

Bernice
ABBOTT



Eugene
ATGET



CANYON, EXCHANGE PLACE
AND BROADWAY,
MANHATTAN. JULY 1936.

SEVENTH AVENUE LOOKING
SOUTH FROM 35TH
STREET, MANHATTAN.
DECEMBER 1935.



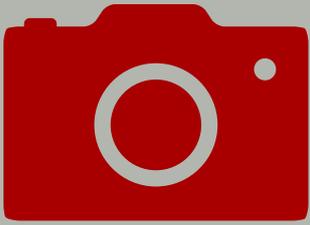
THE STREETS WALKED IN,
"OLD PARIS". EARLY
1900'S.



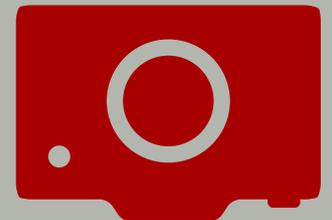
Society

IS FOREVER CHANGING, AND

WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE FOREVER. NOTHING EVER STAYS THE SAME FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME. BERNICE ABBOTT AND EUGENE ATGET EXPLORE THE IMPORTANCE OF USING PHOTOGRAPH AS A FORM OF DOCUMENTATION. THEY ARE BOTH KNOWN FROM PHOTOGRAPHING ARCHITECTURE FROM DIFFERENT POINTS IN TIME. THIS ACTS AS A VISUAL TO HELP US SEE HOW THE CHANGES THAT HAVE HAPPENED IN SOCIETY CAN AFFECT THE BUILDINGS WE LIVE IN, IT ALSO HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND HOW BUILDINGS GAIN THERE HISTORICAL VALUE AND BECOME A PART OF HISTORY. HAVING AN IMAGE MEANS THAT WE HAVE A VISUAL ACCOUNT OF HOW THINGS USED TO LOOK INSTEAD OF RELAYING ON DESCRIPTIONS WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY NOT WORK BECAUSE AS PEOPLE DIE AND THEY DON'T PASS IT ON.



“LET US FIRST SAY WHAT
PHOTOGRAPHY IS NOT. A
PHOTOGRAPH IS NOT A
PAINTING, A POEM, A
SYMPHONY, A DANCE. IT IS
NOT JUST A PRETTY PICTURE,
NOT AN EXERCISE IN
CONTORTIONIST TECHNIQUES
AND SHEER PRINT QUALITY. IT
IS OR SHOULD BE A
SIGNIFICANT DOCUMENT, A
PENETRATING STATEMENT,
WHICH CAN BE DESCRIBED IN
A VERY SIMPLE TERM-
SELECTIVITY”- BERNICE
ABBOTT.

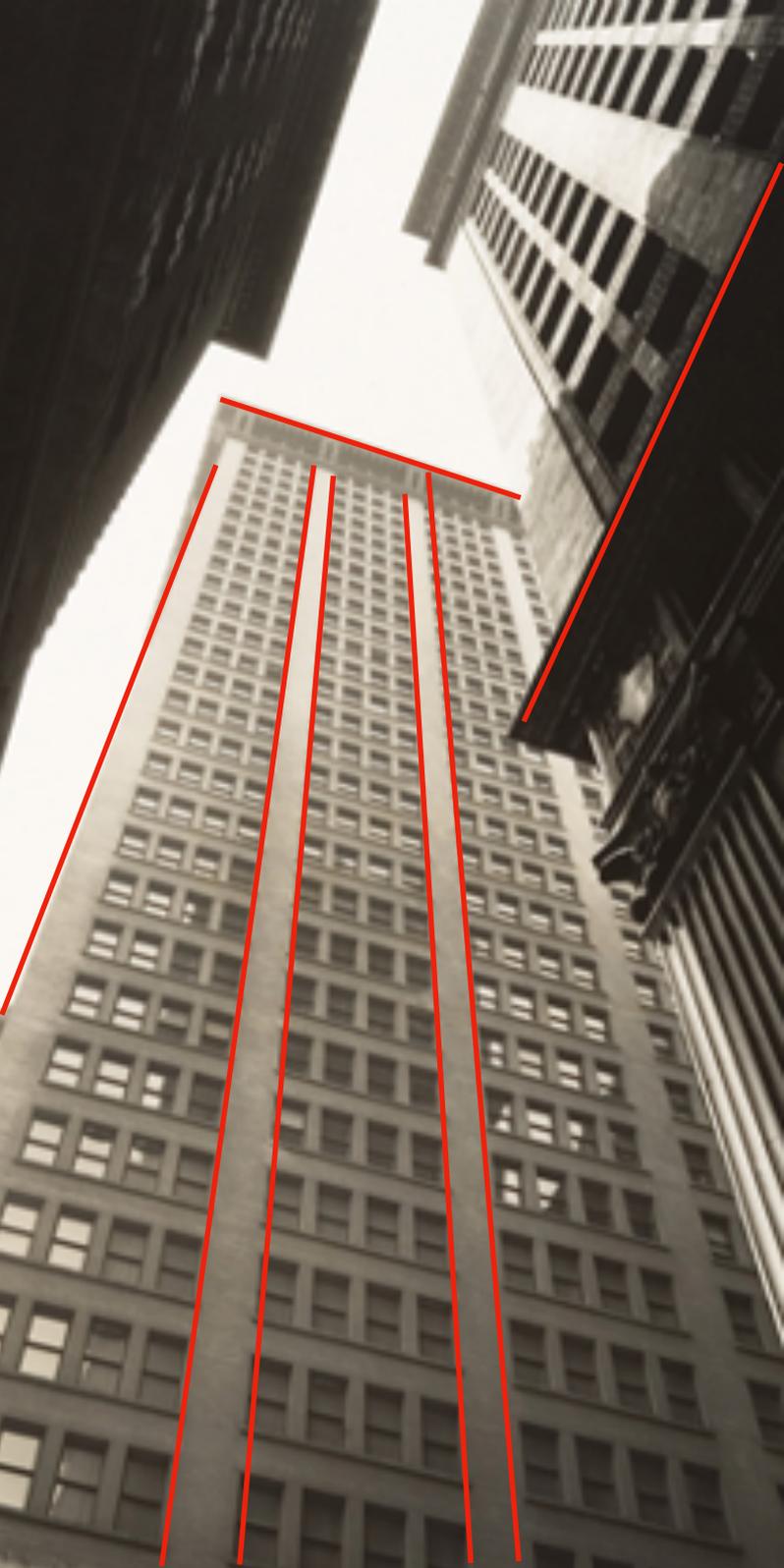


An aerial, high-angle photograph of a dense urban landscape at night, likely New York City. The image is dominated by numerous skyscrapers, their windows glowing with light. The perspective is from a high vantage point, looking down on the city. The overall tone is dark and moody, with the city lights providing the primary illumination. The text is overlaid in a clean, white, sans-serif font, arranged in two columns. The left column is positioned on the left side of the image, and the right column is on the right side. The text is centered vertically within each column.

BERNICE ABBOTT WAS AN AMERICAN PHOTOGRAPHER WHO VISITED NEW YORK IN EARLY 1929, AND SAW ITS PHOTOGRAPHIC POTENTIAL. SHE RECALLED, "WHEN I SAW NEW YORK AGAIN AND STOOD IN DIRTY SLUDGE, I FELT THAT HERE WAS THE THING I HAD BEEN WANTING TO DO MY WHOLE LIFE". OVER THE NEXT DECADE SHE CREATED A COLLECTION OF IMAGES AND NAMED IT "CHANGING NEW YORK"

IT CONSISTED OF IMAGES AROUND NEW YORK DOCUMENTING THE CHANGES THAT WERE HAPPENING AS ALL THE BUILDINGS WERE BEGINNING TO BE MODERNIZED AND CHANGE E.G. THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING OPENED IN 1931, IT WAS THE TALLEST BUILDING IN THE WORLD UNTIL THE WORLD TRADE CENTER OPENED IN 1972. ABBOTT'S FOCUS WAS ON WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE CITY RATHER THAN THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN IT. OTHER IMAGES FROM THE TIME CAPTURED WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN SOCIETY LIKE THE STOCK MARKET CRASH AND THE RISE IN UNEMPLOYMENT, SHE WAS LIKE NO OTHER PHOTOGRAPHER AT THE TIME.

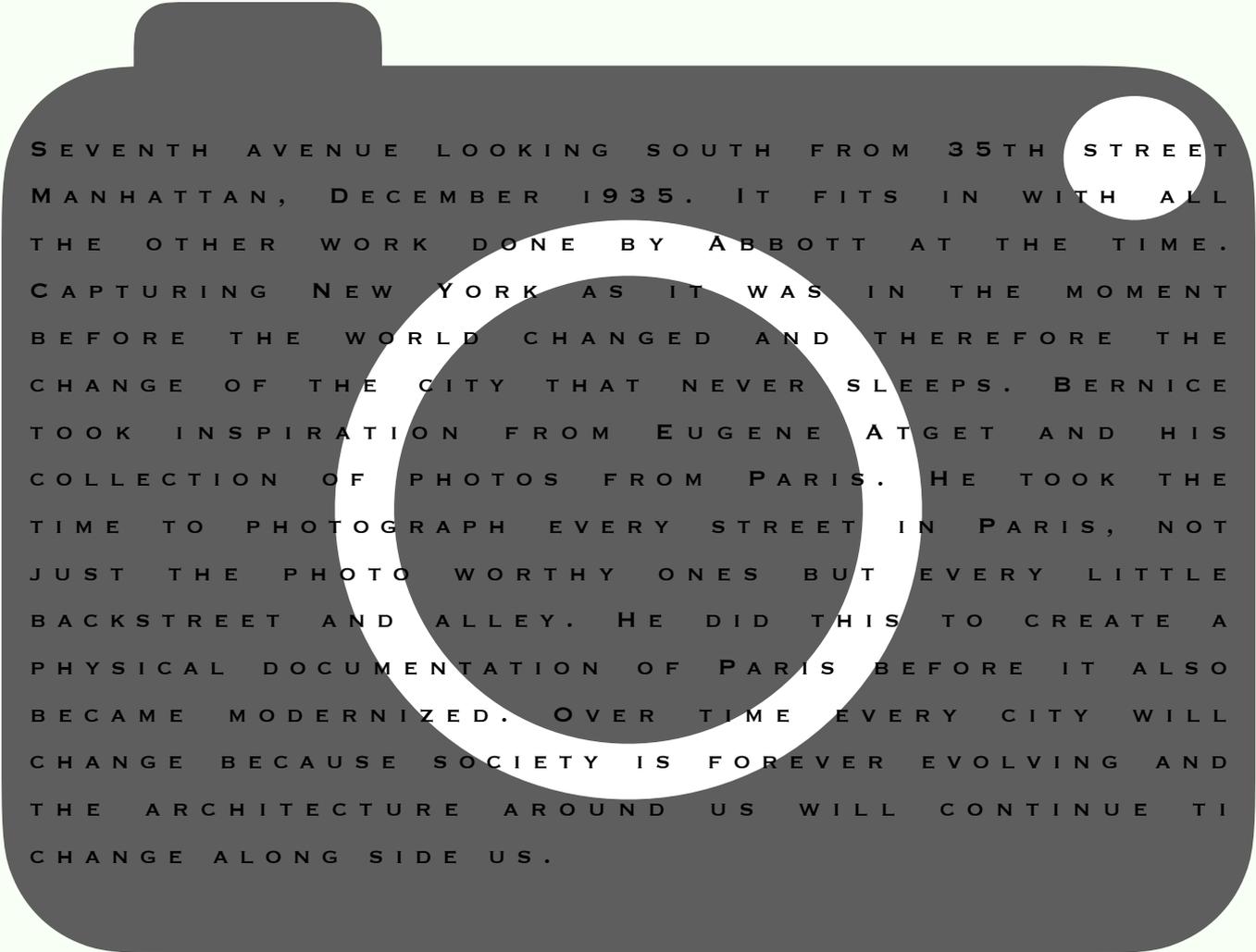
THIS IMAGE IS CANYON,
BROADWAY AND EXCHANGE PLACE,
MANHATTAN. TAKEN JULY 16TH
1936. THE IMAGE CAPTURES A
CORPORATE NEW YORK
SKYSCRAPER. ITS AN IMAGE THAT
HELPS TO REPRESENT THE CHANGE
IN THE BUILDINGS FROM HOW
THEY USED TO BE TO HOW THEY
ARE NOW. THEY REFLECT ON HOW
MUCH SOCIETY HAS CHANGED AND
HOW ARCHITECTURE SHOWS IT.
THE CONTENT OF THE IMAGE DOES
NOT HOLD ANY UNDERLYING
MEANING OTHER THAN THE
BUILDINGS OF A TOWN
REPRESENTING SOCIETY PROBLEMS
AND ITS PROGRESS INTO THE
FUTURE.



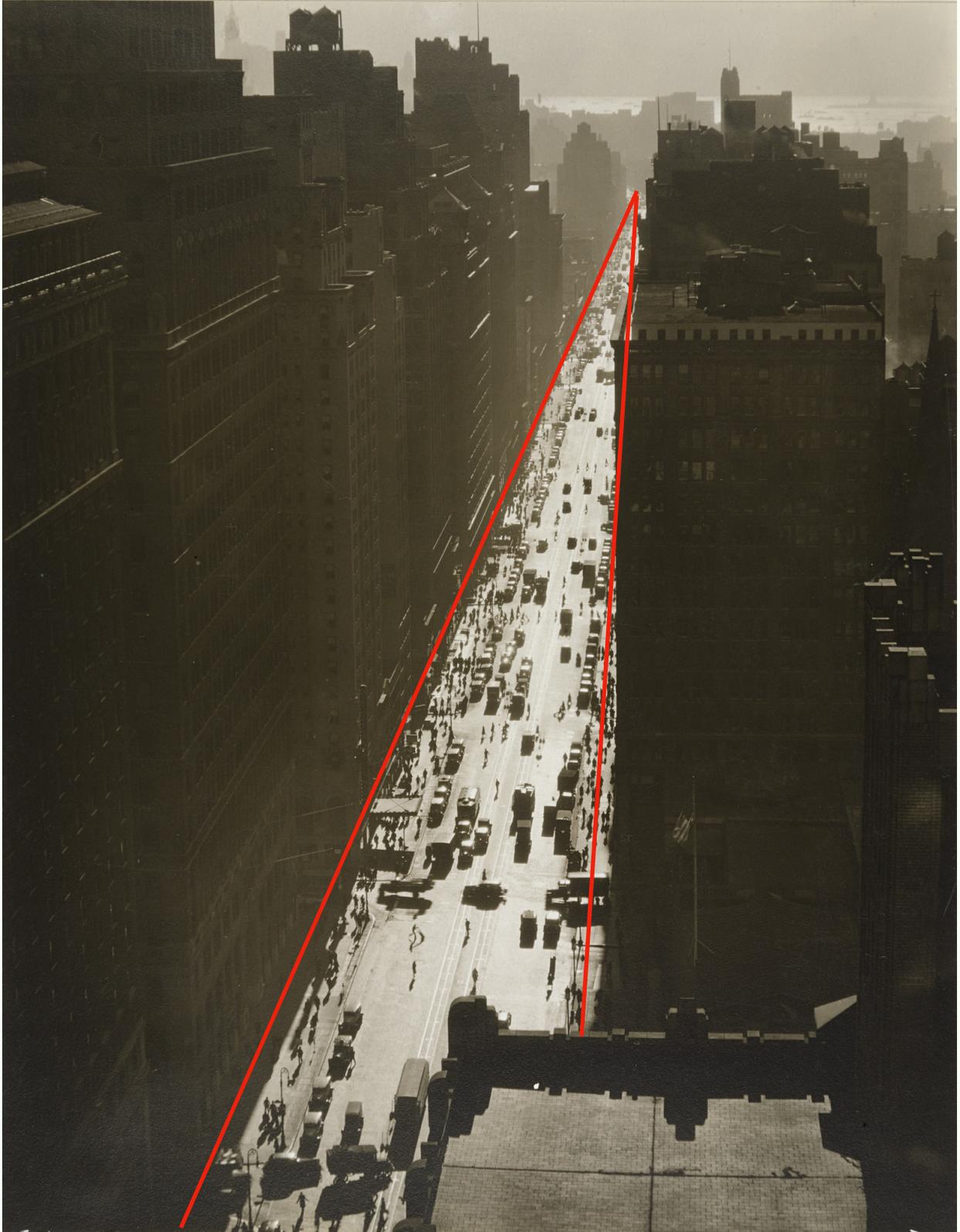
THE IMAGE ITSELF SHOWS THE
EDGE OF THE BUILDING AS
LEADING LINES WHICH MAKES
US LOOK UP AND PROPERLY
SEE ALL THE BUILDING AND
NOT JUST THE BOTTOM OF IT
THAT WE WOULD USUALLY
SEE. AND WITH THE
BUILDINGS IN THE FRONT OF
THE FRAME THEY ARE IN
FOCUS SO WE CAN SEE THE
DIFFERENT TEXTURES THAT
SHOW THE DIFFERENCE IN
MATERIALS USED WHEN
CONSTRUCTING THE
BUILDINGS, IT ALSO
HIGHLIGHTS THE
SIMILARITIES IN THE
BUILDINGS. WITH A DARK
COLOR SCHEME, IT
HIGHLIGHTS THE FEATURES
OF THE BUILDING, THE
ELEMENTS OF LIGHT AND
DARK HAVE EQUAL
SIGNIFICANCE IN THE PHOTO.

ABBOTT USED A HAND HELD CAMERA TO CREATE HER "CHANGING NEW YORK" PHOTO COLLECTION. A 8 X 10 CENTURY UNIVERSAL CAMERA WAS WHAT SHE STARTED OFF WITH TO GET HIGH QUALITY AND DETAILED IMAGES. SHE LATER MOVED ON TO USE A SUPER SIGHT CAMERA WHICH WAS A SPECIALIZED CAMERA THAT BERNICE DEVELOPED HERSELF FOR PHOTOGRAPHIC SCIENTIFIC SUBJECTS. AND ALSO FOR PHOTOGRAPHING MOVING IMAGES SHE USED STROBOSCOPIC LIGHTS TO FREEZE THE MOVING OBJECTS, THIS CAN BE SEEN IN "RAYO GRAMS IN MOTION".

THE OVERALL FEEL OF THE IMAGE IS THAT EVERYTHING IS DULL AND BORING. THERE ARE NOT ANY OTHER COLORS THAN BLACK, GREY'S AND BEIGES. SO EVEN THOUGH THE IMAGE HOLDS SOME SIGNIFICANCE TO SHOW THE CHANGE IN SOCIETY, NOTHING MAKES THE BUILDING STAND OUT IN THE IMAGE, THIS COULD REFLECT HOW IN SOCIETY TO STAND OUT AGAINST EVERYONE ELSE YOU HAVE TO PUT A LOT OF WORK AND EFFORT INTO IT. AS THE VIEWER OF THE BUILDING, IT DOES NOT MAKE US FEEL ANY PARTICULAR WAY BUT IT DOES MAKE US THINK ABOUT HOW MUCH THINGS HAVE CHANGED SUCH AS ARCHITECTURE AND HOW IT REFLECTS WHATEVER IS HAPPENING IN SOCIETY AT THE TIME.



SEVENTH AVENUE LOOKING SOUTH FROM 35TH STREET
MANHATTAN, DECEMBER 1935. IT FITS IN WITH ALL
THE OTHER WORK DONE BY ABBOTT AT THE TIME.
CAPTURING NEW YORK AS IT WAS IN THE MOMENT
BEFORE THE WORLD CHANGED AND THEREFORE THE
CHANGE OF THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS. BERNICE
TOOK INSPIRATION FROM EUGENE ATGET AND HIS
COLLECTION OF PHOTOS FROM PARIS. HE TOOK THE
TIME TO PHOTOGRAPH EVERY STREET IN PARIS, NOT
JUST THE PHOTO WORTHY ONES BUT EVERY LITTLE
BACKSTREET AND ALLEY. HE DID THIS TO CREATE A
PHYSICAL DOCUMENTATION OF PARIS BEFORE IT ALSO
BECAME MODERNIZED. OVER TIME EVERY CITY WILL
CHANGE BECAUSE SOCIETY IS FOREVER EVOLVING AND
THE ARCHITECTURE AROUND US WILL CONTINUE TO
CHANGE ALONG SIDE US.



T H E I M A G E I T S E L F
C A P T U R E S A
S T R E E T I N
M A N H A T T A N ,
S E V E N T H A V E N U E
L O O K I N G S O U T H
F R O M 3 5 T H
S T R E E T . I T S H O W S
U S W H A T
B U I L D I N G S L O O K E D
L I K E B U T A L S O
W H A T T H E S T R E E T S
W E R E L I K E . I T S A
D I R E C T
O B S E R V A T I O N O F
L O O K I N G D O W N A T
T H E S T R E E T F R O M
O N T O P O F
A N O T H E R
B U I L D I N G , G I V I N G
U S A B I R D S E Y E
V I E W .

THE ROAD AND STREET IN THE IMAGE HELPS TO CREATE LEADING LINES WHICH AS A VIEWER GUIDES OUR EYES TO LOOK UP AND DOWN AT THE WHOLE PICTURE RATHER THAN JUST FOCUSING ON WHAT'S IN THE FOREGROUND. BY LOOKING UP THE LINES WE CAN SEE THE BUILDINGS IN THE BACKGROUND THAT HAVEN'T YET BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO SKYSCRAPERS AND ARE STILL SMALL BUILDINGS ON THE STREET. ITS A RELATIVELY BALANCED PHOTO AS ONE SIDE DOES NOT OUTWEIGH THE OTHER BECAUSE THE STREET CREATES A CENTER LINE AND THERE ARE ROWS OF BUILDINGS ON BOTH SIDES.

THE IMAGE CAPTURES THE MOOD OF A BUSY NEW YORK STREET BECAUSE WE CAN SEE THE ROAD IS FULL OR CARS AND PEOPLE. IT SHOWS US THAT THE CITY IS FULL OF LIFE. AS THE VIEWER IT SHOWS US THAT IN A CITY EVEN THOUGHT EVERYONE LIVES THEIR LIVES COMPLETELY DIFFERENTLY THEY ALL APPEAR TO BE DOING THE SAME THING, NO MATTER HOW MUCH SOCIETY CHANGES THE PEOPLE IN IT RARELY CHANGE MUCH.

“ A G O O D

P H O T O G R A P H I S

L I K E A G O O D H O U N D

D O G , D U M B , B U T

E L O Q U E N T ” -

E U G E N E A T G E T .

EUGENE ATGET WAS A FRENCH PHOTOGRAPHER AND A PIONEER OF DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHY. HE IS KNOWN FOR HIS WORK IN PARIS PHOTOGRAPHING THE STREETS AND ARCHITECTURE BEFORE THEY WERE LOST IN THE MODERNIZATION OF THE CITY. HE MOVED TO PARIS IN 1878 IN HOPES OF ATTENDING DRAMA SCHOOL BUT ULTIMATELY THAT DIDN'T WORK OUT.

IN 1890 HE BECAME A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER. HE DOCUMENTED "OLD PARIS" EXTENSIVELY SO THAT THERE WOULD BE A FOCUS ON PARIS ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTS PRIOR TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, HE FRAMED THE STREETS TO SHOW HISTORIC BUILDINGS IN CONTEXT RATHER THAN MAKING A FRONTAL ARCHITECTURAL ELEVATIONS .



HE PHOTOGRAPHED PARIS
WITH A RAPID RECTILINEAR
LENS, IT WAS A FAIRLY NEW
INSTRUMENT WHEN HE
STARTED USING IT, AND EVEN
WHEN HAND HELD CAMERAS
BECAME MORE EFFICIENT HE
STILL CONTINUED USING THE
RECTILINEAR LENS. IN MANY
OF HIS PHOTOS THERE IS
VIGNETTING FROM HIM
REPOSITIONING THE LENS
RELATIVE TO THE PLATE OF
HIS CAMERA.

THE IMAGE ITSELF SHOWS A STREET THAT IS BENDING ROUND THE CORNER. WITHIN THE STREET THERE ARE MANY BUILDINGS THAT HAVE BEEN CAPTURED ONE OF WHICH WE CAN SEE IS A HOTEL FORM THE SIGN THAT'S HANGING ABOVE IT. BUT LOOKING AT THE BUILDINGS THEMSELVES, IT SHOWS THE DIFFERENT WAYS IN WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN BUILT AND ALSO THE DIFFERENT MATERIALS THAT WERE USED CAN BE SEEN.

THE IMAGE SHOWS LEADING LINES THAT IS THE PAVEMENT AND THE ROADS WHICH MAKES US FOLLOW IT AROUND THE CORNER AND EXPLORE THE WHOLE PICTURE AND NOT JUST WHAT'S IN THE FOREGROUND. ITS A BLACK AND WHITE IMAGE SO THERE ISN'T ANY PROMINENT COLORS OTHER THAN ONE BUILDING BEING LIGHTER THAN THE OTHERS, SO OUR EYES RANT IMMEDIATELY DRAWN TO ONE THING IN THE IMAGE.





In conclusion, we can see how both of these photographers have used their work to demonstrate how important it is to have visual accounts of historical places. They also help to contribute to a historical map of the world, and we can see how much the buildings we are surrounded by everyday have changed since they were first built.



Bibliography

Bernice Abbot:

Canyon, exchange place and Broadway, Manhattan, July 1936

Seventh Avenue looking south from 35th Street, Manhattan, December 1935

Eugene Atget:

The street walked in "Old Paris", early 1900's

Secondary sources:

Constructing worlds: photography and architecture in the modern age by Alona Pardo and Elias Redstone.

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New York Changing by Douglas Levere

Quotes:

"Let us first say what photography is not. A photograph is not a poem, a painting, a symphony, a dance. It is not just a pretty picture, not an exercise in contortionist techniques and sheer print quality. It is or should be a significant document, a penetrating statement, which can be described in a very simple term- selectivity"

Bernice Abbott.

"A good photograph is like a good hound dog, dumb, but eloquent" Eugene Atget