

**PRESS RELEASE**

Athens, 15 September 2016

**NEON to unveil new cultural centre at the Athens Conservatoire on 24 September 2016, previously unused for 40 years**

NEON Organization for Culture & Development has collaborated with the Athens Conservatoire on the opening of a new public cultural centre. The space, which remained closed for four decades in the first basement of the historic Conservatoire building, will be officially unveiled by NEON, which funded its 180,000 Euro refurbishment, on Saturday 24 September 2016.

The new 1,800 sq. m venue will open this Autumn with two NEON projects: *IdeasCity Athens*, an international forum that explores the future of cities in collaboration with New York's New Museum (19 – 24 September), and the touring group exhibition *Flying Over the Abyss* (16 November 2016 – 31 January 2017). The venue will then remain under the Athens Conservatoire's management, to be used for forthcoming cultural events.

Since its inception in 2013, NEON has been realizing the aspirations of its founder, Dimitris Daskalopoulos, to bring contemporary art closer to the public, whilst at the same time, collaborating with cultural institutions to make use of venues that often remain untapped. NEON's mission is to highlight these venues of historic value, and bring them to the forefront of cultural activity in an effort to enhance the citizens' everyday experience through encounters with contemporary art within the city.

To this effect, NEON has organized public exhibitions and contemporary art events in Athenian landmarks such as the Gennadius Library and the French School at Athens, and in archaeological sites including the Ancient Agora, the Roman Agora and Kerameikos Cemetery.

The Athens Conservatoire, with a contribution of 150 years in the field of performing arts, has embarked on a mission to expand its cultural activities amidst a constantly changing economic, social and political environment, rationalizing and reforming its operations and modernizing its educational program.

The new cultural venue is housed in the first lower level basement of the Conservatoire's building. The space extends into an expansive atrium, an open-air courtyard which enhances the building's overall cohesion.

The project involved extensive cleaning operations aimed at showcasing the architectural integrity of the design choices of I. Despotopoulos, and some small-scale redesign in the interests of health and safety, in order for the building to operate as a fully functioning exhibition venue.

**Lead design:** Thymio Papayannis & Associates

**Electromechanical design:** DEKTIS Consultants

**Contractor:** DMD

**Mr. Nikos Tsouchlos, chairman of the board of the Music and Drama Society Athens Conservatoire – 1871’**, states: *“Situated in the heart of the capital, the emblematic building of the Athens Conservatoire has been dormant for over four decades as a result of public abandonment and national indifference. Until now one could not fully picture Despotopoulos’s multifaceted architectural vision for the Academy of Performing Arts in Athens - the country’s oldest and most glorious drama school.*

*Today, NEON, together with the Athens Conservatoire, breathes new life into the once neglected venue. Our heartfelt thanks to Dimitris Daskalopoulos and his associates for their discerning vision and creative presence”.*

**Mr. Dimitris Daskalopoulos, founder of NEON**, notes: *“NEON, in keeping with its principle that “our space is the city”, revives one more unknown space of Athens. When I first saw this abandoned venue, so full of potential, I considered it my obligation to undertake its restoration.*

*It is a great joy for me that our refurbishment program has resulted in a new cultural venue which we are now handing over to the public of Athens.*

*I hope that at this adverse juncture, the exquisite venue will be a positive contribution to the Conservatoire’s ambitious program of cultural activities”.*

## **Notes to Editors**

**NEON** is a non-profit organisation founded by art collector and entrepreneur Dimitris Daskalopoulos in 2013. Taking its name from the Greek word for ‘new’, NEON is committed to bringing contemporary culture in Greece closer to everyone, and to highlighting the ability that artistic creation has to stimulate, inspire and affect. It also aims to contribute to wider efforts being made to revitalise and revamp both the city of Athens and the daily lives of its citizens, rehabilitating their connection to the city’s workings, events and affairs.

NEON does not limit itself to a single setting. It sees the entire city, the very urban fabric, as its home. It is a vibrant and engaging interlocutor with civic and cultural stakeholders, and the broader public.

NEON is realising its mission through the organisation of exhibitions, educational programmes, events and talks, scholarship and grant schemes, and the creation of an international network of collaborations and exchanges. NEON partners with arts bodies and supports the activities of public and private institutions in order to help broaden access to contemporary art. NEON seeks to show that culture is a key tool for growth and development.

The **Athens Conservatoire** was founded in 1871 and is the country's oldest educational institution for music and drama. In its almost one-and-a-half century of operation the Athens Conservatoire has had as students or teachers such major figures of international acclaim as Spyros Samaras, Dimitris Mitropoulos, Nikos Skalkotas, Maria Callas, Gina Bachauer, Alexandra Trianti, Mikis Theodorakis, Loukas Karytinis, Dimitris Sgouros and many others. Since 1871 the Athens Conservatoire has had a major contribution in Drama as well, operating the first and oldest drama school in Greece; its teachers over the years include such prominent theatre people as Emiliios Veakis, Dimitris Rontiris, Costas Mousouris, Dimitris Myrat, etc., and this great tradition is continued to this day.

The Athens Conservatoire is housed in the emblematic building by architect and Professor Ioannis Despotopoulos, a student of Walter Gropius in Weimar, and was the only part of his ambitious plan for the Cultural Centre of Athens to be realized. His design won the first prize in the national architectural competition of 1959, and ranks among the top expressions of the radically modern spirit of Bauhaus. The Athens Conservatoire is currently making a great effort for this important building, which remains unfinished, to be completed and assume its rightful place and prestige among the city's architectural heritage, with the aid of the State and through national, EU as well as private funds.

### **Press Information**

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