

Projects: Pier 18, 1971

The decline of industrial activity in Lower Manhattan, caused by changes in the USA's economic model, meant that gradually industrial spaces like warehouses and loading areas became empty, later being taken over by the artists who formed the revamped New York scene. The rise of new kinds of art creation called for new spaces, different from the traditional ones (studios, galleries, museums and so on), while new ephemeral art forms emerged like performances and happenings, turning to the camera and other methods to get themselves documented and captured for time.



Exhibition *Projects: Pier 18*, MoMA, 1971

Projects: Pier 18 is a unique work, in which just for a moment a derelict space takes on new functions through various artistic practices, supported by photography. The project, commissioned by the entrepreneur, artist and critic Willoughby Sharp (1936–2008), consisted of getting twenty-seven artists to create an art work on a pier close to where the as-yet unfinished Twin Towers were being built, “Pier 18”, “a perfect place, totally disassociated from art-making and open to a large variety of work.” Responsibility for the documentation of all the projects was given to two photographers, Harry Shunk (1924–2006) and János Kender (1937–1983). The response of most of the artists was documented in writing, their imprecise instructions showing that they were interested in the photography being more than just straightforward documentation: Richard Serra (1939) created a trapezoidal frame whose position was adapted to the camera lens to get a square image; Dan Graham (1942) used his own body as a tripod; John Baldessari (1931) framed a ship with his fingers and thumbs, challenging the camera's depth of focus; Mario Merz (1925–2003) was absent, and left full responsibility with the photographers, saying only that he wanted twenty different pictures of Pier 18 of their own choosing, but that the place must be fully documented.

The *Projects: Pier 18* photographers documented occasional actions, but also co-wrote the ideas at the centre of the participating artists' proposals: as can be seen, they experience, use and represent the space. The Shunk–Kender photographs are the main focus of the project, and serve as a kind of index, something that points to and records the existence of something which is no longer there: the ephemeral artistic works and the structures that are on the point of disappearing. In both cases, they are the vestiges of an absent collective.

New acquisitions

AA. VV. / Fotografías de Shunk–Kender. *Projects: Pier 18*, 1971/1992

Bibliography

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Links

<http://www.lichtensteinfoundation.org/shunk01.htm>