

★ **Baltimore Lives: The Portraits of John Clark Mayden**

John Clark Mayden, Photographer

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Baltimore Lives collects 101 black-and-white portraits of residents of the city's neglected neighborhoods by John Clark Mayden. As noted in the eloquent foreword, they show "the everyday beauty and pain of Black life in Baltimore."

Published in conjunction with an exhibition, the volume also contains views of Mayden's life and work by the exhibition curator, an art historian, and the photographer's sister. Mayden's sister's affectionate and insightful essay relates how Mayden's twin passions of social justice and art merge in his respectful, empathetic portraits.

Mayden's work freezes moments and places in time. They capture ordinary people "who are not expecting us," many of whom seem burdened by problems, but whose everyday lives resonate with intensity.

The photographs display technical virtuosity. Gorgeous velvety tones and textures reveal skill with composition, lighting, and darkroom technique. Many subjects are revealed through glass or screens or are framed by sharp doorways and stoops. They often redirect the viewer's gaze as they stare, steady and intense, out of their images.

Mayden also injects humor into his work with pieces like "Urban Squire." What first captures notice is the focal older man's light eyes and elegant clothes; upon closer look, there's a dapper knot at the end of his beard and a too-tiny feather tucked into his fedora brim. "Hollywood Charm Center" juxtaposes a fish vendor hard at work with his scales and pushcart with the outside of a beauty salon. A number of portraits show Baltimoreans ignoring "No Loitering" signs as they lounge outside.

These photographs are rich portraits of some of the city's residents and are a rebuke to negative portrayals of the city. Mayden's portraits reveal resilience and "poetry of the commonplace." *Baltimore Lives* is an important addition to the history of Baltimore and to the literature of documentary photography.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2019)

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