

## HOMAGE TO JANNIS KOUNELLIS

Work of art and screening of the play */o* by Etel Adnan  
directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos  
held at the Scatola Magica of Piccolo Teatro Strehler, Milan in May 2022.

Opening: **Wednesday 14 December, 1 - 8 pm**  
Until 22 December, 2022

Galleria Fumagalli pays homage to contemporary art master **Jannis Kounellis** presenting the screening of the play */o* by Etel Adnan held at the Piccolo Teatro Strehler, Milan on 23-24-25 May, 2022. On that occasion an iconic work by the artist was exhibited upon the wishes of director Theodoros Terzopoulos, great friend of Kounellis.

«*/o* is a performance presented in a small space, yet full of energy – the Scatola Magica; a place that looks like a chapel for pray and self-concentration» **Theodoros Terzopoulos** explained.

**Dedicated to Jannis Kounellis' memory**, the play manifests as a candle of memory that, when lit, illuminates human being's pain and persecutions that afflict them, giving the viewer a deeply intimate and moving experience. The monologue is about the silent grief of emigration, escape, displacement of a woman who is, at the same time, a contemporary creature and a character from mythology – persecuted and punished by Hera because of her jealousy of Zeus. The suffering is embodied in a demon that torments the protagonist in her deepest, like an invisible and invincible enemy, a monster to which everyone could give the shape of a personal discomfort.

*Io* gradually accepts the trauma, she changes and mutates, and in this acknowledgment, she manages to find a profound meaning in life. Thus, the liberating and cathartic ending meets Jannis Kounellis' poetics which, like the Greek tragedy, seems to offer a possible way to sublimate individual anxieties and sufferings.

The selected work by Jannis Kounellis (the diptych "Untitled", 2009) enhances the message of the play: the coats compressed by iron sheets serve as symbols of the human condition and specifically, they are indissolubly linked to the words of suffering and oppression of the protagonist */o*, played by Aglaia Pappas.

To complete the scene, there is a tank on the floor – which was also present during the performance in the theatre. Filled with ashes and combustion remains from the Greek woods devastated by fires, it reaffirms the strong connection with Greece – the native country of the artists involved, as well as the myth itself.

Jannis Kounellis' relationship with theatre began in 1968 at the Teatro Stabile in Turin with director Carlo Quartucci for the play *I Testimoni* by Tadeusz Rózewicz, for which he created a scene made of coal bags. Through these elements he could recreate on the stage – but also in his installations – a humanistic, poetic and revealing reality.

For the present occasion, Galleria Fumagalli and Theodoros Terzopoulos meet again, after their first collaboration at the Piccolo Teatro, Milan in 2015. Back then, Terzopoulos and Kounellis wanted to pay homage to one of the most significant authors of German theatre, Heiner Müller, staging the play *Die Hamletmaschine* (1977) in a scene by Kounellis consisting of furniture and domestic objects (wardrobes, bedside tables, coat hangers, bowls, glasses filled with grappa) and goldfish. Even in that case, the video of the play was re-presented at the gallery together with the installation, showing once again Kounellis' strong bond with theatre.

## Biography

**Jannis Kounellis** was born in 1936 in Piraeus, Greece, he moved in Rome in 1956, where he lived and worked until his passing in February 2017. During his studies at the Fine Art Academy in Rome, stimulated by the teaching of Toti Scialoja, Kounellis approached the American Abstract Expressionism and the European Informel. In the early works of the Sixties, the artist experimented with painting to present an obscure and fragmentary writing, made of signs and symbols. Even though he did not intend painting in a traditional way, Kounellis had always considered himself as a painter: «I have the attitude of a painter. This is my identity. I could not abandon it, even if I would like to. In Greek the word painter is *zōgraphos*, which means somebody who draws life. Greek language is much more accurate. It describes a life experience». The artist, in fact, used to replace the canvas with an iron sheet, where he juxtaposed everyday objects. Through the use of materials (such as jute, wax, coal, glass, fabrics, coffee powder, etc...) understood to stimulate the senses, human existence is evoked, in its routine and conflict. In the attempt to face this drama, the artist suggests a cathartic solution, almost following the plot of a Greek tragedy, as he cannot ignore the confrontation with existence.

From the Sixties, Jannis Kounellis started to present his work in the exhibitions organized in the context of Arte Povera, founded by Germano Celant in 1967. In those years even theatre and scenography became essential features of his research. His debut took place at the Teatro Stabile in Turin: he realized a scene made of coal bags for the pièce *I testimoni* by T. Rózewicz (1968-69), directed by Carlo Quartucci.

Many are the international solo exhibitions presented in prestigious institutions, such as: Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2022); Fondazione Prada, Venice (2019); MKM, Duisburg (2018); MAC-USP, Sao Paulo (2016); MAMC, Saint-Étienne Métropole (2014); Palazzo Belmonte Riso, Palermo (2012); Today Art Museum, Beijing (2011); Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire (2008); Musée d'Orsay, Paris (2007); Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin (2007); Museo Madre, Naples (2006); Albertina, Wien (2005); Vijecnica - National Library, Sarajevo (2004); GNAM, Rome (2002); Centro Pecci, Prato (2001); MNBA, Buenos Aires (2000); Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (1996); Palazzo Fabroni, Pistoia (1993); PAC, Milan (1992); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1990); Castello di Rivoli, Turin (1988); MAC, Montréal (1987); MCA, Chicago (1986); CAPC, Bordeaux (1985); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1980); Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (1977). Among the international exhibitions: Venice Biennale (2015, 2011, 1993, 1988, 1984, 1980, 1978, 1976, 1972); Biennale of Sydney (2008); Istanbul Biennial (1993); documenta, Kassel (1982, 1977, 1972).

Among the most recent group shows in institutions: Jeu de Paume, Paris (2022); Centro Pecci, Prato (2022); Magazzino Italian Art, Cold Spring, New York (2021); Metropolitan Museum of Manila (2020); MAMC, Saint-Étienne Métropole (2019); Philadelphia Museum of Art (2018); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2016); Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan (2015); Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao (2014); Fondazione Prada, Venice (2014); MoMA, New York (2013); MACBA, Barcelona (2010); Museo Madre, Naples (2009); Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2007); Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2006); National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (2005).

The collaboration with Galleria Fumagalli started in 2003 with the first solo show in the Bergamo venue. It was followed in 2005 by the participation in the group exhibition "Visioni" curated by Annamaria Maggi at the Former Sant'Agostino Church in Bergamo. Dates back to 2009 the second solo show, in collaboration with Museo Bernareggi, followed by a volume published by Silvana Editoriale with a text by Franco Fanelli. In 2010 the Gallery actively contributed to the realization of the solo show at Teatro Margherita in Bari, Puglia; on that occasion a sculpture was commissioned for Piazza del Ferrarese. The exhibition was accompanied by a volume published by Silvana Editoriale with texts by Bruno Corà, Vito Labarile and Annamaria Maggi. On 28 December 2015 at the Scatola Magica - Piccolo Teatro in Milan, the performance *Die Hamletmaschine* by Heiner Müller took place - directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos, with a scene by Jannis Kounellis and curated by Annamaria Maggi and Alexandra Papadopoulos. The following year, the video of the performance and parts of the scene were exhibited at the Gallery on the occasion of the artist's third solo show: "Jannis Kounellis e il Teatro". In 2021 Kounellis' oeuvre was selected by critic Lóránd Hegyi to be included in the fourth and the eighth shows of the program "MY30YEARS - Coherency in Diversity".

## GALLERIA FUMAGALLI

Via Bonaventura Cavalieri 6, 20121 Milan

From Monday to Friday, 1pm - 7pm

Info: +39 02 36799285 | [info@galleriafumagalli.com](mailto:info@galleriafumagalli.com) | [galleriafumagalli.com](http://galleriafumagalli.com)

Press Office PCM Studio | +39 3499267882 | [Carlotta Biffi](mailto:Carlotta Biffi) | [carlotta@paolamanfredi.com](mailto:carlotta@paolamanfredi.com)