

The Lost Paris of Eugène Atget (1857–1927)

On view in the Works on Paper Study Room are twenty vintage photographs of Paris and its environs by the French photographer Eugène Atget. Working in relative obscurity, with equipment and techniques considered obsolete by the turn of the century, Atget never exhibited his photographs during his lifetime—yet he was destined to become one of the most influential photographers of the modern era.

Following a lackluster career as an itinerant actor, by 1890 Atget had established himself as a commercial photographer in Paris, producing what he called “photographic documents” for use by artists, illustrators, and set designers; by 1898 he began to specialize in photographic views of Old Paris. With the coming of the twentieth century, prerevolutionary architecture was being destroyed by vast modernization projects, particularly the construction of the Paris Métro between 1898 and 1920. For twenty years, Atget worked in the streets of Paris with an antiquated large-format studio camera, compiling an ambitious archive of thousands of glass plate negatives that documented the houses, ornamentation, and occasionally the people in the oldest sections of the city.

In 1921, the expatriate American photographer Man Ray met the elderly Atget, who was his neighbor in Montparnasse. Atget’s antiquated techniques and ghostly images of deserted streets and shop windows were a revelation to Man Ray, who bought fifty of his photographs and introduced him to members of his artistic circle, including the preeminent American photographer Bernice Abbott, as well as to Julien Levy, whose New York gallery would present Surrealism—and Atget’s photographs—to American audiences in the 1930s.

Also on view are five etchings by the French printmaker Charles Meryon (1821–1868) that bear a striking affinity to Atget’s photographs. Meryon’s prints from the 1850s eulogize the labyrinthine streets and Gothic monuments of Paris that had survived since the seventeenth century but were demolished to make way for modern boulevards and thoroughfares, forever changing the city’s once-medieval character.

Calvin D. Brown
Associate Curator, Prints and Drawings



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927

Versailles, Hameau de la Reine, 1923–24

Albumen print

Museum purchase, gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum in honor of Peter C. Bunnell (2004-293)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927

Versailles, Grand Trianon, 1925

Albumen print

Museum purchase, gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum in honor of Peter C. Bunnell (2004-294)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927

Versailles, The Phlegmatic by Matthieu Lespagnandelle, 1923

Gelatin silver print

Museum purchase, gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum in honor of Peter C. Bunnell (2004-291)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927

Versailles, Venus by Legros, 1923–24

Gelatin silver print

Museum purchase, gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum in honor of Peter C. Bunnell (2004-289)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927

Saint-Cloud (allée du parc), 1924

Albumen print

Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Rue Grenier sur l'eau, 1924
Albumen print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Versailles, Trianon, 1919–21
Albumen print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Ruelle des Reculettes, 1926
Gelatin silver print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Saint-Cloud, 1924
Albumen print
Museum purchase, gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum
in honor of Peter C. Bunnell (2004-278)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Soleil, 1896
Gelatin silver print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Rue Mouffetard (le 14 Juillet), 1899
Albumen print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
61 Rue du Marie, 1910
Gelatin silver print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Voitures, Marché des patriarches, rue Mouffetard, 1910
Albumen print
Museum purchase, gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum
in honor of Peter C. Bunnell (2004-282)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Femme arabe, ca. 1890–1920
Aristotype print on arrowroot paper
Gift of Mrs. Saul Reinfeld (x1984-192)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Gif, vieille ferme, 1924
Albumen print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Coin Rue de la Colombe, 1923
Albumen print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Saint-Cloud, ca. 1924
Gelatin silver print
Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund (2004-306)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Porte de la Chapelle de la Sorbonne, 5ème arrondissement, Paris, ca. 1912
Albumen print
Museum purchase, gift of the Friends of the Princeton University Art Museum
in honor of Peter C. Bunnell (2004-285)



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Fête du Trône, 1925
Gelatin silver print
Lent anonymously



Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927
Boutique taxidermiste, ca. 1926–27
Gelatin silver print
Lent anonymously



Charles Meryon, French, 1821–1868

St. Etienne du Mont

Etching

Gift of J. Lionberger Davis, Class of 1900 (x1952-9)



Charles Meryon, French, 1821–1868

Le Stryge, 1853

Etching in sepia ink on blue paper

Gift of David H. McAlpin, Class of 1920, and Mrs. McAlpin in memory of Professor Clifton R. Hall (x1969-317)



Charles Meryon, French, 1821–1868

La galerie Notre-Dame de Paris, 1853

Etching

Gift of David H. McAlpin, Class of 1920, and Mrs. McAlpin in memory of Professor Clifton R. Hall (x1969-319)



Charles Meryon, French, 1821–1868

Le Pont-au-Change, 1854

Etching

Gift of David H. McAlpin, Class of 1920, and Mrs. McAlpin in memory of Professor Clifton R. Hall (x1969-320)



Charles Meryon, French, 1821–1868

L'abside de Notre Dame de Paris, 1854

Etching

Gift of David H. McAlpin, Class of 1920, and Mrs. McAlpin in memory of Professor Clifton R. Hall (x1969-321)