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LEARNING GUIDE

Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows

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VIVIAN MAIER: OUT OF THE SHADOWS

February 1 – March 23, 2013

ABOUT

The Photo Center NW is proud to present Vivian Maier: Out of the Shadows, an exhibition of photographs by Vivian Maier (1926-2009) from the Jeffrey Goldstein collection. This exhibition of posthumous silver gelatin prints puts Maier's work in the context of her life during her highly creative period from the 1950s through the 1970s. This is the first time Maier's impressive body of work and unique story will be shared in Seattle.

Maier's work was discovered in Chicago in 2007 when boxes of abandoned prints, negatives and undeveloped film were sold at auction. 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 to support her passion for photography. Maier died at the age of 83 before her work was ever publicly recognized or exhibited.



STREET PHOTOGRAPHY VS DOCUMENTARY

For decades street photography has provided a straight record of everyday urban life around the world. Arguably similar to documentary photography, street photography provides us with an insight of daily life, often times employing a narrative humor and irony, whereas documentary photography provokes emotion through a captured, single moment in history. The documentary angle includes aspects of journalism, art, education, sociology and history — often images are intended to bring about social change and/or illustrate a specific story. With subjects mostly unaware of the camera, street photographs are mirror images of society and untouched moments frozen in time.



CRITICAL THINKING

**"I BELIEVE THAT, MORE THAN EVER BEFORE,
PHOTOGRAPHY IS ABOUT A COMMUNITY AND A
CULTURE, RATHER THAN THE CAMERA."**

- OLIVER LANG, PHOTOGRAPHER

Street photography is almost as old as photography itself; while its basic concept hasn't changed much, what happens on the streets has changed dramatically over the years. Today everyone has a camera, the 2013 presidential inauguration was one of the most photographed events in history.

1. How have modern times changed street photography? Besides style and fashion differences, think also about current concerns such as street violence, terrorism, intrusion, and surveillance.

2. We insist on the right to privacy and, simultaneously, snap anything and everyone we see and everything we do – in public and in private – on mobile phones and digital cameras, on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Is street photography an invasion of privacy?

3. In an era where Google Street View and satellite imagery allow you to walk the streets nearly anywhere, is street photography still relevant or has it just changed? Should we consider anyone who snaps pictures in public a street photographer? If not, how should we define a true "street photographer?"

4. Maier photographed relentlessly. She left behind a legacy that is bigger than she could probably ever have imaged.

What do you think motivated her? What pushed her to take so many pictures? Being a reclusive person and virtually an unknown photographer, how do you think Maier would view her current rising fame and notoriety?



Jesse Marlow Skip Divers



Doug Rickard



Joel Meyerowitz



Vivian Maier's bathroom in Chicago

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

1. Eugene Atget was arguably one of the founding fathers of street photography. He captured old Paris and its people with a large-format wooden camera. Through Atget's street photographs of city life we learned to accept street life as an acceptable subject in photography. Some fifty years later Maier would hit the streets with her compact camera, which allowed her to move around her subjects in ways that Atget couldn't. Similarly to Vivian Maier, Eugene Atget did not gain attention until after his death.



Eugene Atget



Vivian Maier

a. Although taken in different time periods, both of these images are examples of street photography. What elements of Maier's photograph have evolved since Atget's? What elements have carried on within the street photography tradition?

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Henri Cartier-Bresson



Vivian Maier

2. Prominent photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson was another pioneer of street photography. He frequently photographed different subjects through different perspectives and shot with a 35 mm Leica and tried to go unnoticed by the public. Cartier-Bresson coined the "decisive moment," always camera-in-hand so not to miss the fleeting moment that will never return, often times waiting for hours for a figure to enter his frame.

a. These two photographs by Cartier-Bresson and Maier are examples of decisive moments. What makes these images each a "decisive moment"? Would the photographs have the same effect if there were taken a moment later?

COMPARE AND CONTRAST (continued)

2. Vivian Maier photographed a wide range of subjects in the streets, from still lifes to self portraits, to straight photographs of strangers. Her photographs have received acclaim because of her uncanny use humor, fine compositions, and deadpan gravitation to the bizarre and unique.

a. Choose two images from above and describe what makes them interesting images.

b. Compare the two, how are they different? What are the strengths of each and how do they convey different messages?

