

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Stephen Antonakos: Pillows**

January 13 – February 24, 2023



Images (clockwise): *Untitled Pillow*, February 1963, Mixed media, 27 3/4 x 16 1/8 x 5 inches. *No Dream Tonight*, July 13, 1963, Mixed media, 18.375 x 23.75 x 4.75 inches. *Untitled Pillow*, June 1, 1963, Mixed media, 20.625 x 15.75 x 6.25 inches. *Untitled Pillow*, August 6, 1963, Mixed media, 15.375 x 22.5 x 8.5 inches. *The Bridegroom*, March 4, 1963, Mixed media, 22 x 24 x 18 1/4 inches. *Untitled Pillow*, October 31, 1963, Mixed media, 22.375 x 15.875 x 10.5 inches.

Bookstein Projects is pleased to announce an exhibition of Antonakos's Pillow series from the dynamic early Sixties, a period marked by the powerful emergence of both Pop Art and Minimalism. The series was first installed at New York's Byron Gallery in 1964, again at the exhibition organized by Houston's Contemporary Art Museum in 1971 and most recently at Lori Bookstein Fine Art in 2013. This is the artist's sixth solo show with Bookstein Projects.

The gallery is also pleased to announce the forthcoming monograph, *Stephen Antonakos: Neon and Geometry*, published by Rizzoli with a new essay by David Ebony. The book will be available in the fall of 2023.

From our current perspective, the Pillows may be understood within the long development of European found-object and *assemblage* traditions, particularly from Miro to Burri and on through to the contemporary work of such great American artists as Bontecou, Rauschenberg, and Chamberlain. The Pillows' other essential context is their creation specifically at the temporal intersection of the emergence of both Pop and Minimalism – nearly simultaneous movements surging in very dissimilar directions.

By the early Sixties Antonakos had left behind his hand-made Constructions and "Sewlages" and was working with non-referential, abstract geometry in neon, his signature medium. Suddenly,

unexpectedly, at this pivotal moment there was a detour into a unique series of profoundly personal, nighttime compulsions involving pillows and – once again – found media. Some of the elements are presented "as is" and others are variously painted, manipulated, or even hidden beneath their pillowcases. The rush lasted over a year. Each Pillow reverberates with inner emotional, psychological subtexts. Perhaps more radical than even their most visceral operations is their displacement from human contact and the horizontal to their exposed vertical positions on the wall. This change from private to public recalls Rauschenberg's famous "Bed," but the Pillows have also gone through a lot on the way.

Asked about the "detour" into his distinct and distinctly strange constellation of Pillows, Antonakos said, "It squeezed me, it had me in its grip. I was going somewhere else but it wound me up and pulled me into its coil. I ricocheted from one to the next without rest, without awakening." This does not sound like Antonakos, and the Pillows don't look like Antonakos either – at least not at first. Yet the compelling unconscious force that produced these urgent, almost automatic, handmade objects is upon further consideration quite similar to the unmediated, direct process that has informed his decisions and his hand throughout the more than five decades of neon installations, Panels, and drawings since then.

The intensity and immediacy of these profoundly internal works, for all their tortured, nocturnal content, still show the tender, succinct hand of the artist resisting – with various results – the violent. In the cuts, the bristling areas of nails, the geometric contortions of plumbing pipes, the buttons, rods, and other words and objects revealed or hidden; Antonakos's central formalism can be recognized. For all the vivid yet ambiguous emotional content, these real things in real spaces are shaped not only by internal pressures, but by his natural, deep-seated formal rigor.

**Stephen Antonakos** was born in the small Greek village of Agios Nikolaos and moved to New York with his family in 1930. In the late 1940s, after returning from the US Army, he established his first studio in New York's garment district, and from the early 1960s he worked in studios in SoHo.

Since 1958, Antonakos's work has been seen in hundreds of solo and group shows in New York, around the USA, Europe, and Japan. For almost every exhibition, he created new work. *Stephen Antonakos: A Retrospective*, curated by Katerina Koskina and organized by the J.F. Costopoulos Foundation, was presented December 2007- March 2008 at the Benaki Museum Pireos, Athens. Its major catalogue has essays by five art historians. In slightly smaller form, this *Retrospective*, curated by Robert S. Mattison, was seen in 2008 at the Allentown Art Museum, Allentown PA. Irving Sandler's comprehensive monograph *Antonakos* was published in 1999. Large-scale neon installations were exhibited at the Fort Worth Art Museum, 1974; documenta 6, 1977; the Sao Paulo Bienale, 1987; Artec '89, Nagoya, Japan, 1989; the XLVII Venice Biennale, 1997; the Aeschyleia Festival in Elefsina, 2011 and documenta 14, 2017. Major neons were also exhibited at several Whitney Biennials starting in 1966; and in such institutions as the Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands; the Loeb Student Center, NYU, NYC, 1967; the Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City, MO, 1968; the Grand Rapids Art Museum, Grand Rapids, MI, 1974; the San Francisco Museum of Art, 1974; the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, 1974; the Lowe Art Museum, Miami, 1980; the Washington Project for the Arts, Wash. DC, 1981; Creative Time, NYC, 1981; the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1982; the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris, 1983; the La Jolla MCA, 1984; the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis U., Waltham, MA, 1986 and 2000; Artec89, Nagoya, Japan; the National Gallery – Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Athens, 1992; Harvard's Carpenter Center, 1992-93; the Fortress of St. George, Rhodes, 1993; P.S.1 Center for Contemporary Art, 1999; the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA, 1999; the Neuberger Museum, SUNY, Purchase, NY, 2000 and 2018; the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, 2001; Lafayette College, Easton, PA, 2004; the Kydoniefs Foundation, Andros, Greece, 2004; the Chapel of St. George,

Mystras, Greece, 2004; the Alexander S. Onassis Foundation, Athens, 2011; the Grand Palais, Paris, 2013; Industry City, Brooklyn, 2013; and the Hainan Biennale, Hainan, China, 2021.

Major solo museum shows include *Collages and Assemblages*, Miami MoMa, Miami, FL, 1964; *Pillows*, Contemp. Art Mus., Houston, TX, 1971; *Neons*, Allen Priebe Art Gallery, Wisconsin State Univ., Oshkosh, WI, 1971; California Show, Fresno State College Art Gallery, Fresno, CA, 1972; *Ten Outdoor Neons*, Fort Worth Art Museum, Fort Worth, TX, 1974; *Recent Drawings and Sculpture*, Albright Knox Art Gall., Buffalo, NY, 1974; *Three Neon Walls*, Lowe Art Museum, Miami, FL, 1980; *Neons for Nevers*, Maison de Culture de Nevers, Nevers, France, 1983; *The Room*, the Art Institute of Boston, Boston, MA, 1996; *Inner Light*, Smith College MoA, Northampton, MA, 1997; *Meditation Room*, Samuel P. Harn MoA, Gainesville, FL, 1997; *Public Work and Praise*, State MoCA, Thessaloniki, 2000; *Time Boxes 2000*, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis Univ., Waltham, MA, 2000; *Proscenium*, the Neuberger Museum, SUNY, Purchase, 2000 and 2018; *Journey*, Macedonian MoMA, Thessaloniki, 2003; *Silent Chapel*, Onassis Cultural Center, NYC, 2003–4; S.A.: *Three Spaces/Four Directions*, Lafayette College, Easton, PA, 2004; *Remembrance, Chapel of St. George*, Mystras, Greece, 2004; *Five Decades of Drawing*, Graduate Center, CUNY, NYC, 2005; *The Room Chapel*, Allentown MoA, Allentown, PA, 2018-2020; and *Light: S.A. and the Russian Avant-Garde*, MOMus Museum Alex Mylona, Athens, 2020.

The over fifty Public Works include *Red Neon Circle Fragments on a Blue Wall*, 1978, Dayton, OH; *Incomplete Circles and Squares, Red Neon*, Hampshire College, Amherst, Ma, 1978; *Incomplete Red Neon Square on Exterior Corner (for Chris D'Arcangelo)* Univ. of Mass., Amherst, MA, 1979; *Four Walls for the Hartsfield Int'l. Airport*, Atlanta, GA, 1980; *Neon for 42nd Street*, NYC, 1981; *Neon for the Bagley Wright Theater*, Seattle, WA, 1983; *Neons for the Tacoma Dome*, Tacoma, WA, 1984; *Neon for the La Jolla MCA*, La Jolla, CA, 1984; *Neon for the 14th District Police Station*, Chicago, IL, 1986; *Neons for Exchange Place*, Jersey City, NJ, 1989; *Neon for the 59th Street Marine Transfer Station*, NYC, 1990; *Neons for Pershing Square*, Los Angeles, CA, 1991; *Neons for the Stadtparkasse*, Cologne, 1993; *Neons for Tachikawa*, Japan, 1994; *Blue Room*, Public Library, San Antonio, TX, 1995; *Neon for Granpark*, Tokyo, Japan, 1996; *Neon Lintel*, Neuberger MoA, SUNY, Purchase, NY; *Neons for Reading Power Plant*, Tel Aviv, 1998-99; *Procession*, Ambelokipi Metro, Athens, 2000; *Tria*, Macedonian MCA, Thessaloniki, 2002; *Six Incomplete Circles*, Bari, Italy, 2004; *Two Entrances*, Athena Atrium, Odessa, 2004; *Orrizonte, Airport of Puglia*, Bari, 2005; *Welcome*, Univ of Dijon, France, 2006; and *Recurrence*, Hellenic American Union, Athens; 2007.

His work is in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art; the Whitney Museum of American Art; The Metropolitan Museum of Art; The Morgan Library and Museum; the New York University Art Collection; The National Gallery of Art; the Menil Collection Houston, TX; the Cleveland Museum of Art; the Dallas Museum of Art; The Smith College Museum of Art; the Los Angeles County MoA; The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum, Hartford, CT; the Parrish MoA, Southampton, NY; the National MCA, Athens; the State MCA, Thessaloniki; the Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens; The Alpha Bank Collection, Athens; the Alexander S. Onassis Collection, Athens; and the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris.

He received the Prize for Art from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2009) and Lifetime Achievement Awards from the Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY (2000), the National Academy Museum (2011) and the Greek America Foundation (2011).

*Stephen Antonakos: Pillows* will be on view from January 13 – February 24, 2023. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday, 11:00 am to 6:00 pm. For additional information and/or visual materials, please contact the gallery at (212) 750-0949 or by email at [info@booksteinprojects.com](mailto:info@booksteinprojects.com).