

SHOWCASE

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Touch of salvation follows pain in Frank exhibit

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Of Swiss/American photogra-
pher Robert Frank, Beat genera-

tion author Jack Kerouac wrote,
"You got eyes."

Frank's book "The Ameri-
cans" stirred Kerouac to write

the introduction, in which he called the book a "sad poem" in pictures.

The photographer's contemporaries saw his Guggenheim Fellowship-funded statement as a slur on the American way of life. As with Kerouac's "On the Road," critical acclaim came many years after the work's completion. Since its initial publication in 1960, "The Americans" has been reprinted in several languages.

Indeed it is sadness and pain and irony — with a touch of salvation — that is captured in "Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia," the first retrospective exhibit of Frank's work, currently on display at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art through Sept. 6.

In the 150 photographs taken from 1947-85, Frank has captured a black-and-white street view of not only this country, but also France, London, Wales and Canada. And while his perspective of people and places is personal and severe, most of his photographs reflect a documentary style that has the realism of concrete.

It's a sad commentary of the 20th century, but it's a photographic statement as powerful as Dorothea Lange's was in the '30s.

Some of the high points of the exhibit include his work done in England and Wales in the early '50s. The staunch, sharp demeanor of London's derby-ed businessmen walking briskly through misty Fleet Street contrasts starkly to the blurred and black-faced coal miners of Wales.

Intrinsic to Frank's style are distorted, out-of-focus images on film pushed so far you can count the grains. Slightly cock-eyed composition is also prominent

throughout his work.

These things annoyed his contemporaries in 1960. They also make his photographs distinctly his own. The same remained true when he moved on to film making in 1959.

He's always hung around with the "hip" mainstream artists of the time. And their mutual admiration of his style led to collaborations with them.

With Beat writers Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac and Peter Orlovsky Frank made the much-discussed-but-rarely-seen films, "Pull My Daisy" and "Me and My Brother" (which, along with other Frank films, will be shown at the museum at 8 p.m., Thursday).

Because of his work with the Rolling Stones, more people probably know of his work than realize it. He designed the rock band's 1972 album, *Exile on Main Street*, combining some of his earlier photographs with new ones of the Stones. He also filmed the band's 1972 American tour. (Although unreleased, some of this footage is included in a Stones video retrospective, "Video Rewind.")

Prints of some of the strips from these films is included in

"New York to Nova Scotia."

But it's Frank's recent work that is also the most personal — and the most provocative.

One of these pieces, a photo essay of 12 shots titled "Halifax Infirmary," depicts a patient's last hours spent in the hospital. Before the photos were properly fixed, Frank scratched into them words — such as "pain," "hope" and "goodbye" — telling the story of Mr. Stanley Lawson in Room 554.

At the bottom of the photographs, Frank has written, "The wind will blow the fire of pain across everyone in time."

In part, Frank's sad photographic illustrations reflect his own life: His daughter Andrea was killed at age 21 in a 1974 plane crash and his son Pablo has suffered from physical and mental illness, spending some time in Bronx Psychiatric Center.

"Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia" is a photographic portrait of our 20th century world. But it's also a portrait of an artist.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art is located at 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles. For information, call (213) 857-6111.



'SICK OF GOODBYES' (sic) is one of the dark, pain-streaked images in the exhibit "Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia," running at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Frank made this photograph in 1978.