

## **EXHIBITIONS IN SIGHT for Art Matters (French Twist) July 2013**

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By Burt Wasserman



"Boulevard de Strasbourg Corsets," 1912, Eugene Atget (1857-1957). Printing-out paper, 8 3/4 x 7 inches. Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg. In the "French Twist" exhibition.

Normally, passing moments of time are invisible realities. However, they take shape with crisp precision as photographs in an exhibition, currently on view at the Delaware Art Museum on Kentmere Parkway in Wilmington. It is titled "French Twist: Masterworks of Photography from Atget to Man Ray."

The unique atmosphere of the region and the distinctive character of the French citizenry in the early 20th century come alive in images made by brilliantly creative artists. With cameras in their hands and sensitive eyes in their

heads, they made the era and the locale as memorable as talented painters had done with brushes and colors in the centuries that preceded them.

The elusively fleeting sense of change that marked the character and the appearance of the period can be felt in pictures that both document with objectivity and express emotionally the essence of the time. Without question, the Paris of today looks and feels very different from the sights that loom up in the photographs on display in the museum.

The overall display opens with artworks by one of the most extraordinary visionaries in the history of photography, Eugène Atget. His oeuvre influenced a range of artists from the surrealists to many noted documentary photographers of recent time.

This section encompasses city streets, architectural details, the Gardens of Versailles and one of his most famous subjects, "Boulevard de Strasbourg, Corsets." This last item offers a view of the contents of a store window displaying ladies underwear from 1912. Studying the photograph, you can't help realizing that what is often called the drift of change is actually a constant factor in the human temperament. Or, as the French like to say, "The more things change, the more they are the same."

The next segment of the overall exhibition is titled "Life on the Street." It offers close-ups of transportation arteries and architectural details of the city and features a generous selection of photographs by Ilse Bing. She was an immigrant from Germany who was christened "Queen of the Leica" because she was partial to this brand of miniature, 35 mm camera for making most of the pictures for which she became very well-known.

The third part of the show is labeled "Diversions." It casts attention on sources of recreation that were available to people seeking amusement within the environment of the urban scene. Bing and Brassai, in particular, chronicled the appeal provided to the upper class by the dance hall, night club, theater and indulgent sex trade during the time still remembered to this day as the Belle Epoque.

The fourth section of the exhibition draws attention to the great master of what he liked to call "the decisive moment." This was the brilliant photo-journalist 17 classic blow-ups of negatives originally made with a compact candid camera.

Conceived in settings located in France as well as various other places in the world, they include framed moments captured from sites in Spain during the era of the Second Republic to the coronation of King George VI in London, England.

The fifth area of the show is called "The Lower Classes." Exercising an acute sense of human consciousness, several of the artists included in the exhibition, such as Ilse Bing and André Kertész, aimed their lenses on the existence of poor residents of Paris.

These scenes of urban poverty give voice to a quest for exposing realities that may be quite uncomfortable to look at. But they are nevertheless evidence of factual truths crying out for compassionate understanding, heartfelt sympathy and social justice.

The last section of the show deals primarily with portraits, representational treatments of the figure and assorted

experimental approaches to photographic inventiveness. Among the items highlighted in this area, there is an abstract composite and darkroom solarized prints by Man Ray and a playfully distorted impression made with a reflection in a curved mirror by Andr  Kert sz.

Visitors are especially likely to be impressed with the revelatory power of the black-white-gray coloration in the pictures on display. The impact they make on one's sensibilities is, in many ways, more intense than combinations of such hues as red, yellow and blue.

“French Twist:

Masterworks of Photography

from Atget to Man Ray”

will be on view at

2301 Delaware Art Museum,

Kentmere Parkway,

Wilmington, DE 19806,

through Sept. 15.

Info: 302-571-9590,

866-232-3714 (toll free),

or [www.delart.org](http://www.delart.org).

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