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Jannis Kounellis Notte

curated by **Luigia Lonardelli**

in collaboration with **Archivio Kounellis** and **Estate of Jannis Kounellis**

MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo | Galleria 5

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« IN THE SIXTIES, THEY CALLED ME AN ARTIST BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO DEFINE A PILE OF COAL. BUT I AM A PAINTER, AND I ASSERT MY INITIATION INTO PAINTING. BECAUSE PAINTING IS THE CONSTRUCTION OF IMAGES, IT DOES NOT INDICATE A STYLE OR A TECHNIQUE »

Jannis Kounellis (Piraeus, 1936 - Rome, 2017) was a pioneer in those explorations that profoundly modified the relationship between the artwork and its observer. Greek by birth, Italian by adoption, and a Roman by choice, Kounellis - *Gianni*, for all those who knew how strongly he felt he belonged to Italy - with his art he was able to 'step out of the picture'. An extraordinary builder of images capable of touching deep emotions, he considered space as a blank canvas to be painted, and for this reason, he never ceased to define himself as a *painter*.

Jannis Kounellis. Notte, curated by **Luigia Lonardelli**, is the homage - the first in Rome after his passing - that MAXXI dedicates to this great master, whose history has intertwined multiple times with that of the museum over the years.

In the dramatic Galleria 5, which extends into the void, framing the city with its windows, **three works** are presented, strongly connected to that realm of Kounellis' research focused on theater. Powerful and evocative works, all characterized by a continuous tension between strength and precariousness, capable of establishing a profound relationship of empathy and dialogue with the surrounding environment, an exhibition and scenic space simultaneously.

Starting with **Senza titolo (Notte)** (1996), which revisits the artist's early experiments with the alphabet in the 1950s. The letters, painted in black on papers applied to iron slabs, oscillate in space like limbs of a moving body and rest on the ground in an apparently precarious balance. The eye sees, even before reading, and the dramatic charge strikes before the mind reassembles the letters into the word "*Notte*" (Night). In this work, halfway between installation and painting, no single force prevails: sign, image, and meaning present themselves to the viewer, asking to be considered beyond their interconnection.

Further ahead, on a podium of sheet metal slabs, one of Kounellis' preferred materials, a piano stands alone; at times, a pianist plays, echoing, as if in the mists of a melancholic dream, the slowed notes of *Va pensiero* from Giuseppe Verdi's *Nabucco*. It is **Senza Titolo (Nabucco)**, an action presented for the first time at Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome in 1970, on the occasion of the exhibition *Vitality of the Negative in Italian Art*, promoted by Incontri Internazionali and curated by Achille Bonito Oliva.

The score, fragmented and deprived of the famous text, struggles to flow, and a moving atmosphere invades the space in a continuous series of scraps, lacerations, and ruptures.

To conclude the journey, a large installation on the glass, conceived in 2003 for the cloister of the Monastery of San Lazzaro degli Armeni in Venice. The work consists of a series of small balance plates suspended in vertical sequence: a rigorous system of weights and counterweights, on which fragile compositions of glass cups and pitchers rest.

A theatrical backdrop suspended between reality and fiction, which once again leaves the viewer the possibility to imagine further horizons.

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