



EUGÈNE ATGET

OLD PARIS

24 AUGUST - 4 NOVEMBER 2012

ART
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...I have assembled photographic glass negatives... in all the old streets of Old Paris, artistic documents showing the beautiful civil architecture from the 16th to the 19th century. The old mansions, historic or interesting houses, beautiful façades, lovely doors, beautiful panelling, door knockers, old fountains, stylish staircases (wrought iron and wood) and interiors of all the churches in Paris...

This enormous documentary and artistic collection is now finished. I can say that I possess the whole of Old Paris.

Eugène Atget 1920

cover:

Eugène Atget
Boulevard de Strasbourg 1912, albumen photograph
 George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography and Film, Rochester

from top left:

Eugène Atget
Fireplace, Hôtel Matignon, former Austrian embassy,
57 rue de Varenne, 7th arrondissement 1905

Shop sign au Rémouleur on the corner of the rue des Nonnains-d'Hyères and rue de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, 4th arrondissement July 1899

albumen photographs
 © Musée Carnavalet, Paris/Roger-Viollet/TopFoto

The first comprehensive exhibition in Australia of Eugène Atget's (1857–1927) work will showcase over 200 photographs primarily from the more than 4000 strong collection of Musée Carnavalet, Paris with the important inclusion of Atget's work, as compiled by Man Ray, from the collection of George Eastman House, Rochester, USA.

Atget was considered a commercial photographer who sold what he called 'documents for artists', ie. photographs of landscapes, close-up shots, genre scenes and other details that painters could use as reference. As soon as Atget turned his attention to photographing the streets of Paris, his work attracted the attention of leading institutions such as Musée Carnavalet and the Bibliothèque Nationale which became his principal clients.

It is in these photographs of Paris that we find the best of Atget, the artist who shows us a city remote from the clichés of the Belle Époque. Atget's images of 'old Paris' depict areas that had not been touched by Baron Haussmann's 19th century modernisation program of the city. We see empty streets and buildings, details that usually pass unnoticed, all presented as rigorous, original compositions that offer a mysterious group portrait of the city.

The exhibition is organised into 11 sections that correspond to the thematic groupings used by Atget himself. They are: small trades, Parisian types and shops 1898–1922; the streets of Paris 1898–1913; ornaments 1900–1921; interiors 1901–1910; vehicles 1903–1910; gardens 1898–1914; the Seine 1900–1923; the streets of Paris 1921–1924; and outside the city centre 1899–1913.

The photographs selected by Man Ray, who met Atget in the 1920s, indicate the immediate interest that the work aroused among the Surrealists because of the composition, ghosting, reflections, and its very mundanity. The first to appreciate his talents and importance as an artist were the photographer Berenice Abbott and Man Ray himself, both of whom lobbied to preserve Atget's photographs.



The first time I saw photographs by Eugène Atget was in 1925 in the studio of Man Ray in Paris. Their impact was immediate and tremendous. There was a sudden flash of recognition – the shock of realism unadorned. The subjects were not sensational, but nevertheless shocking in their very familiarity. The real world, seen with wonderment and surprise, was mirrored in each print.

Berenice Abbott 1964

The equipment and techniques deployed by Atget link him to 19th-century photography. He had an 18 x 24 cm wooden, bellows camera which was heavy and had to be supported on a tripod. The use of glass plates allowed Atget to capture every tiny detail with great precision. Also traditional was his printing method, usually on albumen paper made light-sensitive with silver nitrate, exposed under natural light and subsequently gold-tinted. Atget's vision of photography was, however, an astonishingly modern one.

As a result, he inspired artists and photographers such as Brassai, the Surrealists, Walker Evans and Bernd & Hilla Becher amongst many others, and he can also be considered a starting-point for 20th-century documentary photography.

The Art Gallery of NSW is the only Australian venue. The exhibition is currently showing at the Musée Carnavalet, Paris, until the 29th of July.

Principal sponsor

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from top:

Eugène Atget

Cabaret au port Salut, street vendor selling shellfish, rue des Fossès-Saint-Jacques, 5th arrondissement 1903

The former Collège de Chanac, 12 rue de Bièvre, 5th arrondissement, August 1900

albumen photographs

© Musée Carnavalet, Paris/Roger-Viollet/TopFoto

EUGÈNE ATGET OLD PARIS

Art Gallery of New South Wales

24 August – 4 November 2012

Admission \$10, \$8 concession

\$7 members, \$28 family

For further information:

Susanne Briggs

(02) 9225 1791 or 0412 268 320

or susanneb@ag.nsw.gov.au

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