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VISUAL ART **Currently Hanging: The Nanny Who Owned Chicago**

 posted by **JEN GRAVES** on TUE, MAR 19, 2013 at 4:08 PM


COURTESY PHOTO CENTER NW

Vivian Maier haunted the city of Chicago. She took this in 1968 in the north suburbs.

Nobody except the people who knew **Vivian Maier** during her quiet life as a nanny in Chicago knew that she was taking photographs constantly, amassing a collection that would become significant in the canons both of street photography and the plain old documentary history of a city. She was **"discovered" after her death**, and that makes for a juicy story, but ultimately, it's the work that matters or not. A fraction of her **100,000 negatives and prints** are visiting **Photographic Center Northwest through Saturday**; I recommend checking it out.

A story like this **easily leads to sentimentalization** and, frankly, low standards for deciding what's interesting. Some of the pictures here really are not. At the same time, some are heightened by their backstory, especially the shadowy self-portraits—or really, any of the works that hint at a hidden side of things. What's underneath a bathing suit. What entertainments await behind a ticket window. What the face that goes with those legs looks like.



COURTESY PHOTO CENTER NW

At Coney Island, circa early 1950s.

Is Maier a master? I don't know. This show is just a sliver of what she was capable of, and uneven. Who knows what else there is? **Photography is at least half editing**. (Then again, what isn't?) See what you think at the gallery.

Below is one more image for now. I want to say that **you can just tell this was taken by a woman**, it's so in another world from a pure objectification shot **like this one by Jack Welpott (NSFW)** (Welpott's work is in **Out [o] Fashion Photography at the Henry Art Gallery**).



COURTESY OF PHOTO CENTER NW

I love moments like this one in the show. Who else would take a shot like this one?

And you can find a nice full review of the show at Vanguard Seattle **here**.

One more I like for its juxtaposition of the shadowy woman and the modernist Los Angeles architecture, on the jump.



COURTESY PHOTO CENTER NW

Taken in 1955.