

JANNIS KOUNELLIS

Fondazione Prada presents "Jannis Kounellis," curated by Germano Celant, the major retrospective dedicated to the artist following his death in 2017. The exhibition runs from 11 May to 24 November 2019 at the historic palazzo of Ca' Corner della Regina, Fondazione Prada's Venetian venue.

Developed in collaboration with Archivio Kounellis, the project brings together more than 60 works from 1959 to 2015, from both Italian and international art institutions and museums, including Tate Modern (London), Centre Pompidou - Musée national d'art moderne (Paris), Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum (Rotterdam), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis) and Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea (Turin), as well as from important private collections both in Italy and abroad. The show explores the artistic and exhibition history of Jannis Kounellis (Piraeus 1936 – Rome 2017), highlighting key moments in the evolution of his visual poetics and establishing a dialogue between his works and the eighteenth-century spaces of Ca' Corner della Regina.

The artist's early works, originally exhibited between 1960 and 1966, are presented in the spaces on the first floor of the Venetian palazzo and deal with urban language. In an early phase, these paintings reproduce actual writings and signs from the streets of Rome. Later on, the artist transferred black letters, arrows and numbers onto white canvases, paper or other surfaces, in a language deconstruction that expresses a fragmentation of the real. From 1964 onward, Kounellis addressed subjects taken from nature, from sunsets to roses—these latter represented on canvases using automatic buttons. In 1967 Kounellis' investigation turned more radical with the aim of overcoming the traditionally pictorial uniformity of his early production, embracing concrete and natural elements including soil, cacti, wool, coal, cotton, and fire.

Kounellis moved from a written and pictorial language to a physical and environmental one, where the conceptual process became interwoven with elementary materials. The elitist, aseptic and authoritative language typical of the art world is replaced by a more expressive one based on the primacy of vital elements and a terrestrial relationship with art. Thus the use of organic and inorganic entities transformed his practice into corporeal experience, conceived as a sensorial transmission and investigation. In particular, the artist explored the sound dimension through which a painting is translated into sheet music to play or dance to. Already in 1960, Kounellis began chanting his letters on canvas, and in 1970 the artist included the presence of a musician or a dancer. An investigation into the olfactory, which began in 1969 with coffee, continued through the 1980s with elements like grappa, in order to escape the illusory limits of the painting, embrace the world of the senses and join with the virtual chaos of reality.

In the installations featured in this exhibition and realized toward the end of the 1960s, the artist sets up a dialectic battle between the lightness, instability and temporal nature

connected with the fragility of the organic element and the heaviness, permanence, artificiality and rigidity of industrial structures, represented by modular surfaces in gray-painted metal. This opposition operates as a metaphor for the living human condition, crushed between a desire for absolute freedom and a sense of physical and moral constriction brought about by social structures.

Kounellis participated in exhibitions and artistic events that paved the way to Arte Povera, which in turn translated into avoiding the exaltation of materials in favor of an authentic form of visual expression. An approach that recalls ancient culture, interpreted according to a contemporary spirit, in contrast with the loss of historical and social identity that took place during the postwar period. Oscillating between a classical and a radical practice, the artist would create fundamental works that led to an energetic and cultural exchange with the viewer. He created an increasingly intense and fluid art that enveloped components at once natural and historical, corporeal and symbolic, emphasizing their mythical valence.

Beginning in 1967, the year of the so-called "fire daisy," the phenomenon of combustion began to appear frequently in the artist's work: a "fire writing" that enlightens the transformative and regenerative potential of flames. Fire comes in the form of a gas torch freely hung and set at eye level for the viewer, allowing visitors a potential use, or blocking its view in favor of greater attention to interior sensations. It would later become a network of flames set out across the floor, as in the 1971 installation, to announce the desire for a total change. Over the years, with the advent of a political and artistic situation of conservative nature, this practice would take on the reductive form of a candle and paraffin lamp, ultimately transforming into a cannula, light and barely visible, running along the metal surface of the painting.

At the height of the mutation and sublime result of combustion, according to alchemical tradition, we find gold, employed by the artist in multiple ways. In the installation *Untitled (Tragedia civile)* (1975), the contrast between the gold leaf that completely covers a bare wall and the black clothing hanging on a coat hanger underlines the dramatic nature of a scene that alludes to a personal and historical crisis. It is a self-portrait of the artist, here sacrificed and therefore absent, expressing the suffering of an existential and creative condition. A division between past and present that still retains some hope of coming back together again, as the presence of the lit acetylene lamp suggests.

In Kounellis' work smoke, naturally connected with fire, functions both as a residual of a pictorial process involving an energetic transit, and as proof of the transformation of substances and the passage of time. The traces of soot on stones, canvases and walls that characterize some of his works from 1979 and 1980 indicate a personal "return to painting," in opposition to the anti-ideological and hedonistic approach employed in a large part of the painting production in the 1980s. During those same years the artist develops the industrial chimney motif, in other words the exact opposite of the primitive force of flame that is in fact

imprisoned in the brick structure. While fire symbolizes the possibility of a revolutionary intervention on reality, soot and smoke released from the industrial chimney represent dissolution and the end of every potential political and social act through art.

The two works from 1980 and 2006, composed of musical instruments connected to gas cylinders and wrought iron bells, are ideally connected to two works dated 1971. In the first case, several flutists play a fragment of a composition by Mozart, while in the second an oil painting portrays the notes of another sacred composition by Bach, this time played live by a violoncellist. With these two operations, Kounellis renews the sacred dimension of music connected to the myth of Orpheus, which attributes the ability to convert inert objects into living things to music, thus placing it in opposition to death. These works substitute or connect the image with sound, overcoming the traditional distinctions between artistic languages. The repetition of musical fragments and the physical presence of musicians allow the artist to explore once again the corporeal dimension of the work, as well as the sharing of a conceptual and sensorial experience between the author and the viewer.

Throughout his artistic research Kounellis develops a tragic and personal relationship with culture and history, avoiding a refined and reverential attitude. He would eventually represent the past with an incomplete collection of fragments, as in the work from 1974 made up of portions of plaster casts of classical statues laid out on a table and accompanied by a lit paraffin lamp. Meanwhile, in other works the Greco-Roman heritage is explored through the mask, as in the 1973 installation made up of a wooden frame on which plaster casts of faces are placed at regular intervals. This wooden support encloses a black canvas that evokes a theatrical space in which the mask, according to Greek tradition, establishes the role and identity of the character, defining its origins and destiny.

The door, displayed in this exhibition in three different declinations dating from 1972 to 2004, is another symbol of the artist's intolerance for the dynamics of his present. The passageways between rooms are closed up with stones, iron reinforcing bars and lead sheets revealing the historical interiority of the building and making several spaces inaccessible in order to emphasize their unknown, metaphysical and surreal dimension. Over the years Kounellis would present the door motif in various versions, sometimes accompanied by bells and plaster casts of classical statues, the stratified memory of a visual and sensorial legacy at once profound and impenetrable.

The exhibition narrative is completed with large-scale installations realized by Kounellis from the end of the 1980s. These ensembles, which multiplied the modularity of historical works in order to inhabit the space, envelop shelves or metal constructions containing objects of various origins: from plaster casts to stones, from coats to glasses and mechanical gears. The large interventions hosted in the central rooms of the two main floors of Ca' Corner della Regina are included in this context. On the first level visitors will find three large-size works from 1994, 2011 and 2013 respectively. The most recent is made up of two train tracks

that support six iron structures that echo his “cotton” piece (1967), each of which contains 200 kg (441 lbs) of various different materials within. The large room of the second floor hosts an intervention from 1993-2008 made up of different colored closets and forms hanging from the ceiling. Conceived for the first time for the spaces of Palazzo Belmonte Riso in Palermo, the work challenges the laws of gravity and, through the series of casually opened doors, seems to imitate the impossible perspectives of baroque painting.

In terms of external interventions, already as early as 1967 Kounellis dealt with the motifs of gravity and equilibrium in his works, taking advantage of the formal and imaginative possibilities of the act of hanging an object. However, it wasn't until the 1980s and 1990s that he developed a deeper dialogue with architectural and urban spaces. Both of these aspects would result in the monumental 1992's installation presented in the internal courtyard of the Venetian palazzo. Originally conceived for the external façade of a building in Barcelona, it is composed of seven metal plates that support sacks filled with coffee beans.

The retrospective is completed on the ground floor by documents—including films, exhibition catalogues, invitations, posters and archival photographs—that trace Kounellis' exhibition history, and by a focus on his theater projects. The exhibition is accompanied by a volume that includes an essay by Germano Celant and an extensive illustrated chronology, documenting and exploring Jannis Kounellis' artistic career and biography. Designed by 2x4 (New York), the book is published by Fondazione Prada.

Press Contacts

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JANNIS KOUNELLIS

List of exhibited artworks

Untitled, 1959
bottles, plywood
Private collection

Untitled, 1960
oil and pencil on linen
Karsten Greve, St. Moritz

Untitled, 1960
acrylic and enamel on canvas
Private collection, Como

Untitled, 1960
oil on canvas
Pierre Bourgie Collection, Canada

Untitled, 1962-63
enamel and acrylic on canvas
Private collection

Untitled, 1964
oil on canvas
Udo und Anette Brandhorst Sammlung

Untitled (Giallo), 1965
oil on canvas
Private collection

Untitled, 1965
oil on canvas
Collection Centre Pompidou, Musée national
d'art moderne - Centre de création industrielle,
Paris

Untitled, 1966
enamel on canvas
Private collection New York, Courtesy Ales
Ortuzar

Untitled, 1967
iron, flame, rubber pipe,
gas tank
Collection Mario Pieroni, Rome

Untitled, 1967
cloth, automatic buttons
HEART - Herning Museum of Contemporary Art

Untitled, 1967
fabric, seam on canvas
Private collection

Untitled, 1967
iron, coal
Private collection

Untitled, 1968
wood, iron, stones
Private collection

Untitled, 1968
wood, iron, burlap
Collection Mario Pieroni, Rome

Untitled, 1968
wool, wood, rope
Karsten Greve, St. Moritz

Untitled, 1968
wood, wool
Private collection

Untitled, 1969
burlap, grains, pulses, coffee
Tate: ARTIST ROOMS. Acquired jointly with the
National Galleries of Scotland through The
d'Offay Donation with assistance from the
National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art
Fund 2008

Untitled, 1969
metal bed frame, wool
Collezione Margherita Stein, Proprietà
Fondazione per l'Arte Moderna e
Contemporanea CRT in comodato presso
Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea,
Rivoli-Torino

Untitled, 1969
iron, chalk, candle
Sammlung Goetz, München

Untitled, 1969
iron, human hair
Collection Centre Pompidou, Musée national
d'art moderne - Centre de création industrielle,
Paris

Untitled, 1969
iron sheet with shelf and egg
Private collection

Untitled, 1969
iron, burlap
Private Collection

Untitled, 1969
iron, lit metaldehyde
Collezione Margherita Stein, Proprietà
Fondazione per l'Arte Moderna e
Contemporanea CRT in comodato presso
Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea,
Rivoli-Torino

Untitled, 1971
gas tanks, flames, rubber pipes
Herbert Foundation, Ghent

Untitled, 1971
flautists playing fragments
of music by Mozart
Private collection

Untitled, 1971
oil paint on canvas, chair, cellist
Tate: ARTIST ROOMS. Acquired
jointly with the National Galleries of Scotland
through The d'Offay Donation with assistance
from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and
the Art Fund 2008

Untitled, 1972
walled up door with stones
Private collection

Untitled, 1972
iron, cotton, fly
Private collection

Untitled, 1972
hat, golden leaves
Private collection

Untitled, 1973
wood, oil lamp, canvas, metal, cloth
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen,
Düsseldorf Schenkung 2013, Sammlung
Dorothee und Konrad Fisher

Untitled, 1973
wood, plaster, cloth, canvas
Boijmans Museum, Rotterdam

Untitled, 1974
table with plaster cast fragments and lit paraffin
lamp
Collection Walker Art Center, Minneapolis T.B.
Walker Acquisition Fund, 1997

Untitled (Tragedia civile), 1975
goldleaf-coated wall, coat rack,
coat, hat, lit gas lamp
Kolumba, Art museum of the Archdiocese of
Cologne

Untitled, 1979
canvas, wood, rope, soot
Collezione Ala, Milan

Untitled, 1980
flute, violin, drum, trumpet, cornet, cello,
mandolin, gas tank, flames
Pierre Bourgie Collection, Canada

Untitled, 1980
stones, palette, soot
Collection S.M.A.K., Museum of Contemporary
Art, Ghent

Untitled, 1981
painting on canvas, iron, plaster, soot
Collezione Prada, Milan

Untitled, 1984
iron shelves, soot
Private collection

Untitled, 1987
iron, wool
Collezione Prada, Milan

Untitled, 1987
iron, newspaper
Collezione Prada, Milan

Untitled, 1987
iron, burlap
Collezione Prada, Milan

Untitled, 1987
iron, wood
Collezione Prada, Milan

Untitled, 1987
iron, stones
Collezione Prada, Milan

Untitled, 1987
iron, flower
Private collection

Untitled, 1988
glass, grappa, lead
Collection Francis Solet, France

Untitled, 1988
iron, paper, burlap, coal
Private collection

Untitled, 1992
iron, burlap, coffee
Collection Ayuntamiento
de Barcelona

Untitled, 1993–2008
wardrobes, steel cables
site specific
Museo Riso-Polo Regionale d'Arte Moderna e
Contemporanea di Palermo

Untitled, 1994
iron, enamel
Private collection

Untitled, 2015
iron, coats, hat, steel
Private collection

Untitled, 1999
plates, iron shelves, bags, plaster
Collection Martin Z. Margulies

Untitled, 2004
lead, steel
Private collection

Untitled, 2004
lead rolls, fabric (452 elements)
Collezione Gaetano e Barbara Maccaferri,
Bologna

Untitled, 2005
lead rolls, cloth, soil, cacti
Private collection

Untitled, 2006
tables, bells
Tate: ARTIST ROOMS, Tate and National
Galleries of Scotland. Lent by Anthony d'Offay
2010

Untitled, 2008
window glasses covered
by iron sheets
Private collection

Untitled, 2011
coats, hats, shoes
Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co.

Untitled, 2012
chair, burlap, coal
Private collection

Untitled, 2013
iron, coffee
Private collection

Untitled, 2013
iron, coal
Private collection

Untitled, 2013
iron, stones, cloth, steel, burlap, coal, wool,
sewing machines, coats, marble, ceramic
Private collection

Untitled, 2015
canvas, iron, steel
Private collection

Untitled, 2015
iron, steel
Private collection

**FONDAZIONE PRADA, VENEZIA
ARCHITECTURE AND RESTORATION PROJECT**

Ca' Corner della Regina, built between 1724 and 1728 by Domenico Rossi for the Corner family of San Cassiano, is a Venetian palazzo overlooking the Grand Canal and located in the Sestiere of Santa Croce. It was erected on the ruins of the Gothic building in which Caterina Corner, the future queen of Cyprus, was born in 1454. The architecture echoes the style of the nearby Ca' Pesaro designed by Baldassare Longhena. The frescoes on the first noble floor represent a series of episodes from Caterina Cornaro's life.

In 1800, the palazzo became property of Pope Pius VII, who assigned it to the Congregation of the Padri Cavanis. Until 1969, it hosted the Monte di Pietà, whereas between 1975 and 2010 it became the home of the ASAC – the Historical Archive of Contemporary Art of the Venice Biennale. Since 2011, it has been the Venetian headquarters of Fondazione Prada, which has launched 8 temporary projects in this venue until today, concurrently with a preservation and repair program of the palazzo.

Ca' Corner della Regina is built on three main levels: the ground floor and two piani nobili. An attic and two mezzanines, located between the ground floor and the first floor, complete its structure. The façade on the Grand Canal is made of Istrian stone, rusticated over the ground floor and mezzanine. The interiors feature two spectacular symmetrical staircases, aligned with the water entrance, which connect the ground floor hall with the second mezzanine. The two piani nobili host some imposing porteghi, decorated with stuccos and frescoes.

The preservation and repair program of Ca' Corner della Regina, which has been drawn up in line with the directives of the Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici e Paesaggistici di Venezia e della Laguna, is being developed in several phases.

The first stages had the primary aim of securing and preserving the surfaces of artistic and architectural value, the study of all the inappropriate equipment plants, the maintenance of the wooden doors, windows and shutters, the removal of non-original partition walls and the reclamation of spaces that have been used as offices and service rooms. As for the preservation of the decorative apparatus, the ornamental frescoes, stuccos and stonework in the portego and eight rooms on the building's principal piano nobile have been secured. Afterwards, work was carried out to consolidate and secure the surfaces of the mezzanine, the restoration of which brought to light a fresco in the central hall, previously hidden, in 2019. On the second floor, a restoration project focused on the walls and the stucco and marmorino veneziano decorations of the side rooms. The restoration of the surfaces of the portego on the second floor will follow.

INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC

Fondazione Prada, Venice (Calle de Ca' Corner, Santa Croce 2215, Venice)

OPENING DAYS AND TIMES

Every day: 10am - 6pm (closed on Tuesdays)

ADMISSION FEE

Full 10 euros

Concessions 8 euros (students under 26, FAI card holders, carers/companions to visitors with disabilities, groups of 15-25 people)

Free (visitors under the age of 18 or over the age of 65, visitors with disabilities, accredited journalists or holders of a valid press card)

DIRECTIONS

Vaporetto

Line 1 - San Stae or Rialto Mercato stop

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All guided tours (both groups and individuals) must be booked at least 24 prior to visit through Fondazione Prada visitor services:

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