

**LES DOUCHES  
LA GALERIE**

PRESS KIT

BERENICE ABBOTT | VIVIAN MAIER  
*A FANTASTIC PASSION*

OCTOBER 8 – NOVEMBER 26, 2016

From Wednesday to Saturday, 2-7 pm and by appointment

Opening on October 8, 2-7 pm



©Vivian Maier/Maloof Collection, Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris & Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York



©Berenice Abbott/Commerce Graphics, Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris & Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York

What is the connection between these two utterly different women? Berenice Abbott sought out the light, while Vivian Maier hid amongst the shadows. One indefatigably knocked on every door in order to get her projects off the ground; the other criss-crossed the globe on her own. Beyond their particular predilections, however, they were united by the same passion to document the real. They both lived without compromises; nothing and no one could get in the way of their vision. What they have left us are two singular bodies of work that are imbued with a spirit of freedom.

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# Berenice Abbott: No Frills

Born in 1898 in Springfield Ohio, Berenice Abbott posed nude for her compatriot Man Ray when she was his assistant in Paris. It was Man Ray who taught her the arts of portraiture and of the dark room, and through him she met Eugène Atget, one of her neighbours on the rue Campagne-Première in the 14<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. "The shock of realism unadorned" she would later say of his prints. At his death, she purchased a number of his works, later selling them to the MoMA in New York in 1968 after having paid homage to them throughout her life, a life that ended in 1991 in Monson, Maine at the age of ninety-three.

If it is impossible to talk about Abbott without mentioning Atget it is because the young American had a particular attachment to the elder Frenchman, a genuine investment. It was as if Atget, who she said was able to see "the real world with wonderment and surprise", had opened her eyes. Honoring his memory also meant choosing one aesthetic – documentary photography – rather than the pictorialism in fashion, which she found stunted, limited.

Her style was already effective from the very first portraits she made of the American exiles and the bohemians of the Left Bank. The models are seated, gesturing vividly, with striking profiles. There are no starchy effects, no flights of fantasy, only seriousness. She captures more than the whole of her subjects, she captures their super-ego. That fullness lies at the heart of *Changing New York*, a vast project that she undertook from 1935 to 1939, when she had left France to return to the United States. It was a difficult return after the crash of 1929, but New York was in full vertical swing, bursting with enthusiasm. Skyscrapers, bridges, shop fronts, this "fantastic" city fit with her human scale. Her representation of New York is free of nostalgia; for her it was about showing "the past bumping into the present". Her photographs are surprising, sometimes invented, like the great hall of Pennsylvania Station whose utter solemnity she manages to evoke, as if the station were a film set waiting for movie stars rather than ordinary passengers. She found success with *Changing New York*.

Later on, she travelled up and down the East Coast from Maine to Florida on Route 1, and from 1958 to 1961 she worked for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, indulging in the scientific passion she had discovered in 1939. Out of context, her hypnotic views reveal invisible experiences, magnetic fields for example, and unknown planets being born, a bullet ricocheting. They form a dialogue between imperceptible matter and a technician enamored of physics.

"The truth is hard to find. It takes a lot of work", Abbot, an avid ping-pong player, confided to the *New York Times* on February 17, 1983. She had once imagined herself becoming a journalist. Through photography, Berenice Abbott imposed her critical vision, paradoxically rich with a certain austerity. No, there are no frills. She goes toe to toe with reality, without losing her footing.

**Brigitte Ollier**

# Vivian Maier: A Dreamed Life

When Vivian Maier came on the scene, she shattered the reigning dogmas of our gaze. It was if all of a sudden, Nadar, the French national treasure, had turned out to be a woman all along, making us rethink everything accordingly. It's a bit of a stretch perhaps, but only just. At the outset, Maier did not actually have anything special to offer the history of photography, much less to be a part of it. And yet, in record time, this American woman became as famous as the Mona Lisa. She has received top billing for a long time and scores of specialists scour her past, hoping to find something there to work with.

Maier was born on February 1, 1926 in New York and died on April 21, 2009 in Chicago. In between, she and her French mother visited the department of Hautes-Alpes, and in 1932 the valley of Champagnat. Her all-consuming passion was photography, which she engaged in with utmost discretion. Beginning with a Rolleiflex, and then a Leica, she set about photographing the streets of New York and Chicago, the passersby, the poor people on the sidewalks, dolls thrown in wastebins, jewelled zealots, late-night Cinderellas... She also created a series of self-portraits that reveal her uncommon eye: she plays with reflections almost to the point of obsession, at times bordering on fear. When she used the inheritance her great-aunt had left her to travel the world, she continued to take photographs, but without showing what she had seen. And this is one of the mysteries of Vivian Maier, the self-taught photographer who earned her living as a governess: she refused to step out of the shadows. Complete anonymity. Was it a question of a lack of means, or of time, or of place? A wish to opt out of the world?

During an auction in Chicago in 2007, John Maloof, one of the main buyers, paid \$400 for boxes and suitcases that had belonged to Miss Maier. They contained between 100,000 and 150,000 negatives, plus 3,000 prints and hundreds of undeveloped Ektachrome rolls. Quantity has never been a measure of talent, but what Maloof had in his hands, in conjunction with the material from Jeffrey Goldstein and Ron Slattery, was the stuff of dreams.

From 2007 to the present day, there has been a constant quest to discover the real Vivian Maier. Films, books, exhibits... the "Mary Poppins of film rolls" has been the subject of all manner of commentary (not all necessarily stupid; there is a plethora to choose from). One exhibit organised in France, by the Jeu de Paume in 2013, revealed that Maier, who loved the cinema, also made Super-8 films, and that she was a formidable interviewer. None of the haziness surrounding her is likely to dissipate anytime soon. But one thing is certain: anyone who bought her prints will not regret it, for though Maier's talent was understated, you cannot help but want to stand by her side. In her shadow, no less.

**Brigitte Ollier**

# BERENICE ABBOTT

## SELECTION OF WORKS

*Greyhound Bus Terminal, 1936*

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Dimensions du tirage : 49,3 x 39,2 cm sur carton 61 x 76 cm



*Oyster Houses, South Street and Pike Slip, 1931-32*

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Dimensions du tirage : 27 x 34,5 cm sur carton 40,8 x 50,8 cm



*Treasury Building, New York, 1957*

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Dimensions du tirage : 49 x 39 cm sur carton 61 x 76 cm



*Tri-Borough Bridge East 125th Street Approach, Manhattan, June 29, 1937*

Gelatin silver print, printed later

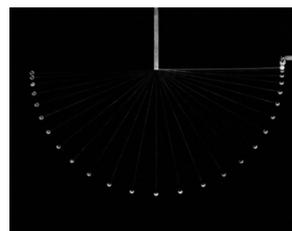
Dimensions du tirage : 33 x 26 cm sur carton 50,8 x 49,9 cm



*Transformation of Energy, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958-61*

Gelatin silver print, printed later

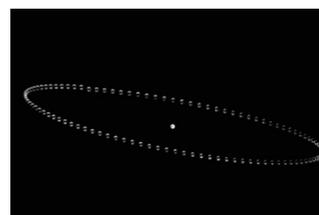
Dimensions du tirage : 26,4 x 34 cm sur carton 40 x 50 cm



*Multiple Exposure of a Swinging Ball, c. 1958-61*

Gelatin silver print, printed later

Dimensions du tirage : 23 x 34,5 cm sur carton 40 x 50 cm



# VIVIAN MAIER

## SELECTION OF WORKS

*Chicago, IL, N.D.*

Gelatin-silver print

Édition of 15

Print size: 40,6 x 50,8 cm



*New York, NY, 1955*

Gelatin-silver print

Édition of 15

Print size: 40,6 x 50,8 cm



*Untitled, n.d.*

Gelatin-silver print

Édition of 15

Print size: 40,6 x 50,8 cm



*New York, NY, June 1953*

Gelatin-silver print

Édition of 15

Print size: 40,6 x 50,8 cm



*New York, 1954*

Gelatin-silver print

Édition of 15

Print size: 40,6 x 50,8 cm



*New York, NY, 1954*

Gelatin-silver print

Édition of 15

Print size: 40,6 x 50,8 cm



# BERENICE ABBOTT

**Born in 1898 in Springfield, Ohio, USA**

**Died in 1991 in Monson, Maine, USA**

- 1898 Birth of Berenice Abbott in Springfield, Ohio, on 17 July.
- 1917 Studies to be a journalist at Ohio State University.
- 1918 Leaves for New York City and moves in artistic circles.
- 1921 Sails to Europe. Studies sculpture in Paris and Berlin and frequents the Surrealist avant-garde.
- 1923 Hired by Man Ray in his Parisian portrait studio. In addition to making prints, starts to take her own portraits.
- 1926 Opens her own studio. Photographs the bourgeoisie and artists. First exhibition at the gallery Au Sacre du Printemps. Art critics take note. Meets Eugène Atget and buys several prints.
- 1928 Buys part of the estate of Atget, who died in 1927. Exhibits at the Salon de l'Escalier, a manifesto against Pictorialism.
- 1929 Shows in two German modernist exhibitions: "Fotografie der Gegenwart" (Essen) and "Film und Foto" (Stuttgart). Returns to New York City. Opens a portrait studio and starts photographing the City.
- 1930 Exhibits at the Weyhe Gallery. Publishes the book Atget photographe de Paris. Takes part in "Photography" at Harvard University, the first American show to break with tradition and also with the circle of Alfred Stieglitz.
- 1931 Seeks institutions to finance her big project on New York City.
- 1932 Exhibitions: "Photographs of New York by New York Photographers", "Photographs by Berenice Abbott" and "Exhibition of Portrait Photography" at the Julien Levy Gallery and "Murals by American Painters and Photographers" at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).
- 1934–35 Photographs Victorian architecture in East Coast cities. Exhibitions: "American Cities Before the Civil War" (Yale University) and "The Architecture of Henry Hobson Richardson and His Times" (MoMA).
- 1934 Exhibits photographs about New York City at the Museum of the City of New York with the hope of finding sponsors for her project.
- 1935 Changing New York is supported by the Federal Art Project, a government programme to aid artists. Abbott takes over 300 photographs.
- 1935–58 Teaches photography at the New School for Social Research.
- 1937 Exhibition of images of New York City at the Museum of the City of New York.
- 1939 Publication of the book Changing New York.
- 1941 Publication of Guide to Better Photography.
- 1944–45 Artistic Director of Science Illustrated. Develops the super-sight technique which produces 40 x 50 cm (16 x 20 inch) negatives.
- 1954 Travels along Route 1 to photograph towns on the East Coast.
- 1958–61 Hired by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to illustrate the physical principles of light, speed and magnetism.
- 1960 Exhibition, "Image of Physics" is organised by the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C.
- 1964 Publication of The World of Atget, Magnet and Motion.
- 1968 The Museum of Modern Art acquires Abbott and Levy's portion of the Atget estate.
- 1991 Death of Berenice Abbott in Monson, Maine, on 9 December.

# VIVIAN MAIER

(1926-2009)

Piecing together Vivian Maier's life can easily evoke Churchill's famous quote about the vast land of Tsars and commissars that lay to the east. A person who fit the stereotypical European sensibilities of an independent liberated woman, accent and all, yet born in New York City. Someone who was intensely guarded and private, Vivian could be counted on to feistily preach her own very liberal worldview to anyone who cared to listen, or didn't. Decidedly unmaterialistic, Vivian would come to amass a group of storage lockers stuffed to the brim with found items, art books, newspaper clippings, home films, as well as political tchotchkes and knick-knacks.

The story of this nanny who has now wowed the world with her photography, and who incidentally recorded some of the most interesting marvels and peculiarities of Urban America in the second half of the twentieth century is seemingly beyond belief.

An American of French and Austro-Hungarian extraction, Vivian bounced between Europe and the United States before coming back to New York City in 1951. Having picked up photography just two years earlier, she would comb the streets of the Big Apple refining her artistic craft. By 1956 Vivian left the East Coast for Chicago, where she'd spend most of the rest of her life working as a caregiver. In her leisure Vivian would shoot photos that she zealously hid from the eyes of others. Taking snapshots into the late 1990's, Maier would leave behind a body of work comprising over 100,000 negatives. Additionally Vivian's passion for documenting extended to a series of homemade documentary films and audio recordings. Interesting bits of Americana, the demolition of historic landmarks for new development, the unseen lives of ethnics and the destitute, as well as some of Chicago's most cherished sites were all meticulously catalogued by Vivian Maier.

A free spirit but also a proud soul, Vivian became poor and was ultimately saved by three of the children she had nannied earlier in her life. Fondly remembering Maier as a second mother, they pooled together to pay for an apartment and took the best of care for her. Unbeknownst to them, one of Vivian's storage lockers was auctioned off due to delinquent payments. In those storage lockers lay the massive hoard of negatives Maier secretly stashed throughout her lifetime.

Maier's massive body of work would come to light when in 2007 her work was discovered at a local thrift auction house on Chicago's Northwest Side. From there, it would eventually impact the world over and change the life of the man who championed her work and brought it to the public eye, John Maloof.

Currently, Vivian Maier's body of work is being archived and cataloged for the enjoyment of others and for future generations. John Maloof is at the core of this project after reconstructing most of the archive, having been previously dispersed to the various buyers attending that auction. Now, with roughly 90% of her archive reconstructed, Vivian's work is part of a renaissance in interest in the art of Street Photography.

## EXHIBITIONS (SELECTION)

- 2016 Vivian Maier, Les Douches la Galerie, Paris
- Vivian Maier, Dunkers Kulturhus, Helsingborg, Sweden
- Taking The Long Way Home : Vivian Maier, Photobastei, Zurich, Switzerland
- Vivian Maier, Arrlington Museum of Art, Arlington Texas
- Vivian Maier, Fundación Canal Isabel II, Madrid
- 2015 Vivian Maier, Merry Karnowsky Gallery, Los Angeles CA
- Vivian Maier, Forma Meravigli, Milan
- Photo Beijing, Beijing, China
- Through The Lens of Vivian Maier, HarperCollins Booklab, New York
- Vivian Maier, Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul, South Korea
- Behind the Image : Portrait and Self Portrait in Contemporary Art, Bernal Espacio Galeria, Madrid
- Vivian Maier, Sao Paulo Museum of Image and Sound, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- Vivian Maier, Willy Brandt Haus, Berlin
- 2014 Vivian Maier, Fifty One Fine Art Photography, Antwerp, Belgium
- Vivian Maier, Beetles + Huxley, London
- Vivian Maier, Lumiere Gallery, Atlanta GA
- Vivian Maier, Les Douches la Galerie, Paris
- In Her Own Hands : Vivian Maier, Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York
- Fotofocus Biennial, Cincinnati OH
- Melbourne Festiva, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Fitzroy Victoria, Australia
- Vivian Maier, Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam
- Vivian Maier, Street Photographer, Hasselblad Foundation, Gothenburg, Sweden