

# 'Something Has been Accomplished'

Robert Frank Exhibition  
(running Sept. 27-Nov. 11)  
by Heather Myers

Robert Frank was born in Zurich, a "nice dull place like Halifax", and he didn't own a Brownie at age eight. He became a photographer because neither university nor his father's business appealed to him as much as apprenticing himself to the old man who lived at the top of the house—a photographer and retoucher, and more importantly, a "good guy". After taking the pictures for **The Americans**, a series of photographs shot while Frank drove across the U.S. in the 1950's, the result made so little impression that he had to have the book published for him as a favour by a friend in France.

Such was the self-deprecating style of the talk Robert Frank gave to open a retrospective exhibition of his

photographs last Thursday night at 8:00 p.m. at the Dalhousie Art Gallery. Given his success in both photography and film, Frank's evident surprise at the relative formality of the occasion and his hesitation in talking about himself and his work, was unexpected but hardly disappointing. "I'm not a great talker," he said, but he was "trying hard" to give us a lecture worth the \$50 the CBC was paying him.

In the course of an hour, Frank's humorous and casual manner proved to be an asset: he succeeded in both entertaining and informing his audience, and indicating to it the long way he has travelled geographically and artistically over the thirty or more years of his career.

In explaining why he turned to films in the 1960's, Frank said that photographs "are only moment to moment

reality"; films are a "greater challenge. . . they are more manipulated and artificial."

But of **The Americans**, a selection from which makes up the bulk of the Dalhousie exhibition, he admits that the sequence "moves, almost makes a story." The interaction of pictures within it, and the effect of the collection as a whole, seem to confirm this claim.

For example, a photograph of a car draped in a blanket outside a house in Long Beach, California, hangs next to a picture of the covered bodies of victims of a car accident. The mockery of apparent reverence for the automobile juxtaposed with mourning those dead from its use, is ironic and memorable.

In one picture taken at a Chicago political rally, a sousaphone-player holds his instrument so that the bell

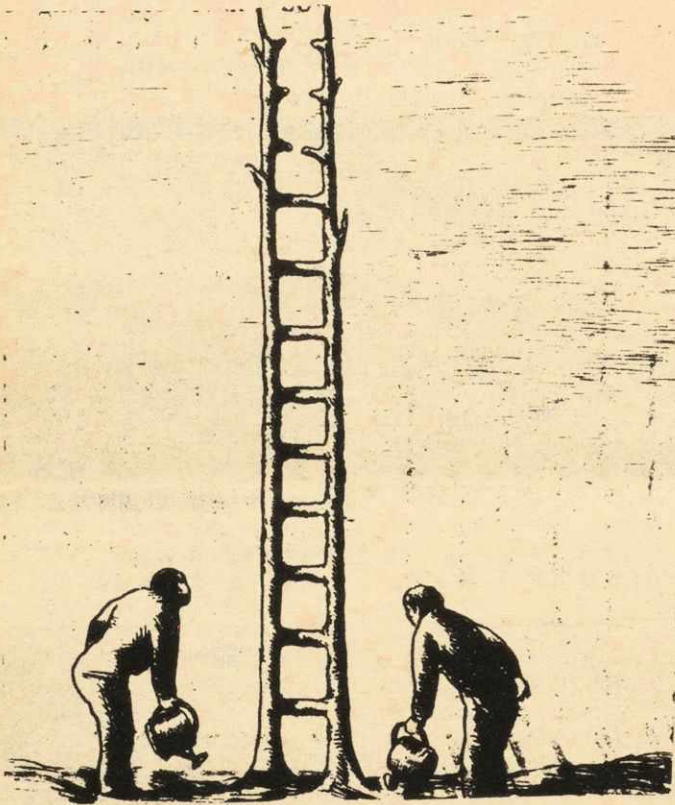
appears where his head should be, while another reveals a politician with arms spread wide and his mouth blaring as large as the "mouth" of the musician.

The images in **The Americans**—people sitting in cars and cafes, people at funerals, parties, and movie premieres, people on movie and T.V. screens and in photographs—are as diverse as the emotions of restlessness, loneliness, aggression, and resignation they display. The overall impression is unified only to the extent that Frank acts as manipulator by selecting and arranging both what to photograph and what to include in the final document. It is his own "story" of America, and it is a sad one.

The photography to which he has returned in the 70's is far more concerned with his own life and feelings than **The**

**Americans**, which, Frank said, was meant to be a document of the world "out there." But continuity in his work need not be obscured by this remark. Many of the pictures in **The Americans**, particularly those containing images within images, have something in common with the attitude toward the photographic image apparent in Frank's recent photo-collages.

It is perhaps out of a new self-knowledge that Frank can say he no longer cares about a public reaction to his work—he knows himself when it is right. But however little he may gain by our looking at his pictures, and however subjective and egotistical an enterprise photography may be, his photographs do indeed leave images on our minds and in doing so, to quote Frank himself, "something has been accomplished."



## Art Society Having Troubles

What do Dalhousie's arts students think of their Arts Society? The pitiful answer is that the vast majority know nothing about it. An informal survey of these students revealed that while some knew of the Society's existence but not of its function, others, including a couple of grad students, were unaware that we even have an Arts Society.

Many people would be astonished to find out that this little known society has a membership of over one thousand! Every full-time B.A. student at Dal pays a three dollar fee at registration which automatically makes him or her a member.

The big problem, then, seems to be a lack of publicity. When Janet Cameron, the former head of the society, was asked why more was not being done in this area, her reply was simply that they

lacked the manpower. At last year's meetings only twelve to fifteen of the more than one thousand members would show up. Hardly an encouraging turnout! But one wonders if it was the situation of "the chicken or the egg"—perhaps not many showed up because not enough people knew about the Society.

For those of you wondering what the Arts Society does for art students, the answer is plenty. The Society sends representatives to speak on behalf of all art students to both Student Council and the Arts and Science Faculty Council. It also sponsors social and intellectual activities such as last year's dance-disco, wine cellar and folk night, poetry contest, and several films, speakers, and debates.

In addition to the above functions, the Society provides grants to its 'satellite' clubs,

such as the French club, the German club, the debating club, as well as many others, own events. As to what can be so that they can sponsor their done, the only limit (besides financial, of course) is the lack of manpower to organize and to give suggestions for a greater variety of activities.

One last comment. At the election for the Society's executive Monday night, so few people showed up that only an interim executive was elected. A second election is scheduled for October 15 at 7:30 p.m. (the location to be announced at a later date). If you are an Arts student, or are just interested in the Society, do show up and vote. Remember, the Arts Society is only as good as its members, so don't criticize them for not doing enough when it is YOU who is responsible.

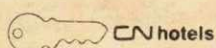


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