



Athens, 2 November 2023

## PRESS RELEASE

### NEON – 10 Years of sharing Contemporary Art

Centring on the city and seeking to bring art to the broadest possible audience, NEON has pioneered an innovative way of working and championed public-private partnership. Over the last ten years, and in line with the philosophy of its founder Dimitris Daskalopoulos, NEON has developed a model for citizen engagement and artist involvement, collaborating with public-sector bodies and other cultural stakeholders to showcase contemporary art in public space as a means of enhancing both the urban environment and the daily lives of citizens.

The launch of NEON in 2013, during the economic downturn, was wholly in keeping with the firm belief of its founder Dimitris Daskalopoulos that economic crisis is but the symptom of a deeply civilisational crisis that Greece now faces. Contemporary art has the capacity to stimulate, inspire, and affect people individually but also to pique the collective consciousness.

**Dimitris Daskalopoulos** expands on this point: *“Through my experience as an entrepreneur, it became clear to me that Greece’s financial circumstances were the outcome of a crisis of a society which failed to tackle constructively the challenges of institutional modernisation and economic development.*

*The reason why I founded and funded the NEON Organization for Culture and Development was to offer Greek citizens the opportunity to be exposed to the challenges and emotions of contemporary art. It is my firm belief that art is a basic human need and is intelligible to all. Contemporary art and the novel ideas it conveys are able to awaken and motivate both individuals and societies. Exposure to contemporary artistic creation leads to fertile reflection, disrupts stereotypes and broadens perceptions.*

*Looking back these past 10 years the imprint NEON left on the soul and mindset of the hundreds of thousands of people who chose to follow its course is a conscious or sub-conscious personal asset and hopefully a cumulative collective asset of our society.”*

NEON is committed to engaging the general public, broadening the appreciation and understanding of contemporary art, and to creating welcoming spaces within the urban fabric, freely open to all.

Across its first ten years, NEON has held exhibitions at 28 different locations: museums, sites of archaeological and historic interest, and urban spaces. It has presented works by 253 artists (94 Greeks and 159 internationals), commissioning 93 new works from 70 artists. It has also worked with 22 art curators (14 Greeks and 8 internationals).

A meaningful part of NEON’s energies are devoted to educational programmes and to initiatives supporting young artists. NEON Grants have supported 212 separate projects to the tune of €3.7 million, with around 1,800 artists benefitting from the programme. NEON has granted 79 scholarships for postgraduate and doctoral studies; through the expertise of the alumni, the programme helps enrich the cultural ecosystem and facilitates the exchange of ideas. The *“Is this Art?”* educational programme is the first such initiative to focus on contemporary art within the Greek state school system. The programme has been run 994 times across 161 schools, taught by 90 educators to reach 18,850 pupils.

The NEON Curatorial Exchange Programme, run in partnership with the Whitechapel Gallery in London, has created a network of 210 young curators and arts professionals who have forged links between Greece and the UK that bolster artistic interconnections between the two countries.

Furthermore, hundreds of educational programmes have been run alongside NEON’s many exhibitions, reaching 17,000 pupils, teachers, parents, and students, while more than 1,000 people have been trained in Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras, and Volos as part of the *Educate the Educator* programme.

From 2013 to 2020, NEON was the sole patron of Outset.Greece, the Greek chapter of the Outset Contemporary Art Fund. Outset.Greece has supported 69 initiatives, including exhibitions, new artistic works, and educational advancements, distributing €490,000 to benefit 891 individuals.

Taking the city as its field of action, NEON has partnered with state-sector cultural bodies to realise the potential of iconic archaeological sites and historic buildings, bringing them to the fore of art scene in the process. The crowning example of this is the renovation of the 6,500-square-metre building that formerly housed the Public Tobacco Factory – a €1.4 million investment for the creation of a high-spec arts centre entrusted to the Hellenic Parliament. Furthermore, NEON has renovated part of the Athens Conservatoire to create a new arts space and has undertaken infrastructure works costing €1.5 million at ten Greek institutions within the framework of partnerships forged to present exhibitions in their spaces.

Partnerships forged with public-sector stakeholders have led to ten exhibitions that were presented at archaeological sites – exhibitions that have imaginatively sought to connect the classical past with contemporary culture.

In the words of NEON Director **Elina Kountouri**: *“The NEON approach is best summed up by the phrase ‘our space is the city’. The aim is to constructively enmesh ourselves in the stories and histories of cities, giving artists the opportunity to interact and connect with the public via a broad range of initiatives and spaces, and within varied social and civic contexts. This might involve an act of reclaiming public space (historic buildings, archaeological sites) – of reclaiming our urban environment as citizens. Through NEON, we hope to offer communal cultural experiences that are freely open to all, without limit.”*

Video | NEON – 10 Years of sharing Contemporary Art

<https://youtu.be/1xWaN3aDa2M>

Download NEON app available on iOS and Android.

[https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/neon\\_app/](https://neon.org.gr/en/exhibition/neon_app/)

[neon.org.gr](http://neon.org.gr)

International press inquiries

Melissa Emery, SUTTON

T: +44 (0)20 7183 3577,

E: [melissa@suttoncomms.com](mailto:melissa@suttoncomms.com)