

# EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY

## PRESS RELEASE



### JONAS MEKAS ROBERT POLIDORI

### PORTRAITS

23 February – 31 March 2012

opening reception: Thursday 23 February, 6-8 pm



Edwynn Houk Gallery is pleased to announce a unique and unusual collaborative exhibition of portrait photographs by long-time friends Jonas Mekas and Robert Polidori. A legendary filmmaker, Mekas is also the founder and director of the Anthology Film Archives in downtown Manhattan. When the Archives were in their infancy, Polidori worked alongside Mekas as his assistant, and Mekas gave him his first exhibition in New York in 1970. Since then, while Polidori has become world-renowned for images of architecture and interior spaces like the Chateau de Versailles and Havana's fading grandeur, the two have remained close, but have never presented their work together before.

This exhibition is also remarkable in that it reveals little-known work by both artists. Mekas is best known as the avant-garde filmmaker of titles such as *Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol* and *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*. But his addition to his medium extends far beyond his completed films: for decades it has been his habit to film the activities of his daily life, as if the camera were simply an extension of his body. His friends inevitably become so accustomed to his camera that they relax before it in ways that perhaps they would not ordinarily, and this has brought forth some remarkable footage of personalities from his often glamorous circles of friends. This show returns to that personal archive, revealing a series of portraits produced from sequences of stills that capture the essence of different personalities. Mekas calls them 'frozen film frames,' and several have never been exhibited publicly before. In them we see John Lennon and Yoko Ono at John's 32<sup>nd</sup> birthday gathering, Jackie Onassis at her 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue home with her pet dog, and Lou Reed and Edie Sedgwick at the first public performance of the Velvet Underground at the Delmonico Hotel for the New York Society of Clinical Psychiatry Annual Dinner in 1966.

When Robert Polidori was working alongside Mekas, in the late 1960s, it was his ambition to be a filmmaker. But he soon turned his attention to still photography, often capturing subjects whose tranquil stillness could never be honored in moving pictures. He is now most known for his photographs of architecture and habitats. What is little known is that in the process of working on these projects he often takes portrait photographs. Unlike Mekas's subjects, his are ordinary people; also unlike Mekas's portraits, Polidori's subjects quickly, fleetingly pose, knowing that their picture is being taken. In recent years Polidori has been travelling extensively to the Middle East and India, and it is from these regions that the majority of this new body of work derives. Passersby, children or those living in the places that he is shooting: Polidori immediately establishes a rapport with them. Despite or because of his being a foreigner, Polidori makes complete strangers feel comfortable, and they are happy to stand in front of his camera for, what is most often, only just a moment.

Jonas Mekas was born in Lithuania in 1922. After escaping from a Nazi labor camp in 1945, he and his brother Adolfas immigrated to New York in 1949. Two weeks after his arrival, he acquired a Bolex camera, and so began his constant filming of his life. He wrote the 'Movie Journal' column for the *Village Voice* from 1958-1975, and in 1961 became president of the Film-Makers' Cooperative. He was the founder in 1970 of New York's Anthology Film Archives, and continues to be its president and program director. His work has been exhibited internationally, including Museum Ludwig, Cologne; La Biennale di Venezia; Bienal de São Paulo, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography. He has received numerous grants and awards, including being twice honored with the French Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. He lives in New York. He is represented by James Fuentes, New York. *To New York With Love* was his most recent show there, in 2010; Fuentes will be exhibiting Mekas's work at Art Cologne this April.

Robert Polidori was born in Montreal and moved to New York City in the late 1960s. He received his M.A. from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1980. He has published many photography books, including *Havana* (2001), *Zones of Exclusion: Pripyat and Chernobyl* (2003), *Metropolis* (2004), and *After the Flood* (2006) and *Parcours Muséologique Revisitée* (2009). His work is known internationally, appearing in *Vanity Fair*, *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Newsweek*, and *Wallpaper*. He was a staff photographer for *The New Yorker* for over ten years. He received the World Press Photo Award in 1997, the Alfred Eisenstaedt Award for Magazine Photography in 1999 and 2000, and Communication Arts awards in 2007 and 2008. In 2006, Polidori's series of photographs of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The 'Portraits' exhibition with Mekas will be his third exhibition at the Edwynn Houk Gallery.

A volume of both Mekas's and Polidori's portraits will be published by Steidl in Autumn 2012.

For additional information or images, please contact the gallery at 212-750-7070 or at [info@houkgallery.com](mailto:info@houkgallery.com)

745 Fifth Avenue New York NY 10151 Tel 212 750 7070 Fax 212 688 4848