

Eugène Atget

b. 1857, d. 1927
photographer
French

Eugène Atget never called himself a photographer; instead he preferred "author-producer." A private, almost reclusive man, Atget first tried his hand at painting and acting, then began to photograph *vieux Paris* (Old Paris) in 1898. He photographed in part to create "documents," as he called his photographs, of architecture and urban views, but he supported himself by selling these photographs to painters as studies. Atget carried a large-format view camera, an outdated, cumbersome outfit, through the streets and gardens of Paris, usually photographing around dawn; many of these areas--storefronts and public spaces in nineteenth-century Paris and Versailles--were demolished soon afterward to make way for rapid urbanization.

Though Atget was not well known during his lifetime, his visual record of a vanishing world has become an inspiration for twentieth-century photographers. American expatriate photographers Man Ray and Berenice Abbott rescued his work from obscurity just before his death. Abbott preserved his prints and negatives, and was the first person to publish and exhibit Atget's work outside of France. Many existing prints of Atget's images were, in fact, made by Abbott in the 1930s from his negatives.