

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



James Fuentes is pleased to present Jonas Mekas, *Notes from Downtown*. The exhibition opens Thursday July 26<sup>th</sup> 6-8pm and ends September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The exhibition includes Mekas' 1990 video work, *A Walk*, alongside a set of film-still photographs, and portraits of the artist by his peer, John Lennon.

Jonas Mekas (b. 1922 in Lithuania) is an artist, critic, poet, and progenitor of experimental filmmaking. Surviving a labor camp and postwar displacement, Mekas arrived to New York in 1949. Within months he acquired a Bolex camera and began making diaristic recordings of the city, its people, and the small, even undetectable forms around him. Mekas saw the United States as the land of cinema. Embarking on a career dedicated to what he describes as “poetic” and “personal” film-making, he also avidly celebrated and distributed the work of his contemporaries.

Made at the end of 1990, Mekas begins *A Walk* with his lens pointed to the ground, intent on filming the raindrops falling into a puddle. An early exercise in the unedited, single-take video form, the work journeys from [80 Wooster Street](#) in Soho, moving at the speed of Mekas' meandering stroll. “A displaced person is a voyeur, is a walker,” he relates in the midst of this wet cityscape, “Nobody really knows where their roots are, what home is. Drop me in a desert, come back in a few days and I will have roots.” *A Walk* is classic Mekas, grasping at the textures of the world closest at hand. Occasionally, he walks right up to an object with his camera, zooming in an attempt to get closer to its edges. Moving in even farther, the image is so close as to be made far—an unfocused blur. As he travels and speaks behind the camera, Mekas mingles with the atmospheric noise of the city. The sound of everything is made that much louder by a thick film of water left by the rain, the rubber of car tires peeling high pitched against it.

Decades later, *A Walk* is an enduring document of downtown New York. Accompanying the video, the exhibition includes a set of photographs—stills from Mekas' films of Williamsburg, shot in periods that precede *A Walk*: the 1940s, when Mekas first arrived to Williamsburg, and later in the 1970s. These photographs contain multiple horizontal images; film frames bordered by bold black edges. In some, the repeated image seems to remain the same, held apart by the smallest quantity of time. In others, an image borders an abstracted

frame or a piece of text. Again Mekas' diaristic eye apprehends the surface of the world around him, all the while experimenting with the distinct qualities of celluloid, light, and motion as if they were those of painting or sculpture.

Alongside Mekas' work are a set of polaroid portraits shot by his friend, John Lennon. Mekas recounts; "On June 29th, 1971, George Maciunas invited some of his good friends to a dumpling party. George was very proud of his dumplings... The party consisted of John Lennon, Yoko Ono, Andy Warhol, Peter Moore, my brother Adolfas, and a couple of others. It took place in George's [80 Wooster Street](#) basement apartment, just below the Film-makers' Cinematheque. The dumplings weren't that great, but we all were in good mood and John was very excited to try his newly acquired Polaroid camera. Here is a glimpse of the evening, with some of John's polaroids and some mages from my Bolex."

Mekas has presented solo exhibitions at venues including the Whitney Museum, New York; MoMA PS1, New York; the Serpentine Galleries, London; Documenta 11; the 2005 Venice Biennale; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Baltic Art Center, Sweden; the Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo; and Palazzo della Ragione in Bergamo, Italy. Mekas founded the Film-Makers' Cooperative in 1962 and Anthology Film Archives in 1970. He was The Village Voice's first film critic and co-founded Film Culture magazine. A collection of Mekas' critical writing appears in *Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959-1971*, first published in 1972 and reissued in 2016 by Columbia University Press. The visual autobiography, *A Dance with Fred Astaire*, was published in 2017 by Anthology Editions.