

ERNA AND VICTOR HASSELBLAD
FOUNDATION

P R E S S I N F O R M A T I O N

**Robert Frank is awarded the Hasselblad Foundation International
Photography Award for 1996**

The Erna and Victor Hasselblad Foundation International Photography Award for 1996 has been awarded to Robert Frank, USA. The prize will be presented to Robert Frank at a ceremony in Göteborg, Sweden, on 8 March 1997, coinciding with the opening of an exhibition of his work at the Hasselblad Center, adjoining the Göteborg Museum of Art.

The Foundation motivates its choice of prizewinner as follows: "Robert Frank is one of today's leading visual artists. He has contributed to a renewal in the fields of both documentary and fine art photography and within 'independent American film art'. Having as his starting point the objective realism of the art of the thirties, Frank has pursued his distinctive search for truth, whatever the medium, with determination and consistency. His pictures have had decisive influence on generations of photographers, painters, film makers, critics and writers."

This is the sixteenth time the Hasselblad prize has been awarded. Previous prize-winners have been: Lennart Nilsson, Sweden; Ansel Adams, USA; Henri Cartier-Bresson, France; Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Mexico; Irving Penn, USA; Ernst Haas, USA; Hiroshi Hamaya, Japan; Edouard Boubat, France; Sebastião Salgado, Brazil/France; William Klein, USA/France; Richard Avedon, USA; Josef Koudelka, Czechoslovakia/France; Sune Jonsson, Sweden; Susan Meiselas, USA; and Robert Häusser, Germany.

Robert Frank was born in 1924 in Zürich, Switzerland, where he started his photographic career. He was influenced by the standards of perfection in graphics and photography. Gotthard Shuh and Jacob Tuggener had a strong influence. He also got inspiration from mountain-climbing and skiing. Magazines like *Du* and *Graphics* replaced art school.

After the second World War, Frank immigrated to the United States. When he arrived he showed his work to Alexey Brodovitch, the art director of the magazine *Harper's Bazaar*. Brodovitch hired Frank in April 1947, but in time Frank found that he made fashion photographs with little enthusiasm and left the employ of Harper's Bazaar in October of that same year.

Between 1949 and 1953 Frank made several trips to South America and Europe. In collaboration with Werner Zryd, he produced three copies of a hand-bound book, *Black White and Things*. Rebellious against his pragmatic and ordered upbringing, Frank had come to believe that truth, or a fundamental understanding of the nature of things, could be obtained only through intuition or the "heart." In working with *Black White and Things* Frank discovered that a carefully sequenced series of thirty-four original photographs could recreate feelings of the heart, and in so doing established a challenge that would dominate his work for many years.

In 1955 Frank was the first European to be awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. He criss-crossed the nation in order to document "the kind of civilization born here and spreading elsewhere." The fellowship was renewed in 1956. Frank tried to publish a book, but no New York publisher was willing to accept his view of America. The first edition, *Les Américains*, was published in 1958 in Paris with Robert Delpire and the second edition, *The Americans*, in New York 1959 with an introduction by Jack Kerouac. *The Americans* is a "vision, not an idea." In the years following its publication, the book was accepted as one of the most important in the history of photography.

Following *The Americans* Frank began to photograph anonymous people on the streets of New York through the windows of city buses. The cinematic quality of his bus series portends his transition to filmmaking. In the summer of 1958 he borrowed an 8 mm movie camera from a friend and made a short film. It proved to be the first of more than twenty-five films and videos that he would direct, write or photograph. Early in 1959 he began the film, *Pull My Daisy*, a poetic parable based on *The Beat Generation*, a manuscript by Jack Kerouac. The film helped to validate independent cinema in the United States and to define the beat generation. It won considerable attention and has served as model for many aspiring film makers.

Frank went on to perfect his technique of marrying documentary footage, improvised scenes and scripted performances in his films. His first openly autobiographical film was the 1969 *Conversations in Vermont*. Of this film Frank commented: "this film is about the past. The present comes back in actual film footage. Maybe this film is about growing older. It is some kind of family album." *About Me*, completed in 1971, was the second of Frank's autobiographical films.

In the early 1970s Frank began to work on a retrospective, autobiographical book of photographs, *The Lines of My Hand*. This book includes still photographs from throughout his career as well as photographs that he created from multiple strips of movie film printed together. He also began to add words to these images. He started to use a Polaroid camera in Nova Scotia where he had moved in the early 1970s and where he lacked a darkroom. "I think this is a way that brought me back to being more of a still photographer." The structure of *The Lines of My Hand* is cinematic and clearly illustrates Frank's transition from still photography to film.

While his move to Nova Scotia prompted a reevaluation of his still photography, Frank continued to make films, combining the autobiographical, everyday sentiments conveyed in his Polaroids with a concern for both documentary and fabricated methodologies. In 1972 Frank made *Cocksucker Blues*, a controversial documentary about the Rolling Stones' North American tour. *Keep Busy*, perhaps his most abstract and cerebral project, was shot in Nova Scotia in 1975, a film about interpersonal politics, isolation, and survival. Between 1980 and 1985 Frank completed the film *Life Dances On...*, a meditation of his own life and destiny and on the inability of film to document his true feelings.

Since 1958, Frank's art has pursued its inward spiral, reflecting his own life and personal experiences. He continues to make innovations in autobiographical method. In his recent photographic triptychs like *Moving Out*, 1994, and *Yellow Flower - Like a Dog*, 1992, Frank brings multiple still images to life with words.

Franks moving pictures and his still photographs are interdependent. As an autobiographical vision emerged in his photography, he began to reinterpret his world through cinema. As his films became increasingly personal he returned to still photography, creating narrative images with the illusion of movement and of time passing, breaking down barriers between his art and personal life to reveal an interior vision and to create a tension that became itself the subject of his work.

In addition to the books mentioned above the following deserve notice; Robert Frank *New York to Nova Scotia* (1986) and *Moving Out* (1994), the latter linked to a large retrospective exhibition of his work assembled by Sarah Greenough and Philip Brookman for the National Gallery of Art, Washington, which bears the same title and has toured in the United States, Japan and Europe for the last two years.

Research and education

The Photography Prize was instituted by Erna and Victor Hasselblad, who donated all their assets to a foundation. In accordance with the statutes of the Foundation, a Photography Prize and the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Medal are to be awarded each or each alternate year as means and occasion permit, to a person of outstanding merit.

In addition the Foundation promotes scientific education and research in the natural sciences and photography. A number of projects are granted funds annually to a total of approximately twelve million Swedish crowns.

In 1989 the Foundation opened the Erna and Victor Hasselblad Photographic Center in Göteborg, Sweden. The Center maintains a continuous exhibition and lecture program. In January 1996 the Hasselblad Center moved to new premises at the Göteborg Museum of Art where exhibition space is available for the Center's purpose. A photographic research and reference library is being established and is open to visitors.

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