



## FINDING VIVIAN MAIER

**Directors: John Maloof & Charlie Siskel**  
{RAVINE PICTURES}

In 2009, the art world was rocked to the core by an incredible discovery: the previously unknown work of a reclusive photographer named Vivian Maier. Unseen until then, Maier's astutely composed black-and-white photos were arresting in their simple, haunting beauty: An adolescent girl rests her head on her hands on the open window of a car, boldly gazing at the camera; a well-coiffed, veiled woman looks over her shoulder, the small head and legs of an animal dangling awkwardly from her thick fur stole; a man sits on the sidewalk, his face lined and scarred from time on the streets. Maier's iconic-yet-unique images, mainly of Chicago street life from

the 1950s and '60s, were on par with those of the great street photographers of the mid-20th century such as Robert Frank, Diane Arbus, and Garry Winogrand. How had this photographer, with such a keen eye and deep perception of the human experience, never been discovered? Who was she? And why had she never shared her photographs?

In this artfully packaged documentary, John Maloof, the man who discovered in a posthumous auction what turned out to be a treasure trove of thousands of Maier's negatives (and who is now the curator and trustee of the Maier collection), seeks to understand Maier, sharing how he discovered the work and then tried to piece together the strange story of the woman who created it.

In a similar vein to 2012's Sundance breakout documentary *Searching for Sugar Man*, Maloof's and Siskel's compelling doc is a detective story of the art world. Maloof carefully combs through the evidence of Maier's life—even presenting her hoarded effects that he found in storage—to find clues as to who she was and how she lived. In the process, he manages to track down the few who knew her, most of whom were never aware of the extent of her photography or her extraordinary talent.

Without giving away any spoilers (as with *Sugar Man*, the less you know before you see it, the better), the story behind Maier's astonishing work is just as fascinating and thought-provoking as the photos themselves. Ultimately, the documentary asks more questions than it answers, as Maier remains as enigmatic in death as she was in life. We may never know whether or not Maier wished to be found, but *Finding Vivian Maier's* rich imagery and intriguing art-sleuth narrative makes a strong case for her place in the canon of American photography.

—ALISSA CHADBURN

**SEE IT WITH:** Modern-art mavens, photographers, and anyone who loves a good mystery.

## I AM YOURS

**Director: Iram Haq**  
{MER FILM}

At first, the Norwegian film *I Am Yours* (*Jeg er din*) seems like a contemporary transnational twist on the indie romance. When 27-year-old Mina (Amrita Acharia) meets Jesper (Ola Rapace) at a vintage-clothing boutique in Oslo, cliché scenes of new lust and love follow. With scenes of the couple kissing and taking selfies in the cemetery where Henrik Ibsen is buried, the film

starts off annoyingly predictable in its indie-romance formula.

Things quickly begin to unravel, however, when Mina and her 6-year-old son, Felix, visit Jesper in Stockholm. For the remainder of the film, we watch Mina negotiate her time, affection, and identity with the demands of others—her ex-husband, her man-child artistic boyfriend, her vulnerable and confused son, and her disappointing and ashamed Pakistani parents. Progressively more and more suffocating, the film symbolically climaxes during a scene in which a dejected Mina seeks solace through a hookup with an old lover, only to have her own needs ignored yet again.

By the time the film ended, it had brilliantly dismantled the indie-romance genre, rebuilding in its place a keen exploration of desire, family, love, belonging, and alienation. The film is ultimately about Mina pushing back against her life's constraints to make space to simply exist. There are moments in *I Am Yours* where we get a glimpse of a kind of elusive freedom for Mina, a theme that will resonate with many viewers. Even though I had set myself up for one type of story, my expectations were shattered by the demands of a

