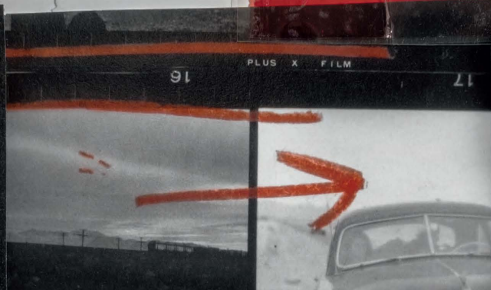


produzenten
 melinda shopsin
 laura israel
 executive producers
 ruth waldburger
 eugene jarecki
 roni jesselson
 schnitt
 alex bingham
 kamera
 lisa rinzler
 zusätzliche kamera
 ed lachman
 ausführender musikproduzent
 hal willner

EIN FILM VON
 LAURA ISRAEL



DON'T
 BLINK



ROBERT FRANK

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ASSEMBLAGE FILMS
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 leitung musik rachel fox
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 Unterstützung von:
 Anthology Film Archives
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 peter macgill, lauren panzo
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 Stadt Zürich Kultur
 fertiggestellt mit einer dokumentarfilm-
 förderung von postworks, new york
 www.dontblinkrobertfrank.com
 /dontblink.derfilm

VEGA

VEGA

Stadt Zürich
Kultur



DON'T BLINK – ROBERT FRANK

DIRECTED BY
Laura Israel

PRODUCED BY
Assemblage Films
in Coproduction with VEGA Film
in Association with ARTE Frankreich

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CREW

Director	Laura Israel
Producers	Melinda Shopsin Laura Israel
Executive Producers	Ruth Waldburger Eugene Jarecki Roni Jesselson
Editing	Alex Bingham
Cinematography	Lisa Rinzler
Additional Camera	Ed Lachman
Executive Music Producer	Hal Wilner
Production	Assemblage Films
in Coproduction with	VEGA Film AG Charlotte Street Filmss GmbH
in Association with	ARTE Frankreich
Consulting Producer	Lukas Fitze
Music Supervisor	Rachel Fox
Made possible with support from:	Anthology Film Archives David Dechman und Michael Mercure Grow Annenberg Foundation Michael Jesselson Jerome Foundation Peter Macgil, Lauren Panzo Pace /Macgill Gallery Stadt Zürich Kultur
Post Production Services	Postworks, New York Andromeda Film AG

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Country of production	USA / Switzerland
Year of production	2015
Duration	82 minutes
Color	black and white / color
Language	English German / French subtitles

DON'T BLINK - ROBERT FRANK

A film by Laura Israel



SYNOPSIS (*New York Film Festival 2015*)

The life and work of Robert Frank—as a photographer and a filmmaker—are so intertwined that they're one in the same, and the vast amount of territory he's covered, from *The Americans* in 1958 up to the present, is intimately registered in his now formidable body of artistic gestures. From the early '90s on, Frank has been making his films and videos with the brilliant editor Laura Israel, who has helped him to keep things homemade and preserve the illuminating spark of first contact between camera and people/places. *Don't Blink* is Israel's like-minded portrait of her friend and collaborator, a lively rummage sale of images and sounds and recollected passages and unfathomable losses and friendships that leaves us a fast and fleeting imprint of the life of the Swiss-born man who reinvented himself the American way, and is still standing on ground of his own making at the age of 91.

DON'T BLINK is a work of art – an intense portrait of an artist, his spontaneity and intuition.

ROBERT FRANK – LIFE AND WORK

1924: Robert Frank was born on November 9 in Zurich.

1946: Frank creates his first book of photographs, *40 Fotos*.

1947: Frank emigrates to the U.S., finding a job in New York as a fashion photographer for Harper's Bazaar.

1949: Frank makes *Mary's Book*, a hand-bound book of photographs.

1950: He marries fellow artist Mary Lockspeiser, with whom he has two children Pablo and Andrea.

1952: Frank makes another hand bound book, *Black and White Things*, which is conceptually sequenced.

1955: Frank secures a Guggenheim grant to travel across the US and photograph. He took a series of road trips across two years, during which time he took 28,000 shots.

1958: *The Americans* is first published in Paris, but finally in 1959 is published by Grove Press in the US.

1959: Frank collaborates with Jack Kerouac on the experimental film *Pull My Daisy*.

1961: Frank receives his first individual show at the Art Institute of Chicago, entitled *Robert Frank: Photographer*.

1969: Frank and Mary are divorced.

1971: Frank remarries to sculptor June Leaf, and moves to Nova Scotia, Canada.

1972: Frank is hired by the Rolling Stones to shoot the cover of their album *Exile on Main Street*. Frank also documents the Rolling Stones on tour in his film *Cocksucker Blues*, which was never released. According to court order, the film can only be screened a few times a year with the artist present.

1974: Frank's daughter Andrea is killed in a plane crash in Guatemala.

1986: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston organized exhibition *Robert Frank: New York to Nova Scotia*.

1987: The American Film Institute hosts a retrospective of Frank's film work: *In the Margins of Fiction: The Films of Robert Frank*.

1994: Frank's son Pablo dies.

1994: The National Gallery in Washington DC organizes a major retrospective of Frank's work, *Moving Out*.

1995: Frank founds the Andrea Frank Foundation, which provides grants to artists.

1996: Frank receives the *Hasselblad Foundation International Award* in Photography.

1998: Frank awarded *Persistence of Vision Award* from the San Francisco Film Festival.

2000: *HOLD STILL – Keep Going*, a traveling exhibition featuring Frank's photography and films organized at the Museum Folkwang in Essen, Germany.

2000: Frank receives the *International Center of Photography's Cornell Capa Award*.

2003: The exhibition *Robert Frank: London/Wales* takes place at the *Corcoran Gallery of Art* in Washington DC.

2004: *Robert Frank: Storylines* exhibit is organized by the Tate Modern, London, an exhibition with 150 of Frank's prints and a program featuring the film and video work.

2008: Exhibition and book *Robert Frank: Paris*, organized by Museum Folkwang.

2009: The book *Frank Films* published by Sixpack in Vienna goes into second printing.

2009: *Looking In: The Americans* organized at the National Gallery of Art, travels to major museums worldwide. The exhibition and companion book celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first edition.

2009 - present: Publisher Gerhard Steidl started the Robert Frank project *Books and Films, 1947 – 2015* a comprehensive publishing and archival/preservation project.

FILMOGRAPHY

True Story, 2004/2008 (documentary/short film)

Director: Robert Frank

Producer: Robert Frank

Paper Route, 2002 (short film)

Director: Robert Frank

Producers: Robert Frank & Vega Film, Zürich

Sanyu, 2000 (documentary/short film)

Director: Robert Frank

Producers: Paris: Yves Riou, Didier Fouquier & Vega Film, Zürich

Flamingo, 1996 (short film)

Director: Robert Frank

Producer: Robert Frank

The Present, 1996 (short film)

Director: Robert Frank

Producer: Vega Film, Zürich, Ruth Waldburger

Candy Mountain, 1987 (feature film)

Directors: Robert Frank & Rudy Wurlitzer

Producers: Ruth Waldburger & Phillippe Diaz

Home Improvements, 1985 (short film)

Directors: Robert Frank, Rudy Wurlitzer & Gary Hill

Producers: Robert Frank, Rudy Wurlitzer & Gary Hill

This Song for Jack, 1983 (short film)

Director: Robert Frank

Producer: Robert Frank

Energy and How to Get It, 1981 (short film)

Directors: Robert Frank, Rudy Wurlitzer & Gary Hill

Producers: Robert Frank, Rudy Wurlitzer & Gary Hill

Life Dances On, 1980 (short film)

Director: Robert Frank

Producer: Robert Frank

Keep Busy, 1975 (feature film)

Directors: Robert Frank & Rudy Wurlitzer

Producers: Robert Frank & Rudy Wurlitzer

Cocksucker Blues, 1972 (documentary)
Director: Robert Frank
Producer: Marshall Chess

About Me: A Musical, 1971 (short film)
Director: Robert Frank
Producer: Robert Frank

Life-Raft Earth, 1969 (documentary/short film)
Director: Robert Frank
Producers: Stewart Brand and Hugh Romney

Conversations in Vermont, 1969 (short film)
Director: Robert Frank
Producer: Robert Frank

Me and My Brother, 1965 (feature film)
Director: Robert Frank
Producers: Robert Frank & Helen Silverstein

Pull My Daisy, 1959 (short film)
Directors: Robert Frank & Alfred Leslie
Producer: Walter Gutman

UNEXPECTED BEGINNINGS

Director **Laura Israel** has built up an impressive resume of artistic collaborations throughout her career – Lou Reed, Sonic Youth and John Lurie are among those who've enlisted her talents in the realm of montage. Israel decided to step into the director's chair herself for 2010's *Windfall*, a critical documentary about the wind turbine industry attempting to establish a foothold in upstate New York. The lauded doc played some of the most prestigious film festivals, including Toronto and IDFA.

It was while touring with *Windfall* that Israel ended up determining the topic of her next directorial effort, which originally seemed an unlikely prospect to her: a portrait of living-legend photographer Robert Frank, the 90-year old master who revolutionized photography with his famous series *The Americans* before moving into more abstract realms of photography and cinema.

Israel has been working as Frank's editor since the late 80s, and she ended up in a conversation at IDFA about Frank's life. "I spoke to somebody there who suggested I do a film about Robert," Israel explained. "I said, 'No, no, no. I work with Robert. I don't do films about him.' But on the plane ride home I started to think perhaps it was a good idea."

Israel ended up proposing the idea to Frank soon after, unsure of what his reaction might be. "I brought it up to Robert and he said, 'Oh no, that wouldn't be a good idea.' So I dropped the subject, but by the end of the conversation he said, 'Come back tomorrow, we'll talk about it.'"

Israel attributes Frank's change of heart about the project to their longstanding friendship, which engendered a respect and understanding of Frank that made the photographer feel comfortable allowing his life to be depicted by Israel – an allowance he has not made often throughout his life. "I think it came together because I was very respectful — I never shot any video before asking him, and I think that's a big part of why he eventually warmed up to the doc. That respect and conviviality carried over into the shoot. Often if we were having a long shoot, we would stop and have tea and talk for an hour. That was part of the shoot, just hanging out. We had a lot of fun shooting this."

Israel's goal was to provide more than a typical bio-doc portrait, to go deeper than a simple work of mythologizing. "It was important for me to keep in my mind that I couldn't idolize Robert," she explained, "Because that's not an honest way to approach something like this. I was always cognizant of that." Instead, Israel decided to analyze Frank's creative process – which of course she'd already been given the opportunity to examine through their decades of collaboration. "I felt like I had the opportunity to provide some insight into his creative process. You sit next to someone for that long and you see the outtakes and the footage, you see what their thought process is, you get a really good perspective on how they make artistic choices. I wanted to share that perspective because I think I've really benefitted from it in my creative life."

Chief among Frank's artistic attributes that Israel wanted to explore was his style of creation, which owes something to the bursts of energy exemplified by the artists of the Beat Generation with whom he's sometimes grouped (after all, *Pull My Daisy* was

narrated by Jack Kerouac). “I was interested in sharing my insights into Robert’s relentless pursuit of creativity,” Israel explained. “He’s big on spontaneous intuition. I think that’s something that younger people could use a dose of, and that other people could be inspired by. The creative approach of, ‘I’m just going to go and do it. I’m going to do whatever comes to my head. I’m going to think about it but I’m not going to think about it too much.’”

With her subject willing and her focus set, Israel commenced the work of putting the documentary together – a deeply personal process in which her crew was never more than a handful of individuals at a time.

ALWAYS ON THE ROAD: THE STRUCTURE OF DON'T BLINK

In keeping with the roaming, creatively restless and aggressive nature of Frank's body of work (and uninhibited artistic style), Israel decided to structure *Don't Blink* as a back-and-forth journey traveling through various aspects of and periods in Frank's life – touching on *The Americans*, his involvement with the Beats and the Rolling Stones and 60s counter-culture, his experimental film work, as well as his relationships with his wife June Leaf and his children Pablo and Andrea (both of whom died tragically young). The film's structure also includes verite footage of Frank at his home in New York, and on excursions with the filmmakers and with various friends (revered cinematographer Ed Lachman appears in the film).

For Israel, the decision to not structure the film as a completely linear bio-doc was integral to her goal of reflecting Frank's creative process. "I think it reflects Robert's life to have the film unfold and build upon itself," she explained. "I think that's the way he works - he looks at his life and he tries to figure out how to have it unfold through his work in a way that is, for the viewer, a bit of a mystery. So I wanted the film to correspond with themes of his life that appear in his work. The film travels from one scene to the next and instead of telling everybody everything right up front, it takes detours back and forth between various subjects – like Robert's own body of work. I think that makes it a bit different for people to experience and as a result I think it forces the viewer to become more involved."

While Frank is known foremost for his work in the realm of photography – especially the manner in which he revolutionized photojournalism with *The Americans* – Israel devotes a significant amount of time to an exegesis of Frank's cinematic works, including the aforementioned Pull My Daisy, which he completed in 1959, one year after he finished *The Americans*. Frank's interest in moving back and forth between the mediums of photography and cinema illustrates why Israel was so interested in a traveling, back-and-forth structure. "I read an interview where someone asked Robert once, 'Why did you start making films?' and he said, 'It's like walking into another room. I'm walking into that room and then when I walk back into the room I was in, it's more interesting because I've been somewhere else, and I can use that experience.' Detours outside of your normal realm provide some perspective."

Frank's love of the detour in art carries over to the freewheeling, open manner in which he conducts his life – a manner that Israel captures in various interviews in the film. "Robert really is interested in the idea of, 'Oh, let's get lost for a while, and then we'll go back to what we were doing, you know, or go back on the road.' At one point when we were shooting we went on a road trip and I said, 'We need a map. You know, we're going to get lost.' And he said, 'No, let's just get lost. Forget about the map.'"

Frank's improvisational style forced Israel and her crew to remain on their toes at all times – providing them with a kind of trial-by-fire throughout the shoot that forced them to adopt Frank's off-the-cuff working methods in their own work. "Robert didn't take direction very kindly!" Israel said with a laugh. "It's pretty funny because we asked him at one point — he had pulled the shade up and we said, 'Oh, we didn't get that. Could you do that again?' And he pulled the shade down instead. It was funny but he did the exact opposite thing of what we wanted, and we started to understand

that about him.”

Israel’s attempts to plan out shoots in advance were subject to similar whims of Frank’s creativity. “At one point, when we had a shooting day traveling around with him, we made this whole plan of where we were going to travel to, and then in the end he just said, ‘I want to go to Staten Island,’ so we wound up trying to get on the Staten Island Ferry, which made us end up in whole different direction. He loves to put a wrench in the plan, just to see how you deal with it. It was fun actually, to be prepared for that. It’s really nerve wracking but it can be fun if you go with it. I think he did that on purpose just to shake us up a little and have things happen more organically.”

Israel spends much of the film bringing to light aspects of Frank’s life that are lesser-known, as she herself was interested in uncovering new facts about the man she’d been collaborating with for over 20 years. “I felt like I knew him well enough to make the film so I actually shot a lot of it and then did research after I began shooting. I thought I knew everything about him, but once you start to look at the vast amount of his work out there, you become surprised. I didn’t know that he wrote so many articles about photography when he was younger. But once I got to know the photography and his history a bit better, some of the films that I knew by heart made more sense to me. There were things in them I started to understand on a deeper level, catching certain references I hadn’t noticed before. I wanted to help people understand him on a deeper level than they get to when they just see his work, without having much context.”

Frank’s artistic collaborations are widely associated and varied, but Israel was surprised to learn that in the late 60s Frank made documentary collaborations with Stewart Brand and Wavy Gravy, which she ended up excerpting in her film. “I had no idea he had worked with Stewart Brand and the *Whole Earth Catalog* crew. Once I found out about that, it seemed like such a natural progression, that he would be into the Beats and then he would be into those guys. Then his footage of the Living Theater Vietnam war protest footage made more sense to me. I met him in the 80s, so I was more familiar with his relation to the downtown East Village punk scene since it was the prevailing counter culture movement at that time.”

Much of the documentary touches on Frank’s collaborative nature, which – exemplified by his work in cinema – sets him apart from many other master photographers, who often work in relative isolation. Israel sees that collaborative nature as key to the portrait of Frank she wanted to depict. “The fact that Robert hung out with poets, painters, actors – it really distinguishes him from so many other photographers and highlights what’s unique about him. It’s also why he was drawn to filmmaking – because it’s collaborative. He likes life, he likes people, he’s inspired by people. In some archive we did not use in the film, Allen Ginsberg actually talked about the reason why Robert was so attracted to Julius Orlovsky, a catatonic, and made a film about him. Allen said that Robert really wanted to see what made Julius tick. His approach wasn’t, ‘Oh, I feel sorry for this guy.’ It was more like he felt some sort of connection to Julius, he felt a common bond with him as a fellow outsider. Robert looks at people. He looks really hard. In a way, the funny thing about *Cocksucker Blues* is the fact that he was really just looking at The Rolling Stones and just saying, ‘Okay, this is what these guys do.’ I think they wanted something done a

little bit differently, obviously.”

Israel's film is a comprehensive portrait of the varied stages and works in Frank's career, but Israel also wanted to provide an intimate portrait of Frank's personal life. Frank's wife June Leaf, also an artist, is also featured in the film, and her presence was crucial for Israel. “With the film, there was something extremely important that I wanted to portray, and that was what it's like to have two very strong people living together and working each on their own, but side by side. Robert and June are both very strong but very individual personalities and they support each other's work. I think that really comes out in the film.

Through explorations of Frank's work, Israel also touches upon perhaps the saddest chapter in Frank's personal life – the loss of both his son and daughter. Israel found that the most effective way to explore those losses was by examining how Frank addressed them in his work. “I think portraying those losses through how they're presented in his work is more honest and much more lyrical. I think that that is where he really is the most honest about it, in his work. I think the work says a lot more than any direct comment about what happened to his children could – and to me, it's a lot more poignant.”

The approach of examining Frank's deeply personal losses through his work exemplifies Israel's larger strategy for the portrait – to continually refer to Frank's work in order to better understand the man. “Every time I approached a scene I said, ‘Okay, should this be about his work, what happened in his work? Or should this be about his life?’ It's interesting, I tried to vary it a little so that you're kind of on a road, touching these different points. A lot of time it just all came together. It seems like the film sort of made itself because I kept following the work. We would always say, ‘Let's go back to the work. Let's look at the work. It's somewhere in the work. We'll find it.’”

Examining her own work, now from the remove of having completed her portrait, Israel recognizes that the film has gone through various permutations. “I've heard that as a director there's always three films. There's the one that you started making, there's the one that you shoot, and then there's the one that you edit and end up with. I think that throughout this process, those three things became different things for us, and for Robert. I think in the beginning he thought, ‘Oh, we're just making this little film and it's going to be a ten minute video or something.’ And then when I started researching and talking to him more, he started to realize it was a much different film than he thought it was going to be.”

PRODUCTION TEAM BIOGRAPHIES

Laura Israel: Director

Laura Israel cut her teeth editing award-winning commercials and music videos while still a film student at NYU. By the time she graduated she had formed her own editorial company, Assemblage. Her project credits include: John Lurie, Lou Reed, Patti Smith, Keith Richards, Sonic Youth, New Order, Ziggy Marley, David Byrne, artists Laurie Simmons and Robert Frank. The films she edited with Frank have screened all over the world and won many awards. *Windfall*, her debut doc, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and won top prize at Doc NYC. A NY Times Critics Pick, the paper dubbed it “Urgent, informative and artfully assembled”. *Windfall* is distributed by First Run Features, and Ms. Israel was named in Filmmaker Magazine’s 2011 “25 New Faces of Independent Film”.

Melinda Shopsin: Producer

Melinda Shopsin is an Emmy, Sundance and Peabody award-winning producer with 15 years of experience in documentary, television and online content. Most recently, she produced the first season of Gimlet Media’s *Mystery Show* a podcast that has garnered three million downloads and reached number one on the iTunes charts. She is currently Vice President of Production at acclaimed director Eugene Jarecki’s company Charlotte Street Films where she oversaw production on *The Trials Of Henry Kissinger*, *Why We Fight*, *Freakonomics*, *Reagan* & *The House I Live In*.

Lisa Rinzler: Cinematography

Lisa Rinzler is an Independent Spirit and Emmy award-winning Director of Photography whose films include: *Pollock*, *Menace li Society*, *Buena Vista Social Club*, *Trees Lounge*, *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence In The House Of God*, *Dead Presidents*, *BMW (Bombay's Most Wanted)*, *30 Beats*, *The War Within*, *Three Seasons*, *Lisbon Story* and *The Soul Of A Man*.

Ed Lachman: Additional Camera

Acclaimed cinematographer Ed Lachman has received an IFP Award as well as Emmy and Academy Award nominations for films including *Carol*, *The Virgin Suicides*, *I’m Not There*, *Far From Heaven*, and the HBO miniseries *Mildred Pierce*. *Shadow*, a collaboration with artist Slater Bradley, premiered at the Whitney Museum of Art in 2010.

MUSIC

“Memphis Egypt”

Written by Tom Greenhaigh & Jon Langford

Performed by The Mekons

Courtesy of: The Mekons

"Hang on St.Christopher"

Written & Performed by Tom Waits

Courtesy of: Island Records Unter Lizenz von: Universal Music Enterprises

“European Son”

Written by Lou Reed, John Cale, Maureen Tucker & Sterling Morrison

Performed by The Velvet Underground

Courtesy of: Universal Music

“Moanin”

Written & Performed by Charles Mingus

Courtesy of: Sony Music

"The Future Starts Slow"

Written by James Hince & Alison Mosshart

Performed by The Kills

Courtesy of: Domino Recording Company

“Nowhere Near”

Written by Georgia Hubley

Performed by Yo La Tengo

Courtesy of: Matador Records/Beggars Group

“Haitian Fight Song”

Written & Performed by Charles Mingus

Courtesy of: Atlantic Records / Warner Music Group

“Wham Bam Thank You Ma’am”

Written & Performed by Charles Mingus

Courtesy of: Atlantic Records / Warner Music Group

“You Can’t Put Your Arms Around a Memory”

Written & Performed by Johnny Thunders

Courtesy of: Jungle Records

“Volcanic Jig”

Written by Natalie MacMaster

Performed by Natalie MacMaster

Courtesy of: MacMaster Music Inc

“You’ve Been Hiding Too Long”

Written & Performed by Bob Dylan

“Rocks Off”

Written by Mick Jagger & Keith Richards
Performed by The Rolling Stones
Courtesy of: Promotone B.V.

“Shells From A Thirty-Ought Six”

Written & Performed by Tom Waits
Courtesy of: Universal Music

“Blue Monday 88”

Written by Bernard Sumner, Stephen Morris, Gillian Gilbert, and Peter Hook
Performed by New Order
Courtesy of: Warner Music Group

“Where Were You”

Written by Roslind Allen, Andrew Corrigan, Thomas Greenhaigh,
Mary Elizabeth Jenner, Jonathan Langford, Kevin Lycett, Mark Joseph White
Performed by The Mekons
Courtesy of: The Mekons

“One More Cup of Coffee”

Written by Bob Dylan
Performed by The White Stripes
Courtesy of: Sympathy for the Record Industry

“Ask The Angels”

Written by Patti Smith & Ivan Kral
Published by Linda’s Music
Courtesy of: Sony Music

“What New York Used to Be”

Written by James Hince & Alison Mosshart
Performed by The Kills
Courtesy of: Domino Recording Company

Zusätzliche Filmmusik:

Joseph Arthur

In Memory of

Harris Savides
Michael Shamberg