

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Stephen Antonakos: 1977**

November 7 – December 20, 2024

*Reception: Thursday, November 7<sup>th</sup> from 6:00-8:00 PM*

Bookstein Projects is pleased to announce an exhibition of work by Stephen Antonakos, all made in the year 1977. It will include a seminal Neon Wall and a selection of works on paper. This is the artist's seventh solo show with Bookstein Projects.

1977 was a momentous year for the artist. He was invited to participate in *Documenta 6*, curated by Manfred Schneckenberger, in Kassel, Germany. His contribution was a monumental *Incomplete Neon Square* that adorned the façade of the Fridericianum. Measuring over 50 feet tall, it was met with critical acclaim, with art historian David Shapiro calling it one of "his best pieces ever."<sup>1</sup> Antonakos also had a rigorous year of gallery programming with three important (and related) exhibitions of neon sculptures at Galerie Aronowitsch, Stockholm, Sweden; Galerie Jean and Karen Bernier, Athens; and John Weber Gallery, New York.

The centerpiece of *Stephen Antonakos: 1977* is *Ruby Neon Incomplete Circles on a Light Blue Wall*, which was originally created for that exhibition, *Antonakos: Neons – New York – 1977*, at the John Weber Gallery. This was a significant show for the artist and included some of the first works that would come to be categorized as his Neon Wall series. In these sculptures, Antonakos installed neon (usually in incomplete geometric shapes) in compositions that were mounted directly onto the gallery wall. The walls themselves were prepared in a variety of ways: sometimes they were painted a uniform color (or two colors), sometimes they were hand-painted by Antonakos in expressionist brushstrokes, and sometimes they were left white. As its name implies, *Ruby Neon Incomplete Circles on a Light Blue Wall* is composed of fifteen ruby incomplete circle shapes installed on a light blue wall.

Antonakos referred to his work as "real things in real spaces in the here and now." Viewers may experience the neon's geometric forms not only in relationship to each other, but the larger architectural space the work inhabits. At the same time, the artist invites viewers to complete these incomplete geometric shapes in their own mind. In his words, "something should happen between the work and the inner life of the individual viewer." This inherent tension between the physical and the intangible is what makes his work so dynamic.

In the smaller gallery, there is a selection of related drawings and collages from 1977. Like the Neon Wall, these works on paper explore the same themes of placement and scale. As art historian Karen Wilkin explains, "just as we experience Antonakos's geometric neon forms in relation to their architectural and spatial sites in his public works, we also experience his colored pencil geometries in relation to the flat rectangles of paper or vellum on which they are drawn. Whatever the medium or the material, the geometric forms are in conversation with each other and with their location. Placement is crucial. The space between elements is as important as the elements themselves and, on many occasions, perhaps even more important. We are always acutely aware of interval, of the tension across the surface."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Shapiro. "A View of Kassel." *ARTFORUM*, Number (Vol 16, No 1.), 1977. p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Karen Wilkin as quoted in the press release for "Stephen Antonakos Drawings: Geometry and Space," New York Studio School of Drawing, Painting and Sculpture, New York, November 2, 2023 - Sun, January 07, 2024.

**Stephen Antonakos** was born in the small Greek village of Agios Nikolaos and came 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 fur district. 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. 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.

Antonakos made over fifty Public Works including *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 Museum of Art, 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.

Antonakos's 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 Museum of Art; The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum, Hartford, CT; the Parrish Museum of Art, 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.

Antonakos 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).

In the fall of 2023, Rizzoli Electa published *Stephen Antonakos: Neon and Geometry*, a major new monograph on the artist's career designed by Henk van Assen. It features comprehensive new scholarship by David Ebony.

*Stephen Antonakos: 1977* will be on view from November 7 – December 20, 2024. A reception will be held on Thursday, November 7<sup>th</sup> from 6:00–8:00 PM. 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).