Jonas Mekas, Open Archives

By Caitlin Anklam

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In the spring of 2020, the Monira Foundation at Mana Contemporary began a collaboration with the Monira Foundation and Jonas Mekas Studio. The project has resulted in multiple exhibitions across the country that feature works from Mekas’ archives and studio. One of the most recent exhibitions is titled “Out-Takes from the Life of a Happy Man: Jonas Mekas, Open Archives,” an exhibition that opened in February at Mana Contemporary in Chicago. The exhibition is an opportunity to view a collection of images and objects from Mekas’ life and career, as well as to consider the importance of archives in preserving artists’ work.

The exhibition is organized around the idea of “out-takes,” or discarded footage, that Mekas has gathered throughout his career. The exhibition features a variety of objects, including films, still images, and personal belongings, that were once considered “trash” but have now been transformed into valuable sources of information and inspiration. The exhibition also includes a screen where excerpts of films are projected, allowing visitors to experience Mekas’ work in a new and different way.

One of the highlights of the exhibition is a large installation of paintings that Mekas created throughout his career. The paintings range in size and style, and are accompanied by written descriptions that provide context and insight into Mekas’ process. The paintings are arranged in a way that allows visitors to see how Mekas’ artistic vision has evolved over time.

In addition to the paintings, the exhibition features a variety of other objects, including personal belongings, such as a sweater and scarf that Mekas wore while traveling to London. The objects are arranged in a way that allows visitors to see how Mekas’ personal life has influenced his artistic work.

The exhibition also includes a section that features a collection of photographs and drawings that Mekas has made throughout his career. The photographs and drawings are accompanied by written descriptions that provide insight into Mekas’ thinking and inspiration.

The exhibition is a testament to the importance of archives in preserving artists’ work. By gathering and presenting a wide range of objects, the exhibition creates a portrait of Mekas through presenting the objects in a way that is both collaborative and individualistic. The exhibition also serves as a reminder that archives are not just collections of objects, but are also a way of preserving and celebrating the work of an artist.

In conclusion, the exhibition “Out-Takes from the Life of a Happy Man: Jonas Mekas, Open Archives” is a unique and thought-provoking opportunity to view a collection of images and objects from Mekas’ life and career. By presenting the objects in a way that is both collaborative and individualistic, the exhibition creates a portrait of Mekas through presenting the objects in a way that is both collaborative and individualistic. The exhibition also serves as a reminder that archives are not just collections of objects, but are also a way of preserving and celebrating the work of an artist.