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THE WORK OF
ATGET
OLD FRANCE

Eugène Atget

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK
OCTOBER 3, 1981—JANUARY 3, 1982

NO. 49
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FIRST IN A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITIONS
RECALLING THE WORK OF ATGET
TO OPEN AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The first in a series of four exhibitions exploring the art of the French photographer Eugene Atget, will open to the public in the East Wing Galleries of The Museum of Modern Art on October 3, 1981, and will remain on view through January 3, 1982. THE WORK OF ATGET: OLD FRANCE is directed by John Szarkowski, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography.

The exhibition concerns the French countryside, a subject that previously has not been recognized as one of Atget's major interests. Taken largely in the Ile-de-France, the country's ancient core, the photographs depict the region's natural landscapes and the structures of its civilization, and describe the traditional values and lifestyles of the rural people. The exhibition is comprised of 125 photographs drawn from all periods of Atget's long career and elucidates both the beginnings of his artistry and its flowering.

THE WORK OF ATGET: OLD FRANCE is part of the Springs Mills Series on the Art of Photography at The Museum of Modern Art, and is supported by grants from Springs Mills, Inc., and the National Endowment for the Arts.

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Eugène Atget was a commercial photographer who worked in and around Paris for more than thirty years. When he died in 1927, his work was known only to a few archivists and artists. Little is known about his life, and less about his intentions, except as they can be inferred from his work. In his lifetime Atget made perhaps 10,000 photographs. Almost all of these describe the historic character of French life, as indicated by its architecture, its landscape, and its traditional labors and vernacular gestures. To many photographers today his work stands not only as a heroic and original achievement, but as an exemplary pedagogical lesson, the full implications of which are even now only beginning to be perceived.

Atget was an artist in service to an ideal: the creation of a body of photographs that would explain an issue of great richness and complexity--the authentic character and spirit of his native culture. John Szarkowski has written of Atget: "He brought to his work a quality that one might describe, inadequately, either as an original eye or an original mind... all of Atget's pictures are informed by a precise visual intelligence, by the clarté that is the highest virtue of the classic French tradition. This quality was achieved not by impeccable technique, but by discovering precisely what one meant to say, and saying neither more nor less."

In 1968 The Museum of Modern Art acquired from Berenice Abbott a collection of over 5,000 prints and 1,000 plates which the American photographer had originally purchased from Atget's estate in 1928. For the past twelve years, the Museum's Department of Photography has carried on the work first of organizing the collection to the point where its contents became available for analysis and study, and then attempting the reconstruction of

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both Atget's own complex record system and the chronology of his production. For the first time it is now possible to date with reasonable accuracy almost all of Atget's work and to speculate, with objective support, as to the function that individual pictures were meant to serve.

Following OLD FRANCE at yearly intervals will be THE ART OF OLD PARIS, THE ANCIEN REGIME and MODERN TIMES. Each exhibition will be accompanied by a volume of The Work of Atget. Co-authored by John Szarkowski and Maria Morris Hambourg, Old France will be published by The Museum of Modern Art and distributed by The New York Graphic Society, Boston. The 180-page book will contain an introductory essay by John Szarkowski, 121 plates, 83 reference illustrations with notes by Maria Morris Hambourg. Each will be published in a clothbound edition only and will be priced at \$40.00. THE WORK OF ATGET exhibition series and the four accompanying catalogues have been generously supported by Springs Mills, Inc.

After closing at the Museum, THE WORK OF ATGET: OLD FRANCE will travel to: the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (January 23 - March 7, 1982); The Saint Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, Missouri (April 1 - May 16, 1982); The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (June 15 - August 15, 1982); The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota (September 13 - November 7, 1982); The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan (December 6, 1982 - February 6, 1983); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California (March 12 - April 18, 1983).

For further information, please contact Luisa Kreisberg, Director, (212) 956-2648, or Sharon Zane, Associate Director, 956-7295, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York NY 10019.

August 1981