

# PETER MILTON



## **Notes on: *SIGHT LINES III: ECLIPSE***

ECLIPSE was born out of my interest in the photographer Eugene Atget, and out of my fascination with his c.1900 street photography of Paris. Work on the image went through many transformations and reversals, until my focus finally settled on Atget's Paris street scene of a crowd watching the hybrid solar eclipse of 1912. It was two days after the sinking of the Titanic. The clock is announcing the two times of the two events on a single face.

In homage to Atget, I have assembled other notable photographers associated with Paris. For those who like puzzles, there are various versions of Atget, Cartier-Bresson, Brassai, Lartigue, and Stieglitz. Stieglitz, of course is New York, but his photo- secessionist movement was just one more passing shadow in an American eclipse of the fading Paris as the shining center of avant gardishness.

Intrigued by all matters eclipsical, I have scattered various celestial references throughout. The most fanciful one is a hint of the moon's gravitational pull on the central group of Atget, Brassai, and the child Lartigue (with his first

camera and an anonymous friend) as they gently rise to the occasion. I did resist an impulse to include a Lewis Carroll Cheshire Cat trace of a crescent-moon grin.

The central figure of Atget proved elusive. He is symbolically present in the organ grinder and monkey which was inspired by the photographer's most joyous photograph and which, in turn, led to me to the introduction of the image's various children. For his likeness all I had for reference was Berenice Abbott's portrait of a stooped elderly man sitting in a chair. An unsuccessful struggle to evoke a more vigorous figure in its prime, eventually came down to the figure of an aging transparent Atget fading along with the beloved Paris he had been so dedicated in recording.

Gradually the general fading, becoming contagious, spread all through the image in the form of a mist. Most of the objects and figures of the assemblage were drawn in painstaking detail, but I then found myself starting to erase here, deleting there, to keep the whole thing from collapsing into a ruination of labored busyness. A 600-layer meltdown turned into to a 200-layer triage operation. A performing trapeze team and Fellini-like apparatus setup was removed, an Orpheus and Eurydice sequence abandoned, leaving only the Paris Metro as an Art Nouveau reminder of the underworld and some ghostly steps climbing towards a heavenly Montmartre. Maybe my ultimate relief with all the house cleaning can be sensed in the stillness of the air that now inhabits the former jumble of ideas. Curiously, much of my work begins to succeed only after I have been forced to a ruthless demolition of half of what had been first meticulously pored over with such high hopes.

ECLIPSE was begun in the summer of 2009 and completed in the spring of 2011. I abandoned it repeatedly, consoling myself with two other images, WATERFALL and THE GREEN ROOM. Finally, ECLIPSE did find its certain *je ne sais quoi*. I began to see it, in its layers and complexity of rhythm, as a ticking, intricate clockworks. Time itself, it seems, was once again intervening to become my inevitable subject.

There are two sizes to the ECLIPSE edition. In the larger (46-90/90) Atget's face has been further altered by combining the Abbott portrait with the Paris photographer Felix Nadar's portrait of the Paris poet, Theodore de Banville, in my wish to lend more of an air of sweet melancholy to the stern and fading Atget. A palimpsest upon a palimpsest, suggesting the time-shifting mysteries and transparencies of photography itself. I have also added a child with a deflating balloon, which I am photographing, in the middle distance, and a few other touches. It does seem however that the additions are sufficiently minor to make the potential confusion of a second state designation very hard to justify.

The larger size was a late decision, born of my increasing assurance and pleasure with the image with each passing day. There were requests for the larger size, and in addition I am feeling an urge to try for more exhibitions to help vindicate my move into the digital. Besides, this image's high degree of resolution and its potential for scale convinced me that a full size had become a foregone conclusion.

***ECLIPSE*** (digital print - cat134d)

Notes on print and paper sizes, edition detail

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ECLIPSE exists as a high resolution digital print in two sizes.

Edition Size: 90

PAPER: Moab Entrada Rag Natural 300

**Small Prints**

Print size: 17 x 28 inches (43.18 x 71.12 cm)

Paper size: 24 x 36 inches (60.96 x 91.55 cm)

Numbered: 1-45/90

**Large Prints**

Print size: 23 x 37 inches (58.42 x 93.98 cm)

Paper size: 32 x 44 inches (81.28 x 111.76 cm)

Numbered: 46-90/90