

## KIRBY CONGDON

Fifty years ago Kirby Condon published his first book of poetry with Interim Books. Back in 1962 Kirby and Jay Socin were just embarking on the "mimeograph revolution" which was to engage so many underground writers, poets, and visual artists during that decade of innovation and experimentation.

Their first full-fledged book titled *Iron Ark* was a small, but powerful poetic treatise on the machine and modern man's reliance and relationship with our mechanical world. The twelve poems memorialize the machine and its various forms as symbols of the process of life itself.

Up to this time in his poetic career, Kirby had published his work in a variety of magazines and newspapers, starting in 1954 with some very touching and fragile lines in the early gay publication *One* and in the *American Poetry Magazine*. By the late fifties his work was regularly seen in *The New York Times*, *The Herald Tribune*, and *The Christian Science Monitor* and in numerous literary journals, with the result that at the beginning of the sixties he had published sixty-one individual poems, several of which were reprinted in later publications at their request.

As the sixties unfolded Kirby began to read at coffee houses with fellow beat generation poets. He created his own poetry periodical titled *MAGAZINE* which consisted mainly of the other coffee house poets with some of his own work and the occasional brief, but rather tart critique of the commercial and academic institutions by Kirby, signed Crank. The final *MAGAZINE* was published in 1972 with a new format, ending the mimeograph style publishing.

By this time, Kirby had moved from presenting his critical comments in his own *Interim* publications to the wider audience to be found in other periodicals, both specialized and general. From the seventies on his letters, essays, reviews and articles appear in such varied venues as *Americas*, *COSMEP Newsletter*, *Margins*, *The Book Review*, *Contact II* and *The Small Press Review*, as well as in more localized publications in *Brooklyn*, *Fire Island* and *Key West*. True, his poems remain his first concern, but Kirby Congdon is not just a writer of poetry, he was and is a student and judge of poetry and its place in today's world.

Ten years ago Ray Longtin created a bibliography based on his own personal collection of Mr Congdon's work. Kirby was able to provide additional information, notes and photostat copies of published material. These items would otherwise be almost impossible to locate today due to the ephemeral nature of the work of the mimeograph revolution. Literary historians today have realized that the beat generation and their lesser known colleagues in the underground poetry world of the sixties have their own literary importance. Kirby Congdon now has an impressive list of major university libraries that are actively searching for his earliest publications. The Rare-Bookstore prices of his works as well as Crank Press, *Interim Press* and *Cycle Press* indicate that there is, today, a definite commercial stake in this most anti-commercial of poets!

We in *Key West* are most fortunate to have this distinguished writer in our midst and that the most fitting way to show that gratitude would be an official recognition of Kirby Congdon's lifelong literary contributions.

Sincerely,

The Key West Poetry Guild Editorial Board