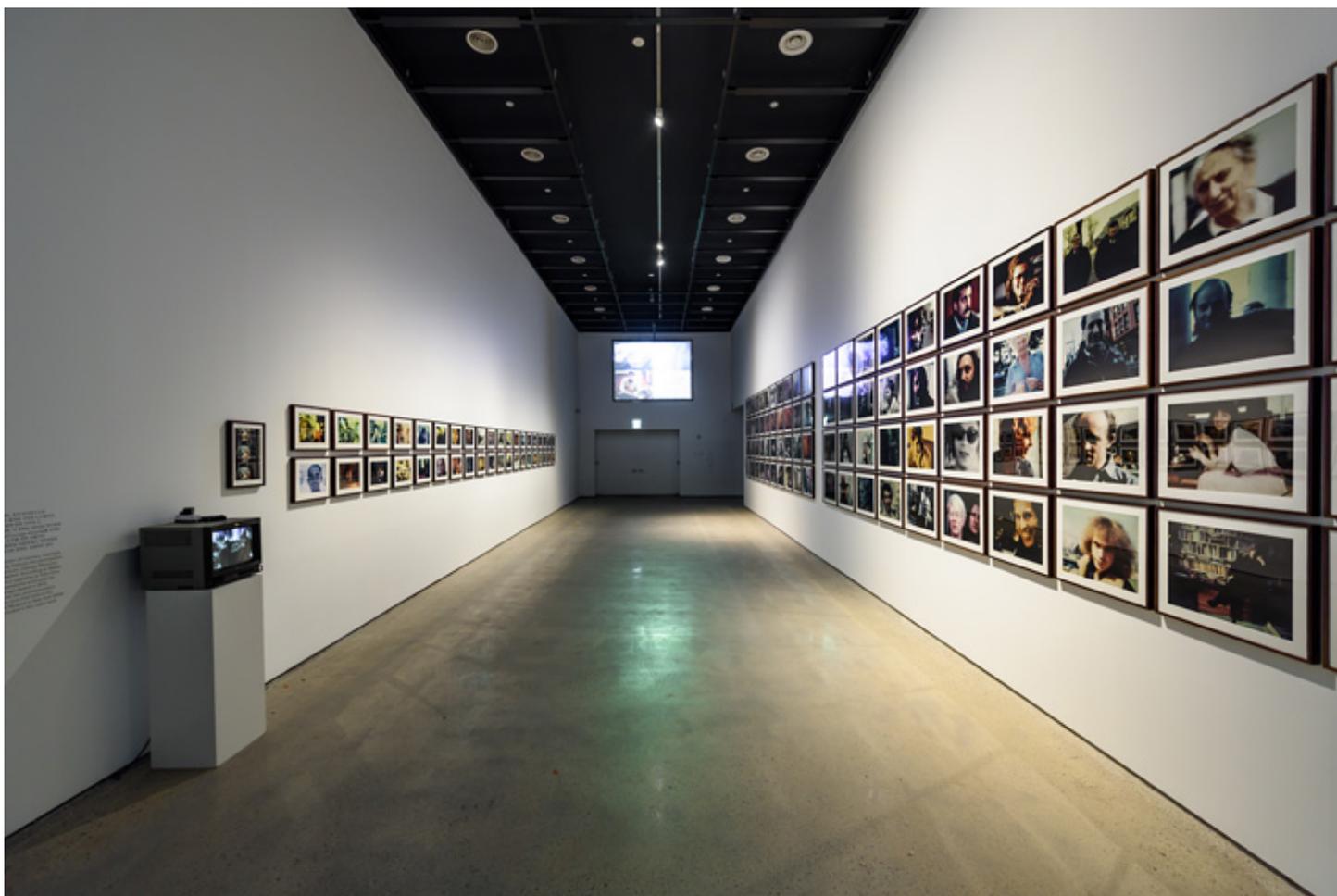


THE KOREA TIMES

2017-11-22 19:32

Avant-garde film pioneer Mekas' oeuvre on view in Seoul



An installation view of Jonas Mekas exhibit "Again, Again It All Comes Back to Me in Brief Glimpses" at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul / Courtesy of MMCA

By Kwon Mee-yoo

Jonas Mekas, known as the pioneer of poetic, avant-garde cinema, is being introduced to Korea through a major retrospective at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) Seoul branch.

The 95-year-old Lithuanian-American is a filmmaker, poet and artist, who captured poetic moments of

daily life as well as the brutal and violent side of life. The Seoul exhibition is the first retrospective of Mekas in Asia, giving a thorough look into the avant-garde filmmaker who blazed a trail in film.

Titled "Again, Again It All Comes Back to Me in Brief Glimpses," the exhibit features some 60 videos and 50 archival works, tracing major moments of Mekas' life.

Born in 1922 in Lithuania, Mekas experienced the tragedy of World War II. He was taken to the labor camp of Elmshorn and later refugee camps at Wiesbaden and Kassel by the Nazis and the experience of confinement influenced Mekas' works exploring violence.

"The Brig" (1962) is based on Kenneth Brown's play of the same name, depicting life in a U.S. Marine Corps military prison and Mekas captured the brutal nature of humans. The film earned Mekas a grand prize at the Venice Film Festival in 1964.

The portrayal of humanity's savage nature continues in the 2006 film "Destruction Quartet," a video consisting of four pieces of footage of different events juxtaposed _ the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1990, Danius Kesminas' fire sculpture in New York in 1991, Nam June Paik's piano wrecking performance in 1997 and the collapse of the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001, recorded by the filmmaker on the roof of his apartment in New York.

"We don't want false, polished, slick films _ we prefer them rough, unpolished, but alive; we don't want rosy films _ we want them the color of blood," Mekas said in a statement to the New American Cinema Group, which was organized by Mekas and other independent filmmakers who were against the aesthetics of commercial Hollywood.

Mekas also acquainted himself with many modern artists such as Andy Warhol, Yoko Ono, John Lennon and Salvador Dali and they influenced each other through collaboration. Fashion designer Agnes B described Mekas as "an artist, a scribe and a keeper of memories."

Mekas inspired Warhol to enter the world of filmmaking and also created a video on the artist titled "Scenes from the Life of Andy Warhol" (1990). "In an Instant It All Came Back to Me" (2015) consists of 768 images from Mekas' films, set on 32 glass panels. The still frames include ordinary images such as a flower, a sunset and a dog as well as portraits of his artist friends Dali and Barbara Rubin.

The avant-garde filmmaker has a knack of capturing the vitality of everyday life, using his camera as an extension of his own eyes. He is known for his "diary films" recording moments in life, whether intense or insignificant. "Summer Manifesto" (2008) offers a kaleidoscopic editing of photos that reminds its viewers of the image of summer and radiates a whimsical and festive atmosphere.

The "365 Day Project" is a project began in 2007 and continues through today. He posted a video clip per day on his website www.jonasmekas.com , documenting glowing moments of daily life. The

videos are presented on 12 monitors at this exhibition.

His 2012 film "Outtakes From The Life of a Happy Man," which was created with unused footage from his films from 1960 to 2000, sums up the filmmaker's belief _ every moment of life is worthy of celebration in itself, no matter how trivial.

In addition to the exhibition, 44 short- and feature-length films of Mekas are screened during the period at MMCA Film & Video in MMCA Seoul.

The exhibit runs through March 4, 2018, and the screenings run through Feb. 25. Admission is 4,000 won for all exhibitions at MMCA Seoul. For more information, visit www.mmca.go.kr or call 02-3701-9500.