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**INDEPENDENT LENS:
"HANSEL MIETH:
VAGABOND PHOTOGRAPHER"**



By Nancy Schiesari
to premiere nationally on ITVS's new series on PBS

Film Explores Legacy of Pioneering Woman Photojournalist

HANSEL MIETH: VAGABOND PHOTOGRAPHER *Airs Nationally on
Independent Lens on Tuesday, May 27, 2003 at 10:00 P.M. on PBS*

"You cannot photograph without a point of view."

— HANSEL MIETH

(San Francisco, CA)—**HANSEL MIETH: VAGABOND PHOTOGRAPHER** is the compelling tale of a pioneering woman photojournalist who created some of the most indelible images of America mid-twentieth century, but is in danger of being forgotten today. A German immigrant who arrived in this country in the midst of the Great Depression, she rose to become a celebrated *Life* magazine staff photographer, only the second woman to occupy that position. Armed with convictions, perseverance and talent, Mieth courageously carved out a career in the male-dominated world of photojournalism at a time when very few women were accepted in the profession. **HANSEL MIETH** will air nationally on PBS on Tuesday, May 27th at 10 P.M. (check local listings).

The forces that shaped Mieth into a photographer with a conscience are evident from her childhood as the daughter of working-class German parents who experienced hardship and poverty. As a young woman she met Otto Hagel, with whom her life and work became inextricably linked. Her lifelong love affair with Hagel, also a photographer, is vividly portrayed in the film through Mieth's own words, and through the images Mieth and Hagel took of each other and of their surroundings.



Moving to the U.S. in the 1930s, the out-of-work Hagel and Mieth toiled alongside migrant workers in the Salinas Valley, experiencing the same hunger, fatigue and despair as their co-workers. After months of grueling conditions, they became determined to document the plight of the laborers and unemployed workers in the Southwest, saving whatever money they could for photographic chemicals. After the death of their child, they moved to New York and began their rise to fame as photographers for hire.

A contemporary and friend of such historical figures as Imogen Cunningham, Peter Stackpole, Dorothea Lange, Carl Mydans and Margaret Bourke-White, Hansel Mieth remains one of the great but still undiscovered women photojournalists of this century. During the "golden age of photojournalism"



(1930s - 1950s), her work appeared in virtually every pictorial magazine in the world. She documented the casualties of social injustice—from Depression-era hardships to the alarming assault on civil liberties in Japanese American internment camps. Yet through her talents as a photographer, Mieth gave her subjects a nobility, a sense that the lives she captured on film had an intelligence and worth few others had noticed.

Nancy Schiesari was immediately drawn to Mieth's photographs when she encountered them in a small publication, *Photography Forum*, in an article written by Grace Schaub. Schaub, who had co-written [with Mamuru Inoye] the text for a book of photos about the Heart Mountain Internment Camp, put Schiesari directly in touch with Mieth. Beginning in 1996 with the barest crew—just herself and cinematographer Therese

Sherman—Schiesari was fortunate to establish a personal connection with Mieth, recording more than 20 hours of intimate interviews at her home in Santa Rosa, California. Tragically, between their meetings, Mieth suffered a series of strokes. Her quickly fading health made the process of reflecting backwards all the more poignant and essential. Before she could see the film completed, Mieth died at the age of 88 in 1998.

Schiesari reveals Mieth's extraordinary life experiences by intercutting taped interviews and voice-over narration with poetic imagery, both through archival flashback (selected for artistic merit as much as for historical context) and through Mieth's photographs, re-explored with the use of the camera. The result is a richly woven documentary that places Hansel Mieth as a significant contributor to the cultural context of her time.

A modest woman, Mieth's compassion for the underprivileged and her integrity as an artist far overshadowed her drive for professional recognition. Her significant contributions to our national heritage are dangerously close to fading into obscurity. It is, therefore, with some sense of urgency that filmmaker

Schiesari has reclaimed Mieth's work, sharing with new generations the inspiration of this pioneering artist.

For more information, go to www.pbs.org/independentlens/hanselmieth

HANSEL MIETH Credits

PRODUCER / DIRECTOR

Nancy Schiesari

EDITOR

Cooper Wood

ORIGINAL MUSIC

Javier Chaparro

CO-PRODUCERS

Hans-Martin Liebing

Elana Wakeman

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Julie Dervin

Tim Kolenda

FEATURED IN HANSEL MIETH (in order of appearance):

Georgia Brown, Hansel Mieth Archivist

Anne Tucker, Curator of Photography, Houston Museum of Fine Art

Peter Stackpole, Photographer

Beverly Brannon, Curator of Photography, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

J. B. Colson, Department of Photojournalism, University of Texas at Austin

Bill Hosokawa, Heart Mountain Internee

Mamura Inyou, Heart Mountain Internee

Mike Mackey, Historian

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Nancy Schiesari PRODUCER / DIRECTOR / EDITOR

Nancy Schiesari is an Emmy-nominated cinematographer who has shot dozens of documentaries around the world for The Learning Channel, Discovery, ABC, British Film Institute, BBC and Channel 4. Her most recent project was a profile of Martin Scorsese for BBC 4, which was broadcast on January 8, 2003 to coincide with the release of *Gangs of New York*.

Schiesari was nominated in 2002 for an Emmy for her work on the series *The Human Face* with John Cleese and Elizabeth Hurley. Other recent credits in documentary include *The Human Body* [1998] for BBC, ABC and The Learning Channel; *Six Degrees of Freedom* [1997], profiles of virtual reality designers, for Silicon Graphics; and *Warrior Marks* [1994] for Channel 4, shot on location in Africa with Alice Walker. In features, she worked on the all-women camera crew of Sally Potter's first feature, *The Gold Diggers* [1983], shot in Iceland, and then became a DP on *Partition* [1988], featured at the Berlin Film Festival and other prestigious festivals and *Poco Loco* [1994], with Debra Koons Garcia. She currently teaches cinematography at the University of Texas at Austin and shoots and directs freelance assignments.

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS HOST ANGELA BASSETT

Academy Award-nominated actress Angela Bassett, a long-time champion of independent filmmaking, hosts the first season of *Independent Lens*. Says Bassett, "There are so many talented independent filmmakers working today. I'm excited that ITVS and PBS are bringing these films to primetime television. I'm inspired by the diversity and depth of the *Independent Lens* series." Bassett, whose career includes outstanding work in television, on Broadway and in film, has also consistently worked with independent filmmakers, including John Sayles, with whom she collaborated on the recent *Sunshine State*, *Passion Fish* and *City of Hope*. A skilled producer with numerous projects to her credit, Bassett served as executive producer of the recent highly acclaimed CBS film *The Rosa Parks Story*, for which she earned an Emmy nomination as Best Actress. Bassett received an Academy Award nomination and a Golden Globe Award for her unforgettable portrayal of Tina Turner in *What's Love Got To Do With It*. Her many other film roles include *The Score*, *Boesman & Lena*, *Supernova*, *Music Of The Heart*, *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, *Contact*, *Waiting To Exhale*, *Strange Days*, *Boyz In The Hood* and *Malcolm X*.

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

Independent Lens is a weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. Hosted by Angela Bassett, the anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of dramas united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. *Independent Lens* is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS.

ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people. Contact itvs@itvs.org or visit www.itvs.org.



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