

**MoMA INSTALLATION OF MORE THAN 100 EXTRAORDINARY PHOTOGRAPHS
BY EUGÈNE ATGET INCLUDE VIEWS OF THE PARKS AT SCEAUX AND PARISIAN
STREETSCAPES**

Exhibition is the First In-Depth Presentation of Atget's work by MoMA in Over 25 Years

Eugène Atget: "Documents pour artistes"

February 6—April 9, 2012

The Robert and Joyce Menschel Gallery, third floor

NEW YORK, February 3, 2012—*Eugène Atget: "Documents pour artistes"* presents six fresh and highly focused cross sections of the career of master photographer Eugène Atget (French, 1857–1927), drawn exclusively from The Museum of Modern Art's unparalleled holdings of his work. The exhibition, on view at MoMA from February 6 through April 9, 2012, gets its name from the sign outside Atget's studio door, which declared his modest ambition to create documents for other artists to use as source material in their own work. Whether exploring Paris's fifth arrondissement across several decades, or the decayed grandeur of parks at Sceaux in a remarkable creative outburst at the twilight of his career, Atget's lens captured the essence of his chosen subject with increasing complexity and sensitivity. Also featured are Atget's photographs made in the Luxembourg gardens; his urban and rural courtyards; his pictures of select Parisian types; and his photographs of mannequins, store windows, and street fairs, which deeply appealed to Surrealist artists living in Paris after the First World War. The exhibition is organized by Sarah Hermanson Meister, Curator, Department of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art.

Atget made more than 8,500 pictures of Paris and its environs in a career that spanned over 30 years, from the late-19th century until his death. To facilitate access to this vast body of work for himself and his clients, he organized his photographs into discrete series, a model that guides the organization of this exhibition. More than 100 photographs are presented in six groups, demonstrating Atget's sustained attention to certain motifs or locations and his consistently inventive and elegant methods of rendering the complexity of the three-dimensional world on a flat, rectangular plate.

With seemingly inexhaustible curiosity, Atget photographed the streets of Paris. Eschewing picture-postcard views, and, remarkably, never once photographing the Eiffel Tower, he instead focused on the fabric of the city, taking pictures along the Seine, in every arrondissement, and in the "zone" outside the fortified wall that encompassed Paris at the time. His photographs of the fifth arrondissement are typical of this approach, and include facades of individual buildings (both notable and anonymous), meandering streetscapes, details of stonework and ironwork, churches, and the occasional monument.

Between March and June 1925, Atget made 66 photographs in the abandoned Parc de Sceaux, on the outskirts of Paris, almost half of which are on view in this exhibition. His approach

was confident and personal, even quixotic, and his notations of the time of day for certain exposures read almost like diary entries. These photographs have long been recognized as among Atget's finest, and this is the first opportunity for audiences outside of France to appreciate the full diversity and richness of this accomplishment.

Atget photographed the Jardin de Luxembourg more than any other Parisian park, likely reflecting his preference for its character and its proximity to his home and studio on rue Campagne-Première in Montparnasse. His early photographs there tend to capture human activity—children with their governesses or men conversing in the shade—but this gave way to a more focused exploration of the garden's botanical and sculptural components following the First World War, and culminated in studies that delicately balance masses of light and shadow, as is typical of Atget's late work.

Atget firmly resisted public association with the Surrealists, yet his work—in particular his photographs of shop windows, mannequins, and the street fairs around Paris—captured the eye of artists with decidedly avant-garde inclinations, such as Man Ray and Tristan Tzara. Man Ray lived down the street from Atget, and the young American photographer Berenice Abbott, while working as Man Ray's studio assistant, made Atget's acquaintance in the mid-1920s—a relationship that ultimately brought the contents of Atget's studio at the time of his death to MoMA, almost 40 years later.

Atget clearly relished the metaphorical and physical aspects of the courtyard—a space that hovers between public and private, interior and exterior—and he photographed scores of them, both rural and urban. This exhibition marks the first time these pictures have been grouped together, allowing the public to appreciate previously unexplored aspects of the Abbott-Levy Collection, which includes prints of nearly 5,000 different images.

Only a tiny fraction of the negatives Atget exposed during his lifetime are photographs of people, yet they have attracted attention disproportionate to their number. With few exceptions, this segment of his creative output can be divided into three types: street merchants (*petits métiers*); ragpickers (*chiffonniers*) or Romanies (*romanichels*, or Gypsies), who lived in impermanent structures just outside the fortified wall surrounding Paris; and prostitutes. As with each section of this exhibition, Atget's career is represented by the finest prints drawn from critically distinct and essential aspects of his practice, allowing a fresh appreciation of photography's first modern master.

Related Publication:

To coincide with the exhibition of *Eugène Atget: "Documents pour artistes,"* MoMA will bring *Atget* by John Szarkowski, originally published in 2000, back into print. Featuring newly color-corrected tritone images, the lushly illustrated volume presents 100 carefully selected photographs by Atget from the collection of The Museum of Modern Art. Atget devoted more than 30 years of his life to the task of documenting the city of Paris and the surrounding countryside, in the process creating an oeuvre that brilliantly explains the richness, complexity, and authentic character of his native culture. Through an introductory essay and a brief commentary on each photograph, John Szarkowski, head of MoMA's Department of Photography from 1962 to 1991 and

an acknowledged master of the art of looking at photographs, explores the unique sensibilities that made Atget one of the greatest artists of the 20th century and a vital influence on the development of modern and contemporary photography. 9 ¾ x 12 ¾ in. 224 pages; 100 tritone and five duotone ills. Hardcover, \$60. *Atget* is available at the MoMA Stores and online at MoMAStore.org. It is distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK | D.A.P in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson outside North America. This reprint is made possible by the John Szarkowski Publications Fund.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, register at MoMA.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, NY 10019, (212) 708-9400, MoMA.org

Hours: Wednesday through Monday, 10:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Friday, 10:30 a.m.–8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesday

Museum Admission: \$25 adults; \$18 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$14 full-time students with current I.D. Free, members and children 16 and under. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs). Tickets can be purchase [online](#) at a reduced rate of: \$22.50 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D.

Target Free Friday Nights 4:00–8:00 p.m.

Film Admission: \$12 adults; \$10 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$8 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)

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