

The Museum of Modern Art

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VIEWS OF HISTORIC FRENCH GARDENS FEATURED IN THIRD EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY ATGET

The third in a four-part series of exhibitions exploring the art of turn-of-the-century photographer Eugène Atget will open at The Museum of Modern Art on March 14, 1985. The 120 photographs in THE WORK OF ATGET: THE ANCIEN REGIME were taken in the years 1901-27 and describe three venerable monuments of France's aristocratic past: the gardens at Versailles, Saint-Cloud and Sceaux. The exhibition differs markedly in theme from the fourth installment, MODERN TIMES, which will run concurrently with THE ANCIEN REGIME and takes for its subject the commerce and amusements of working-class Paris at the turn of the century. Seen in combination the exhibitions offer a view of the most divergent aspects of Atget's work.

THE WORK OF ATGET has been organized by John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography. It is part of the Springs Industries Series on the Art of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art and is supported by grants from Springs Industries, Inc.

Atget's deep interest in documenting the art and history of French culture led him to explore the region surrounding Paris, where many of the most visible reminders of France's old order are located. From 1901 until his death in 1927 Atget devoted much of his energy to photographing the chateaux and parks of the French kings and noble families. He began taking pictures at Versailles in 1901 and at Saint-Cloud in 1904, and at each park strove to capture the site's special character. At Versailles, Atget ignored

the vast facades and seemingly endless vistas in order to recreate the garden on a more human scale. As was his custom with favorite motifs, he revisited Versailles over a number of years. The hundreds of photographs he made there reflect the development of Atget's artistic vision, from an early affection for dramatic composition to the serene, yet vital, arrangements of his last years. However, from his pictures one could construct neither a map of the park nor a catalogue of its contents, "for he photographed not the topography of the place, but what he understood to be its essence," according to Mr. Szarkowski.

At Saint-Cloud, a garden used in Atget's time as a public park, the artist photographed sculptured terraces, reflecting pools and garden vistas. In contrast to his work at Versailles, Atget's pictures of Saint-Cloud are "more abstract, more lyrical, freer in their effort to describe the ineffable," Mr. Szarkowski observes.

The park at Sceaux was in a tangled and decaying state when Atget photographed it in 1924, just before its renovation. The pictures he made there, of lichen-covered steps, time-worn statuary and stately, aged trees constitute what Mr. Szarkowski believes to be "perhaps the most consistently remarkable series of his career."

In conjunction with the exhibition, The Museum of Modern Art has published The Work of Atget: The Ancien Régime. It is the third in a series of volumes produced to accompany the Atget exhibitions, all of which have been co-authored by John Szarkowski and Maria Morris Hambourg. The Ancien Régime contains an essay by Mrs. Hambourg on the structure of Atget's work, both as a commercial endeavor and as a private art. She reconstructs Atget's unique and comprehensive system of organizing his photographs and offers penetrating insights into his

working methods and artistic development. Like the two preceding volumes, Old France and The Art of Old Paris, The Ancien Régime was supported by a grant from Springs Industries, Inc. and is being distributed by New York Graphic Society Books/Little, Brown and Company, Boston. It is available in a hardcover edition only, which sells for \$40.00.

Three noted authorities on the art of Atget will present lectures at the Museum on Tuesdays at 8:30 p.m. beginning March 19. The first talk, entitled "Hidden Narratives: Reflections on Atget" will be given by Robert Harbison, author of Eccentric Spaces. On March 26, Theodore Reff, Professor of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University, will present a talk on "Atget and Cézanne." The series will conclude on April 16 with "Inheriting Atget," presented by David Travis, Curator of Photography at the Art Institute of Chicago.

The four exhibitions comprising THE WORK OF ATGET were originally projected to open at The Museum of Modern Art at one-year intervals, beginning in 1981 and ending in 1984. During the Museum's recent expansion period, THE ANCIEN REGIME opened at Houston's Museum of Fine Arts, and has since been seen at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts and the Cleveland Museum of Art. After closing at The Museum of Modern Art on May 14, the exhibition will travel to the St. Louis Art Museum (June 13 - July 28, 1985) and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (August 29 - October 27, 1985).

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