

Wall Label for "A Dialogue with Solitude": Photographs by Dave Heath, July 12 - August 18, 1963

In 1947, shortly before his sixteenth birthday, Dave Heath saw Ralph Crane's photographic essay, A Bad Boy's Story, in LIFE Magazine. Of this experience he has said: "In Mr. Crane's unique visual interpretations I found portrayed conditions similar to my own: broken home, foster families, social withdrawal, and life in an orphanage in which I was then living. In that moment of self-awareness I discovered photography as a direct and moving form of expression." He found work for three years in drugstore finishing, later as a bus boy, and the purchase of a good camera enabled him to begin the serious photography which has continued, with rich production and revelation, ever since. In 1952 he was drafted and sent to Korea as a combat infantryman. When he returned he spent a year at the Philadelphia Museum College, then came to Chicago where he worked in a large commercial studio and - in his spare time - produced two books of photographic sequences. At the beginning of 1957 he went to New York City and continues to live there.

This year Dave Heath was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. His photographs are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art and Yeshiva University. They have been exhibited at 7 Arts Gallery (1958), Image Gallery (1961), Judson Gallery (1962), Karen Horney Clinic (1962) and The Museum of Modern Art (1963). Work by him has been published in Color Photography 1960, Photography Annual (1963), Photography of the World 1960 and 1961 (Japanese), Modern Photography, Infinity, Popular Photography, The New York Times Magazine, and Contact. This fall A Dialogue with Solitude, which comprises the present exhibition, is to be published as a book.

A Dialogue with Solitude is a self portrait in which the artist himself never really appears, but is revealed and interpreted by every detail. Its revolt is alive with sympathy and acceptance of man's modern placement in

the world, mated with contradictory realization and resistance which deny and combat the absurdities of existence. This is expressed with a sincere poetry which is never shocked out of countenance by reality. From the beginning of the sequence to its end, the viewer accompanies his unseen guide, out of darkness and troubled sleep, on a pilgrimage through an unpredictable environment where contradiction seems to be the only law. It is a solitude crowded with human beings, all of whom he recognizes and understands, but with whom he can make no exchange other than the gestures of an almost mechanical ritual. Along the way are pauses, marked by poetic quotations. It is a journey somewhat like those shown in the films of Antonioni where the ones who really belong in the world are its most passionate advocates, seem to have no part in its inexplicable and pointless competitions. When we have finished with this Dialogue with Solitude, we know another of those rare works of the last few years which - like the books of James Baldwin, John Rechy, Jean Genet - contemplate humanity's weaknesses, helplessnesses, hostilities and irresistible attractions, to draw from them new ~~hidden~~ truths which may be more lasting than our lost illusions.

Hugh Edwards, Curator of Photography,
The Art Institute of Chicago.

Wall label for "A Dialogue with Solitude": Photographs
by Dave Heath, July 12 - August 15, 1983.

In 1947, shortly before his sixteenth birthday, Dave Heath saw Ralph Crane's photographic essay, A Bad Boy's Story, in LIFE Magazine. Of this experience he has said: "In Mr. Crane's unique visual interpretations I found portrayed conditions similar to my own: broken home, foster families, social withdrawal, and life in an orphanage in which I was then living. In that moment of self-awareness I discovered photography as a direct and moving form of expression." He found work for three years in drugstore finishing, later as a bus boy, and the purchase of a good camera enabled him to begin the serious photography which has continued, with rich production and revelation, ever since. In 1952 he was drafted and sent to Korea as a combat infantryman. When he returned he spent a year at The Philadelphia Museum College, then came to Chicago where he worked in a large commercial studio and - in his spare time - produced two books of photographic sequences. At the beginning of 1957 he went to New York City and continues to live there.

This year Dave Heath was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship. His photographs are in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art and Yeshiva University. They have been exhibited at 7 Arts Gallery (1958), Image Gallery (1961), Judson Gallery (1962), Karen Horney Clinic (1962) and The Museum of Modern Art (1963). Work by him has been published in Color Photography 1930, Photography Annual (1963), Photography of the World 1960 and 1961 (Japanese), Modern Photography, Infinity, Popular Photography, The New York Times Magazine, and Contact. This fall A Dialogue with Solitude, which composes the present exhibition, is to be published as a book.

A Dialogue with Solitude is a self portrait in which the artist himself never really appears, but is revealed and interpreted by every detail. Its revolt is alive with sympathy and acceptance of man's modern placement in the world, mated with contradictory realization and resistance which deny and combat the absurdities of existence. This is expressed with a sincere poetry which is never shocked out of countenance by reality. From the beginning of the sequence to

its end, the viewer accompanies his unseen guide, out of darkness and troubled sleep, on a pilgrimage through an unpredictable environment where contradiction seems to be the only law. It is a solitude crowded with human beings, all of whom he recognizes and understands, but with whom he can make no exchange other than the gestures of an almost mechanical ritual. Along the way are pauses, marked by poetic quotations. It is a journey somewhat like those shown in the films of Antonioni where the ones who really belong in the world and are its most passionate advocates, seem to have no part in its inexplicable and pointless competitions. When we have finished with this Dialogue with Solitude we know another of those rare works of the last few years which - like the books of James Baldwin, John Rechy, Jean Genet - contemplate humanity's Weaknesses, helplessnesses, hostilities and irresistible attractions, to draw from them new beliefs which may be more lasting than our lost illusions.