



## Vivian Maier: Come Out of the Shadows

Posted by Rachel Marie on Mar 21, 2013 in Rachel Marie | 27 comments

### ***Vivian Maier: Come Out of the Shadows* by [Rachel S](#)**

Recently, I had the privilege of attending one of the most fascinating and enjoyable lectures in my recent memory - author Richard Cahan and collector Jeffrey Goldstein spoke about the life and works of Vivian Maier. Maier remains one of the most mysterious street and documentary photographers of the mid 20th Century - she was a complete unknown until the time of her death in 2009. If you're unfamiliar with her work or the story of her accidental discovery, I'm happy to introduce you to this prolific talent.



*Vivian Maier - Goldstein Collection*

Vivian Maier's work was first discovered in Chicago in 2007 when boxes of 3000+ prints, 100,000+ negatives and hundreds of undeveloped rolls of film, hidden within several abandoned storage units, were sold at auction in separate lots. In 2009, Maier died at the age of 83 before her work was ever publically recognized or exhibited. This was also the year that the world was first introduced to Maier's work by John Maloof. Over the next few years, the near totality of her prints, negatives and film were purchased by a few collectors. The most well known anthologies of Maier's work are the [John Maloof Collection](#) and the [Jeffrey Goldstein Collection](#). Her work is undeniably evocative, nostalgic, and inspiring.



*Vivian Maier - Goldstein Collection*

Vivian Maier initially became recognized for her Chicago street photography. She captured the essence and vibrance of her surroundings, particularly in the city. Maier's work is particularly evocative for those who grew up in the 50's and 60's because she seemed to stare deep into the soul of the time and preserve the everyday experience of the people. She ventured outside the comfortable homes and picturesque residential neighborhoods of her employers to document all segments of life in and around the big city.



My first introduction to Maier was through her "looking glass" self-portraits and came via my good friend across the seas - photographer Gavin Gordon, who has since instigated #vivianmaierportrait appreciation projects on Instagram and [Google+](#). The moment I laid eyes on Maier's work, I was hooked. Maier was a fiercely private person and in the majority of her perfectly composed self-portraits, she appears stoic.



*Vivian Maier - Goldstein Collection*

Since that first encounter, I've enjoyed shooting myself in the occasional "Viv" style. Naturally, the exhibition of her work was an appropriate venue for a couple 'Viv in Viv' portraits





*Inside Inspiration :: by Rachel Sawyer*

Born in New York, Maier spent much of her youth in France. Starting in the late 1940s, she shot an average of a roll of film a day. She moved to Chicago in the mid-1950s, and spent the next 40 years working as a nanny. Maier shot many of her most iconic pictures while working for various suburban Chicago families - including Phil Donahue - a job that allowed her to periodically travel both domestically and abroad, as shown in her photographs of New York, South Dakota, Florida, California, as well as the rural pastures of Southern France.



*Vivian Maier - Goldstein Collection*

Maier's camera was her diary, and the biographers who have studied her life and work believe this could be why she rarely shared her photographs with anyone. She was an extremely private person and most people who were acquainted with her, didn't really know *who* Vivian Maier was. She left no family, no partner, not even her employers knew the depth of Maier's photographic talents or her inspiration.



*Vivian Maier :: Goldstein Collection*



*Vivian Maier :: Goldstein Collection*

And so, her life's work - negatives, film, prints - remained hidden from the world until now. Maier has been likened to Emily Dickinson in that her work was shared with the world posthumously and outside of the author/artists original intent.

If you're one of my fellow Seattleites, don't sleep! [Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows](#) will be on the walls at Photo Center Northwest until March 23rd and is well worth the trip to Capitol Hill. For you lucky Chicagoans - the [Vivian Maier's Chicago](#) exhibition is currently on display at the Chicago History Museum and will be open through Summer 2013.



*Vivian Maier :: Goldstein Collection*

There is so much to admire in work of this mysterious and gifted human being. If you feel as compelled by these images as I was, I encourage you to discover more about the work of Vivian Maier. Within this article are a number of links to more information about Maier, and I encourage you to visit them and come back here to share your thoughts in the comments.

"We went far in documenting Vivian's life, but she loved being a woman of mystery," said Richard Cahan, co-author of the book. "Even her photographs—clear, forthright images—only go so far in revealing her. That's what great photographers do."

