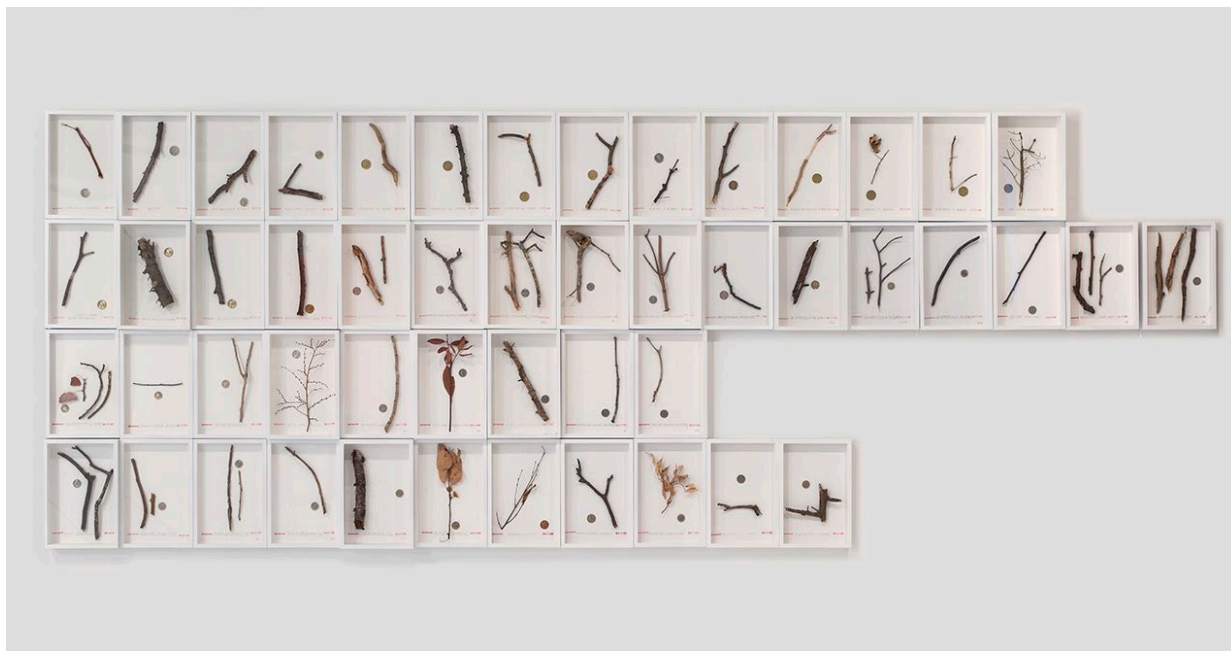


FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Stephen Antonakos: Neon and Geometry

September 28 – December 15, 2023



Stephen Antonakos, *Last Collage* (50 Units), 2001-02, Mixed media, 4 feet 2.75 inches x 11 feet 6.5 inches x 3 inches. (BP#SA-6903)

Bookstein Projects is pleased to announce an exhibition of selected works by Stephen Antonakos from the artist's new monograph, *Stephen Antonakos: Neon and Geometry*, published by Rizzoli and designed by Henk van Assen. It features a new essay by David Ebony. This show will feature Neon Panels, Travel Collages and Gold Works—three diverse facets of Antonakos multifarious practice united by the artist's paramount concerns of placement and light. This is the artist's seventh solo show with Bookstein Projects. This is Bookstein Projects's inaugural exhibition at its new location at 39 East 78th Street.

I find that the least can do the most and then I recognize again the deep, defining bonds between geometry and space. I reach for those strong, still unrevealed possibilities which life holds for all of us. – Stephen Antonakos

The Neon Panels commenced in 1980 and were created throughout Antonakos's life. They were first constructed from monochrome wood and Versacel panels with colored neon illuminating from behind the edges. The result is a back-lit panel that seems to float on colored-light. It is a light that becomes physical, pooling out onto the wall and extending far beyond the "picture plane" of the panel in front of it.

While the Neon Panels do not depict specific figures, the titles of the various Neon Panels do reference important people, family members, places and even saints (like *For John Climacus* and *Saint George* on view in this exhibition) of varying significance to the artist. As such, they can be seen as intense manifestations of the artist's relationship to the world around him.

"The Panels in a way include all the work I made up to the early 1980s—I mean the deep things. The great inner needs that somehow had to answer, as well as the specific solution of materials, proportions,

positions... This touches the central issue, the danger, the risk encountered in the effort to keep time, close to the essential identity of each panel, to express it fully but to include only what is absolutely necessary. The only comparison I could make is with [Byzantine] icons, with their unspeakable, powerful spiritual presence.”¹

Antonakos began creating his Travel Collages in the late eighties and would continue creating these works over the next several decades. As an artist who traveled quite frequently throughout the United States and abroad—for exhibitions, commissioned Public Works and to receive international awards—these collages allowed him to continue working with his hands even while he was living out of a suitcase. These diaristic assemblages were composed predominately of found objects—maps, stones, hotel stationery, twigs, restaurant menus, postage stamps, etc.—that were gathered from the various places he visited. Carefully assembled, they attest to the artist’s ongoing interests with placement and scale while also marking the specific places he inhabited at specific times.

“While I was traveling for my public works,” Antonakos explained, “making the Travel Collages was an activity that allowed me to keep on composing in a small way—to keep placing things in relation to each other and in relation to their framing spaces.”²

His final collage, *The Last Collage*, is a monumental 50-part work. Each unit is composed of just two elements: a piece of local foliage (such as a stick, twig, or leaf) and a coin of local currency. The composition is stamped with the name and date and hand inscribed with the place of collection, with sites as various as “DOM PLAZA FRANKFURT” to “60 HEMPSTEAD ST. SAG H.” Each collage identifies a seemingly banal moment in time while memorializing the physical distance and time passed between the collage’s creation and the viewer’s observation of it.

The Gold Works were created in the final years of the artist’s life and are comprised of thin sheets of gold-leaf applied to varying supports including Tyvek, mylar and wood. The first series, *Site*, is composed of sixteen units in which gold-leaf has been applied to mylar and then cut from the corners and sides to create sixteen compositions each with a unique negative geometric form. As with the artist’s Direct Neons, Antonakos invites the viewer to complete the incomplete geometric forms created in the negative space.

The Terrains, constructed of crumbled gold-leafed Tyvek, focus on gold’s range of tonality and surface-reflection. While the Terrains seem to suggest aerial, topographical landscapes and certainly recall the strong cultural associations to the spiritual and iconographic, the artist’s paramount concern with the medium is still about light. Indeed, the work changes as the viewer walks around it from different vantage points and as it is viewed during different times of day in different lighting.

“With gold-leaf,” Antonakos said to Irving Sandler, “I am most interested simply in seeing what it is, how it acts visually and spatially and what it can mean to us. The constant *agon* between the ravishing surfaces and the rigorous cuts animates the spaces of these works and—I hope—excites something in us in the here and now.”³

¹ Stephen Antonakos as quoted in Koskina, Katerina, Brian O’Doherty, Martin Filler, Daniel Marzona, et al, *Stephen Antonakos: A Retrospective*, (Athens: Benaki Museum and The J. F. Costopoulos Foundation, 2007).

² Ibid, p. 178.

³ Stephen Antonakos in conversation with Irving Sandler from *Antonakos: Gold Works, 2011* (New York: Stephen Antonakos Studio LLC, 2011, p. 47.

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: Neon and Geometry will be on view from September 28 – December 15, 2023. Please note the gallery's new address at 39 East 78th Street, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10075. 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.