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GETTY PRESENTS RARE TREASURES OF 19TH-CENTURY FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHY

Real/Ideal: Photography in France, 1847-1860

On view August 30-November 27, 2016

At the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center



Left: *Draped Model* (about 1854). Jean-Louis-Marie-Eugène Durieu (French, 1800 - 1874) and possibly with Eugène Delacroix (French, 1798 - 1863). Albumen silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. **Right:** *Facade of the Cathedral of Saint-Gatien, Tours* (1851). Gustave Le Gray (French, 1820 - 1884) and Auguste Mestral (French, 1812 - 1884). Waxed paper negative © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

LOS ANGELES – In the shadow of the political revolutions of 1848, an artistic revolution was also brewing in France within the young medium of photography. An unprecedented period of creativity and discovery among photographers emerged between the first French announcement of a paper negative process in 1847 and more mechanical processes for photographs in the 1860s, sparking debates about photography's prospects in the divergent fields of art and science.

Organized around the Getty Museum's rich holdings of early French photography and supplemented with important international loans, *Real/Ideal: Photography in France, 1847-1860*, on view August 30-November 27, 2016 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center, highlights the work of four pioneering photographers—Édouard Baldus (1813-1889), Gustave

Le Gray (1820-1884), Henri Le Secq (1818-1882), and Charles Nègre (French, 1820-1880)—alongside other artists who championed the paper and glass negative and contended with photography's unprecedented "realism."

"This exhibition tells a pivotal story about a short period—some 12 years—in the early history of photography; one that the Getty is uniquely positioned to tell given our extensive holdings of nineteenth-century French photographs," explains Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum. "It is also an opportunity to showcase – for the first time – an important, recent acquisition of paper negatives from the collection of Jay McDonald. The exhibition sheds light on the freedom that early photographers enjoyed as they explored new means for developing images, and as they balanced the 'real' recording of the world as it is with the 'ideal,' creative possibilities of the medium."

The Paper Negative and Possibilities

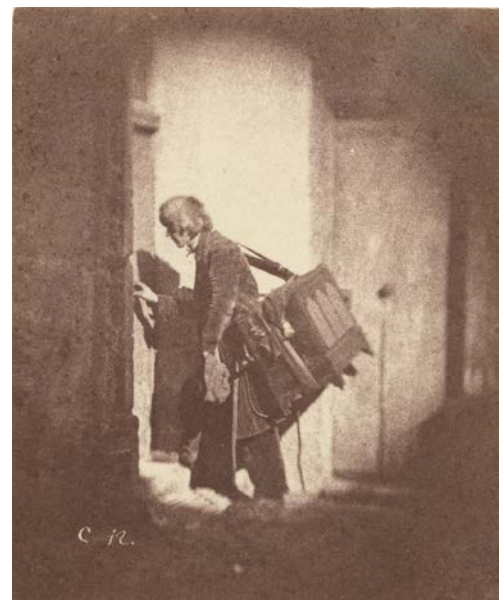
The first paper negatives, created by William Henry Fox Talbot in England in the 1830s, first inspired French photographers in the early 1840s. In 1847, a cloth manufacturer named Louis Désiré Blanquart-Evrard (1802-1872) published a method of improving the paper negative, a process which created a more refined positive image. Due to the political turmoil of 1848, his discovery went unnoticed by the French government, which had long favored the hyper-real quality of the silver-plated daguerreotype invented by Louis Daguerre (French, 1787-1851) in 1839.

Without a national mandate or commercial viability, French photographers using the paper negative enjoyed a brief period of freedom and experimentation between 1847 and 1860. Gustave Le Gray's innovation of the "waxed paper negative," which involved the addition of a layer of wax before the negative was sensitized with photo chemistry, was particularly vital, rendering the negative more translucent and portable. Rare waxed paper negatives by these photographers from the Getty Museum's collection and from the Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine and the Musée D'Orsay in Paris will be on view. The exhibition will also include a view of Montmartre from "barrière de Clichy," a photographic school and studio that Le Gray founded in 1849, as well as other early prints from paper negatives by Hippolyte Bayard, Henri-Victor Regnault, and Humbert de Molard.

The Rise of Realism

Originally trained as painters, Baldus, Le Gray, Le Secq, and Nègre saw the creative potential of photography and became its greatest champions. They were founding members of the Société héliographique, the first professional group devoted to photography, which published an important journal, *La lumière*.

Experimentation in photography coincided with an increasing interest in "realism" – a word first used by



[Organ Grinder at 21, quai Bourbon, Ile Saint-Louis, Paris] (before March or May 1853). Charles Nègre (French, 1820 - 1880) Salted paper print from a paper negative. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

critics in reference to paintings exhibited by Gustave Courbet (French, 1819-1877) at the 1849 Salon des Beaux-Arts. Artists and writers were increasingly rejecting academic, idealist subjects for everyday ones, and vanguard photographers similarly turned their attention towards the common individual, the worker, and the everyday scene. Nègre's staged genre scenes of figures posed on the streets of Paris demonstrate how photography could interweave the "real" and "ideal." Additionally, in Baldus's documentation of the southern French seaside town of Bandol the idealized landscape is abandoned for a more realistic view, including the rugged foreground and industrial elements that lead back to a recently-constructed railroad bridge far in the distance.

Commissions, Demolitions, and Renovations

The new photographers of the period increased their profile through commissioned work for the French government. The Mission héliographique, which formed in 1851, hired five photographers (Baldus, Le Gray, Le Secq, Auguste Mestral, and Hippolyte Bayard) to travel across France and record hundreds of significant historical monuments before they were transformed through restoration under the government of Napoléon III. Nègre also pursued a six-month project to document the Midi region of France. The exhibition features examples from these projects, including images of Reims Cathedral, Chateau of Chenonceaux, and St. Gabriel près Arles.



Amphitheatre de Nîmes (1850s). Édouard Baldus (French, born Germany, 1813 - 1889) Albumen silver print. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Upon returning from their respective photographic missions, Baldus, Le Secq, Le Gray, and Nègre turned their attention to documenting the transformations—through demolition and restoration—of Parisian monuments, including the Cathedral of Notre Dame, the Hotel de Ville, the Louvre Museum, the Place du Carrousel, and the Tour Saint-Jacques, images of which are also on view in the exhibition.

"Baldus and Nègre, who were friends as well as competitors, took a subject like the same cloister of Saint-Trophime in Arles and photographed it in different ways," says Karen Hellman assistant curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum and curator of the exhibition. "Nègre captured a narrow, vertical section of the colonnade, while Baldus carefully joined ten negatives to create a more all-encompassing view of the space."

The Rise of Commercial Photography

The administration of Napoléon III and its free-market policies led to an explosion of commercial activity in photography, which was becoming increasingly industrialized and commonplace. The use of the paper negative fell out of favor and was gradually replaced by the sharper and more sensitive glass plate negative. The Getty's exhibition thus presents a rare insight into a brief yet important moment in the history of photography that was shaped by these four pioneering photographers.

Real/Ideal: Photography in France 1847-1860 is on view August 30-November 27, 2016 at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center. The exhibition is curated by Karen Hellman, assistant curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum. An accompanying publication, *Real / Ideal: Photography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century France* will be available, with essays by Sylvie Aubenas, Anne de Mondenard, Paul-Louis Roubert, Sarah Freeman and Karen Hellman. Also on view in the Center for Photographs will be *Richard Learoyd: In the Studio*, curated by Arpad Kovacs, assistant curator of photographs at the J. Paul Getty Museum.

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The J. Paul Getty Museum collects Greek and Roman antiquities, European paintings, drawings, manuscripts, sculpture and decorative arts to 1900, as well as photographs from around the world to the present day. The Museum's mission is to display and interpret its collections, and present important loan exhibitions and publications for the enjoyment and education of visitors locally and internationally. This is supported by an active program of research, conservation, and public programs that seek to deepen our knowledge of and connection to works of art.

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