings from this period show words, letters, numbers and directional signs traced over monochromatic surfaces, bringing visual signals from an urban context into pictorial language. In 1968, he participated in the 'Arte Povera + Azioni Povere' exhibition at the Antichi Arsenali in Amalfi. In 1967, he participated in 'Arte Povera – Im Spazio' at the Galleria La Bertesca in Genoa. His celebrated work in which twelve living horses make up the installation was exhibited in Rome, at the Galleria L'Attico, in 1969. At this time he started to create large installations using natural materials and everyday objects, including living beings, rocks, cacti, coffee grounds, carded wool, hessian sacks both empty and full of grain, blowtorch flames, fragments of reproductions of classical sculptures, oil lamps, metal shelves, and rails. Since the beginning, he has also made works and sets for the theatre. In more recent work, one continues to find everyday objects, including furniture, arranged within his monumental installations. Since 1972, Kounellis has participated seven times in the Venice Biennale (one of his works was exhibited in the Italian Pavilion this year), and twice in Documenta in Kassel (in 1972 and 1982). He exhibited at the Musée de l'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1980, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1990, at the Museo Nacional Centro Reina Sofia in Madrid in 1996, at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne in 1997, at the Museo Pecci in Prato in 2002, at the Museo Madre in Naples in 2006, at the Neue National Galerie in Berlin in 2007, at the Museo Heart in Herning in 2009, at the Today Art Museum in Beijing and at the National Center For Contemporary Art in Moscow in 2011, at the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens in 2012 and the Musée d'art contemporain de Saint-Étienne in 2014.