



PLATO  
CONTEMPORARY  
ART + THEORY

**Organising / Scheduling:**

**JANNIS KOUNELLIS**

At

**The Numismatic, Athens – Hellas**

**SANTO ODISSEO: Alchemy of the Homeric Nostos**

ART + THEORY CURATORIAL PROPOSAL

PRESENTING-INTERPRETING:

***The 'BLACK ROSE' & 'Tragedia Civile'***

**ARTWORKS**

**MUSEO DEL NOVECENTO, Milan**

**ALMINE RECH Gallery, Brussels**

**ALFONSO ARTIACO Gallery, Naples**

**PARTICIPATING:**

***The ITALIAN INSTITUTE in Athens***

***The GOETHE INSTITUTE in Athens***

***The FRENCH INSTITUTE in Athens***

***The HELLENIC AMERICAN UNION in Athens***

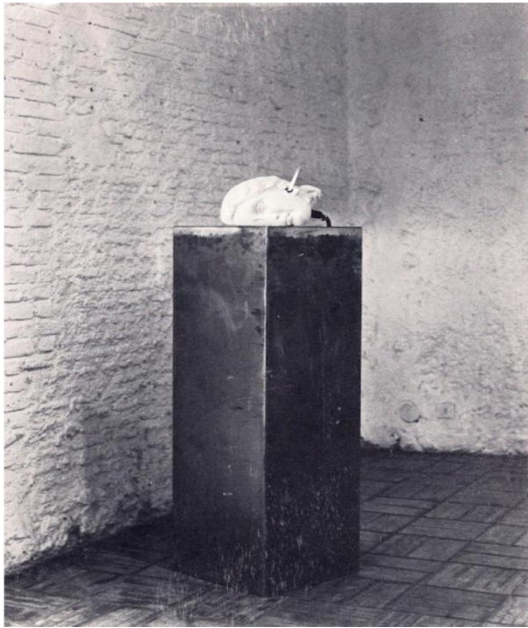
**ART + THEORY PLATO CONTEMPORARY thank the experts at the:**

***KOLUMBA KUNSTMUSEUM, Köln***

***SPROVIERI GALLERY, London***

***GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE, New York***

***BERNIER-ELIADES GALLERY, Athens***



Galleria Lucio Amelio, Invito alla Mostra (Invitation Card to the Exhibition) The Black Rose, 1975  
Archivio Giorgio Colombo, Milano

Image from: «Una partecipazione che va trovata»: Jannis Kounellis, Tragedia civile, 1975” by  
GIORGIO DI DOMENICO, published on *STUDI DI*

*MEMOFONTE Rivista on-line semestrale Numero 21/201.8 - FONDAZIONE MEMOFONTE*

*Studio per l'elaborazione informatica delle fonti storico-artistiche: [www.memofonte.it](http://www.memofonte.it)*

## SIX SERIES OF THEORY TALKS

### SERIES A.

#### COATS: Skins

Space, Form, Material / Gravity / Organism Contents / Trace & Substance / Merleau-Ponty I / Concrete Presence – Abstract Absence / Alchemy of Matter

**Jannis Kounellis:**

*I SAW THE SANCTITY OF EVERYDAY OBJECTS*

*Wherever I left my raincoat last night is where I also left my house keys and my memory of this slowly slips away.*

*The first trade in history can indeed be said to be that of the artist. Cave paintings are there to prove it. The values of this profession were established there and then, in deep and secret recesses in pre-historical times... It's a trade quite unlike anything else. A man is born, a very curious man and then, illumination; the rest is idiom.*

*My materials do not blend in, they demand a space of their own and, at the same time, create an overall space that tends to bring the pretense into question, to provoke it and reveal its restrictions.*

*In the '60s I did a work with 100 kg of coal resting against the wall of a public building, it could have been a gallery, a church, a factory, I am interested in the weight of the materials, not in a phantasmagoric image, weight excludes the virtuality and the effect and leads you – with the complicity of smell – to have a real relationship with the world. This of course does not exclude the complexity of Malevich's square.*



**Jannis Kounellis con Tragedia Civile [Jannis Kounellis with Tragedia Civile], Napoli, Galleria Lucio Amelio, 1975**

**Foto Mimmo Jodice**

**Image from: «Una partecipazione che va trovata»: Jannis Kounellis, Tragedia civile, 1975” by GIORGIO DI DOMENICO, published on *STUDI DI***

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Jannis Kounellis, *Tragedia Civile*, Napoli, Galleria Lucio Amelio, 1975

Foto Mimmo Jodice

Image from: «Una partecipazione che va trovata»: Jannis Kounellis, *Tragedia civile*, 1975” by  
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## **SERIES B.**

### **GESTURES: Longing**

Sense & Emotion / Passion / Personal & Collective Memory / Moving Souls / The Barred Door / Fire & Kinesis / Merleau-Ponty II / Abstract Presence - Concrete Absence / Alchemy of Affect & Concept

#### ***Jannis Kounellis:***

*A WORK OF ART IS LIKE A STONE – YOU THROW IT INTO THE WATER AND WATCH THE RIPPLES.*

*The artist is a human being who liberates things and teaches others to liberate things and doesn't liberate the thing that has already been liberated, because that would be absurd.*

*If you take drama away from form, you are left with formalism. Without drama, art becomes merely an industrial affair...Western thought gives human beings a central role.*

*Ghosts make painting... Without ghosts, there would be no painting, or painting would be stagnant. Ghosts help painting to move, ghosts give hope and meaning to things... to come at the end, to sit inside the picture.*

*I have the mindset of a painter. That's my identity [...] In Greek the word for painter is zōgraphos, which means someone who draws life.*

*Fire for me is the same as the parrot. It's a living thing, turned outward in an aggressive way. [...] They are alive, real but above all they are signs of an image constructed on a support and, when all is said and done for me they are both painting.*

*Arte Povera was a term born in the theatre, that's one reason I recognized myself in it. The phrase is connected with [Jerzy] Grotowski's idea of a teatro povera... In the early 1960s, the experimental Polish director expounded on the concept of a 'poor theatre in which the relationship between actors and audiences was primary, rather than sets and props...*





**JANNIS KOUNELLIS**

*Untitled*

**1971**

**Installation at L' Attico Gallery**

**TATE MODERN**



**JANNIS KOUNELLIS**

*Untitled*

**1969**

**Steel pipes and hooks, propane gas torches**

**GLADSTONE GALLERY**



**JANNIS KOUNELLIS**

*Untitled*

1967

Image courtesy Fondazione Prada

& AnOther: <https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/11738/jannis-kounellis-fondazione-prada-venice-2019-artist-arte-povera-poor-art>

## SERIES C.

### EPICS: Processes

Odyssey & Polis / History & Life / Memory / Selection & Interpretation / Narrators & Rebels –  
Heroes & Saints / Social-to-Individual Culture / Art Language / Nobility & Impetus /  
Ontological Abstraction / Alchemy of Consciousness

### ***Jannis Kounellis:***

*...I SEARCH AMONG FRAGMENTS (EMOTIONAL AND FORMAL) FOR THE SCATTERINGS  
OF HISTORY.*

*Each artist is born genuine but the society turns them into warriors. The spirit of rebellion and  
resistance flows through their blood.*

*The artist has always been a visionary and in many periods of history the dictatorships of  
various kinds that have populated the planet have tried to take away the artist's independence  
and freedom and to replace it with a political direction to tie it, with some excuse or another, to  
a propagandistic idea of the image. I think that the artist is the inventor of the new as an  
affirmation of freedom.*

*What interested me was that the horse was part of the wall.....*

*Obviously, I just put them there: creatures that had a weight and a natural personality, animals  
that breathed and moved. So, it was different from classical iconography. On the other hand, it  
is true that there is a certain classicism about this work. It isn't a Pop art image. It was  
calculated and came out of living in this city that has an incredible history underneath it. It was  
modern but not modernist and modern despite being ancient.*

*Compared to American Minimalism, which had architecture as a model, the show of horses  
brings to the surface the emotional impact, the idea of space, it redesigns the basics of that  
exhibitive cavity which is a gallery and it gives a dramaturgical dimension back to the artist  
who is no longer bound to objects.*

*They were not pictures as such, all the canvases derived from the measurements of the house,  
in which I lived. They referred to the wall. In fact, I used to stretch the canvas or the sheet, right*

*up to the limits of the corners of the wall, the painting ended there [...] it was like taking off a fresco, since the canvases or sheets had the form and breadth of the walls of the room [...]. The letters or painted signs, they came however from forms which I prepared out of hard cardboard. They were printed, not calligraphic but structural.*

*The term "painter" is medieval, it refers perhaps to fresco painters.*

*It is not just the tonal picture that is painting, the cubists are painters, so is Franz Kline, Rembrandt is a painter but so are the constructivists, the medieval Christs are painting and Duchamp is also a painter. To define oneself a painter means having that tradition and that way of thinking, where freedom takes you, on its multicolored sails, on mountain lakes and on oceans toward uncharted islands, this is painting and each time it is unique and unrepeatable.*

*For me, atmosphere is something static. Cubism removes the atmosphere and as a result embraces classicism because it removes the atmosphere. Everything returns to the interior and the greys, the ochres, are interior colours and the Impressionist colours are gone.*

*What would be the best way to set out on a journey: a camel or a boat? As we all know, in both cases, one looks at the sky toward the constellation of the Ursa Minor to chart the path to the final goal. For me, the way of the sea is far more natural for reaching the destination, be it near or far, propelled forward by the desire of having a dialogue in a language invented there and then but never forgetting its roots, buried beneath a heap of stones in the textile factory abandoned in the winter of 1907.*

*You want to see the world so that you can, ultimately, discover what others are like. Not, of course, in the same way as a tourist but like Odysseus. One leaves to see other centers. You can, of course, travel the world and still fail to see anything. Traveling is good when it functions like a step ladder that allows you to discover new lands. The important thing in the case of Odysseus leaving, is not just that he went to war but also that he returned. Returning is the good conundrum.*



**JANNIS KOUNELLIS**

*Untitled [Cavalli]*

**1967**

**12 horses, Installation view at Galleria L'Attico, Rome, 1969**

**Artwork © Jannis Kounellis**

**Image from PHAIDON, <https://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2021/march/23/how-jannis-kounellis-and-12-horses-made-an-arte-povera-masterpiece/>**



**JANNIS KOUNELLIS**

***Manifesto per un teatro utopico* [Manifesto for a utopian theater]**

**1973**

**Graphite and tintypes on paper, sewing machine, kerosene lamp, paper and acrylic on canvas**

**Dimensions variable; paper sheet: 100.3 x 69.9 cm**

**The Sonnabend Collection Foundation and Antonio Homem**

**Image from the *Ileana Sonnabend and Arte Povera Exhibition*, Curated by Germano Celant**

**LEVY GORVY Gallery**



JANNIS KOUNELLIS

*Manifesto per un teatro utopico* [Manifesto for a utopian theater], Detail

1973

The Sonnabend Collection Foundation and Antonio Homem

Image from the *Ileana Sonnabend and Arte Povera Exhibition*, Curated by Germano Celant

LEVY GORVY Gallery





JANNIS KOUNELLIS

*Untitled*

1973

Installation at La Salita Gallery, Rome

Image from: ARTFORUM PRINT OCTOBER 1983

THE COLLISION AND THE CRY: JANNIS KOUNELLIS by GERMANO CELANT,

<https://www.artforum.com/print/archive/22/31712>



JANNIS KOUNELLIS

Jannis Kounellis at Galleria L'Attico

Image courtesy Fondazione Prada

& AnOther: <https://www.anothermag.com/art-photography/11738/jannis-kounellis-fondazione-prada-venice-2019-artist-arte-povera-poor-art>



JANNIS KOUNELLIS

Image from CHEIM & READ Gallery: <https://www.cheimread.com/artists/jannis-kounellis>



CLAUDIO ABATE

*Untitled*

1989

39.878 x 11.4 x 28.956 cm

Private Collection

## SERIES D.

### CARTABIANCA: Contexts

Socioeconomics & Politics in Arte Povera: Anarchy & Communist Party / May '68-Paris & Lacan's Contemporary Schizophrenia / The Strawberry Statement & Woodstock / Autonomy of Art / Revolution-Globalisation-Ancient-Humanist-Modern / Contemporary Alchemy of Culture(s)

### **Jannis Kounellis:**

*ARTE POVERA IS A CONTEMPORARY ART MOVEMENT.*

*The Arte Povera movement took place between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s in all cities throughout Italy and above all in Turin. Arte Povera expresses an approach to art which is essentially anti-commercial, precarious, banal and anti-formal, concerned primarily with the physical qualities of the medium and the mutability of the materials.*

*Arte Povera is an Italian artistic movement which, starting from Turin and Rome, appeared on the international scene in the 1960s. It is an "attitude", a behavior advocated by Italian artists since 1967 which consists of challenges to the cultural industry and more broadly the consumer society, according to a strategy modeled on guerrilla warfare. This refusal of identification is manifested by an artistic activity which also privileges the process, in other words the creative act to the detriment of the finished object. Process that consists mainly of making meaningless objects meaningless. By condemning both the identity and the object, arte povera claims to resist any attempt at appropriation. It is an art that is basically nomadic, elusive.*

*It is clear that minimalist art has a very different emotional effect. The minimalist point of reference was linked to a Protestant civilization. For these Americans drama was demode. The minimalists didn't want to have anything to do with images but my work can be connected to a painting such as Van Gogh's Potato Eaters (1885). There are various ways to be modern and various ways of seeing in modernism.*

*Goya was in Paris at the time of the French Revolution, the summary trials and the daily death sentences, and he wrote that he was struck by the fact that David had drawn the face of Marie*

*Antoinette sitting in the cart that was carrying her to her death in a neoclassical manner, whereas in that scene he instead had only seen a grimace of fear on that face.*

*The 1968 movement began as a university protest but it never reached the degree of radicalness in the French Revolution's demand for liberty.*

*I have no desire to do sociological work, that doesn't interest me, I'm an old humanist and for me man is an irreplaceable centrality and an open border. Moving away from this reality causes you to lose the vision of the future; we must not forget, however, that in the final analysis the problem is style, which is revolutionary or conservative and that the new image must have the pathos of the old paintings.*

*I like to cast my mind back on the 'fauve' Matisse and then see how he evolved. I love Matisse the colorist; after all, Matisse loved Delacroix just as I do. I also like to think of Matisse in Morocco. As I like to think of Rimbaud in Ethiopia. I do not love the political exploitation of Matisse. We need to re-examine the avant-garde stance of the avant-garde. But we mustn't forget that poets, like artists, are born with a new language.*

*...I was in love with America because I loved (Jackson) Pollock, a man who managed to convey a great sense of freedom combined with overwhelming intellectual acuteness. Then, for better or worse, America changed and we artists changed along with it. We had to come to terms with the concept of "competition". Actually, we weren't aware of it as "competition". It was simply a natural assertion of diversity. As an individual, I'm different and strive to be better. This is what we might call "competition". What it amounts to is affirmative action by whoever leads a different life and risks discrimination because of this difference.*





JANNIS KOUNELLIS

*Senza titolo – Rosa near*

1966

Enamel on canvas

223 x 260 cm

MUSEO DEL NOVECENTO, Milan



**CLAUDIO ABATE**

*Rosa Nera*

1966 (printed in 2018)

Silver print

150 x 120 cm

Almine Rech Gallery

## SERIES E.

### GOLD: Four drachmas in the fish's mouth

Cleaving the Gold / Immateriality & Value / Sanctity-Iconic Humanity / Hierarchy or Tragedy / Value of Itinerary & Passage / Alchemy End of the Spiritual Gold

#### **Jannis Kounellis:**

*EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BE CENTRED ON HUMANITY, OTHERWISE THERE'S A GREAT RISK OF FALLING INTO DECADENCE.*

*I have wanted only very beautiful things... I have measured the distance from the objective... I have seen the sacred in the common object.*

*I make no reference to religion because I am an atheist but I cite culture because it has come to me by way of religion.*

*What was space in fourteenth-century works, with plastic figures and the gold background? The infinite. But infinite does not mean space. In fact, an abstract dimension was given to space, a non-place, while in reality someone arrives, puts down an object, hangs up a jacket and acts.*

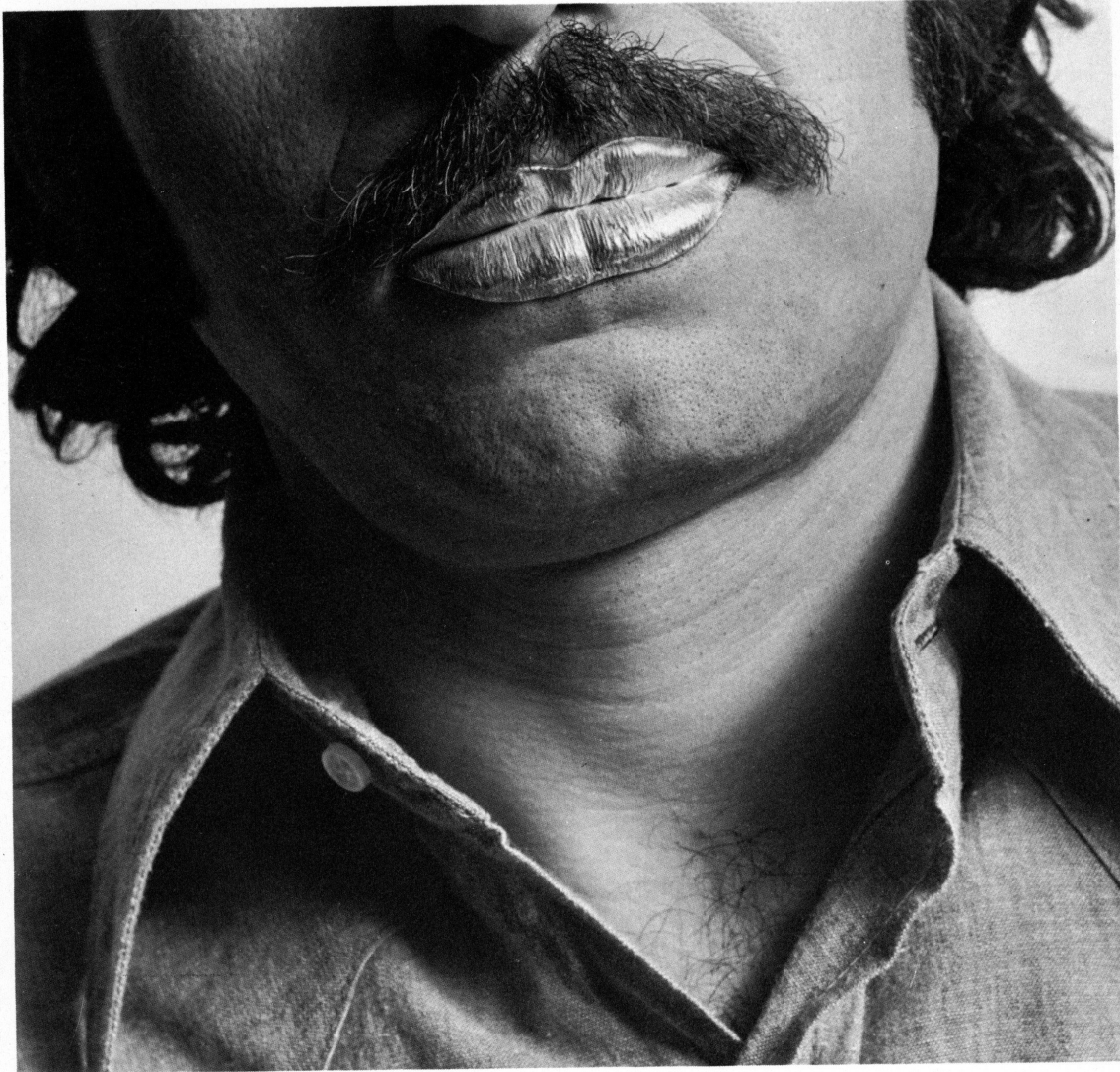
*But an artist is also cohesive with the basic values of her/his space-continuum. Beauty is a good example. A person can start out looking good in the morning and end up looking horrible at the end of the day. In this case, beauty depends very much on the time of day. Long-term beauty is art's prerogative. It's a very real instantiation and yet it holds a perennial value. Beauty is born and reborn an infinite number of times.*

*(Just after a great many drowned bodies of refugees had been found floating in the sea.) I found myself thinking about Piet Mondrian. I imagined him there in Sicily, today, sitting in a studio confronted by this terrifying spectacle. Under those circumstances, Mondrian wouldn't have been able just to paint a vertical line and a horizontal one – that wouldn't have been enough.*



*I desperately seek unity, albeit difficult to attain, albeit utopian, albeit impossible and therefore dramatic.*

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JANNIS KOUNELLIS

*Performance Golden Leaf on Lips*

1972

ARCHIVIO JANNIS KOUNELLIS



JANNIS KOUNELLIS

*Artist's shoes with golden soles*

1975

Private Collection

**SERIES F.**

**VIGIL: Arte per la vita / sanctity in luminosity**

**Jannis Kounellis intimate artist in, around and for the World**

***Jannis Kounellis:***

*I COME WITH EMPTY HANDS, AS AN OLD PAINTER.*

*LIKE PAINTING IN THE DARK – ELIMINATING SEEING BUT NOT THE VISION*

*FREEDOM IS ABOUT RESISTING STYLE, NOT EMBRACING IT. NEW FORMS NEED TO BE DEFINED BY A CONCEPT.*

*The reason why we moved out of the canvas was to establish a more direct relationship with the space and the viewer. It was a natural process, almost a question of two poles attracting each other. This is not to say that I hate paintings, because I don't. But artists locked in their studio all the time clearly don't enjoy the same level of interaction with the public that we do.*

*There has always been someone who has bought a work and given it to a museum! This is nothing new, the challenge instead is to remain dialectical, otherwise internationality will not be understood, you always have to have another before you, with whom you can dialogue and this does not mean losing one's own identity but rather understanding, as in the time of Hellenism, that the other represents a reality and therefore a value.*

*Artistic endeavour is not so much aimed at working out a modality or style as such but at creating a unique image, unrepeatably and clone-proof. Mind you, we're living in times of idiomatic fragmentation. Community identities are being torn asunder by globalisation.*

*It's not for this form or another but for creating the possibility of life, no? An attempt to open something outside these walls of convention. With our work we try to open an unconventional road to language, because language is stereotyped and in using language it constantly stereotypes itself. Our task is this: to find the means of opening more ways to communicate. This is what I believe.*

*Nowadays there's a lot of talk about generations. I'm convinced though that it's not all that decisive. We can't say now what the future holds in store. At the moment, the prevailing opinion is that we're living in an age of absolute artistic innovation. But what does all this originality really amount to? Thanks to my long years of university teaching in Germany, I've many young friends and I can say that I honestly don't think they've sprung from nowhere. They're no different from so many others, carrying forward the same values as their forerunners. It's not all that remarkable after all. As artists, they're indeed rooted in the past; there's no way they can be wholly "new".*

*I don't take oaths lightly... It is a construct to explain my radical decision to leave the Byzantine tradition and to embrace the Renaissance. It had nothing to do with oaths... I never felt any bitterness toward Greece. I do not allow myself to be bitter in this way. I have a plan for the future. I was always trying to find the things I missed. There were no other feelings involved.*

*I have never killed anybody but I am prepared to do so if they trample on my right to freedom. I have never borrowed linguistic extracts, except out of necessity. I have only ever sought beauty. I measured distance through objectivity. I saw the sanctity of everyday objects. I believed in weight as the right form of measurement. I have loved phrases that depict virginity as the ultimate state of being. I have traveled difficult paths, through the woods, heading up the mountain. Lead, hair, clouds, Ursa Minor, which points North, the wind. I don't know how to live outside the labyrinth of language. I love the olive tree, the vineyard and the wheat. I want to see the return of poetry through any means: through exercise, observation, solitude, speech, image and rebellion. Unsatisfied in perpetuity.*

## **SITES OF THE TALKS**

**Appointed Lecture Halls of: the Bank of Greece, the Cultural Foundation of the National Bank of Greece - MIET and the Athens School of Fine Art, Athens – Hellas.**



Mini médaille signée par l'artiste Jannis Kounellis, Monnaie de Paris, 2016.

From: <https://www.monnaiedeparis.fr/en/jannis-kounellis>

**Dedicated with undying gratitude to the artist and to the critic:**

**Jannis Kounellis + February 2017**

**Germano Celant + April 2020**

**Paradigm Links:**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6NTxxqx9tE>**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouG2mSijXJA>**

**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2-Py\\_I5CZw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2-Py_I5CZw)**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9UR6-ZGes4>**

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eda9dou-Mro>**

**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87oo\\_aSS5xg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87oo_aSS5xg)**

***'PAGA CON LA VITA'***

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