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Roger Mayne

By William Meyers

Roger Mayne (1929-2014) was a major British photographer of the postwar era. He took portraits of such representative figures of the period as Kenneth Tynan, Harold Pinter and Lindsay Anderson; but while they are associated with an existential bleakness, much of Mayne's work celebrates middle-class and working-class vitality, particularly that of children. Nearly all the 50 or so prints up at Gitterman date from 1956 to 1960 and most are pictures of children playing in the London streets or at littered bomb sites. They are not ragamuffins, they are not to be pitied, and Mayne invites us to participate in their games and sports.

In seven pictures titled "Keith, Addison Place, London" (1957), a handsome boy in shorts and a torn shirt, a bandage on his left shin, plays cricket on a cobblestone street; he swings his bat and raises his arms over his head at some apparent triumph. One of the main participants romping in eight pictures of the rubbish strewn "Bomb Site, Portland Road, North Kensington, London" (1958) is a girl with an engaging smile and a button missing from her double-breasted overcoat.

On the other hand, the eight pictures from "Throgmorton Street, London" (1960), a thoroughfare through The City, are filled with men in suits intent on getting wherever they are hurrying. It is a long time since they played games in the street.