

## STEPHEN ANTONAKOS

2 neons and 12 drawings

January 12 – March 3, 2013



*Fragment of a Circle #29, November 17, 1976*  
colored pencil on paper, 14 x 11 inches



*Pink Incomplete Neon Square, 1975*  
neon, 18 x 18 inches

From January 12 to March 3, 2013, The Drawing Room in East Hampton is pleased to present a focused selection of works from the 1960s and 1970s by Stephen Antonakos, renowned for his groundbreaking neon installations, panels, and site-specific public works, as well as a robust body of drawings that explore parallel concerns of spatial perception. The exhibition is anchored by two signature neon wall sculptures from the mid-1970s that exemplify Antonakos' interest in the potential of luminous geometric forms to articulate and transform human experience of architecture. Paired with these glowing three-dimensional works, two groups of drawings offer a glimpse into other facets of the artist's keen observations on the formal relationships between geometry, architecture and the white field of the page. Throughout, Antonakos' distinctive use of incomplete geometric forms reveals his engagement with the intersection between what we see and what we know.

This exhibition highlights work from a decade in the artist's career that was marked by his early excitement with neon as an independent sculptural element and his fervent investigation of its far-reaching possibilities. Tracing the progression of ideas from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s, it includes a series of 'project drawings' that record his inventive concepts for the use of neon, as well as two restrained geometric neon works that hover on the wall, and a suite of rigorous drawings from 1976. Four decades later, these works have an enduring impact that underscores their timeless reach.

Early in his career Antonakos acknowledged affinities to Italian artists Alberto Burri and Lucio Fontana. The formal and spatial concerns already apparent in this period later evolved to include three-dimensional interior and exterior installations, architectural interventions, back-lit panels, rooms, chapels and large scale public works. Conceptually rigorous, the neons are celebrated for their formal clarity as well as their radiating color. *Pink Incomplete Square* (1975) captures the reductive sensibility that has governed the artist's practice since the early 1970s. This glowing outline of pink neon, 18 inches across, casts an aura of pure color that transforms the space it inhabits into a sublime and contemplative refuge.

(over)

Over the years, drawing has been a polestar for the artist, evidenced in a constellation of works on paper that investigate different aspects of geometric forms in space. Seven conceptually expansive 'project drawings' address pictorial space much in the way the artist has approached the ambient properties of neon in physical space. Using vivid colored pencil, graphite and rag paper Antonakos generated vibrant proposals for neon sculptures in these drawings that pulsate with evocations of radiating colored light. Some works in this series feature colored pencil marks connoting neon tubes clustered in various compositions. In others, such as *On the Wall Neon, April 8 – May 24, 1973*, Antonakos pared down his ideas for neons in spare compositions. Here, individual green, red, and blue squares abut one another to form a pristine new geometric hybrid. On each of these lively sheets, the artist's graphite notations, smudges, and erasures mark the act of their making and offer insight into his creative process.

In a suite of smaller drawings from 1976, fragments of circles interlocked within fields of saturated color allow negative space to read also as concrete form. In the palette of reds, blues, and greens that characterizes most of his neon work, these drawings express a physical clarity that reflects the artist's statement that he creates "real things in real spaces." In each composition, Antonakos' repetitive hatching connotes his devotion to the potential of surface, color and form, and celebrates the infinite potential he mines on the site of the crisp white page.

Born in Greece, Stephen Antonakos immigrated to New York City with his family as a child. His essential concerns with color, light, and geometric forms can be traced from the assemblage and found-object works of the 1950s to his current drawings, panels, and installations. Though known primarily for his redefinition of neon as a medium, his openness to other media has ranged from collages of ephemera to gold leaf. Still, it is in the decades of colored pencil drawings on paper and vellum that the history of his creative investigations is most succinctly revealed.

Antonakos has had over 100 one-person exhibitions including a fifty-year retrospective with venues at the Benaki Museum in Athens and Pennsylvania's Allentown Art Museum. The subject of numerous monographs, books and catalogues, he has created more than 50 public works in the United States, Europe and Japan, and is represented in major collections including The Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens. In 2011 his extraordinary 17,000-square-meter indoor/outdoor installation *The Search* was presented in Elefsina, Greece; and in that year he received Lifetime Achievement Awards from both the National Academy and the Greek America Foundation. This spring his work will be included in *Correspondences*, at the Espace Louis Vuitton, Paris, and *Luminous! Dynamic! Space and Vision in Art from the Present to 1913* at The Grand Palais, Paris.

Gallery hours: Monday & Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 10-5; Sunday 11-5  
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