Ralph Eugene Meatyard Creates Images 'Not Quite of This World'
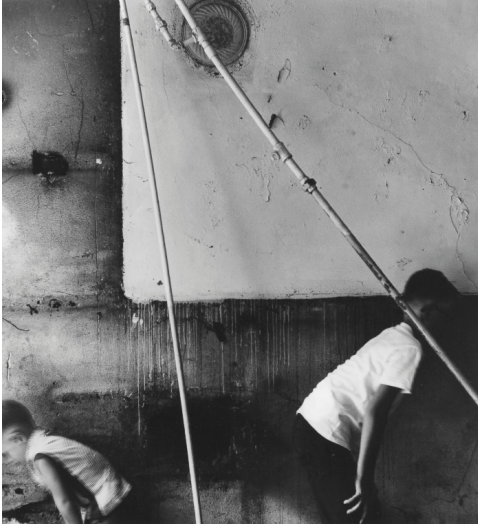
Untitled, 1965

Ralph Eugene Meatyard, 1925-1972, purchased his first camera in 1950 to take snapshots of his young family. Over the next two decades, the Lexington, Kentucky, based optician created a body of work that took the familiar people and environments from his life and imbued them with an off-kilter quality, making them seem "not quite of this world."

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Untitled, c. 1960

Peter Barberie, the Brodsky curator of photographs at The Philadelphia Museum of Art, told ABC News that while Meatyard was reticent about explaining the meaning behind his photos, he was "greatest at leaving us on the fulcrum between the familiar, the everyday, and the utterly mysterious and strange."

Untitled, 1960

Peter Barberie continues, "His photos showed amazing humor," continued Barberie. "They were uproariously funny and bawdy at times, but he was also loving to his subjects and deeply meditative."

Untitled, 1961

Often working on the weekends while he wasn't at his shop, Meatyard used masks and dolls and other props to help create tableaux that engaged viewers and evoked feelings or inspired curiosity.

Untitled, c. 1960

Meatyard had an interest in Zen philosophy and turned his camera toward the nature around his home, including rocks, ice and twigs. His son, Christopher Meatyard wrote, "By using twigs … with their ever present phi scaling and rotational ratios, a beautiful mathematical harmony presents itself without a calculated or overbearing design."

Lite, 1959

In his "Light on Water" series, the artist created photographs of sunlight reflecting off of the surface of bodies of water found in nature.

Untitled, c. 1963

Meatyard was born in Normal, Illinois, in 1925 and attended Williams College before serving in the Navy. Settling in Lexington, Ky. in 1950, he and his wife Madelyn had three children: Michael, Christopher and Melissa.

Untitled, 1963

Living in working in Lexington, Meatyard is known to have engaged with a community of intellectual friends who were poets, philosophers and writers, but he was a long way from the art scenes at the cultural epicenters of the country.

Untitled, 1964

Peter Barberie told ABC News, "He was marginal during his life and he is still not as well-known as he should be. But looking at the broader field of contemporary art, his work is important and resonates. That, to me, is really exciting about him."

Untitled, 1968-70

Meatyard opened his own optical shop named Eyeglasses of Kentucky in the 1960s.

Untitled, c. 1968-72

Ralph Eugene Meatyard died in 1972 at the age of 46.

#48 ID, 1968-72

Works by Ralph Eugene Meatyard are on display at DC Moore Gallery in New York from Nov. 19 to Dec. 23, 2015.

http://abcnews.go.com/Photos/photos/ralph-eugene-meatyard-creates-images-world-35291162/image-untitled-1965-35291838

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