

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR WEDNESDAY RELEASE

NEWLY ACQUIRED PHOTOGRAPHS BY STIEGLITZ AND ATGET

TO BE EXHIBITED AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Two large groups of photographs by the famous American photographer Alfred Stieglitz and by his French contemporary, Eugene Atget, have just been acquired by the Department of Photography of the Museum of Modern Art and will be on view from March 29 until May 7. The exhibition, comprising more than 100 prints, is being arranged by Edward Steichen, Director of the Museum's Department of Photography, and will be shown in the first floor galleries of the Museum at 11 West 53 Street.

The group of 61 Stieglitz prints, which have been given to the Museum by his widow, Georgia O'Keeffe, is highlighted by part of the famous cloud series - or "equivalents," as Stieglitz called them; a group of portraits of Miss O'Keeffe done between 1918 and 1933; a series of Lake George landscapes, and New York City photographs. The latter, done between 1893 and 1934, include a sequence showing the same city view taken 6 times at brief intervals.

The 50 Atget photographs which come from the extensive collection of Berenice Abbott were given to the Museum by an anonymous patron. They include a representative selection of the work of this famous French pioneer in modern photography, who recorded the Parisian facade during the first quarter of this century: the streets, the shop windows, the people, the parks, the rooms, the cafes.

Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), internationally famous photographer who won 150 medals during his lifetime, was also a writer, lecturer, demonstrator of new techniques, organizer of photography and art groups and a source of inspiration and encouragement to photographers and painters. He was the earliest American champion of photography as an art and was director of the "Photo Secession" and editor and publisher of Camera Work.

While carrying on his activities on behalf of the arts, Stieglitz was also making great photographs. Of his unique cloud series, which were made in the 1920s and early 1930s, and some of which are included in the current exhibition, he wrote:

"Clouds and their relationship to the rest of the world, and clouds for themselves, interested me, and clouds which were

R4 5

most difficult to photograph - nearly impossible. I wanted to photograph clouds to find out what I had learned in 40 years about photography. Through clouds to put down my philosophy of life - to show that my photographs were not due to subject matter - not to specific trees, or faces, or interiors, to special privileges, clouds were there for everyone - no tax on them as yet."

Like Stieglitz, Eugene Atget (1857-1927) photographed the city and the people simply and directly. But for the French photographer, taking pictures was his entire life. He never "expressed a theory, set down an explanation or spoke a word on his own behalf," says Ferdinand Reyher, leading authority on this photographer. He died unknown, without money or fame, in 1927, but left behind more than 10,000 prints and almost 2,000 plates which constituted an immortal portrait of Paris in the first part of the century. For almost 30 years he photographed the uneven cobblestones, the dark littered courts; the people on the streets, at fairs; the children playing in the parks; the rooms, doorways, facades of the poor, the middle class and the rich. Using old-fashioned equipment and reducing personal needs to simple essentials, Atget worked alone, tirelessly covering the city and environs with his single camera.

Berenice Abbott, well-known American photographer who salvaged and brought the Atget collection to this country shortly after his death, has written:

"From Atget's work, if we had no other record, we could reconstruct the visual image of Paris in the first quarter of the twentieth century.... Turning to photography when about forty, after a life spent first as a sailor and then as an actor in the French provinces, Atget is a supreme exemplar of the wisdom of the old adage in regard to cultivating one's own acre. Paris was Atget's acre - a loose, sprawling acre - which he traversed by foot, street car, Metro and bus. Imbued with a passionate love of this city which holds the hearts of French and foreigner, Atget saw no subject too small or too great for his lens. The simplest people and subjects were dear to him. Old factory yards, alleyways, bleak half-demolished vistas which only a poet's nostalgic perception would note and make significant, if withal sad - all these fragments of the world he took and molded into a creative whole...his work is great because its substance, statement, and content, are great...."

The Stieglitz photographs given to the Museum Collection were selected by Miss O'Keeffe to complement, not to duplicate, those given to the Metropolitan Museum and those already in the Photography Collection.

Regarding these new photographic acquisitions, Mr. Steichen says:

"The generous gift by Georgia O'Keeffe of this collection of Alfred Stieglitz photographs and the gift by an anonymous donor of the Eugene Atget prints, represent the most important acquisitions in recent years by the Museum's Department of Photography.

"It is a proud privilege to exhibit these prints and to give them a home in the Museum. Both Stieglitz and Atget represent peak attainments in the art of photography."