



International Center of Photography

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news release

Paris: Eugène Atget and Christopher Rauschenberg



Eugène Atget
Cour de Dragon, 1913
George Eastman House collection



Christopher Rauschenberg
Courtyard, Village St. Paul, 21 Rue St. Paul, September 26, 1997
George Eastman House collection, gift of the artist

"I was walking around Paris in Atget's shoes, and this is where they took me."
Christopher Rauschenberg

Eugène Atget, who photographed Paris extensively in the early part of the twentieth century, created a visual record of that city that served as an inspiration for many of the photographers that followed him. At the century's end, Christopher Rauschenberg captured many of those same images. From June 9 through August 27, 2006, the International Center of Photography (1133 Avenue of the Americas at 43rd Street) will present *Paris: Eugène Atget and Christopher Rauschenberg*, an exhibition that explores Paris through the lenses of two photographers working decades apart. This will be the tenth in the "New Histories" series of collaborations between ICP and George Eastman House in Rochester, New York.

Eugène Atget (French, 1857–1927) photographed the streets and gardens of Paris, creating an indelible monument to the city—particularly as many of the locations he captured were demolished shortly thereafter to make way for greater urbanization. When he died, he left approximately two thousand 8 by 10 inch glass plates, ten thousand prints, and an archive at the Palais Royale. Christopher Rauschenberg (American, b.1952) photographed five hundred scenes that Atget had admired and shot—street scenes, architectural details, and landscapes. While he chose not to replicate Atget's equipment, stance, or time of day, his images nevertheless reference the distinctive mood and characteristics of the earlier photographs. Rauschenberg's study of the city is both an homage to Atget and a personal artistic statement in its own right.

On view from
June 9 through
August 27, 2006

Media Preview
June 8, 2006
9:30 - 11am

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Known for his encyclopedic and comprehensive document of the French capital in transition made at the turn of the last century, Eugène Atget is today considered one of the seminal photographic modernists. By 1897, he had begun a systematic visual catalogue of Paris, photographing the city's streets, buildings, shopfronts, parks, and people prodigiously over a twenty-year period. Atget used his camera to create images that preserved the city's historical past, yet these photographs were not just documentation. Though he considered himself a photographic illustrator and not an artist, and refused to allow himself to be judged by fashionable contemporary artistic mores or use his socially accepted status as "artisan," he inadvertently established himself as one of the twentieth century's greatest photographers. This is primarily because of the intuitive visual quality and striking compositions characteristic of his work, and that his images do not pretend to be anything other than what they are.

Christopher Rauschenberg is recognized nationally and internationally as an artist and curator, a founding member of the Blue Sky Photographers' Collective and Gallery in Portland, Oregon, and a longtime participant in the acclaimed Portland Grid Project. During a 1989 visit to Paris, he encountered a gatepost that he knew from a photograph by Atget, and rephotographed it from his memory of the image. Wondering how many other of the French photographer's subjects might still exist, Rauschenberg resolved to return and do a larger rephotographic exploration. In 1997 and 1998 he made three such trips, and rephotographed not only scenes from among the ones that Atget had originally captured, but hundreds of others that he felt resonated with the earlier photographer's spirit.

Rauschenberg has said of this project: "Having photographed all of these scenes, it is clear to me that the Paris of Atget's vision is still there and available to eyes that look for it. In central Paris, most of the scenes that Atget photographed are still there, and still posing. You can see the effects of acid rain on them; you can see the effects of graffiti; most of all, you can see that the magical streets of Paris are now thickly covered with parked cars. However, among all the other Parises that co-exist so thickly in one amazing city, Atget's Paris is still definitely and hauntingly there."

This is the first time that the two groups of Paris photographs have been shown together. The exhibition is both a survey of George Eastman House's exemplary holdings of the work of Eugène Atget, and a presentation of its newly acquired prints by Christopher Rauschenberg, the son of artist Robert Rauschenberg.

The exhibition is curated by Alison Nordström, Curator of Photographs, George Eastman House, Rochester, New York. It is the tenth in the series "New Histories of Photography," collaborations between ICP and George Eastman House made possible by the generous support of The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation. Additional funding for *New Histories 10* was received from George N. Abraham, M.D.