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BA Documentary photography & Visual Activism

M5X01634

Word count 502

My passion for photography has always been about capturing images of people, for me they are the most interesting images even going back in time and looking at photographers such as Diane Arbus who's work I find fascinating as she didn't look to just photograph the normal she wanted to capture those marginalised in society and ensure their representation, or Helen Levitt, Martin Parr or Robert Doisneau all street photographers recording life during their era.

Diane Arbus - untitled

Whilst researching portrait and street photographers I discovered Vivian Maier, I had never heard of her before and started reading more about who she was, finding that actually very little is known about her as she died before her work was ever discovered, she had been a nanny in Chicago and New York in the 50’s and 60’s and was also an avid street photographer, many of her films were never developed until after her death. The documentary about her life, Finding Vivian Maier, was fascinating in particular the fact that very little was known about her other than anecdotal stories from people she had looked after. She kept many items throughout her life including clothes, nik naks found on walks as well as all her photographs. From this an idea of who she was has been derived, but was it accurate or true?

Vivian Maier Self-Portrait, 1953

This really started me thinking about what do the items we keep as keepsakes say about us. I have always collected memorabilia of my life and have several boxes of 'stuff' ranging from baby records, school books, girl guide uniform and various items of religious artifacts that although were relevant to me at the time, as a child making her first holy communion at 7 years of age, it says

nothing of me as an atheist adult. What would people think of me after my days when going through the junk I have accumulated.

The project I wanted to focus on was creating an alternative portrait of me but without using a digital camera. I have spent years using digital cameras and spent very little time using film or alternative methods of image making such as Cyanotypes and in particular Lumen printing which I have used in my final image. In my research I found an artist called Joshua White who's lumen prints are a beautiful rich array of colours.

Joshua White – Lumen print

I initially went back to using film and inspired by the images of Vivain Maier I took several self portraits of myself in shop windows, they weren't that great! I also made several photograms in the dark room using a mix of dried plants a

and negatives. I made several cyanotype images using plants and acetates of negatives I had taken but in the end I felt that the lumen prints mixed with digital images of my ‘stuff’ lent itself well to this project. I feel I have learned a lot from this project by focusing on alternative methods of photography and stepping away from digital I’ve found a new love for Lumen Prints.