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

Eugène Atget, French, 1857–1927

**Porte de la Chapelle de la Sorbonne, Sème arrondissement, Paris**, ca. 1912
Albumen print

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. Étienne 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)