



JANNIS KOUNELLIS

NOVEMBER 24TH, 2016 – JANUARY 28TH, 2017
Centro de Arte Contemporáneo Wifredo Lam
San Ignacio No.22, Esquina a Empedrado, La Habana, Cuba

Jannis Kounellis was born in The Piraeus, Greece in 1936 and he has been living in Rome, Italy since the last part of the 50s. In the works of his early years, the artist traces words, letters, numbers and directional signs on monochrome surfaces, welcoming the color, symbols and signs used to establish a communication with the urban landscape in the environment of pictorial language. Ab initio, his work is identified with the investigation on a new space vision and an original conception regarding painting, following an exploration line characterized by contradictory issues and placing interest in the symbols of the urban and industrial mass culture, as well as in the most primordial and essential values of the individual.

The direct use of materials considered extra pictorial, makes him use forms, colors and characteristic scents of natural or technological primary elements, transforming them into poetic energies through imagination mechanisms, of mythology, culture, classic and religious ideals, and passion. Their artistic production is developed to include a wide array of paintings, facilities, performances and theatrical shows with the common objective of expressing tensions and the alignment of the contemporary society, as well as the multiplicity, the darkness and the fragmentation of its language.

The abandonment of the traditional concept of pictorial representation with a radical "off the square", allows him to move away from abstract formalism toward a more conceptual discourse. This provides him an artistic language that, as of 1967, reaches a capacity to create spaces based on places and contexts different every time.

The artistic journey of Kounellis stems from a liberal and dreaming matrix of an art based on a dialectical mobility regarding places, people and signs. Time dimension has been, and it continues being, one of the main concerns in the work by the artist: elaborated in a constant confrontation with history, with something that surpasses the present and permanently stimulates a tension between past and future.

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In this context, his work does not seem to be influenced by the present time, but rather by the tragedy that overcomes the time problem: "I search among the emotional and formal fragments; the deviations of history are tragically in the search of a unit, regardless it might be unreachable, utopian, impossible and, basically for these reasons, dramatic."

His participation in the artistic movement that follows the theory by Germano Celant bearing the name Art Povera (Poor Art) is marked by some decisive biographical moments: in 1968 he participated in the exhibition "Art Povera + Azioni Povere" (Poor Art + Poor Actions), in the Old Arsenals of Amalfi (Italy), in 1969 he showed the celebrated work with twelve alive horses in the gallery l'Attico de Roma and, in the same year, he presented his work in the exhibition "Art Povera" in Genoa, Italy. From then on, he starts creating big facilities using natural elements or objects that remember the daily thing as real people and alive animals, stones, fatty plants, powdered coffee, combed wool, empty or filled grain jute bags, the flames produced in the burning of hydrogen in chlorine, and objets trouvés such as fragments of classic statue copies, oil painted lamps, doors, bed structures, closets and train beams.

His experimentation work with not too orthodox material combinations has continued all along his artistic career, until present times. This has always been hand in hand with a constant research on the role of the artist and the civil mission played by art in contemporary society.

Kounellis works with "resistance structures" that have their own weight, and they elude that what is vague and suggestive, structures that restore sovereignty and power to the common basis.

When trying to understand the meaning of the materials used by Kounellis, as well as to understand its hidden value, it is always opportune to observe the evocative capacities, the possible literary reminiscences deductible from its presentation.

"Clay is matter, iron is matter, paper is matter, and we need to expand the concept of raw material: matter means to draw, matter means to acquire a meaning, a sense. A hundred pounds of coal: not plastic colored as coal, not an abstract and unreal weight. Weight hides its own history, its own mortality. The things become realer."

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY:

Jannis Kounellis has been present in seven editions of the Biennale of Venice (Italy), since 1972, and at Documenta, Kassel (Germany), in 1972 and in 1982. Among numerous exhibitions in the largest museums and international institutions, mention is made to that of Musée d'Art Moderne of the Ville of Paris (France) in 1980, of the Museum of Contemporary Art from Chicago (USA) in 1986, of the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam (The Netherlands) in 1990, of the Museo Nacional Centro Reina Sofía de Madrid (Spain) in 1996, of the Ludwig Museum of Cologne (Germany) in 1997, of the Tate Modern of London (United Kingdom) in 2001, of Galleria Nazionale Modern d'Arte in Rome (Italy) in 2002, of the Museum Madre de Napoles (Italy) in 2006, of the Neue National Galerie in Berlin (Germany) in 2007, of the Museum Heart di Herning (Denmark) in 2009, of Today Art Museum of Beijing (China) in 2011, of the Museum of Cycladic Art of Athena (Greece) in 2012, the Musée d'art contemporain in Saint-Etienne (France) in 2014 and of Galleria Continua - San Gimignano (Italia) in 2015 and Galleria Continua - Les Moulins (France) in 2016.