

Jannis Kounellis

*Alfabeto, Early Works on Paper*

17 January – 28 March, 2025

Preview: 16 January 6–8 p.m.



Jannis Kounellis, *Untitled (segnali)*, 1960

Sprovieri is pleased to present Jannis Kounellis: *Alfabeto, Early Works on Paper*, organised in collaboration with the Estate of Jannis Kounellis, which marks the artist's sixth solo show with the gallery.

The exhibition showcases twelve remarkable works on paper, created between 1959 and 1963, during a period of radical experimentation when Kounellis began presenting the fundamental components of communication: numbers, arrows, symbols, and letters. By isolating these elements and placing them on plain surfaces, Kounellis removes them from their usual context, drawing the viewer's focus to their form and meaning.

This approach gave rise to his renowned *Alfabeti* series, initiated shortly after developing works inspired by signage from the urban landscape. Influenced by his experiences in Rome's everyday life, these combinations of letters, numbers, and symbols represented the personal language of the artist.

This exhibition captures that unique “charontian” moment between the presence and the absence of the human gesture. In the work “Piraeus” the landscape of the Greek port mutates, with the piers and cranes migrating towards letters and signs. In the *Alfabeti*, using various types of paper, Kounellis applies these symbols with stencils and eliminates the traces of the “artist's hand”.

The results of this experimentation were exhibited in the *Alfabeto di Kounellis* show at La Tartaruga gallery in Rome. Concerned that his art might become trapped in the repetitive use of standardised everyday imagery akin to Pop art, Kounellis shifted his focus in 1965 toward materials, natural elements, and the essence of living, making these works on paper a fine and rare example of Kounellis language.

*“I cannot live outside of the labyrinth of language.  
I love the olive-tree, the vineyard and the grain.*

*I want the return of poetry by any means: practice, observation, loneliness, the word,  
the image, subversion”.*

Jannis Kounellis