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Exhibition Press Release

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Curator Biography:

Sarah Kennel

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First U.S. Exhibition on French Photographer Charles Marville
at National Gallery of Art, Washington
September 29, 2013 – January 5, 2014



Charles Marville, *Bords de la Bièvre (au bas de la rue des Gobelins)* (*Banks of the Bièvre River at the Bottom of the rue des Gobelins*) (fifth arrondissement), c. 1862

albumen print from collodion negative

Musée Carnavalet, Paris

©Musée Carnavalet / Roger-Viollet

Washington, DC—The first exhibition in the United States and the very first scholarly catalogue on the accomplished 19th-century French photographer Charles Marville will explore the beauty, variety, and historical poignancy of Marville's art. On view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from September 29, 2013, through January 5, 2014, ***Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris*** will include 99 photographs and three albums that represent the artist's entire career, from his exquisite city scenes and landscape studies made across Europe in the early 1850s to his compelling photographs of Paris both before and after many of its medieval streets were razed to make way for the broad boulevards, parks, and monumental buildings we have come to associate with the City of Light. The accompanying exhibition catalogue will present recently discovered, groundbreaking scholarship informing Marville's art and his biography.

“Although his photographs of Paris on the brink of modernity are widely hailed as among the most accomplished ever made of that city, Marville himself has long remained an enigma to art historians,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. “We are thrilled to present this new look at the art and life of Marville and are deeply grateful to lenders, both public and private, for making this landmark show possible.”

Forty-one of the 102 works presented in the exhibition are on loan from the Musée Carnavalet, Paris. Conservation and preparation of the loans from the Musée Carnavalet has been undertaken by the Atelier de Restauration et de Conservation des Photographies de la Ville de Paris (ARCP).

Exhibition Organization and Support

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, in association with The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The exhibition in Washington is made possible through the generous support of Leonard and Elaine Silverstein. Additional support is provided by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

Recent Discoveries

Marville has long remained a mystery partly because documents that would shed light on his biography were thought to have disappeared in a fire that consumed Paris' city hall in 1871. The whereabouts of other documentation was simply unknown. However, new research has helped curator Sarah Kennel and exhibition researcher Daniel Catan reconstruct Marville's personal and professional biography.

The son of a tailor and laundress, Charles-François Bossu was born in Paris 1813. In a double act of self-invention, he jettisoned his given name (*bossu* means hunchback in French) around 1832, at the moment he became an artist. He embarked upon a career as an illustrator in the early 1830s but turned to the young discipline of photography in 1850. Although he continued to be known as Marville until his death in 1879, he never formally changed his name, which is the reason many of the legal documents pertaining to his life have gone unnoticed for decades. The exhibition catalogue establishes Marville's biography, including his parentage and his relationship with a lifelong companion, and uncovers many significant details that illuminate the evolution and circumstances of his career.

The Exhibition and Artist's Background

A talented and prolific artist lauded for his rigorously composed, beautifully detailed prints, Marville was commissioned in the early

1860s to record the city of Paris in transition. He soon became known as the official photographer of Paris and produced one of the earliest photographic series documenting urbanization. He continues to be recognized as one of the most accomplished photographers in the history of the medium.

Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris offers an overview of the artist's photographic career, beginning with a compelling series of intimate self-portraits and portraits of friends and colleagues that provide a fascinating window into Marville's personal life and professional ties, and serve as an introduction to the exhibition.

Starting in 1850, Marville traveled throughout France and Germany, using the paper negative process with great skill to create beautiful landscapes, cityscapes, studies of sculpture, and striking architectural photographs. Many of these works were included in albums produced by the pioneering publisher Louis-Désiré Blanquart-Evrard. The quantity and quality of the photographs used by the publisher serve as both a testament to Marville's skill and an indication that his training as an illustrator prepared him exceptionally well for this new pictorial enterprise of photographic documentation.

In the mid-1850s, Marville adopted the collodion negative process and undertook a series of sky and cloud studies, made from the rooftop of his Parisian studio. More rapid and sensitive than the paper negative process, the collodion negative process enabled the photographer to capture delicate, luminous cloud formations on the city's horizon and made him one of the first artists successfully to photograph clouds.

At the same time, Marville expanded his practice by honing in on two lucrative areas: reproductions of works of art and architectural photographs. He excelled at both and assumed the title and related privileges of photographer to the Louvre while he also documented building and renovation projects in Paris and the provinces for prominent French architects, including Eugène Viollet-le-Duc.

In 1858, Marville was commissioned by the city of Paris to photograph the newly refurbished Bois de Boulogne, a royal park on the edge of Paris that had been transformed under the emperor Napoleon III into a site of bourgeois leisure and pleasure. Arguably his first important body of work that was conceived and executed as a systematic series, the Bois de Boulogne series would influence his best-known work, the Old Paris photographs.

Commissioned by Paris' agency on historic works (under the aegis of urban planner Georges-Eugène Baron Haussmann) in the early 1860s, Marville made more than 425 photographs of the narrow streets and crumbling buildings of the premodern city at the very moment they were threatened by demolition. Known as the Old Paris

album, the photographs are captivating for their seamless integration of artistic sensibility and intense devotion to maximum visual clarity. In many cases they serve as the only visual record of sites that have long since vanished.

The exhibition closes with an exploration of the emergence of modern Paris through Marville's photographs. Even before completing the Old Paris series, Marville began to photograph the city that was coming into being, from massive construction projects, renovated churches, and broad boulevards to a host of modern conveniences, such as the elegant new gas lamps and the poetically named *vespasiennes* (public urinals) that cemented Paris' reputation in the 1860s as the most modern city in the world. Marville also explored the city's edges, where desolate stretches of half-finished construction suggest the physical displacements and psychic costs of modernization. Sharp-edged, beautifully detailed, and brilliantly composed, Marville's photographs of the French capital as at once glamorous and alienating do not simply document change but in their very form shape the visual rhetoric of modern Paris.

Curator and Catalogue

Sarah Kennel, associate curator of photographs, National Gallery of Art, Washington, is the curator of the exhibition.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated scholarly catalogue on Marville, written by Kennel; Peter Barberie, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Anne de Mondenard, Center for Research and Restorations of the Museums of France; Françoise Reynaud, Musée Carnavalet; and Joke de Wolf, University of Groningen. The catalogue is available for purchase in the Gallery Shops. To order, visit the Web site at shop.nga.gov/; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation.

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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PRESS KIT

Curator's Biography

Sarah Kennel

Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris

September 29, 2013–January 5, 2014

Diaghilev and the Ballet Russes, 1909–1929: When Art Danced with Music

May 12–October 6, 2013

In the Darkroom: Photographic Processes Before the Digital Age

October 25, 2009 through March 14, 2010

The Art of the American Snapshot, 1888–1978: From the Collection of Robert E. Jackson

October 7, 2007–December 31, 2007

In the Forest of Fontainebleau: Painters and Photographers from Corot to Monet

March 2–June 8, 2008

Paris in Transition: Photographs from the National Gallery of Art

February 11, 2006–May 6, 2007

Irving Penn: Platinum Prints

June 19, 2005–October 2, 2005

André Kertész

February 6, 2005–May 15, 2005

The Art of Romare Bearden

September 14, 2003–January 4, 2004

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Curator Biography

Sarah Kennel

Assistant Curator, Department of Photographs

National Gallery of Art, Washington

Sarah Kennel is associate curator in the department of photographs at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. She holds a Ph.D in art history from the University of California, Berkeley, completing her dissertation on the relationship between dance and the visual arts in early 20th-century Paris. After a Mary Davis Predoctoral Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts from 1999-2001, Kennel was a contributor for *The Art of Romare Bearden* (2003) and then joined the department of photographs where she has contributed to numerous shows, including *André Kertész* (2005), *Irving Penn: The Platinum Prints* (2005), and *The Art of the American Snapshot* (2007). She has also curated or co-curated *Paris in Transition: Photographs from the National Gallery of Art* (2006); *In the Forest of Fontainebleau: Painters and Photographers from Corot to Monet* (2008); *In the Darkroom: Photographic Processes before the Digital Age* (2009), and *The Serial Portrait: Photography and Identity in the Last One Hundred Years* (2012). Kennel is currently working on the exhibition and catalogue for *Charles Marville: Photographer of Paris*. She has taught classes in the history of art at the University of California, Berkeley, Princeton University and is currently an adjunct professor at George Washington University.

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