

The Museum of Modern Art

11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019 Tel. 956-6100 Cable: Modernart

NO. 97
FOR RELEASE:
SEPTEMBER 23, 1970
PRESS PREVIEW:
SEPTEMBER 22, 1970
10 A. M. TO 4 P. M.

EAST 100TH STREET, an exhibition of 43 photographs made by Bruce Davidson over a two-year period on a single block of East Harlem, will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from September 23 to November 29. The exhibition coincides with the publication by The Harvard University Press of a book entitled East 100th Street with an introduction and 123 photographs by Bruce Davidson.

The antithesis of candid photography, these pictures are rather the product of a conscious collaboration between photographer and subject. The result is a poised, respectful, and moving record of specific and individual lives.

In addition to their photographic interest, the pictures in both the book and the exhibition constitute a significant social document covering the period during 1967 and 1968 when Davidson worked continually on the block with the aid of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The introduction to his book describes his two-year sojourn:

"'What you call a ghetto, I call my home.' This was said to me when I first came to East Harlem, and during the two years that I photographed people of East 100th Street, it stayed with me...I entered a life style, and, like the people who live on the block, I love and hate it and I keep going back."

Davidson also describes some of his subjects in the introduction. Among them are a Congo drummer who has two jobs and goes to night school to study aeronautical engineering; an old man who tends a garden between broken slabs of concrete in a tenement backyard; a retired maid in uniform scrubbing her own linoleum floor; a young articulate poet and revolutionary who feared that his photograph would end up in an FBI file.

John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography, who selected the photographs in the exhibition, says:

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"Most photographers have approached America's visible minorities as though they were exotic quarry to be stalked and captured, or as statistics that might buttress a political position, or as symbols of the majority's guilt. Bruce Davidson has done a more difficult and more valuable thing: he has shown us true and specific people, photographed in those private moments of suspended action in which the complexity and ambiguity of individual lives triumph over abstraction."

The block Davidson chose for his photographic essay, East 100th Street between First and Second Avenues, is part of a larger area known as the Metro North community, so called because it covers the area north of Metropolitan Hospital from 96th Street to 106th Street and from Third Avenue to the East River. Davidson was first attracted to the area because of the work of the Metro North Association, a committee of residents active in improving the community physically, socially and economically. This organization and its director, Edwin Suarez, provided Davidson with access to people in the community and with initial introductions to families on the block.

A block with run-down tenements, abandoned buildings, vacant and garbage-strewn lots, a housing project and a population of 2,000, East 100th Street in the 1950's had the reputation of being one of the worst blocks in the city. As part of the larger, long-term community development project of Metro North, East 100th Street has undergone a metamorphosis. Since Davidson began his project in 1967, three quarters of the existing tenement structures on the block have been renovated, low-rise apartment houses are going up in some of the vacant lots and a vest pocket park and day care center are in the works.

Davidson gave out some 2,000 prints to people on the block in appreciation for their cooperation. Many of these prints now hang on the walls in apartments on East 100th Street. Several people from the block and the surrounding community will be attending the opening of the show at the Museum.

"After being on the block every day for nearly two years, you really get a feeling for the people there," Davidson said. "And what's important about seeing the people

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there is that this block really relates to the world in general where most people are poor and invisible. The camera makes you see and feel people the way nothing else can."

Bruce Davidson was born in 1933 in Chicago, grew up in Oak Park, Illinois and became interested in photography during childhood. After undergraduate study at the Rochester Institute of Technology, he studied painting with Joseph Albers at Yale University. Since 1959 he has been a member of Magnum Photos, Inc. In 1962, he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in photography to photograph the civil rights movement.

Viewing his work in general, Davidson, working fundamentally in the reportage tradition, has redirected that tradition away from a concern for dramatic narrative toward a heightened awareness of photography's ability to evoke the indefinable sense of place, character and relationship.

His work has been widely published in the United States and abroad and has been exhibited extensively in this country. Davidson's photographs were first shown at The Museum of Modern Art in 1958-59 in an exhibition of photographs from the Museum's collection, and his photographic essay "Brooklyn Gang" was included in the inaugural exhibition in the Steichen Galleries in May 1964. In 1965, he was given a one-man exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago. In 1966, The Museum of Modern Art held an exhibition of 40 photographs by Davidson including works from his essays on England, Wales, Los Angeles and The American Negro.

On October 6, 1970, Davidson will be named Photographer of the Year by the American Society of Magazine Photographers. He is one of only ten American photographers represented at Expo '70 in Osaka, Japan.

Additional information and photographs available from Diana Goldin, Coordinator of Press Services, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N. Y. 10019. (212) 956-7297, 7501.

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Introduction to EAST 100TH STREET

By Bruce Davidson

Published by Harvard University Press, September, 1970

"What you call a ghetto, I call my home." This was said to me when I first came to East Harlem, and during the two years that I photographed people of East 100th Street, it stayed with me. Home became an old man who grows grass between broken slabs of concrete in a tenement backyard, children behind windows covered by chicken wire, walls with pictures of Christ, Kennedy, and the American flag, and a retired maid in uniform scrubbing her own linoleum floor. Home is formal family photographs, a boy with an African-head medallion on a rooftop who wouldn't let me photograph his pigeons because he wanted them to be free, a party given by seven brothers for their mother arriving from Puerto Rico whom they hadn't seen in eighteen years, a young articulate poet and revolutionary who feared that his photograph would end up in an FBI file, four bullet scars on the abdomen of a reform school graduate, and a Congo drummer who has two jobs and goes to night school to study aeronautical engineering. It is an aspiring fashion designer, commuter traffic on the East River Drive, a Springfield rifle under a neatly made up cot, a blinded Marine veteran of Vietnam learning to use his cane, junkies in basements and abandoned buildings, a musician who when his violin was stolen could not afford to buy another and joined the Air Force, the child in her white Sunday dress who gave me the name "picture man," the taxi driver who had his small son pay me a quarter for the photograph I'd given them, the theatre and dance group Soul and Latin going to Central Park with their name on T-shirts, the pregnant girl on a rock surrounded by rubble in a lot waiting patiently for me to compose, and the man in the bar who looked at my white skin and said I'd raped the world. I entered a life style, and, like the people who live on the block, I love and hate it and I keep going back.

B.D.

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EAST 100TH STREET

WALL LABEL

For almost two years Bruce Davidson was a constant visitor to the block of East 100th Street which lies between First and Second Avenues. It was his purpose to get to know the people of the block, to earn their confidence and trust, and to describe in his medium - photography - as much as he could of their lives and circumstances.

Davidson made no attempt to catch his subjects unaware; on the contrary it was basic to his idea that the photographs be the result of a conscious collaboration between subject and photographer. In order to preserve this intention, and to make it clear to his subjects, he worked with a large tripod camera, which slowed the tempo of his work and made secretive shooting impossible. The eloquence of these pictures is thus in large measure the eloquence of the people of 100th Street, who allowed Davidson into the privacy of their individual lives.

Most photographers have approached America's visible minorities as though they were exotic quarry to be stalked and captured, or as statistics that might buttress a political position, or as symbols of the majority's guilt. Bruce Davidson has done a more difficult and more valuable thing: he has shown us true and specific people, photographed in those private moments of suspended action in which the complexity and ambiguity of individual lives triumph over abstraction.

John Szarkowski

One hundred and twenty-three photographs of this series are reproduced in East 100th Street, published by The Harvard University Press. The book is available in the Museum bookstore.