

DAVE HEATH: DIALOGUES WITH SOLITUDES 8 MAR – 2 JUN 2019

24th January 2019

"The fact that I never had a family, a place or a story that defined me, inspired a need in me to join the community of mankind. I did so by inventing a poetic form linking this community, at least symbolically, in my imagination, through this form" - Dave Heath

The Photographers' Gallery, in collaboration with LE BAL Paris, presents *Dave Heath: Dialogues with Solitudes*; the first major UK exhibition dedicated to the work of this hugely influential American photographer (b. 1931 USA, d. 2016 Canada).

Heath's psychologically charged images both reflect and respond to the alienation particularly prevalent in post war North American society. He was one of the first of a new generation of artists seeking new ways to try and make sense of the increasing sense of isolation and vulnerability that typified the age.

Predominantly self-taught, Heath was nonetheless extremely informed and versed in the craft, theory and history of photography and taught extensively throughout his life. Although greatly influenced by W. Eugene Smith and the photographers of the Chicago School, including Aaron Siskind and Harry Callahan, Heath cannot be neatly pigeonholed as either a documentary or experimental photographer. His work feels more at home within a narrative or poetic tradition, where an interior reality takes precedence.

Heath was born in Philadelphia in 1931 and had a turbulent childhood, abandoned by his parents at the age of four and consigned to a series of foster homes before being placed in an orphanage. He first became interested in photography as a teenager, and joined an amateur camera club. He was fascinated by the photo essays in Life Magazine and cites one in particular as having a decisive impact on his future. *Bad Boy's Story* by Ralph Crane, charted the emotional landscape of a young orphan. Not only did Heath identify with the protagonist, he immediately recognised the power of photography as a means of self-expression and as a way of connecting to others. In the following years he trained himself in the craft, taking courses in commercial art, working in a photo-processing lab, and studying paintings at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. While stationed in Korea with the US Army, he began to photograph his fellow soldiers,

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eschewing the drama of the battlefield for quiet and private moments of subdued reflection.

On his return, Heath dedicated himself to photography, continuing his interest with capturing an “inner landscape” and training his lens on anonymous strangers whom he identified as similarly lost or fragile. Although he photographed in mostly public spaces, on the streets of Chicago and New York (where he moved to in 1957), his subjects seem detached from their physical context, shot in close-up, articulated by their isolation. His frames possess an intensity of concentration, showing single figures or close-knit couples entirely wrapped up in their own world. An occasional sidelong glance conveys a momentary awareness of being photographed, but for the most part Heath is an unobserved, unobtrusive witness. By concentrating on the fragility of human connection, focusing on the personal over the political, Heath gave ‘voice’ to those largely unheard and joined a growing community of artists searching for alternative forms of expression. His work was pivotal in depicting the fractured feeling of societal unease just prior to the rise of the civil rights movement and opposition to the Vietnam War and his ground-breaking approaches to narrative and image sequence, his exquisite printing techniques, handmade book maquettes, multimedia slide presentations culminated in his poetic masterwork, *A Dialogue with Solitude*, 1965. This sensitive exploration of loss, pain, love and hope reveals Heath as one the most original photographers of those decades.

After 1970, Dave Heath gave up on photography and devoted his time to teaching (in particular at Ryerson University, Toronto) in Canada, where he later became a citizen. He died in 2016.

Taking his publication, *A Dialogue With Solitude*, as a point of departure, this exhibition highlights Heath’s preoccupations with solitude and contemplation and further makes explicit the importance of sequencing in his practice. Heath was clear that “the central issue of my work is sequence” and held the belief that the relativity and rhythm of images offered a truer way of conveying a universal psychological state than a single image. He perfected a form of montage, often blending text and image to create visual poems, which captured the mood of the decade in a manner akin to a photographic protest song.

The exhibition presents Heath’s photographs in dialogue with cult American films from the 1960s similarly focused on themes of solitude. These include: *Portrait of Jason* by Shirley Clarke (1966); *Salesman* by Albert and David Maysles and Charlotte Mitchell Zwerin (1968); and *The Savage Eye* by Ben Maddow, Sidney Meyers and Joseph Strick (1960).

Curated by Diane Dufour, Director of LE BAL, Paris, in collaboration with The Photographers’ Gallery, *Dave Heath: Dialogues with Solitudes* was conceived by and first presented at LE BAL, Paris (2018), with the support of Stephen Bulger Gallery (Toronto), Howard Greenberg Gallery (New York), Archive of Modern Conflict (London) and Les Films du Camélia (Paris) with the contribution of Manfred Heiting and the participation of Maysles Films Inc.

-Ends-

Press Contacts:

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Notes for Editors:

The Photographers' Gallery

The Photographers' Gallery opened in 1971 in Great Newport Street, London, as the UK's first independent gallery devoted to photography. It was the first public gallery in the UK to exhibit many key names in international photography, including Juergen Teller, Robert Capa, Sebastiano Salgado and Andreas Gursky. The Gallery has also been instrumental in establishing contemporary British photographers, including Martin Parr and Corinne Day. In 2009, the Gallery moved to 16 – 18 Ramillies Street in Soho, the first stage in its plan to create a 21st century home for photography. Following an eighteen months long redevelopment project, the Gallery reopened to the public in 2012. The success of The Photographers' Gallery over the past four decades has helped to establish photography as a recognised art form, introducing new audiences to photography and championing its place at the heart of visual culture. www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Visitor Information

Opening times: Mon – Sat, 10:00 - 18:00; Thu, 10:00 - 20:00; Sun, 11:00 - 18:00 Admission: free until noon (Mon - Sun) and then £5 / £2.5 concessions

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Dave Heath,
New York City, 1960 © Dave Heath / Courtesy of Howard
Greenberg Gallery, New York, and Stephen Bulger
Gallery, Toronto



Image 2
Dave Heath
Washington Square, New York City, 1960 © Dave Heath /
Courtesy of Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York, and
Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto



Image 3
Dave Heath
Washington Square, New York, 1960 © Dave Heath /
Collection Torosian, courtesy Howard Greenberg
Gallery, New York, et Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto



Image 4
Dave Heath
Washington Square, New York City, 1960 © Dave Heath /
Courtesy of Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York, and
Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto



Image 5
Dave Heath
California, 1964 © Dave Heath / Courtesy of Howard
Greenberg Gallery, New York, and Stephen Bulger Gallery,
Toronto



Image 6
Dave Heath
Elevated in Brooklyn, New York City, 1963 © Dave Heath /
Courtesy of Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York, and Stephen
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