Vollständiger Text über Lotte Jacobi aus dem Magazin „Yankee“ (USA), Ausgabe August 1976

Das Magazin gehört als Exponat zur Ausstellung „Lotte und Ruth Jacobi“ (16.02.-22.03.2020) im KuK. Aus konservatorischen Gründen ist es Besucher_innen jedoch nicht möglich, dieses zur Hand zu nehmen und zu blättern. Deswegen wurde nachfolgend eigens für KuK-Besucher der Original-Artikel, der sich auf den Seiten 60ff und 85ff auf insgesamt 15 Magazin-Seiten verteilt, komplett abgetippt. Er ist in englischer Sprache verfasst, Autor ist Richard M. Bacon. Scans der Original-Innenseiten mit deutschen Angaben zum Inhalt sind in der Zusatzpräsentation im digitalen Bilderrahmen des KuK zu sehen.

Lotte Jacobi

She's opinionated – and proud of it. She's super talented and world-famous. Her friends have included Robert Frost, Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, and Pablo Casals. Her goals in life are still before her – and one of them is to have the Deering, N.H., Town Hall foundations be granite, not cement block. Another is to amend the U.S. Constitution.

Lotte Jacobi was waiting in the glass-doored entrance to her studio – a later addition to a nestling complex of three low buildings which she had to relocated, reassembled, and joined together. Originally built to shelter lumbermen in the winter woods, they have been her home and gallery in southern New Hampshire since 1960.

"You see my rosemary in bloom?" she asked by way of introduction. It was hard to find in the green curtain of oversized houseplants that ranged along the south-facing windows of her studio, oriented to overlook a neatly fences herb and vegetable garden and the meadow beyond.

The four short peals of her party-line telephone immediately interrupted us – as it was to do all morning. When she returned, I was examining her matted photograph of an introspective-looking man whose face was disturbingly familiar. I had already taken in the polite printed injunction to refrain from using tobacco tacked to a central post, a notice from an environmental meeting, broadsides of upcoming folk concerts, arts and crafts shows, the catalogue of her most recent exhibition in Germany, and – on white-plastered walls – nature studies, photogenics, and more faces.

"Do you know we will destroy the beauty of our only historic public building in Deering?" she asked when she found me, using her hands to punctuate her sentences. "That was the selectman on the phone. Anything that is good in American culture is immediately squashed. It's killed."

At the age of eighty, Lotte Jacobi is still actively concerned with bettering the quality of life for as many people as she can reach. Reenforced by a stubborn faith in the democratic process and a well-informed knowledge of human needs and the environment, she makes war on shoddiness wherever she sees it. Sometimes it is with a gentle persuasion, backed by frequent telephone campaigns: often, according to her critics, it is with an abrasive shove. Always her intention is to encourage human beings to fulfill their potential while respecting each other and their surroundings.

Since fleeing the Nazis in 1935, Ms. Jacobi has been an untiring worker, as concerned with the replacement of the granite foundations of the Deering, New Hampshire, Town Hall (1788) as she is in pushing for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that will redefine in twentieth-century terms Thomas Jefferson's use of the word "men" in his Preamble. For the one she rants against cost-conscious, pragmatic neighbors and local town officials who would substitute cement block construction for the original granite in the renovating the foundation of the Town Hall; for the other, she bombards her Senators in Washington with telegrams and letters, then keeps her foot in their office doors until they allow her time to speak her mind.

"Of course, I am opinionated," she admits somewhat airily in a strong German accent undiluted even after nearly forty years as a citizen of this country. "I am born rebel and a persistent troublemaker."

If one could as casually dismiss her artistic accomplishments, she might be just another fly in the ointment - a little old lady with dedication to causes and a cantankerous persistence. One can't.

Lotte Jacobi is also one of the world's great portrait photographers – a specialty label she hesitates to accept – the fourth generation of a dynasty whose name is synonymous with artistic excellence on two continents. Since the time she assumed the responsibilities of her father's Berlin studio in 1927, her list of credit reads like a compilation of this century's giants in the world of art, science, and politics.

You sense it immediately on viewing one of her retrospective on-man shows that are being held now more and more frequently. The output of her career is staggering. Her sitters over the years from a kind of cult of personalities that include many of the leading actors, musicians, dancers, writers, philosophers, film-makers, and statesmen of our age.

It would be easy for her to name-drop Robert Frost, Thomas Mann, Albert Einstein, Sir Thomas Beecham, Marc Chagall, Eleanor Roosevelt, Louis Bromfield, Scott Nearing, Benjamin Britten, Theodore Dreiser, Margaret Mead, W.H. Auden, J.D. Salinger, May Sarton, Edward Steichen, Lotte Lenya, Pablo Casals – the list could be extended indefinitely. But she will not, even though some of her portraits - particularly the series she took of Einstein from 1921 until shortly before his death in 1955 – are now considered historical documents which record have faces of men and women who have shaped modern culture.

In appraising a Jacobi exhibition in New York two years ago, one reviewer saw in her portraits a psychological penetration and a "humanism and optimism about people" that few photographers can claim.

You recognize these qualities just by talking with her. She has the ability to make people feel at ease by dealing with them as equals. While stressing positive goals, she constantly encourages everyone she meets to develop his potential. It can be students at a symposium on photography, environmentalists at a land-use meeting, museum curators, politicians, or young people just finding their way. To do this she taps hidden reserves of strength and follows a schedule that would shame most people one third her age.

Certainly Lotte Jacobi is not the "little old lady" type, however small and slightly built. Her white hair is fastened back loosely with combs at the back of her head. Her voice is soft; her face lined. It is her energy and her eyes, hazel-brown and clear, that belie her age. One can imagine them like twin lenses of a camera, focusing on you and penetrating your thoughts.

Of her profession, she says," I am an artist, not a commercial photographer. The difference is that I do what I want to do and still get paid for it."

She even shrugs off tables that would limit her. "Specialization kills everything in our society. I do what I have to do."

Indeed, her photographic work in the last thirty years has not been limited to portraiture alone but includes "photogenics" as well. This is the term applied to her work by Leo Katz, painter an photographer and one of her many teachers, to mean free artistic creations without cameras and without objects. After some preliminary preparation, Ms. Jacobi takes her flashlight into the darkroom and does a kind of action painting with it on photosensitive paper. A mask controls the diameter of the beam. She frees herself from inner restraints and admits that her subconscious greatly affects the results.

According to a review in the current catalogue of "Women in Photography - An Historical Survey" (the traveling exhibit assembled by the Museum of Fine Arts, San Francisco, to show representative work of fifty women photographers from the 1860s to the present). Jacobi's results "combine a precision of line and an uncertain, misty quality… like superb pencil drawings." Her creations therefore, are on the same level as a painter's; they produce a work of art that is unique. They also help free photography from the criticism that is a "non-art" which can only record what a camera lens sees. "Few have stumbled on art in the process of playing with the process," declares a *New Yorker* art critic, "…as Jacobi has triumphantly, mysteriously done."

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Examples of her work for his exhibit were selected from the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. She is also represented in collections at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Wellesley (Massachusetts) College Museum; the University of Maryland in College Park"; the Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire; the University of New Hampshire in Durham; German museums; and in private collections.

Both through training and instinct Lotte Jacobi is much involved with people – not, perhaps, the suffering humanity that photo-journalists record, but human being who are in the process of establishing their mark with varying degrees of success. For one with so many interests, she is surprisingly well-informed on all of them. Her studio on Old Country Road, Deering – which until recently she also operated as a gallery to mount the work of other internationally known artists – still draws people from great distances. Referring both to her clientele and to friends who may come only for advice and support, she says, "There is always a danger in having preconceived ideas."

When a client comes from sitting, she registers a quick first impression. "One must guard against taking a picture of the photographer rather than the sitter. It is easier with strangers than with friends." She might suggest that he sit up straighter, but she never poses him. Naturalism is what she seeks. To achieve this, Ms. Jacobi encourages conversation often through a third person so that the sitter will lose his self-consciousness and not interrupt her work.

Once, when sent to photograph Robert Frost in Ripton, Vermont, for the dust jacket picture of Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant's book, *Robert Frost, Trial by Existence*, she took her daughter-in-law along to talk with the poet. His secretary had advised Ms. Jacobi not to overstay her time and tire Frost. While she worked, Frost and her daughter-in-law (Beatrice Trum Hunter, writer and lecturer on natural foods; YANKEE, April 1973, p.132) discussed the fine points

of making bread at home. At the end of the appointment Frost insisted he was not tired and, encouraged that homely arts were not all dead, demanded they stay for a round of ginger beer. The conversation continued for two more hours and resulted in Frost's inviting the ladies to attend his Christmas party in Cambridge, which they did - accompanied by May Sarton.
Does Ms. Jacobi feel awed by the fame of her sitters? "Of course not," she asserts matter-of-factly. "They are human just like you and me." It is this common thread of humanity, a characteristic she can recognize and appeal to in others because she has such an abundance of it herself, that guides Lotte Jacobi's thoughts and actions.
She recalls photographing Eleanor Roosevelt in Manhattan when her husband was president. Ms. Jacobi has attended a party to which she knew Mrs. Roosevelt had also been invited. She brought along a portrait she had taken of one of the Firsts Lady's sons to show her. Some time later, when the incident had nearly been forgotten, the photographer answered her doorbell and found Mrs. Roosevelt standing there alone. Her ubiquitous bodyguards had not kept up, nor had she had time to telephone ahead. "I have twenty minutes between appointments," Mrs. Roosevelt said simply. "Can you take my portrait now?" The result is a widely publicized likeness of the First Lady.
Consideration and a shared sense of loyalty dominated Lotte Jacobi's relation with Albert Einstein which continued from 1921 to the scientist's death. She had photographed him for many publications both in Germany and the United States. After they had each fled the Nazis and found sanctuary in this country, *Life* magazine planned an article about Einstein's life in Princeton, New Jersey. The scientist insisted they use Jacobi as one of the photographers. Ms. Jacobi spent a day at Einstein's home, stalking him with her camera while he worked, pondered over the mounds of mail, and tried to relax.
He refused to allow her to photograph him again two years before he died. By then he was ill and still wracked by guilt that the United States had used the atomic bomb to kill hundreds of thousands of people. "He thought that the bomb would be exploded only on some Pacific Island before spectators to show the Japanese that American scientists had developed it." She is still bitter today about President Truman's decision to drop the bomb on Japan.
But the bitterness is not part of Lotte Jacobi's makeup for long. Her neighbors in the rural community of Deering find her reputation as a concerned and active local citizen more immediately engulfing than that of an international photographer who has been in the news most of her life. She has served on the state Democratic Party Platform Committee and has had a hand in writing the arts and agriculture planks. She has run as a delegate-at-large to the National Democratic Party convention in this year's primaries and, although she lost, is determined to try to attend the meeting in New York in some capacity.

"Democracy works only if people take part," she insists. "Most government officials are out for the fast buck today, not to serve others. There are too many people in government who have no ethics or morals. Elected officials are the servants of the people - we are not their slaves. They have to be constantly reminded, to be checked up on."

For someone living so far from population centers, Lotte Jacobi manages to keep abreast of political issues, from the local to the national level, better than most. Furthermore, she does not hesitate to inform her public servants exactly how she feels about these matters.

"Change in society will come only from the bottom," Ms. Jacobi says. "It is people like you and me who really care who will make these changes in education, in tax and land reform, in fighting against bigness. And we must."

To many politicians this insistence that they toe the mark is not an endearing trait. Although she admits that her views are not always accepted, she believes they do have some effect on the workings of our government; she takes her duties as a citizen seriously.

Why has this internationally known, cosmopolitan woman settled for living in a rural town of 378 registered voters?

"I could be at home anywhere," Lotte Jacobi says. She has always been country-oriented although she has spent most of her life in Berlin or New York. From her earliest days in Thorn, a part of eastern Prussia that is now in Poland, she had wanted to be a farmer's wife, but admits she never found the farmer. Perhaps this desire was strengthened by her having been heir to her family profession – and a girl at that. According to family tradition, her great-grandfather, Samuel Jacobi, started it all as the result of a lark. It was in the 1840s that Jacobi, a glazier by trade, took a holiday in Paris. That trip coincided with the unveiling of Louis Daguerre's invention, the daguerreotype, the father of the modern camera. Jacobi visited the inventor's studio, liked what he saw, bought equipment, and committed himself to photography in the days of its infancy. Jacobi shave been taking pictures ever since.

However, the twin desires of living in the country and being an artist persisted like a running pattern in Lotte Jacobi's life. "I would have taken pictures anywhere. If I had been in the country all the time, they might have turned out differently, but I would have taken them."

Instead, in the early 1930s she took an extended trip to Russia both to photograph and to satisfy a strong need to travel. When she returned to Berlin, she found that Hitler's government would no longer allow her to photograph. Since she was unable to pursue her career there, she came here where she and so many other exiles were hailed by the press as "Hitler's gift to the U.S.A."

In a way she was paralleling another family tradition by coming to his country. Her maternal grandfather, after an uprising in 1848, had also fled to America for asylum. Later he settled in western Massachusetts where he owned a dry goods store. He eventually returned to his homeland when the girl he was engaged to refused to come to the New World. Ever after, he was known as "The American" in his village.

Gardening, keeping bees, and tending farm animals have always had a strong appeal for Lotte Jacobi even to the extent of planting sweet corn and sunflowers in the window boxes of her midtown apartment when she settled in New York to open a studio. This is recorded by a photograph she made of a praying mantis she discovered in one of her sunflowers there. Today, however, she gardens on a grander scale. Dedicated to organic methods and natural foods, she is convinced that anyone can grow a varied and adequate diet even in the northern New England climate.

"The land is here. We must still learn to use it with respect," she says, and points to the success of her friends Helen and Scott Nearing, authors of *Living the Good Live* and the more recent photo/ companion to this book which she had a hand in compiling, although only a few of the pictures are hers.

In 1955, Lotte Jacobi, her son, and daughter-in-law finally left the city and its growing confusion. They bought land in Deering and made the transition from summer people to year-round residents five years later. For a while they debated on how to make a living from the land. One of their schemes was to raise and fatten geese and sell them smoked to urban consumers, but this was discarded when they realized they could not face even the first step in preparing their product. They eventually settled for running a natural foods guest farm – long before the current craze – and continued it for several years. "The trouble was that our friends would come from the city to see us, but we had to get up so early to prepare for the day we would be too tired at night to sit up and talk with them." For a while Ms. Jacobi's job was to make beds an dclean rooms.

Today she lives alone, not far from her family, in a set of recycled buildings protected on the north by a grove of pines and exposed on the south to the New Hapshire sun. She still tends her bees and garden, with help, but will not keep animals beacause of a heavy travel shedule. Somehow, since committing herself to the rural life, she has taken courses at the University of New Hampshire in graphic arts, history of art, French, horticulture, and educational television; studied etching and engraviing with William Stanley Hayter in Paris at Atelier 17; attended the openings of two of her exhibitions in Germany; been awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Fine Arts by the University of New Hampshire; an dmost recently stopped to see both of her Senators in Washington on her way back from visiting friends in the Caribbean.

She still sometimes regrets that her command of English limits the expression of her opinions in moments of stress. This can be observed occasionally at the annual Town Meetings, during volunteer work for the New Hampshire League of Arts and Crafts, the New Hampshire Art Association, and various environmental committees she is involved with. Although realizing that she is more politically liberal than many of her neighbors, she is not hesitant about presenting her views for consideration.

"I am not against conservatives," she says, "but I will fight reactionaries wherever I see them. The time change, as they should. But we do not have to give in to what we see is happening. We must keep trying. I have never seen a more gifted people anywhere in the world than in this country. But their priorities are in making money so most of their talents go to waste."

There was not time to continue. The telephone was ringing again. The call could have come from Washington, for Lotte Jacobi has sponsored a move to honor Alfred Stieglitz – artist, scientist, publisher, and the first photographer to experiment with limited light - with a commemorative stamp. It could have been from a novice photographer three states away asking for an appointment; or from a neighbour wanting to discuss the benefits of natural foods; or a gallery director in Philadelphia or Bridgeport asking her to be in a symposium on photography; or from a friend who just wants to know how Lotte Jacobi is today.