

Madelyn Jordon spotlights 50 years of photos

By STEVEN ORLOFSKY

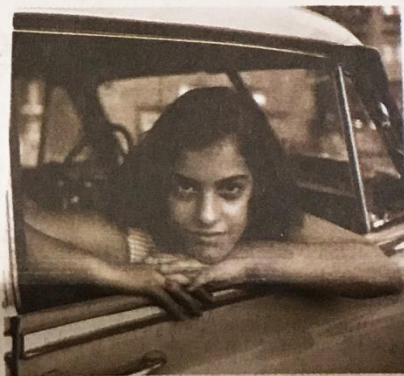
Vivian Maier took photographs for more than five decades, amassing a catalog exceeding 150,000 taken in New York and Chicago beginning in the 1950s and continuing until her death in 2009. Like many great artists who toiled in obscurity, Maier's work wasn't discovered until shortly before her death.

Maier studied her subjects with a careful, detached, yet maternal empathy; she worked as a nanny for most of her life, but never had children of her own.

"I'm a big fan of black-and-white street photography, and I just instantly loved her work," said Madelyn Jordon, owner and curator of Madelyn Jordon Fine Art Gallery at 37 Popham Road.

The gallery will host an exhibition of Maier's work from June 14 to Aug. 11.

In her later years, Maier put her negatives and prints in a storage unit in suburban Chicago, where in 2007 they were discovered and purchased by John Maloof, a real estate developer at the time, who helped bring Maier's work to a wider audience. In 2013, Maloof successfully crowdfunded a documentary about her life and story in "Finding Vivian Maier," interviewing those who knew her. The film was nominated for a handful of awards, including an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.



VIVIAN MAIER PHOTO

Chicago, IL, August 16, 1956, Gelatin silver print, © Estate of Vivian Maier, Courtesy of Maloof Collection and Howard Greenberg Gallery, NY.

After watching the film, Jordon said she was "very impressed with [Maier's] story and her photography." It was then that she decided to stage a showing of Maier's work in her own gallery — the first exhibition of the late photographer's work in Westchester County.

Maier is often compared to Diane Arbus, a prolific photographer from the same era known for her photos of marginalized people — dwarfs, the transgender community, circus performers — people whose physical appearance seemed to separate them from the rest of the world.

But while Arbus shines a light on the crowds society ignores and forces us to confront their humanity, Maier's photos are more traditional, less political — but still intimate, in a way. They're easier to empathize with. Maier's subjects look like us because they are us.

The scenes she captures — curious children, well dressed couples linking arms, scraggly, bearded winos on a corner stoop — all tell a story, but more than that, they evoke the memory of a society long gone. So foreign are the haircuts, the outfits, the way strangers gaze at each other. Pedestrian street scenes are interspersed with glitzy shots of celebrities and movie premieres, and the transition between the two feels somehow natural — a visual representation of the 20th century.

Studying Maier's oeuvre is more difficult than that of her contemporaries, Jordon said, many of whom have grown in response to criticism received over their careers. "It will take some time until people become familiar with her work," Jordon said.

Most of Maier's photographs were discovered two years before her death, and a steady trickle of posthumous releases have also surfaced. "Nothing was known about her ... there's still a lot to be learned," Jordon said. Many of Maier's photos are undated, and little information exists about their subjects or locations.

Looking through an album of Maier's photos makes one wonder if the 21st century has halted these displays, the blurring of public and private life that offered insight in the days before social media. Or maybe Maier was capturing what has always been visible, lurking just under the surface.

"Vivian Maier Revealed: Selections from the Archives" opens June 14, with a reception from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. A screening of "Finding Vivian Maier" will be shown at the gallery July 12 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., which is free and open to the public.