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Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

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JANNIS KOUNELLIS

From November 12, 1987 to February 14, 1988, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal is presenting a major exhibition of the works of Jannis Kounellis. The exhibition was organized by Mary Jane Jacob, then chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and recently appointed chief curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. When first presented in Chicago in October 1986, it was hailed as the first important North American retrospective of Kounellis's work.

Jannis Kounellis, who was born in Greece in 1936 and has lived in Rome since 1956, is considered a leading figure in contemporary art. He is one of the principal exponents of Arte Povera, a movement that arose in Italy in the sixties and calls into question the very foundations of art. His work is not characterized by a single style or aesthetic but rather by the poetic expression of an ideology, his philosophy of cultural history and his stance as an artist in Europe in the postwar years.

Unlike conventional retrospectives with a chronological arrangement of works, the presentation at the Musée will take the form of a series of groupings conceived by Kounellis himself in relation to the gallery spaces. Closely linked to the locations that will receive them (the physical space as well as the social and cultural context), the pieces selected by Kounellis will indicate the main themes that have run through his work for nearly 30 years and examples of the various forms that his art has taken: paintings with large black numbers and letters, works with burlap, wool, beds, fire, live animals, smoke, fragments of classical sculpture, walled-up doors and windows as well as works that include a combination of motifs.

Fire has remained a favourite material of Kounellis. In its mythological reference, it punctuates the painter's work with its evocative power and its hues of red and gold. As an agent of transformation, even purification, fire acts as a metaphor in Kounellis's installations and expresses, by way of example, his commitment to an art that is a reflection of his ideological position.

In the eighties Kounellis's work entered a phase of highly complex combination of earlier themes. By combining elements of his earlier works, and in some instances incorporating previous works into a new larger body of work, Kounellis has multiplied his metaphors and given new meaning to his pieces.

For the presentation at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Kounellis has chosen to include a group of recent works, never before seen in North America or in Europe, consisting of 11 paintings made of iron and incorporating various materials, which were produced in 1987 and shown for the first time at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Nagoya, Japan, last summer. This spectacular series of works will be added to those included in the Jannis Kounellis retrospective organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and will thus create an opportunity for a fresh interpretation and consideration of his entire "oeuvre".

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On the occasion of this exhibition, the Department of Education of the Musée has produced an informational brochure which will be available in the galleries and in which Lucette Bouchard concludes: "Through continuous questioning and skilful adaptation to a world that is constantly evolving, Kounellis's art has remained the work of a painter. Concerned with relations between materials, volumes and colours, Kounellis creates images, images that engender and sustain a dialogue between past and present, between structure and sensibility, between the political and the poetical."

A catalogue published by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and which features an introduction by Mary Jane Jacob, curator of the exhibition, and an essay by Thomas McEvelley, accompanies the exhibition. A French version of the texts has been prepared by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal.

This exhibition was organized by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, with the financial support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Chicago, and the Illinois Arts Council.

Transportation of Kounellis's works from Japan has been provided by CANADIAN AIRLINES INTERNATIONAL through the intermediary of Lavalin.

The Museum is offering a shuttle bus service from McGill and Bonaventure metro stations, every day between 9:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.. Information: 873-2878

The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal is opened from Tuesday to Sunday between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m..

The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, the only institution of its kind in Canada, is a national museum by virtue of the Quebec National Museums Act. It is an associated museum in the context of the Museum Assistance Programmes of the National Museums of Canada.

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