

Jannis Kounellis is regarded today as one of the most important artists of the Italian "Arte Povera" movement, which was first made known by this name by the Italian critic Germano Celant in the late 1960s. For the artists of the "Arte Povera" movement, working with everyday "poor" materials, such as coal, fire and natural objects, meant a departure from the tradition of panel painting and a poetical reinterpretation of the contemporary world with the help of sensuous materials.

Over the last few decades, Jannis Kounellis' work has been shown due appreciation through numerous exhibitions in many large museums in Europe and America. His works are included in the most significant collections in the entire world. After extensive retrospectives in Naples and Vaduz and his spectacular exhibition in the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, the artist is returning to the Galerie Lelong Zürich (curator Johannes Gachnang) to present his latest works in the same rooms in which his last exhibition was held in 1991.

An exhibition of Jannis Kounellis' art always results in the presentation of the entire room enacted by the artist himself, be it in a gallery or a museum. A room transformed in this way to resemble a stage develops its own presence in which the memory of the location itself, the artist's works which have come together and metamorphosed over the years and the experiences and expectations of the beholder all melt into one piece in which - although the artist is the director - time and the memory of the viewer are actually of greater significance. The dramatic effect of the location produced in this way characterizes Kounellis' exhibitions and makes them so impressive to the visitor.

Kounellis confronts the various materials of his art in a dialectical manner. Energy in different forms is immanent in all of them, be it coal, jute sacks, lead, iron slabs or steel girders as metaphors of the Industrial Revolution and origin of our present-day culture and those of the Bunsen burner, the candle and the fire which constitute a vigorous foil to the static materials and allows the beholder to sense their tangible weight. A transcendental and poetic aspect is added to the static and structural part of the work to form an interplay between prescribed structure and sensuous transformation which allows a third dimension to emerge in the form of warmth and sounds.

Just like their poesy, the physical presence of each piece is always geared towards human experience. Accordingly, the iron slabs that can be viewed in the rooms of the gallery are the same size as a double bed, double door or table, which suggests that they have their origins in the experiences of everyday life, and they combine with coats hung up on hall stands to form an image of the Theatre of Life. As if in a never-ending play, Kounellis brings the set scenes of his repertoire onto the stage in constantly changing compositions, thus negating the idea of the possibility of a completed individual work. "I never wanted to burden myself with a great work because I wanted to

live something that was unfinished."1 Despite the negation of the panel painting, Kounellis remains an epic narrator who creates walk-in images which emphasize the notion of being thrown into a world in which personal, historical and mythical memories cross over with the present.

Lithographs from the series "Fumo di Pietra" will also be on display at the exhibition. Smoke gathering in front of the window of a country house inspired the artist to produce the drafts of a series of fantasy faces. The artist ran his fingers through the wet ink at the same speed that smoke evaporates to create the impression that he was painting in the smoke. The lithographs, which were produced in small editions, belong to the collections of large museums.

Kounellis describes his role as an artist as a "lover on a journey" and he is now making his way to Zürich to enact a piece from his artistic career at the gallery.

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