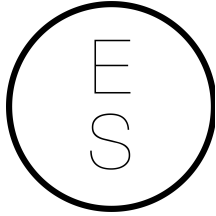




by Nathalie De Clerck



# Jannis Kounellis

01/08 – 21/09/2019

Edouard Simoens Gallery  
811 Zeedijk  
8300 Knokke-Zoute  
Belgium

## BIOGRAPHY

### **B. 1936, Piraeus, Greece; D. 2017, Rome**

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 equally inspired 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, he was using found elements in his paintings. Kounellis began to use live animals in his art during the late 1960s; one of his best-known works included 11 horses installed in the gallery. Kounellis not only questioned the traditionally pristine, sterile environment of the gallery but also transformed art into a breathing entity. His diverse materials from the late 1960s onward included fire, earth, and gold, sometimes 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. Additional materials have included bed frames, doorways, windows, and coat racks.

In 1967, Kounellis was included in an important group exhibition entitled *Arte povera e IM spazio* at the Galleria La Bertesca, Genoa. Curator Germano Celant coined the term *Arte Povera* to refer to the humble materials, sometimes described as detritus, which Kounellis and others were employing at the time to make their elemental, anti-elitist art.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Kounellis continued to build his vocabulary of materials, introducing smoke, shelving units, trolleys, blockaded openings, mounds of coffee grounds, and coal, as well as other indicators of commerce, transportation, and economics. These diverse fragments speak to general cultural history and to a new way of artmaking, following the Second World War, whilst equally assembling a rich and evocative history of meaning within Kounellis's oeuvre.

As a well-travelled adventurer and epicurean, Kounellis combines everyday materials with his personal interest in smoking. *Untitled* (1988), made out of iron, wood, pipes, paper and ink, demonstrates how these materials are elevated to a strong and poetic installation. The work was created for the book cover of 'Finecorsa' written by his long-time friend, Marco Gherardi, who travelled with Kounellis and his wife Michelle since the eighties. It is unique in its genre and is the only oeuvre that ever included pipes.

Steel and coal have occupied a special place in Kounellis's pictorial narratives since the 1960s. *Untitled* (1995), a unique oeuvre consisting of 5 individual steel plate, iron and wax on paper works, was produced in Warsaw for the group exhibition 'Where is Abel thy brother?' The exhibition was organised on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and was intended to counter the communist system and Soviet domination of Poland. Its aim was to find out whether contemporary art was able to address war atrocities in a meaningful manner. That same year, the work was included in a solo exhibition at Galerie Kewenig in Cologne during the artist's time in the Ruhr region after he accepted the post of professor at the Academy of Art in Düsseldorf, where he taught from 1993 until 2001. The installation was further shown at the Kunst-Station Sankt Peter in Cologne in 2001 where its status was elevated by presenting it in a Catholic Church. For Kounellis, "Iron and Steel were the materials that best reflected the world of the Industrial Revolution and hence the origins of today's culture". Hence the works have recently been included in 'Art & Coal: homage to Jannis Kounellis' in the MKM Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst in Duisburg that ran from June 8 till October 8, 2018.

*Untitled* (2002) is a subtle nod to the Industrial Revolution. A stack of blankets covers a Singer sewing machine, iron, and a pair of men's and women's shoes. The sewing machine contains connotations of both production and industry. The connection between the factory and the industrial materials frequently found in his work are here exploited by Kounellis.

His works are included in important museum collections such as the Tate Modern, London, the Centre Pompidou, Paris, MoMA, New York and the Guggenheim, New York, to name but a few. Throughout his life, Kounellis was the subject of major retrospectives, including the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1980, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in 1986, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, in 1996. He was included in the Venice Biennial in 1972, 1974, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1993 and 2015 and is currently the subject of an extensive retrospective at the Fondazione Prada in Venice, running through 24 November 2019.

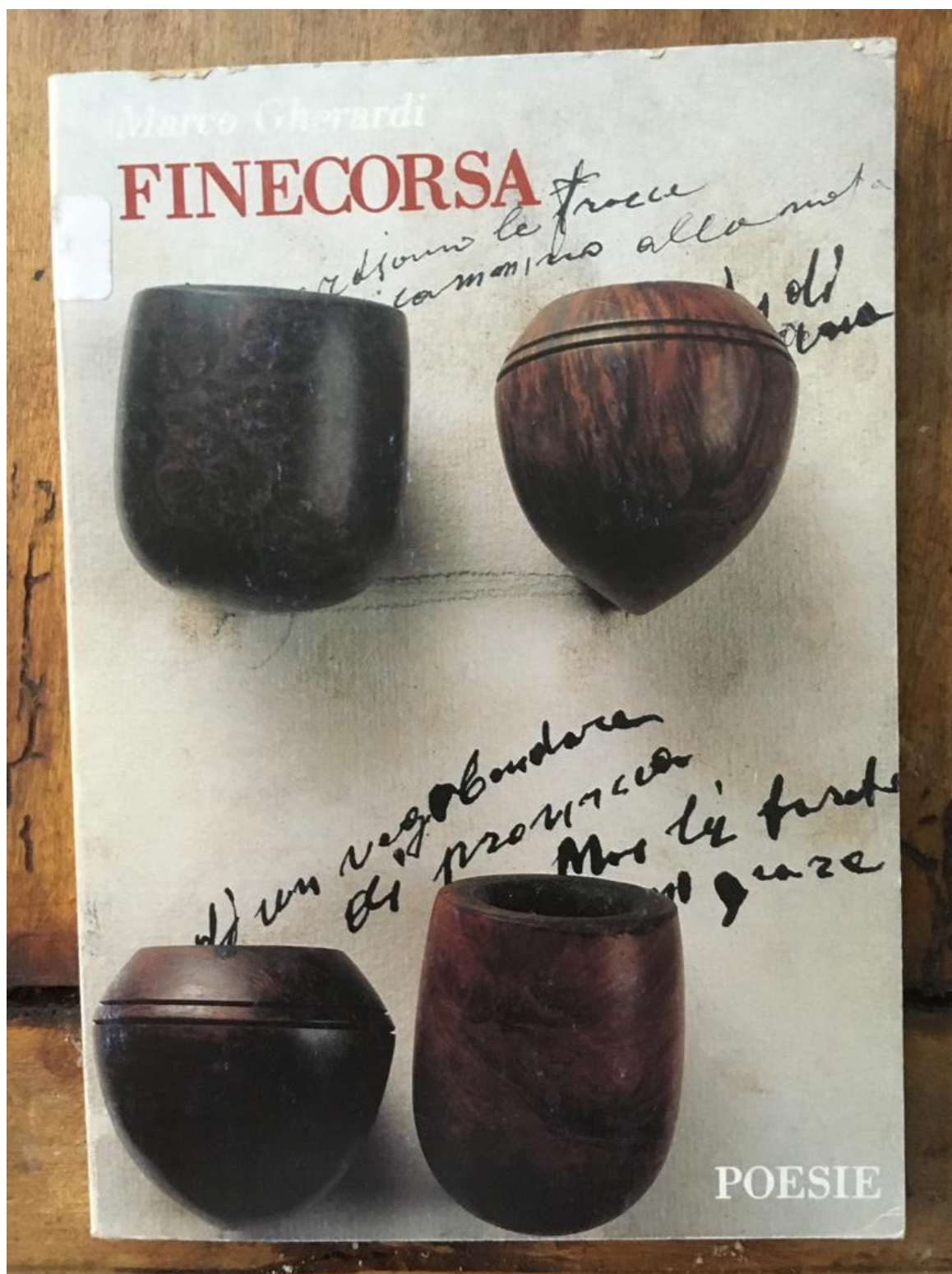


*Untitled*

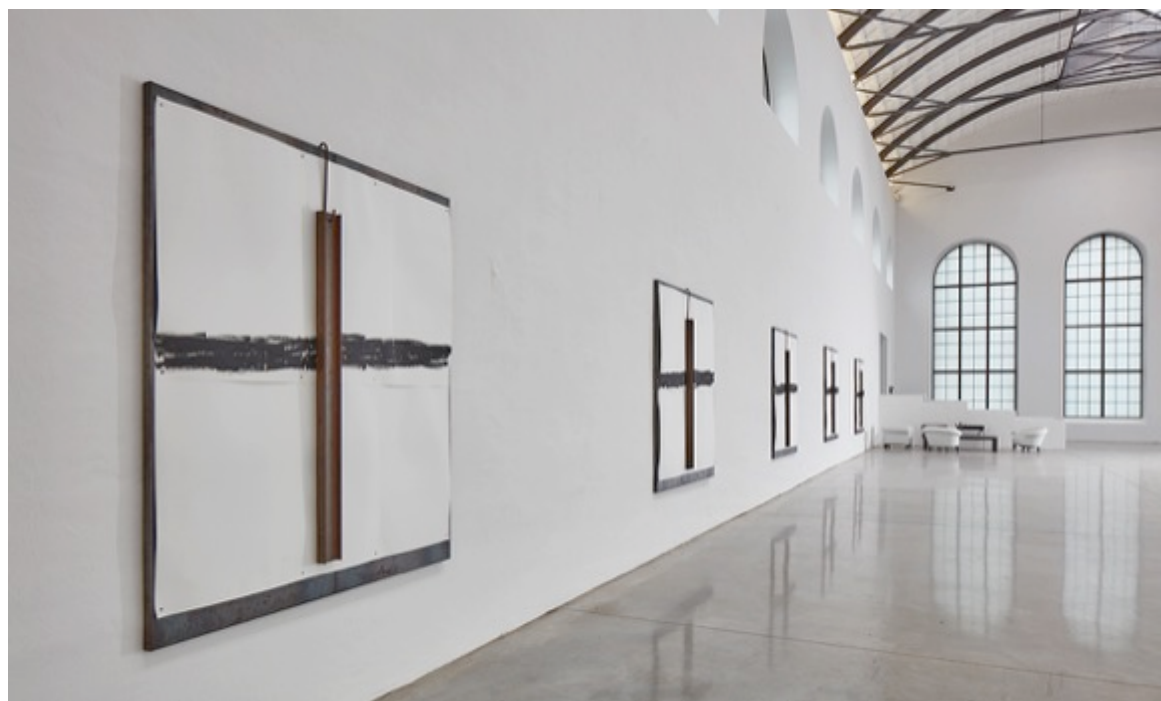
1988

Iron, painted wood, 4 pipes, paper, ink

100 cm x 69.7 cm x 10 cm (38 7/8 x 27 1/2 x 4 Inch.)



Untitled 1988 seen on the book cover *Finecorsa*, written by Kounellis's longtime friend, poet Marco Gherardi. Courtesy of Archivio Kounellis.



*Untitled* (5 works)

1995

Steel plate, iron, wax on paper

5 x (200 cm x 180 cm x 12 cm) (78 3/4 x 70 7/8 x 4 3/4 Inch.)





*Untitled*

1995

Steel plate, iron, wax on paper

200 cm x 180 cm x 12 cm (78 3/4 x 70 7/8 x 4 3/4 Inch.)





*Untitled*

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Steel plate, iron, wax on paper

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Jannis Kounellis in front of *Untitled 1995* at the opening of "Where is Abel thy brother?", group show at the National Gallery of Contemporary Art Zacheta, Warsaw, Poland. Courtesy of Zacheta National Gallery of Art & Archivio Kounellis.



*Untitled*

2002

Iron, sewing machine, blankets, pair of men's and women's shoes

100 cm x 70 cm x 42.5 cm (38 7/8 x 27 1/2 x 16 Inch.)





*Untitled 2002. Courtesy of Archivio Kounellis.*