From 1 March to 14 June 2020, the Museo d’arte della Svizzera italiana will present the works of Harry Shunk and János Kender in the recently renovated spaces of Palazzo Reali. Through their photographs, the duo created an invaluable record of the world of avant-garde art and its most famous representatives – Andy Warhol, Christo and Jeanne-Claude, Yves Klein, Daniel Spoerri, Niki de Saint Phalle and Jean Tinguely – in Paris and New York between the late 1950s and early ‘70s.

The exhibition, conceived by the Centre Pompidou of Paris in collaboration with MASI Lugano, is the first retrospective dedicated to Harry Shunk and János Kender, whose work documents the spirit of a generation of artists interested in experimentalism and sexual and artistic freedom, while also on the constant lookout for alternative spaces in which to create and show their work. Shunk and Kender were onlookers but also artists and authors during those crucial two decades of the 20th century: their images have a dual nature in that they offer important documentation while also being photographic works in themselves. This two-fold character overturned the function of photography, which Charles Baudelaire had defined in 1859 as “the humble servant of art”, to become art’s vital companion.

The photographs shown, grouped in the sections “Intimacies”, “The body in action” and “New spaces”, plunge viewers into the art world in Paris with a series of images of openings, exhibitions and performances: the famous photomontage Le Saut dans le vide by Yves Klein (1960); the photos taken during his many sessions of Anthropométries and those of Niki de Saint Phalle shooting for the exhibition Feu à Volonté (1961); and Daniel Spoerri’s dinners, such as those organised for the exhibition 723 utensiles de cuisine (1963). Shunk and Kender’s closeness to the Nouveaux Réalistes group allowed them to capture the group’s performances in Milan in 1970, on the tenth anniversary of the Paris group’s foundation.

The photographic duo moved to New York in the late 1960s to document the happenings of Yayoi Kusama, the choreographic work of Trisha Brown in industrial zones converted to artists’ studios in SoHo, and the artistic experiments carried out for Pier 18, a project devised and organised by the independent curator Willoughby Sharp, for whom Shunk and Kender photographed 27 artists at work. The shots were exhibited by the MoMA the following summer in the only show that celebrated the photographers’ work while they were both still alive.
Shunk and Kender were among the first to venture outside the photo studio to capture artists engaged in highly avant-garde research. The deep empathy between the photographers and the artists at work makes the duo the only reference in avant-garde circles between the '50s and '70s. The trust they forged with the artists allowed them to photograph the latter in their private moments, for example, Robert Rauschenberg at home surrounded by his pets, and Andy Warhol resting during his first visit to Paris in 1965 on the occasion of an exhibition of his work at the Galleria Sonnabend. Warhol was the focus of one of the last joint works by the two photographers, when in 1971 they illustrated *The Autobiography & Sex Life of Andy Warhol*, a book of interviews with people close to the artist and photographs by Shunk and Kender. It is an invaluable portrait of the key figure in New York's underground scene during the '60s.

In 1973, the relationship between the two photographers came to an end and they arrived at an agreement by which all the photos taken from the period 1958–73 would be signed as "Shunk-Kender", regardless of who took it. Shunk continued to record the art scene of his time until the progressive isolation into which he fell that characterised the end of his life.

The exhibition, curated by Julie Jones, Stéphanie Rivoire and Chloé Goualc'h, is composed of 450 original photographs and documents from the more than 10,000 that were donated by the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in 2014 and which are now held in the Bibliothèque Kandinsky Library in Paris.

**Biographical notes**

Harry Alexandre Schunke was born in Reudnitz, Leipzig, in 1924 and moved to Paris in 1957. He changed his name to Harry Shunk and became the assistant of the portraitist Dora Kallmus, who introduced him to the city's Dutch and Hungarian communities. There he met János Kender who would become his life and work partner.

Kender was born in Baja in Hungary in 1937 and arrived in Paris in 1956. In 1957 they met the gallerist Iris Clert, who was a point of reference for the Nouveaux Réalistes, and they began to follow the exhibitions and performances of the group (Klein, Arman, Spoerri, Villeglé, Hains, and Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle among the others).

In 1963 they became the photographers of Ileana Sonnerbend, who had opened her own gallery in Paris. There the duo got to know Oldenburg and Warhol.

In 1967 they left for Montreal with Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle for the Universal Exhibition and from there went to New York (1968), where they mingled with the experimental art scene. The Jewish Museum in New York held the exhibition *Software, Information Technology: Its New Meaning for Art* in 1970, which Shunk and Kender documented.

The same year they documented the wrapping of a section of the Pacific coast in Australia by Christo and Jeanne-Claude (*Wrapped Coast, One Million Square Feet*, Sydney, 1969–70).

In summer 1971 the Museum of Modern Art held the exhibition *Project: Pier 18*, the only show that celebrated the photographic work of Shunk and Kender while they were both still alive. The same year, the book *The Autobiography & Sex Life of Andy Warhol* was published with photographic illustrations by the two photographers.

In 1973, Kender broke off relations with Shunk, married and gave up photography. Shunk died alone and alienated in 2006 without a will. It was necessary to break down the door of his studio to get in, which was found filled with archive photographs and documents. Kender died a few years later, in 2009 in Florida.

In 2008, Shunk's archive was bought up by the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation during the auction organised by the New York City administration.

In 2014, some 200,000 photographs were donated by the Foundation to five important institutions: the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., the Tate Modern in London, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.
Catalogue
The exhibition catalogue is published by Éditions Xavier Barral in partnership with Éditions du Centre Pompidou Exposition, with contributions from Jack Cowart, the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, Glenn R. Phillips, the Getty Research Institute and, for the Centre Pompidou, Didier Schulmann, Florian Ebner, Chloé Goualc'h and Stéphanie Rivoire, Julie Jones, and Marcella Lista. The book is available in English and French.

MASI Lugano
Founded in 2015, after just a few years the Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana (MASI Lugano) has become one of the most visited art museums in Switzerland. It forms a cultural bridge between the north and south of the Alps, between Latin and Germanic Europe. Through its two locations – the LAC cultural centre and the historic Palazzo Reali – it offers a rich programme with temporary exhibitions and changing collection presentations as well as a comprehensive, multilingual educational programme for visitors of all ages. The offer is complemented by the close collaborations with the Collezione Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati, which is part of the MASI network, entirely dedicated to contemporary art. MASI is one of the Swiss museums to be directly supported by the Swiss Federal Office of Culture and is also one of the "Art Museums of Switzerland", the group of museums selected by Switzerland Tourism to promote the country’s cultural image worldwide.

Current exhibitions
La collezione
Palazzo Reali

Shunk-Kender
Art Through the Eye of the Camera (1957–1983)
Palazzo Reali, until 14 June 2020

Upcoming exhibitions
A Collection in Progress
Collezione Giancarlo e Danna Olgiati, 27 March – 14 June 2020

PAM Paolo Mazzuchelli
Tra le ciglia
LAC, 5 April – 2 August 2020

Bally Artist of the Year Award
Palazzo Reali, 22 April – 17 May 2020

Nicolas Party
LAC, 31 May – 29 November 2020
Information

Venue
Palazzo Reali
Via Canova 10
CH - 6900 Lugano

Opening hours
Tuesday – Sunday 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Thursdays open until 8 p.m.
Closed on Mondays

Admission
Entrance fees and the full list of reduced rates and concessions can be found on the Museum’s website.

Online sales
www.masilugano.ch
www.luganolac.ch

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Captions

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Shunk-Kender  
John Baldessari, Pier 18, New York, 1971  
Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of  
Harry Shunk and Janos Kender  
Photograph: Shunk-Kender  
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Shunk-Kender  
Yves Klein, *Le Saut dans le vide* (The leap into the void),  
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Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of  
Harry Shunk and Janos Kender  
Photograph: Shunk-Kender  
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Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of  
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Andy Warhol, Edie Sedgwick and Chuck Wein, Hôtel Royale Bison, Paris, May 1965
Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of
Harry Shunk and Janos Kender
Photograph: Shunk-Kender
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Harry Shunk and Janos Kender
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Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of
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Mimmo Rotella, Paris, 1962  
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Jean Tinguely, unidentified location, circa 1960-1967  
Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of Harry Shunk and Janos Kender  
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Harry Shunk et Janos Kender, self portrait, Italy, 1966  
Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of Harry Shunk and Janos Kender  
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Christo et Jeanne-Claude, *Monument emballé*, demonstration against the wrapping of the statue of Vittorio Emanuele II during the festival to celebrate 10th anniversary of Nouveau Réalisme, Milan, 1970  
Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of Harry Shunk and Janos Kender  
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César, *Expansion*, 10th anniversary of Nouveau Réalisme, Milan, 1970  
Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of Harry Shunk and Janos Kender  
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Jean Tinguely, *Monument à la fertilité devant le Duomo*, 10th anniversary of Nouveau Réalisme, Milan, 1970  
Gift of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation in memory of Harry Shunk and Janos Kender  
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