

The Museum of Modern Art

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ATGET'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF TREES ON VIEW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

To provide an opportunity to study more closely the nature of Eugène Atget's work, and his values as a photographer, John Szarkowski, Director of the Department of Photography has selected 50 photographs of trees by Atget from The Museum of Modern Art's unique collection of several thousand Atget prints. They will be on view at the Museum from June 19 through September 5.

Attention to Atget's work has concentrated chiefly on his documentation of social and cultural aspects of French life. His own concerns as a photographer, however, were much broader than those generally encompassed by the documentary rubric. Trees were evidently among his favorite subjects, and he apparently photographed them throughout his career.

"On the basis of a small and heterogeneous collection, the quality of effortless poise that identifies Atget's work might easily be read as naivete," Mr. Szarkowski observes in the wall label for the show. "A study of his repeated investigation of the same or similar subjects, on the other hand, suggests a conscious and sophisticated concern with the ultimately formal problems of picture making.

"Atget was acutely aware of the literally infinite number of images that are potential in a given 'subject,' and he knew also that none of them was true, in the sense that it shared a privileged identity with the object photographed. The subtle variations in framing included here among the six plates of the Beech Tree, St. Cloud, for example, make it clear that Atget did not confuse the subject with the object. He understood that the true subject is defined by (and is identical with) the picture."

The Museum acquired its Atget collection in 1968 from Berenice Abbott and Julien Levy with the aid of a gift from Shirley C. Burden. A selection was exhibited

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by the Department in the winter of 1969. Atget's pictures are said to have been a valuable reference source for such artists as Braque and Utrillo, and aspects of his work were admired and published by the Surrealists. Today they not only provide a unique record for historians of French culture, but have been a major influence on the exploration of the potentials of documentary photography as seen in the work of Berenice Abbott, André Kertész, Brassai, Walker Evans, Robert Frank and many others.

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Additional information and photographs available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53 St., New York, NY 10019. Phone: (212) 956-7501, -7504

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