



Louise Boyle

Portrait photography is among the oldest photographic forms, dating back to daguerreotypes in the 1840s. Throughout the latter half of the 19th century photography studios prospered, in part as a low-cost challenge to the painter's exclusive hold on the art of portraiture. In the 20th century portrait photography became a mainstay in the photographic field. One gifted practitioner of this form in Ithaca was Louise Boyle.

Boyle was born in 1910 in North Dakota, and came to Ithaca when she was eight, when her father became a professor at Cornell's College of Agriculture. Boyle attended Vassar, and later the New York Photography Institute.

Her life-long career in photography began in the 1930s, when she documented the struggles of Southern tenant farmers and Pennsylvania coal miners. But most of her career was spent here in Ithaca, where, for more than thirty years, she photographed the people and animals of the area. She felt that her greatest talent was in photographing children, (often with their pets), and she liked to pose them outdoors in natural settings. Some of her most profitable commercial engagements (with magazines such as *McCalls*) involved kids.

However, Boyle's adult subjects also display a rich and insightful talent. Character and personality are captured in distinctive poses and dramatic lighting. In a 1994 interview Boyle talked about her love for expressing light and shape, and her desire to do it through innovative photography. She was not, she said, "clever enough to be a real artist." But those of us who have had the pleasure of seeing her work would disagree.

Photo Caption:

Russian-born Vladimir Nabokov, photographed by Louise Boyle in 1949. Nabokov, writer, translator, critic, and teacher, taught at Cornell from 1948 to 1959. His highly controversial novel *Lolita* was first published in 1955. This contemplative pose shows the scholar and thinker in a pensive moment.