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At FotoFocus Show, Michael Keating Remembers His Elderly Neighbor



Photo: Michael Keating

I wish the “sunroom installation” that is part of Michael Keating’s current *Shadow & Light* exhibition at Kennedy Heights Arts Center (through Saturday) could move straight into a museum afterward.

It could serve to anchor a fuller, larger look at the noble project this veteran Cincinnati photojournalist (formerly with *Cincinnati Enquirer*) undertook to chronicle the final year in the life of an elderly neighbor, Clyde N. Day. Day, of Lakeside Park, Ky., died in 2011 at age 104. It deserves the widest possible audience.

Keating had long known Day, and the project was both a way to honor Day’s life and also show just how difficult life can be for the elderly. After Day’s first wife died, he remarried. His second wife preceded him in death by several months.

In the installation, which is in the former sunroom of the building at 6546 Montgomery Road that houses the arts center, Keating has placed Day’s dresser with memorabilia from his long life.

And on the walls are photographs from the project.

Two black-and-white images really capture Day’s final months, in their quiet way. One, reproduced as a wall-sized, mural-like adhesive print (in two sections), shows Day painstakingly making his bed. Light seeps through the windows’ curtains, spotlighting the stand-up crutch he has left in the room to have hands free for this task.

It’s a mundane task, but the photograph conveys the sense of heroism, a sense of determination, with which he does it. And our perspective — we seem to be in the distance, looking slightly downward — makes us feel we’re watching something profound.

Other, smaller photographs are on another wall, ink-jet prints mounted on thick gator board. In one, a companion to the mural, we see Day in this same bedroom, sleeping on a small hospital bed with railings. The headboard of his other bed is propped against a wall — the mattress gone.

It’s a melancholy image when compared with the other, since you can see how one’s choices shrink as old age moves to its inevitable conclusion. Still, the room itself is comforting with its floral-print wallpaper. It’s a touch of the familiar and the secure.

Since Day’s death, Keating has helped start the Clyde N. Day Foundation to contribute to causes related to child safety, education and the arts. You can learn more about it, and also find more of his photos, at clydendayfoundation.org. This work is important.