



BERENICE ABBOTT: THE LYRIC THEATER, 1933-37, at the Friends of Photography, Carmel.

ABBOTT AND ATGET

Carmel

It is particularly fitting that the two photographers Berenice Abbott and Eugene Atget are exhibited together at the Friends of Photography. In many ways, each of their careers is dependent upon the other. Berenice Abbott first met Atget about a year before his death in 1927. She was so enthralled by his work that she immediately bought several prints and began a lifelong job of promoting a man whom she believed to be one of the finest photographers ever to have lived. Shortly after Atget's death, Abbott bought the entire collection of Atget negatives and prints, and cared for them until their sale to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1968. It was Abbott who made most of the Atget prints for this show at the Friends of Photography.

The influence of Atget upon the work of Abbott is obvious and profound. Beyond the simple similarities in their decision to record a major city and its life, Atget's unwritten aesthetic philosophy finds its voice in these words from Ms. Abbott's book, *The World of Atget*: "The photographer's *punctilio* is his recognition of the *now* — to see it so clearly that he looks through it to the past and senses the future. This is a big order and demands wisdom as well as understanding of one's time. Thus the photographer is

tremendous value and historical importance, as well as its sheer enjoyment. Once the first edition is sold, this facsimile volume will rapidly become a collector's item.

It is not a book that a dealer can afford to allow a prospective buyer "to leaf through" because of the carefully mounted, and easily damaged, reproductions. It's a unique volume — the only book by the inventor of the process of making paper print. (JM)

Charles Desmarais

the contemporary being par excellence; through his eyes the now becomes past."

Berenice Abbott began to photograph in 1923 when, while studying drawing and sculpture in Paris, her money ran out and she went to work as an assistant to Man Ray, the Surrealist painter and photographer. Within three years she opened her own studio and began making portraits of the literary and artistic giants who then lived in Paris. Gide, Cocteau, Joyce, Duchamp, Ernst and many others revealed attitudes or traits to Abbott and her lens. These qualities carry the images far beyond mere records.

In 1929 Abbott began a project that was to form the bulk of her creative work — documenting the changes that the city of New York was undergoing. Choice of subject matter, point of view and an excellent technical ability are combined in these straightforward prints which convey the immense size and activity of the growing city. Yet, she did not ignore its origins. "I wanted to record New York before it changed completely," she said, "before the old buildings and historic spots were destroyed."

Eugene Atget, who worked in Paris in the early 1900's, was also attracted to images of urban life and landscapes. Strapping a huge view camera, a tripod and a pile of glass plates with holders to his back, he walked the streets of his city, seeking to record all the characteristic bits and pieces which contributed to its beauty. The resulting photographs transcend their subjects while remaining a "true" account of what was before the lens. □

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