



16.09.26 — 26.10.26

Julian Charrière & Jannis Kounellis

OLIVIER VARENNE
ART MODERNE & CONTEMPORAIN

Olivier Varenne Art Moderne & Contemporain is pleased to bring together Julian Charrière and Jannis Kounellis in a cross-generational dialogue shaped by a shared commitment to material thinking.

The exhibition follows the recent opening of Charrière's major solo exhibition **Hard Core** at the Museum of Old and New Art (Mona) in Tasmania, which likewise explores geology, deep time and the material forces that shape our planet.

Across their practices, both artists turn to elemental substances — coal, fire, metal, oil — not simply as materials, but as carriers of history, energy and symbolic charge. In Kounellis' work, raw matter — burning gas, steel, coal — confronts the viewer with the physical and political force of industrial modernity. Charrière carries this legacy into the present, tracing how these same materials register planetary time, ecological transformation and the enduring logic of extraction.

Here, material becomes both **witness and agent**: a repository of deep time, and a site of combustion, transformation and consequence. Where Kounellis insists on presence and confrontation, Charrière refracts these concerns through scientific processes and image-making, exposing the ways industrial histories continue to shape contemporary systems of perception. Fire and coal become conceptual hinges between energy and exhaustion, visibility and opacity, past and future.

The exhibition brings together a group of works by Julian Charrière that explore these tensions through distinct yet interconnected material strategies. In *Buried Sunshines Burn* (2023), petroleum oil is both subject and substance. Heliographic images made with natural tar collapse representation into extraction, transforming fossil fuel into a visible flow of deep time. In *Coalface* (2024), a polished slab of anthracite becomes a dark, unstable mirror. Animated by the indirect presence of flame, the work shifts coal from raw geological mass into a surface of reflection, implicating the viewer within the material histories it holds. In *Sun Sets in Stone* (2024), analogue double exposure brings a contemporary forest into contact with its Carboniferous fossil trace. Vast temporal scales converge, while coal-based pigments materially embed the image within the very cycles it evokes.

Seen alongside Kounellis, these works extend the Arte Povera engagement with elemental matter into a distinctly planetary register. If Kounellis stages coal and fire as immediate, charged presences, Charrière expands their reach across geological and ecological time — revealing fossil matter not merely as the residue of industrialisation, but as the afterimage of ancient life and a condition of the present.

At the heart of the exhibition is a simple but profound proposition: matter remembers. Coal carries vanished forests; oil holds the residue of ancient life; fire transforms what it touches. Across generations, Kounellis and Charrière ask us to look again at these substances — not as inert materials, but as active forces through which histories, environments and futures remain entangled.

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE (B. 1987)

Based in Berlin, Swiss-French artist **Julian Charrière** engages with both natural terrains and imaginary landscapes, investigating the cultural histories and slow geological forces that shape the planet and our idea of it.

Spanning film, sculpture, photography, and installation, his practice is grounded in fieldwork in remote sites that have become charged by human inference—such as melting glaciers, nuclear test sites, deep-sea ecosystems, and mining grounds. Through a methodology informed by scientific observation and speculative poetics, his immersive spaces are marked by both wonder and disquiet, staged as encounters that aim to deconstruct the colonial and extractivist legacies inherent to acts of exploration—and which still govern our technologies of seeing.

His work has been widely exhibited internationally, with solo exhibitions at the Museum of Old and New Art, Australia; Museum Tinguely, Switzerland; ARKEN Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark; Palais de Tokyo, France; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, United States; Dallas Museum of Art, United States; Langen Foundation, Germany; Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (MAMbo), Italy; Aargauer Kunsthau, Switzerland, and Berlinische Galerie, Germany, among other venues. His work has also been presented at the Centre Pompidou, France; Fondation Beyeler, Switzerland; and Mori Art Museum, Japan, as well as in multiple Venice Biennales. In 2024, Charrière became the first recipient of the Eric and Wendy Schmidt Environment and Art Prize, awarded by The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Los Angeles.



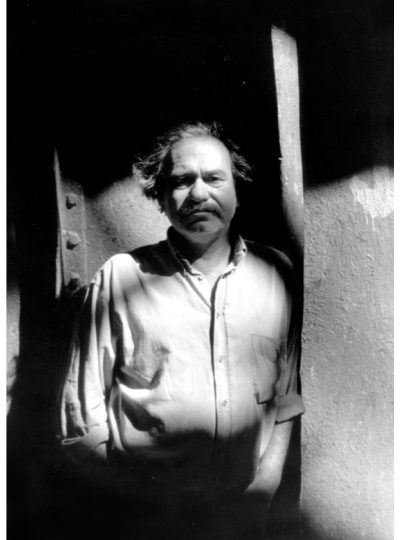
JANNIS KOUNELLIS (1936-2017)

Jannis Kounellis was a Greek-born, Rome-based artist and one of the defining figures of the Arte Povera movement. Born in Piraeus, Greece, he moved to Rome in 1956 to study at the Accademia di Belle Arti, where he developed a radical artistic language that transformed the relationship between painting, sculpture and installation. From the late 1960s onwards, Kounellis abandoned the conventional picture plane in favour of elemental and everyday materials—including coal, steel, burlap, wool, coffee, fire, smoke and live animals—to create powerful works that explored history, memory, labour and the enduring legacies of industrialisation.

Throughout his career, Kounellis challenged traditional distinctions between art and life, bringing raw matter and lived experience into the gallery space. His installations are characterised by their physical immediacy and poetic intensity, combining humble materials with references to classical mythology, literature and European history. As a leading voice of Arte Povera, he redefined sculpture as an experiential and theatrical encounter, foregrounding the material and symbolic power of objects while questioning systems of production, commerce and cultural identity.

Kounellis represented Italy at multiple editions of the Venice Biennale and participated in Documenta in Kassel on three occasions. Major solo exhibitions have been presented at institutions including the Whitechapel Gallery, London; Neue Nationalgalerie; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía; Tate Modern; Monnaie de Paris; and Fondazione Prada.

His work is held in the permanent collections of many of the world's leading museums, including The Museum of Modern Art, Tate, Centre Pompidou, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, National Galleries of Scotland and the British Museum, among many others. Today, Kounellis is recognised as one of the most influential European artists of the post-war period, whose pioneering use of material continues to shape contemporary artistic practice.



AVAILABLE WORKS

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE
(b. 1987)

IMPERFECT LOVERS, 2026

lithified antique mechanical clock

40 x 20 x 10 cm.
unique



JULIAN CHARRIÈRE
(b. 1987)

SUN SETS IN STONE / ALETHOPTERIS – ESMERALDAS
16.0s, 2024

piezography on Hahnemühle Photo Rag

149.4 x 112.4 cm. (framed)

1/3 +2AP



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In the artwork *Sun Sets in Stone*, Charrière collapses both time and space, bridging a deep time that makes uncertain the threshold between the organic and geological, living and fossil. The artwork marks the continuation of the artist's experiments with analogue double exposure photography, an unpredictable process where the final image is subject to accident rather than the will of the photographer. A medium format analogue camera is used that brings together two subjects, in this case, an Ecuadorian cloud forest and a material trace from the Carboniferous period, layered onto a single black-and-white negative—a snapshot of biomes both past and present.

To realise this, Charrière first surveyed the undergrowth of a Western Andean Cloud Forest, overgrown with tree ferns, orchids, and bromeliads. A key biodiversity hotspot in Ecuador, it marks a site both biologically rich and deeply threatened by resource extraction, climate change, and the global agro-industrial complex. On the same film negative, the artist then documented a Carboniferous era fossil, found in the geological collection of the Natural History Museum in Berlin. Folding the forest of the present into the remains of a past primordial realm, *Sun Sets in Stone* forges a panchronic ecosystem of its own, which, while growing 350 million years apart, in the organic synopsis of planet Earth, remains inextricably linked.

Printed using coal pigments, a method known as piezography, the artwork also brings to the foreground themes of resource extraction, explicating the liveliness that inhabits our fossil fuels. In the same way, the unexpected nature of the double exposure symbolizes our hubristic belief in being able to control biogeochemical cycles without disturbing them. Produced in the context of Charrière's *Calls for Action*, a public artwork that also connects urban cities with remote and endangered forests via livestreams, the print also functions as a portal, not only between worlds but towards new forms of meaning-making beyond human time scales. It is also a keen reminder for the oft-forgotten debt industrialized society owes to the agency and experimentation of vegetal life. *Sun Sets in Stone* celebrates this plant-based planetary custodianship, a presence without which the onslaught of climate change would be even harsher, while also memorializing their ghosts, released once more into the atmosphere when we erratically burn coal, oil, and natural gas.

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE
(b. 1987)

COALFACE, 2024

anthracite coal, stainless steel oil lamp

108 x 68 x 15 cm.
unique



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The sculpture *Coalface* consists of a thick piece of sliced anthracite coal that has been polished into a mirror and suspended in the space, projecting a lightness that contradicts its apparent mass. Approaching it, the viewer encounters an uneven surface, the ripples of which are reminiscent of a fun-house mirror, distorting reality. An otherworldly presence, *Coalface* is at once earthly and uncanny, impenetrable yet bottomless.

Though the discovery of coal as a form of energy was irrevocably transformative, accelerating us toward a techno-industrial future that has long since lost the hopeful promise it once seemed to hold, it is here rendered solely as a tool for reflection. Lit ominously by an oil lamp, the flame of which is never directly visible, the warped imagery that appears reveals our emotional disconnect from the natural world and our struggle to recognize ourselves in the materialities that embed us. This discreet arrangement enacts a subtle yet crucial tension between fuel and combustion, between the combustible and its flame. The fire, withheld yet present, performs on the skin of the coal, drawing together the paradox of a material that is at once the promise of energy and the threat of its own undoing. By confronting the fossil fuel—a compound that permeates our reality but with which we rarely interact—with our own likeness imposed upon it, we are prompted to question our complicity.

In the process, *Coalface* also reflects the complex relationship between human beings and the geological, where, since our conception, we have sought meaning in and through stone, from cave paintings to the black volcanic glass of obsidian used to gaze into other realms, and now into the screens of our iPhones, animated by the necessity of mining rare earth metals. *Coalface* thus foregrounds coal as a vehicle for both accelerationism and entrapment, the economic power of which is almost magnetic and can seemingly twist our view of the world, while also showing how humankind, in our pursuit of such fossils, contorts the planetary timeline, unearthing buried strata of coal, petroleum oil, and natural gas, ransacking the past to fuel the present. An act which, if left unhindered, might burn the future before we even arrive in it.

JULIAN CHARRIÈRE
(b. 1987)

BURIED SUNSHINES BURN / 466.X7C, 2023

heliography on high-polished stainless steel plate,
stainless steel frame, museum glass (ArtGlass 70)

104 x 84 x 4 cm. (framed)
unique

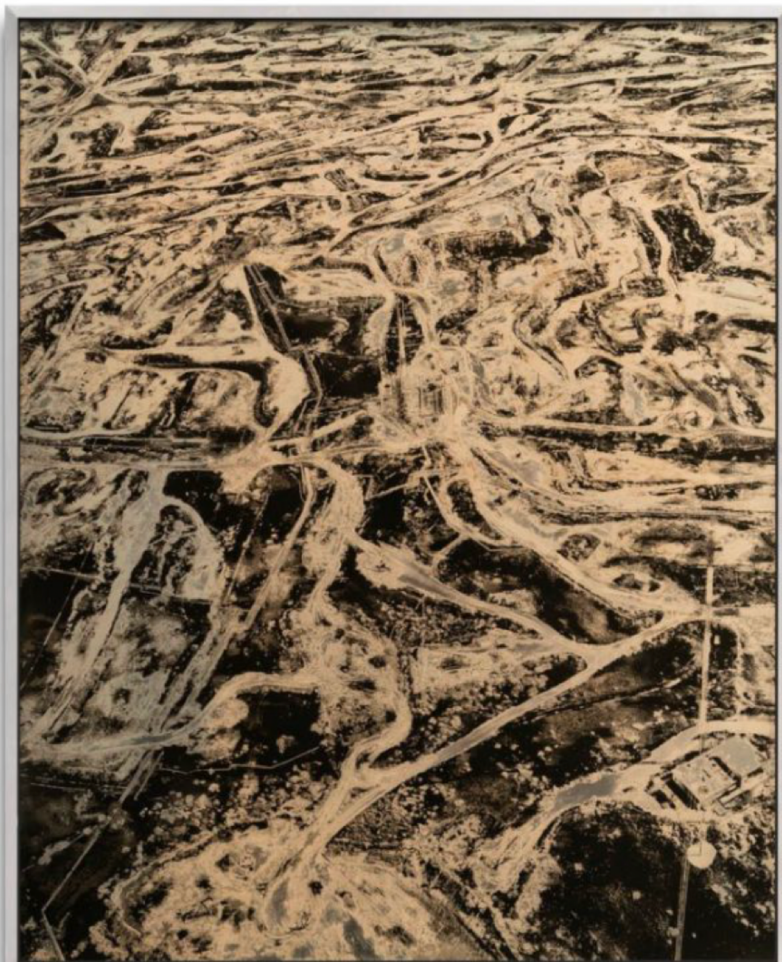


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BURIED SUNSHINES BURN / 0DZ.W6W, 2023

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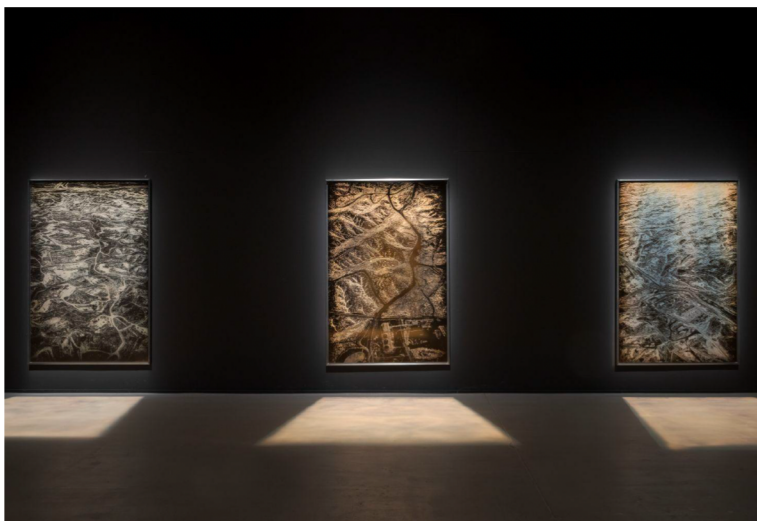
JULIAN CHARRIÈRE
(b. 1987)

BURIED SUNSHINES BURN, 2023

HELIOGRAPHY ON HIGH POLISHED STAINLESS STEEL PLATE,
STAINLESS STEEL FRAME, MUSEUM GLASS (ARTGLASS 70)

In the photographic series *Buried Sunshines Burn*, Charrière dives into the seeping asphaltum and bituminous residues of industrialization, exploring the crude histories of oil extraction. For these works, the artist employs heliography, an ancient technique invented in 1822 by French innovator Nicéphore Niépce. This process requires a specialized emulsion, which Charrière created using natural tar gathered from the geological formations of La Brea, McKittrick, and Carpinteria Tar Pits, all located near Los Angeles.

From a bird's eye perspective, the series surveys California oil fields, where the subterranean discovery of petroleum in the late 19th century transfigured a vast and desolate Los Angeles basin into a megacity sprawl. The aerial views of the oil fields reveal winding rivers of hydrocarbons, seemingly coagulating just below the surface of our reality. Coiled beneath our world, their psychedelic patterns mirror the progression of actual oil spills, where the lifeblood of ancient biomes pours forth iridescent and sticky. These toxic but alluring forms also allude to the counterculture of California, historically entranced by utopian thinking, mind-altering drugs and spiritual freedom. The series seeks to capture the delirium of the petroleum industry and the black material, which, when pumped out of the ground, acts as an almost hallucinatory accelerant for technology. At the same time, it stands as a conceptual *mise en abyme*; a mirror reflecting ourselves, being both a view of and from the flow of hydrocarbons, addressing their impact on our modern powers of visualization through a return to material sources.



BURIED SUNSHINES BURN, 2023. INSTALLATION VIEW: ARKEN MUSEUM, ISHOJ, 2024.

JANNIS KOUNELLIS
(1936 – 2017)

UNTITLED, 2014

oil on canvas and steel beams mounted on iron

200 x 180 x 20 cm.



JANNIS KOUNELLIS
(1936 – 2017)

UNTITLED, 2008

oil pastel on paper

50 x 70 cm.

framed: 66 x 86 x 6 cm.



JANNIS KOUNELLIS
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UNTITLED, 2008

oil pastel on paper

50 x 70 cm.

framed: 65.5 x 86 x 6 cm.



CHARRIÈRE & KOUNELLIS – LIST OF WORKS
16 September - 26 October 2026

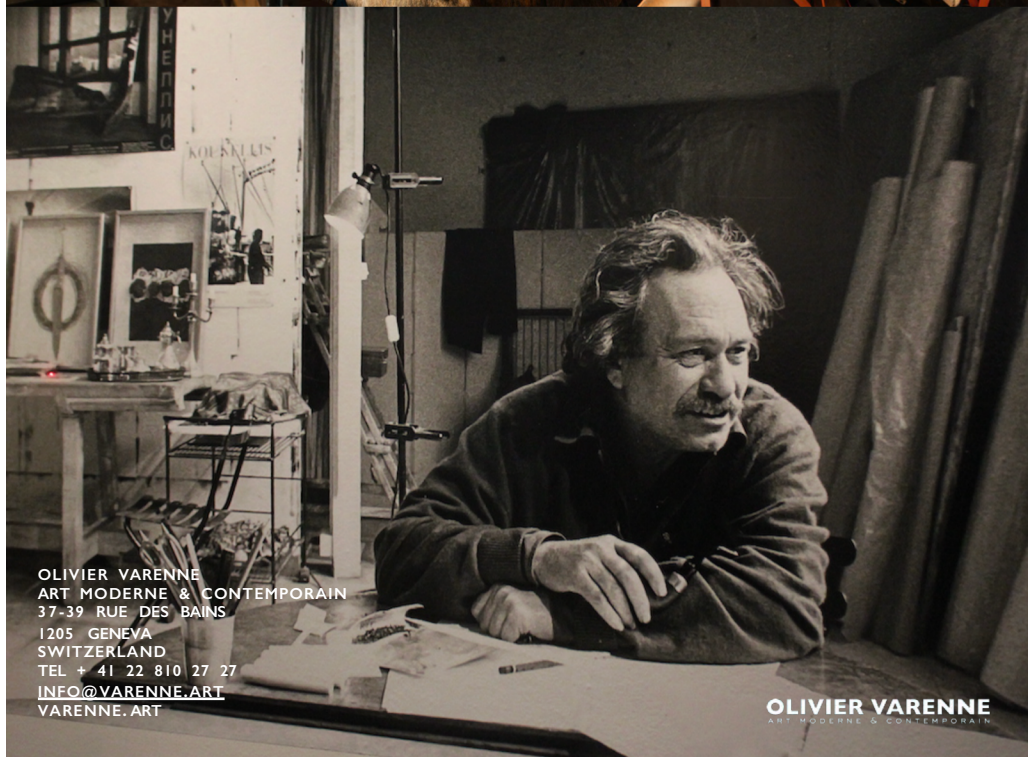
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