

Vivian Maier

Opening: Apr 25th 2013 from 6pm

Show: Apr 26th until July 13th 2013

Fifty One Fine Art Photography is showing two shows simultaneously: Vivian Maier (ground floor) and Saul Leiter (basement). The exhibitions are not correlated with each other.

Fifty One Fine Art Photography proudly presents the first exhibition in Belgium of the work of Vivian Maier (USA, 1926-2009). Her undeveloped body of work was recently discovered by chance and until today the whereabouts of Vivian Maier herself remain restricted: she worked most of her adult life as a nanny, had an eccentric character and was a photographer extraordinaire in her spare time. She captured mid-century America in black & white, mostly people on the margins in urban settings like New York and Chicago.

Up till 2007 her photographic oeuvre was completely unknown. It was a young Chicago, real estate agent, John Maloof who discovered her marvellous street photography: boxes completely stashed with negative rolls were auctioned off at a small, local auction house. He hoped to find relevant visual data for a neighbourhood history book he was co-producing. After scanning the negatives, the images had no editorial value for his book. Nevertheless Maloof was intrigued by what he saw and decided to reconstruct this body of work he had in front of him.

Vivian Maier's visual language reflects the peculiarities in the streets. Often she recorded the less fortunate citizens in the rich America of the 50s and 60s: children, blacks, disabled and unemployed people. Her compositional and artistic gaze wasn't impulsive, but rather refined and self-assured. Through her photography the spectator can notice that she scrutinized the comfort zone of her subjects, in a way their anonymous drama grabs the viewer. The 'reflections' of her subjects in window shops to compose a visual language between reality and illusion, is also an important feature in her work.

In the mid-1970s she started to shoot with a 35mm color camera. From the early 1950s until the mid-1990s she made approximately 100.000 photos.

John Maloof's investigation also brought some aspects of her identity to light. In 1926 she's born in New York City, but soon after her birth she moved to France with her French mother, before settling in New York in 1951.

Interviewing some of her former employers, mostly in the suburbs of Chicago, Maloof learned that she was a fiercely private individual. She had a peculiar personality and no family they knew off. It was in her leisure time that she secretly roamed the streets with her Rolleiflex camera constantly around her neck.

With no evidence of a formal training as a photographer, Vivian Maier's work unravels a great quality. Her precise timing and framing the spontaneity of street scenes captured in a controlled play of light reveals a master photography of a bygone era from urban American city life.

Today Maloof estimates that only a fraction of her work is been developed and is continuing to archive the rolls. Nevertheless her oeuvre is enthusiastically received worldwide and already included in several exhibitions in the United States and in Europe.

Fifty One Fine Art Photography is honoured welcoming you to discover Vivian Maier's photographs.