j. paul getty museum acquires rare trove of 19th-century photographs from noted collector

thirty-nine works from the collection of jay mcdonald represent some of the finest surviving photographs produced in the medium’s early years

los angeles – the j. paul getty museum announced today the acquisition of thirty-nine french and british photographs from the 1840s through 1860s, representing some of the most impressive architectural and landscape prints and negatives produced in photography’s early years. the works were acquired from jay mcdonald, a santa monica resident who has actively collected photographs since the 1970s and has amassed one of the finest private collections of 19th-century photography in the united states.

“with this acquisition, the getty museum is poised to become one of the most important resources for the sustained study of early negative/positive photography that came out of the revolutionary first generation of experimentation with the new medium. it represents one of the rare moments when science and art come together to produce something totally unexpected – indeed a totally new art form,” says timothy potts, director of the j. paul getty museum. “this acquisition also reinforces our commitment to collecting photography that spans the full history of the art form and places the getty among the most significant repositories of early paper negatives in an american collection, rivaled only by the
The group of works includes six prints and four negatives by Charles Nègre (French, 1820-1880), four prints by Louis-Auguste and Auguste-Rosalie Bisson (Bisson Frères) (French, 1814-1876 and 1826-1900), three prints by André Giroux (French, 1801-1879), three paper negatives by Louis–Rémy Robert (French, 1810-1882), a print and negative by Henri Le Secq (French, 1818-1882), a print and negative by Captain Linnaeus Tripe (English, 1822-1902), as well as single works by Édouard Baldus, Eugène Cuvelier, Louis De Clercq, Roger Fenton, Frédéric Flacheron, John Beasley Greene, Louis-Adolphe Humbert De Molard, Gustave Le Grey, Charles Marville, Léon-Eugène Méhédin, Dr. John Murray, Victor Regnault, Captain Horatio Ross, Benjamin Brecknell Turner, and an unknown photographer. All works are in excellent condition, underscoring the degree to which early practitioners became invested in the craftsmanship of the medium.

Created by some of the most significant photographers of this period and primarily featuring landscapes and architecture, the works reflect the active debate on aesthetic and scientific aspects of early photography that animated the medium at the time. The experimentation and bold compositional choices of these photographers became foundational for subsequent generations who sought to capture the natural and man-made wonders of the world. Subjects include important architectural sites around the world, from Notre Dame, the Louvre, and the Roman Coliseum to the Taj Mahal and sites in Burma; as well as historic examples of early photojournalism, including a flood in Southern France, the aftermath of an earthquake in a Swiss village, and one of the battlefields of the Crimean War. Other scenes depict villages, ruins, and tree-lined roads across Europe.

The acquisition also ensures that the Museum's photography holdings will better complement its collection of paintings from this period. Because many early photographers were trained as painters, there was a sustained dialogue between the two media. The spirit of experimentation in photography played a critical role in the development of modern art, and the Getty will now be an important West Coast resource for the study of this relationship, both as established during photography's early decades and as demonstrated by practitioners working today who apply similarly experimental approaches that revel in the immediacy of the materials and potential of the medium. The work of seven such artists can be seen in the current exhibition, Light, Paper, Process: Reinventing Photography, on view at the Getty Center through September 6.
“As rare as it is to find individual prints and negatives of this quality, it is all the more extraordinary to have the opportunity to acquire a collection that has been so expertly assembled and preserved,” says Virginia Heckert, curator and department head of the Getty Museum’s Department of Photographs. “The sixteen paper negatives in the group comprise a particularly important component of the acquisition, as they triple our holdings of paper negatives by French makers and add four excellent negatives by British makers.”

Selected French works from the acquisition will be included in the Getty exhibition and publication Real/Ideal: Photography in France, 1848-1871 (working title) in preparation by assistant curator Karen Hellman for fall 2016.

Images (Left to Right):

_Taj Mahal_, 1862, Dr. John Murray (British, 1809 – 1898). Paper negative, sky opaqued with ink and graphite, 37 x 47 cm (14 9/16 x 18 1/2 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2015.42

_Notre-Dame_, Paris, about 1853, Charles Nègre (French, 1820 – 1880). Waxed paper negative, 33.6 x 24 cm (13 1/4 x 9 7/16 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2015.43.1

_Village Scene with Geese_, about 1855, André Giroux (French, 1801 – 1879). Salt print from a paper negative, 21.5 x 27.5 cm (8 7/16 x 10 13/16 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2015.35.3

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The J. Paul Getty Trust is an international cultural and philanthropic institution devoted to the visual arts that includes the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Getty Research Institute, the Getty Conservation Institute, and the Getty Foundation. The J. Paul Getty Trust and Getty programs serve a varied audience from two locations: the Getty Center in Los Angeles and the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades.

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.

Visiting the Getty Center
The Getty Center is open Tuesday through Friday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., with special extended Friday hours until 9:00 p.m. May 30-August 29. It is closed Monday and most major holidays, open on July 4. Admission to the Getty Center is always free. Parking is $15 per car, but reduced to $10 after 5 p.m. on Saturdays and for evening events throughout the week. No reservation is required for parking or general admission. Reservations are required for event seating and groups of 15 or more. Please call (310) 440-7300 (English or Spanish) for reservations and information. The TTY line for callers who are deaf or hearing impaired is (310) 440-7305. The Getty Center is at 1200 Getty Center Drive, Los Angeles, California.

Same-day parking at both Museum locations (Getty Center and Getty Villa) is available for $15 through the Getty's Pay Once, Park Twice program.
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