

STEPHEN ANTONAKOS  
Light, Location, Color

From June 29 through July 31, 2006, The Drawing Room is pleased to present *Light, Location, Color*: an exhibition of drawings and neon work by Stephen Antonakos. The exhibition focuses on two distinct periods of Antonakos's ongoing explorations of light, space, and color, bracketing the five-decade career of this artist who is known both for his signature neon installations, neon panels, and architectural meditation spaces as well as a rigorous body of drawings, a central and formative practice.

The first gallery features the iconic white gold and neon panel, *Son of Alpheus* (2001) and recent colored pencil drawings on vellum. These drawings reveal the latest evolution in Antonakos's twenty-five year exploration of colored pencil on translucent Plastivellum, a textured paper he prefers for its luminosity. The impact of these delicate elongated drawings, which mine the potential of four-colored pencils, depends upon short, gestured strokes activated by the white space that envelops them. The energy and light they emanate harmonizes with the sublime presence of *Son of Alpheus*, a gilded panel backlit by hidden, grass green neon tubes. The shimmering plane seems to float off the wall surrounded by a glow of suffused evanescent light. As Irving Sandler points out in his 1999 monograph, it is no surprise that Antonakos is a great admirer of Mark Rothko. In Antonakos's work, neon imbues Minimalism with the spirituality of Byzantium.

The second room highlights two related groups of vibrant colored pencil drawings from the 1960s and 1970s and on the edge of one wall, *Incomplete Blue Circle* (1975), a quintessential neon work from the same period, casts a striking blue halo. This incomplete geometric form, 30 inches in diameter, activates the entire wall. The earlier and more expressionistic horizontal drawings are concepts for projects, depicting ideas for freestanding and architecture-related neon sculptures. Some are punctuated by descriptive texts in graphite that reveal the artist's thought process, but become compositional elements in their own right when intentionally blurred by a gestural rub. The slightly later vertical sheets introduce a more formal concern with pencil lines articulating the placement of a single geometric form – whether a square, triangle or circle – on the page, and in space. These pages are virtual neons.

While acknowledging affinities with Constructivism and Minimalism, Antonakos attributes his preference for rectangles and cubes to childhood memories of the interior of the small village church from his Greek birthplace. His keen spatial and color sensibility link the early project drawings that were crucial to his development as a neon artist with the later independent, non-referential works whose formal meanings are internal. Whether composing with neon in a three-dimensional space, or allowing a drawing to evolve on what he describes as "the site" of the page, Antonakos carefully guides viewers through a unique and transcendent spatial experience.

Born in Greece in 1926, Antonakos moved to the United States with his family when he was four years old. During the 1950s, the culmination of his first mature body of work led to his inclusion in the ground-breaking 1960 survey of assemblage, *New Forms, New Media* at the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York. In the following decade, Antonakos began to investigate neon, intrigued by its compelling color in the streets of New York and by its three-dimensional linear potential. In addition to numerous international public and private commissions, his work is included in many museum collections, among them The Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon

R. Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Milwaukee Art Museum.

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