

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER ROBERT FRANK DONATES

MAJOR GIFT TO NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Washington, D.C., September 6, 1990 -- Renowned American photographer Robert Frank is giving a major archive of his work to the National Gallery of Art, director J. Carter Brown announced today. This archival collection of works by Frank, who is one of the leading post-World War II photographers, represents his entire career from his earliest work made as a student in Switzerland in the 1940s to his most recent images from the late 1980s. The Frank archive contains 27 rare vintage photographs, including a series of photographs of 11th Street in New York City called People You Don't See; 34 photographs bound in a compelling volume, Black, White and Things; many negatives (approximately 2,000 rolls of film); 2,296 contact sheets; and 999 work prints.

The gifts will be included in an exhibition of Frank's work at the National Gallery of Art in 1992. Sarah Greenough, curator of photographs, National Gallery of Art, and Philip Brookman, director of programs at the Washington Project for the Arts and a Frank scholar, will select the works.

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"This extremely generous gift from Robert Frank will form an archive at the National Gallery of Art that will be unrivaled by any other private or public holding of his work," said Brown. "Frank's gift to the nation is also a major addition to our collection of photographs, enabling us to show to students, scholars, and the general public the full range of his important contribution to American art."

According to Greenough, "Robert Frank is, in my view, the most important and influential photographer of his generation. His gift is unprecedented for the National Gallery. To be able to look at his negatives, contact sheets, and work prints is like looking over his shoulder as he worked, recreating not only his journeys but his process of thought as he made the images."

Born on November 9, 1924, in Switzerland, Frank immigrated to the United States in 1947. Three years later he was included by American photographer and curator Edward Steichen in the exhibition 51 American Photographers at the Museum of Modern Art, and in 1955 Steichen also included many examples of his work in the celebrated exhibition The Family of Man. Throughout his career as a photographer and filmmaker he has traveled, exhibited, and published widely. Since the late 1950s he has devoted much of his time to the making of films, including Pull My Daisy with narration by Jack Kerouac, 1959, and Me and My Brother, with a cast that included poet Allen Ginsberg, and the actor Joseph Chaiken, 1968.

Much of Frank's work is about the process of discovery. His highly influential book, The Americans, first published in France in 1958, and in the United States in 1959, contains a series of photographs taken by Frank while traveling through the United States on a Guggenheim Fellowship. It was not just Frank's subject matter -- gas stations, diners, and juke boxes -- or the raw, grainy style of his photographs which made his work so controversial. Nor was it his suggestion that these, rather than the majestic landscape, were the true icons of American civilization. Instead it was the sense of loneliness, isolation, and angst that pervaded his images, and was so at odds with the myth of post-war prosperity, for which he was strongly criticized. Despite its initial reception, The Americans profoundly influenced generations of photographers, filmmakers, painters, and writers, both in America and abroad.

Frank's work is also about the artist's personal journey, his discovery and definition of himself, his relationship with friends and family, and his connections to his environment. "It is these subjects," Greenough said, "explored so consistently, honestly, and passionately for the last fifty years that are both the source and inspiration for his art." They have also been the focus of his widely acclaimed publication, The Lines of My Hand.