

photograph

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ROGER MAYNE AT GITTERMAN GALLERY

By Jordan G. Teicher



Roger Mayne, *Glasgow*, 1958. Courtesy Gitterman Gallery

The London Roger Mayne encountered in the mid-1950s was beat up and bombed out, but as his images prove, still full of life.

Mayne was born in Cambridge and took up photography as a chemistry student at Oxford. When he came to London, he was still getting to know both his craft and his surroundings. But that didn't stop him from creating images that display an extraordinary affinity for both.

In the following decades, Mayne photographed all over the world, but the exhibition on view at Gitterman Gallery through January 23 — the gallery's fourth show on Mayne, and its first since his death in 2014 — focuses on his post-war images of working-class neighborhoods, for which he is best known.

Among these, his photographs of children are most loved. In groups, in pairs, and in isolation, kids are everywhere on these walls — running, jumping, stretching, and exploring the rubble of the damaged city. They seem entirely uninhibited before Mayne’s lens, and in their rowdy congeniality they seem to embody the exuberant spirit of these communities.

The black-and-white prints in the gallery are small, and appear mostly in groups according to the place or time they were created. They highlight Mayne’s fascination with the everyday happenings of the street, perhaps the result of his own strict, socially isolated childhood in boarding school. As a result, he took more than a cursory look at mundane activities. One cluster of seven images, for instance, is solely devoted to a single boy playing cricket. While such an abundance of images on a single subject contributes to a sense of the boy’s character, a smaller selection might have better highlighted Mayne’s finest work.



Roger Mayne, *Soho* (from “*The Teenage Thing*”), 1959. Courtesy Gitterman Gallery

Like any photographer of the street, Mayne’s interest was in people and their interactions. When it came to children and teenage Teddy Boys — the fashionable young men of the day — those encounters were often physical. In his photographs of adult pedestrians on bustling Throgmorton Street, however, the engagements are more likely to be encapsulated in a glance or an expression that is just as communicative.

Mayne’s photographs contain the timelessness of human relations, but they’re also a valuable record of a vanished way of life. Southam Street, which he photographed for five years, was demolished as London continued to rebuild. The pain of dislocation that surely awaited those residents makes their smiles only more poignant today.