

# The Museum of Modern Art

50th Anniversary



## MUSEUM TO PRESENT COMPLETE FILMS OF LES BLANK, INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER

The Department of Film of The Museum of Modern Art will present a retrospective of the works of Les Blank, an unorthodox and committed filmmaker. This retrospective, including all Blank's 16 mm. films from 1960 to 1979, will open on June 25, when the filmmaker will arrive here from his West Coast home and studio to make a personal appearance in the Museum's auditorium. At the 6:00 p.m. showing, he will introduce a two-year work-in-progress titled "Garlic Is As Good As Ten Mothers." Blank delves into the history, folklore, and other aspects of garlic and people. In this film he departs somewhat from the music that has been the subject of his other films.

The filmmaker's interest in food and his love of music combine to express his impressions of an America with a diversity of sub-cultures. He celebrates the ethnic sounds and tastes of the America that is rapidly vanishing. Blank hopes to preserve on film deeply rooted traditions not always visible, and according to Larry Kardish, Associate Curator in the Department of Film, he does so with "a rough lyricism".

According to one critic, Jay Cocks, "Blank's movies are excursions

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 \* NOTE TO PRESS: For advance showing of any Les Blank \*  
 \* films, requests should be directed to Pamela Sweeney, \*  
 \* Department of Public Information, (212) 956 - 7501. \*  
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down those American byways you speed past on the way to somewhere else." His films, many in collaboration with Maureen Gosling, his recordist and assistant editor, convey the life of Cajuns, Creoles, Delta Blacks and rock and jazz pioneers. It is clear that the most adhesive components in the life of these people, and that which sustain them, are music and food.

For more than a decade Les Blank -- his first picture-making was a student improvisation in 1960 -- has been creating films on American regional music, "in-depth glimpses into the life and music of people who live at the periphery of American society", to quote the filmmaker. Among these films is "Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins" (1968), which takes us to the red-clay country around Houston where Texas blues had its origin. It includes footage on jook-joint dances, railroad gangs lining the tracks, a black rodeo, and a great jazz personality, Hopkins, who jives, sings, ponders, and boogies as he sings, raps and plays the blues.

Other jazz pictures are "A Poem Is A Naked Person," a documentary on a famous rock-artist; film portraits of Dizzy Gillespie, Christopher Tree and his one-man orchestra, and the late Mance Lipscomb, considered one of the great guitarists, later in life a man who lived by share-cropping, and who said "The world is made for everybody and we got to share it." This attitude is reflected in his music.

As an ethnologist-musicologist-filmmaker, Les Blank has also made "Chulas Fronteras," it covers the "Beautiful Borders" surrounding Mexican-Americans who live on the American side of the Rio Grande. Their music, called "nortena", is full of incisive political lyrics. The words and music can be traced to the experience of poverty and

oppression. There are also ballads with topical overtones, and a number of dances that are familiar and sometimes fairly exotic.

"Dry Wood" and "Hot Pepper," twin films, can be seen as a single program and represent a sociological document. It captures Creole life and includes a boucherie (where hogs are butchered and dressed) and a black Mardi Gras near Mamou, Louisiana. Here the music, belonging to the Bayou region, weaves together the lives of two families. Like other Blank films, it expresses his respect for living a simple, loving, open life, without the pressures of dehumanizations and excessive materialism and comfort.

"Always For Pleasure" is an hour-long ode to New Orleans and the pulse and sensuality of the city with its mystic quality and intimate acquaintance with living and dying. Focusing on ritual traditions, such as the jazz funeral and the Mardi Gras, it also divulges the existence of a tribe of Blacks who share an American Indian ancestry and vie with one another in their elaborate costumes and dances as they participate in the Mardi Gras.

Altogether there are sixteen films in the Les Blank retrospective, and the scheduled program which continues through July 9, is attached.

June 1979

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For further information, please contact Lillian Gerard, Special Projects Coordinator, (212) 956-7296 or Pamela Sweeney, (212) 956-7501, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, New York 10019.

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# The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

LES BLANK 1960 - 1979  
June 25 - July 9, 1979

Complete retrospective of the films (16mm) of the independent American documentary filmmaker whose works have been described as "privileged windows into a world that's disappearing much too fast." Blank's lyrical films celebrate regional American cultures and their expressions, particularly in music and food.

Monday, June 25 at 6:00

Les Blank will introduce his work-in-progress, *GARLIC IS AS GOOD AS TEN MOTHERS*, the first in a series of 'Food Films'.

Thursday, June 28 at 2:30

*ALWAYS FOR PLEASURE*. 1978. Les Blank. Assisted by Maureen Gosling. 58 min. About New Orleans street celebrations and the music and food that accompany them.

Thursday, June 28 at 6:00

*DRY WOOD* and *HOT PEPPER*. Both 1973. By Les Blank. Assisted by Maureen Gosling. 91 min. About the life, music and food of the French-speaking Blacks in Louisiana's 'Cajun country' and featuring "King of the Zydeco," Clifton Chenier.

Sunday, July 1 at 2:30

*DIZZY*. 1965. Les Blank. 20 min. Earliest Blank 'music' film. With Dizzy Gillespie.  
*A WELL-SPENT LIFE*. 1971. By Les Blank, with Skip Gerson. 44 min. Portrait of the late Mance Lipscomb, Texas 'blues' man and guitarist.

Sunday, July 1 at 5:00

*THE BLUES ACCORDIN' TO LIGHTNIN' HOPKINS*. 1968. Les Blank, with Skip Gerson. 31 min.  
*THE SUN'S GONNA SHINE*. 1968. Les Blank. 10 min. Companion film to *Lightnin' Hopkins*.  
*GOD RESPECTS US WHEN WE WORK BUT LOVES US WHEN WE DANCE*. 1968. By Les Blank, with Skip Gerson. 20 min. Panorama of the 'historic' Easter Sunday Love-In, Los Angeles, 1967.

Monday, July 2 at 2:30

First films. *RUNNING AROUND LIKE A CHICKEN WITH HIS HEAD CUT OFF*. 1960. 3 min. Improvisation, student (USC) film.  
*PLEASURE FAIRE*. 1964. 20 min. Impression of two Renaissance Pleasure Faires in Los Angeles.  
*THE SEVEN SECOND LOVE AFFAIR*. 1969. Directed by Bob Abel. Photographed by Les Blank. 36 min. About drag-racing in Southern California, original score by Canned Heat Blues Band.

LES BLANK

- Monday, July 2 at 6:00 THE BLUES ACCORDIN' TO LIGHNIN' HOPKINS, THE SUN'S GONNA SHINE, GOD RESPECTS US WHEN WE WORK BUT LOVES US WHEN WE DANCE. Repeat of Sunday, July 1 at 5:00.
- Tuesday, July 3 at 6:00 First films, repeat of Monday, July 2 at 2:30.
- Thursday, July 5 at 2:30 DIZZY and A WELL-SPENT LIFE. Repeat of Sunday, July 1 at 2:30.
- Thursday, July 5 at 6:00 CHICKEN REAL. 1971. Les Blank. 20 min. Made for the world's second largest poultry producer: a humorous, affectionate, musical look at the North Carolina industry.  
SPEND IT ALL. 1971. Les Blank, with Skip Gerson. 41 min. With the Balfa Brothers, Marc Savoy, and other 'Bayou people in Cajun country.'  
CHRISTOPHER TREE. 1970. Les Blank. 10 min. Spontaneous concert of Tree's cosmic music performed by the one-man orchestra.
- Thursday, July 5 at 8:30 A POEM IS A NAKED PERSON. 1974. Les Blank. Assisted by Maureen Gosling. 85 min. Portrait of Leon Russell. Also with Willie Nelson, George Jones, Jim Franklin.
- Friday, July 6 at 2:30 CHICKEN REAL, SPEND IT ALL, CHRISTOPHER TREE. Repeat of Thursday, July 5 at 6:00.
- Saturday, July 7 at 2:30 ALWAYS FOR PLEASURE. Repeat of Thursday, June 28 at 2:30.
- Saturday, July 7 at 5:00 A POEM IS A NAKED PERSON. Repeat of Thursday, July 5 at 8:30.
- Sunday, July 8 at 2:30 CHULAS FRONTERAS (BEAUTIFUL BORDERS). 1976. Filmed and edited by Les Blank. Conceived and produced by Chris Strachwitz. About the Nortena musicians (the northern Mexican-Texas border) and migrant farm workers. With Flaco Jimenez, Los Alegres de Teran, Lydia Mendoza. 58 min.
- Sunday, July 8 at 5:00 DRY WOOD and HOT PEPPER. Repeat of Thursday, June 28 at 6:00.
- Monday, July 9 at 2:30 CHULAS FRONTERAS. Repeat of Sunday, July 8 at 2:30.

All films are through the courtesy of the filmmaker at: Flower Films, 10341 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito, California 94530.

The Museum's film program is made possible in part by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

