

Robert Frank Tribute

by Larry Racioppo

I bought a copy of THE AMERICANS—the 1968 Aperture/Museum of Modern Art Edition—for \$5.95 in 1971.

I liked Jack Kerouac's introduction as much as the photographs. Little did I know that the powerful images in this little book would still be influencing me almost 50 years later.

When I returned to Brooklyn in December, 1970, after two years in California as a VISTA Volunteer, I had no plans and a \$30 camera I barely knew how to use. I was 22 years old and I wanted to become a photographer. I took a course at the School of Visual Arts and a job with the telephone company. I began to photograph my family and friends in South Brooklyn. I rented a small storefront in Sunset Park and set up a black and white darkroom.

I wanted to make simple, direct photographs of real people so, of course, I was drawn to Frank's natural, clear-eyed images. I remember loving his photos of bars, especially their jukeboxes.

I might have had these images in the back of my mind in 1971 when I made this photo in a Bronx candy store:



I have that same copy of THE AMERICANS and looked through it last night.

The photographs still pulse with power and energy, and sure enough the tenth image—*Candy Store—New York City* depicts a group of teenagers gathered around a jukebox!



There are three more photos with glowing jukeboxes—in South Carolina, Nevada and back in New York City.

I dream of making a body of work like this.

Rockaway, NY
10-31-19

THE BROOKLYN RAIL, Robert Frank Tribute, January, 2020