

MUSEO JUMEX PRESENTS
JANNIS KOUNELLIS IN SIX ACTS,
THE FIRST COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY
OF THE ARTIST IN MEXICO

GALLERY 3
 01.APR. – 17.SEP.2023

Mexico City, march 30, 2023—From April 1 through September 17, 2023, Museo Jumex presents *Jannis Kounellis in Six Acts*, the first comprehensive survey in Mexico of the Italian contemporary artist Jannis Kounellis (Greece, 1936 – Italy, 2017). Kounellis is best known for his central role in the Italian *Arte Povera* movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, influencing generations of artists around the world. This exhibition is the most extensive assessment of his career to date, presenting 43 works that revisit the artist’s practice, including iconic pieces as well as some that are rarely seen. It will also introduce Mexican audiences to Kounellis’s practice, which remains deeply relevant to contemporary art dialogues, and offers new scholarship that enriches global understanding of his innovative vision and approach.

Jannis Kounellis in Six Acts honors Kounellis’s assertion that not only works made of paint on canvas can be considered paintings. While his production was predominantly sculpture, installation, and performance, he identified himself as a painter. This exhibition presents his work through this lens and is an expansive and deep analysis of painting as a medium. Kounellis expressed his relationship to history in his sculptural projects through his use of found items, giving new life to fragments of classical sculpture, furniture, and organic or industrial materials presented in carefully composed groupings. Several large-scale installations are included in the exhibition, all based on experiences of memory and the senses.

From the 1980s onward, Kounellis continued to build his material vocabulary, introducing smoke, shelving units, trolleys, blockaded openings, mounds of coffee grounds and coal, as well as other indicators of commerce, transportation, and economics. He also continued to experiment with and embrace elements of performance that brought the viewer into active connection with his work and the ideas of memory, history, language, and nature that were central to his oeuvre for over five decades. Kounellis’s profound career-long examination of the relationships between nature, culture, and humanity makes his work incredibly resonant in contemporary art dialogues.

Jannis Kounellis in Six Acts is organized by Museo Jumex, Mexico City, and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. The organizing curators are Kit Hammonds, Chief Curator, Museo Jumex, Mexico City; and Vincenzo de Bellis, former Curator and Associate Director of Programs, Visual Arts, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; with Cindy Peña, Curatorial Assistant, Museo Jumex.

JANNIS KOUNELLIS

Jannis Kounellis was born in 1936 in Piraeus, Greece. In 1956, Kounellis moved to Rome and enrolled in the Accademia di Belle Arti. While still a student, he had his first solo show, titled *L'alfabeto di Kounellis*, at the Galleria la Tartaruga, Rome, in 1960. The artist exhibited black-and-white canvases that demonstrated little painterliness; on their surfaces, he stenciled letters and numbers.

Influenced by Alberto Burri as well as Lucio Fontana, whose work offered an alternative to the expressionism of Art Informel, Kounellis was looking to push painting into new territory. He was inspired, too, by the work of Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline, and by the earlier abstractions of Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian. Kounellis's painting would gradually become sculptural; by 1963, the artist was using found objects in his paintings. Kounellis began to use live animals in his art during the late 1960s; one of his best-known works included 12 horses positioned inside the gallery. Kounellis not only questioned the traditionally pristine, sterile environment of the gallery but also transformed art into a live environment. His diverse materials from the late 1960s onward included fire, earth, and gold, alluding to his interest in alchemy. Burlap sacks were introduced in homage to Burri, though they were stripped of the painting frame and exhibited as objects in space. Other materials have included bed frames, doorways, windows, and coat racks. People, too, began to enter his art, adding a performative dimension to his installations.

In the twenty-first century, Kounellis developed an increasingly architectural vocabulary, creating labyrinthine environments that manipulate the exhibition space, the viewer's experience, and the materials that have articulated the artist's oeuvre for decades. Kounellis was honored with major exhibitions at Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome (2002), Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina in Naples (2006), and Neue National Galerie in Berlin (2008), among others. The artist died in Rome on February 16, 2017.

MUSEO JUMEX

Museo Jumex, Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo's main platform, opened its doors to the public in November 2013 as an institution devoted to contemporary art. Its aim is not only to serve a broad and diverse public, but also to be a laboratory for experimentation and innovation in the arts. Through its exhibitions, publications, research, and public programs, Museo Jumex familiarizes audiences with the concepts and contexts that inform current art practice. Through the use of critical and pedagogical tools, the museum's educational programs further the institution's commitment to build links between contemporary art and the public.

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