

THE EYE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE JULY 5, 2024

The summer season at **The Courtauld Gallery** in London has opened with **Youth**, a major exhibition of photographs by the acclaimed post-war photographer, **Roger Mayne**. The first-ever photography exhibition at The Courtauld, reassesses the importance of Roger Mayne (1929-2014), through the lens of his evocative black and white images of young people. The exhibition brings together the works of the 1950s and early 1960s for which he is famous, alongside lesser-known images of his own children. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue positions Mayne as crucially important in the emergence of documentary photography as an art form in Britain in the years after the war.

A self-taught photographer, having discovered the medium while studying chemistry at Balliol College, Oxford, Mayne moved to London in 1953. Inspired by the work of the artist Nigel Henderson, among others, he became passionate about photographing human life as he found it. He quickly achieved widespread recognition for his powerful images of communities struggling with poverty against a backdrop of dereliction in London and across the UK. Renowned for his sustained portrayal of Southam Street, now long gone but then located on the northern fringes of Notting Hill, Mayne's dedication to photographing this one locale over a six-year period – from 1956 to 1961 – was, and still is, extraordinary in the history of photography.

Mayne's photography in the 1950s and early '60s captured an exuberance and an uneasiness that embodied both the scars and hopes of post-war Britain. In documenting the lives of young people growing up in Britain, his images highlight the significance of children's play and the identity formation of the teenager in the post-war years, revealing the tectonic shifts in society at that time. Highlights include *Children in a Bombed Building*, Bermondsey, London (1954) and one of his most famous images, *A Girl Jiving in Southam Street* (Eileen Sheekey), London (1957).

In 1962 a new chapter opened in Roger Mayne's personal life, when he married Ann Jellicoe, a pioneering and well-established playwright. Their honeymoon in Spain left Mayne feeling creatively nourished by the vitality of the people he encountered there. With children and young people still at the forefront of this fresh strand of image-making, he judged the photographs from this trip to be 'the best series of photographs I have yet done.' Following the birth of his own children and a move to the Dorset countryside in the mid-1960s, family life and the local bucolic landscape became a new backdrop for Mayne's lens. The imagery of the street was replaced by that of a growing and adored family.

This exhibition, curated by Jane Alison in close collaboration with Mayne's daughter, Katkin Tremayne, features over 60 vintage photographs, some never exhibited before. While the two bodies of work, street and family, have a different tenor, they are united by Mayne's radical empathy with his youthful subjects and his desire to create photographic images that enjoy a lasting impact, produced with great sensitivity and artistic integrity. With Mayne's post-war subjects now in their more senior years, and today's younger generation facing a myriad crises, Mayne's deliberations on growing up, childhood, adolescence and family feel especially poignant and timely.

Roger Mayne: Youth

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The Courtauld Gallery

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