

DOROTHEA LANGHE

GRAB A HUNK
OF LIGHTNING

1 x 60, 1 x 90 **HD**



PBS.

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I will set myself a big problem.

I will go down there,

I will photograph this thing,

I will come back, and develop it.

I will print it and I will mount it.

And put it on the wall—all in twenty four hours.

I will do this to see if I can just grab a hunk of lightning.

Dorothea Lange

Her celebrated photograph *The Migrant Mother* is one of the most recognized and arresting images in the world, a haunting portrait that came to represent the suffering of America's Great Depression. Yet few know the story, struggles, and profound body of work of the woman who created the portrait: Dorothea Lange. Directed and narrated by Lange's granddaughter Dyanna Taylor, herself an award-winning filmmaker, *Dorothea Lange: Grab a Hunk of Lightning* explores the life, passions, and uncompromising vision of the woman behind the camera, whose enduring images document five turbulent decades of American history. Taylor, who learned to see the visual world through her grandmother's eyes, combines intimate family memories and journals with extensive scholarship and never-before-seen footage to bring Lange's life and work, triumphs and pain, into sharp focus. The result is a revealing portrayal of the artist whose empathy for people on the margins of society challenged America to know itself.

Taylor weaves together Lange's private and public worlds: the childhood polio that left her with a withered foot, the will she summoned to overcome physical obstacles, and the toll her ambition and creative passion took on her personal life. Taylor presents an insider's view of Lange's challenging marriage to Western artist Maynard Dixon and her second marriage to unconventional labor economist Paul Taylor, a life-long creative partnership that led to some of Lange's most compelling work.

Dorothea Lange: Grab a Hunk of Lightning shows the range of subjects Lange captured with her unsentimental lens: Native Americans, striking workers, destitute migrants fleeing the ravaged Dust Bowl, and Japanese Americans forced into internment camps during World War II. The wartime photos, taken at the Manzanar War Relocation camp in California, were so unsettling to the government agency commissioning them that the images were impounded for half a century. Taylor also shares rare footage of Lange preparing for her unprecedented one-woman show at New York's Museum of Modern Art, an event the photographer would not live to see.

This documentary is more than a retelling of an artist's life—it illuminates the deeply held beliefs that allowed Lange to create such power in her photographs. By making herself nearly invisible to her subjects, Lange achieved the intimacy that was the hallmark of her work, and produced images that propelled America toward social justice.

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CREDITS

Producer, Writer, Director: Dyanna Taylor

Producer: Roberta Grossman

Photo: Dorothea Lange in Texas on the Plains, Paul S. Taylor, 1937



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