

f F O T O I M A G E

DAVE HEATH

(American, 1931 - 2016)

By the age of four, Dave Heath had been abandoned by both of his parents. By the age of fifteen he had lived in a series of foster homes and, finally, in an orphanage. Given that only his mother was of the Jewish tradition (yet this is how he was being raised), as well as the lack of any family support, he did not feel that he belonged anywhere. However, through the study of Jewish history he gained an understanding of a human community and our individual commitments to survival. Coupling this with American history, Heath began to lay the groundwork for his belief in a purposeful life. At this early age, Heath knew that he wanted to be an artist, seeing this as the best way to experience the world and come to define himself within it.

In May 1947, Heath saw Ralph Crane's photo-essay in LIFE Magazine called "Bad Boy's Life". Struck by the success of how succinctly these pictures connected to a deeply felt shared experience, Heath knew he wanted to become a photographer. Using the orphanage's darkroom, he began to master the mechanics of the medium. Thwarted by his vocational school due to its restrictive enrolment policy, he dropped out of high school and became a darkroom printer at a commercial lab. A book by John Whiting called *Photography is a Language* helped him understand the complexity of the medium. It was Heath's passionate dedication to a self-directed study of history, art and the role of an artist which defined his existence.

Heath began photographing during the late 1940s. He briefly studied art at the Philadelphia College of Art and the Institute of Design in Chicago, supporting himself as assistant to commercial photographers. By 1959, Heath was in New York where he studied with the groundbreaking photojournalist W. Eugene Smith. His subsequent work has been highly influenced by Smith's humanistic tone and emphasis on the photographic narrative.

Working in the street, Heath used its inhabitants to capture individual moments in tightly structured compositions that are charged with the importance of their individuality and the seriousness of their situation. Early on, he was inspired by the ability of a sequence of photographs vs. a single image to evoke the complexity of his story. At the age of 21 he composed his first maquette, called "3" and in the intervening years worked his subsequent photographs into elaborate sequences culminating in 1961's *A Dialogue With Solitude*, published as a book in 1965.

Heath first came to prominence with the 1963 exhibition *A Dialogue With Solitude*, a moving series of black and white images addressing contemporary isolation. Heath subsequently won two Guggenheim Fellowships. In the 1970s, after moving to Toronto, Heath began experimenting with Polaroid technology and produced a series of narrative works under the title *Songs of Innocence*.

In addition, Heath mounted several thematic slide presentations using vernacular photographs including *Le Grand album ordinaire* (1973) and *Ars Moriendi* (1980). In 1981 the National Gallery of Canada mounted an exhibition of the two series *A Dialogue With Solitude* and *Songs of Innocence IV*. Heath would continue to exhibit across the United States and Canada, including group and solo exhibitions at San Francisco Camerawork, Photofind Gallery (New York), Stephen Bulger Gallery (Toronto), and Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography (Ottawa).

His photographs are represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Art Institute of Chicago, the International Museum of Photography, George Eastman House (Rochester, NY), and the Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, among other institutions. From 1970 until 1997, Heath taught photography at Ryerson University in Toronto. In 2001, Heath began producing digital colour work, a selection of which was published in his book, *Dave Heath's Art Show*, in 2007.

Dave Heath died in 2016, aged 85, in Toronto.