



Heat exhaustion, from the series "Conversations with the Dead"

Date

1968 (printed 2011)

Primary Maker

Danny Lyon

Medium

Gelatin silver print

Description

In 1962, shortly before graduating from the University of Chicago with a degree in history, Danny Lyon hitchhiked to Cairo, Illinois, to attend a civil rights demonstration and met the young activist John Lewis, who inspired him to travel even farther south and try his hand at photojournalism. Over the next two years, Lyon documented the progress of the civil rights movement and became the first official photographer of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC. In the half century that has followed, roving from Bushwick to Haiti, Lyon has produced a large oeuvre of powerful, socially conscious photography. Late in 1967, when Lyon was twenty-five years old, he was granted permission to document the lives of inmates in the Texas penitentiary system. For fourteen months, he shot in six prison units of varying levels, from a processing center for incoming inmates to a prison farm for young men to a treatment center for inmates classified as mentally ill. The resulting series of photographs was published in 1971, along with prison records and writings and drawings by inmates Lyon had met and befriended, as the book *Conversations with the Dead*. In the photographs, Lyon set out to convey the experience of the prisoners rather than produce a formal study or survey of the prison system. *Heat exhaustion* alludes to the harsh conditions faced by inmates working on prison farms. "Much has changed in America since I drove from NYC to Texas to stay and make this book," Lyon wrote when *Conversations with the Dead* was reissued in 2014. "But prisons remain." (SOURCE: Alcauskas, *INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS*, 2017)

Dimensions

Image: 8 5/8 × 12 7/8 in. (21.9 × 32.7 cm) Sheet: 10 15/16 in. × 14 in. (27.8 × 35.6 cm)