

Ilayda Yildirim
Tyler Fellow, Paris 2025
Prof. Jasna Bogdanovska
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Through The Eyes of Photographers in Paris, France

Paris, often called the city of light, holds a significant place in the history of photography. It was there that the first known photograph of a person was taken by Louis Daguerre while he was testing his photographic process, Daguerreotypes. The image is titled, Boulevard Du Temple and depicts a man getting his shoes shined (Figure 1). This is notable for being one of the earliest photographic records of human presence. Since, photography has evolved to a medium that showcased history and artistic endeavors of people. Throughout its history, Paris has been both a home and a destination for photographers from around the world. According to INSEE, the city is home to approximately seven million immigrants and welcomes between 40 to 45 million tourists annually. While these figures remain slightly below pre-COVID-19 levels, they continue to grow each year. This high volume of tourism contributes to the global image of Paris, as photographs taken by visitors and locals alike shape public perception and often serve as visual guides for future travelers. These numbers highlight the immense scale of tourism in Paris, where countless photographs contribute to shaping the city's global image. Many people rely on these images for inspiration and guidance when planning their own visits. Interestingly, Parisian and tourist photographers often portray the city differently in their work, using distinct styles and perspectives to convey their unique experiences of Paris.

In June, I traveled to Paris to conduct research through the support of the University of Florida's Tyler Fellowship. Under the guidance of my professor, I was able to join three other students in gaining firsthand experience and knowledge in the city. This paper focuses on the work of both Parisian and tourist photographers by analyzing what they chose to photograph, the styles that influenced their work, and why these images matter. I approached this research with several guiding questions: How did Parisians photograph their own city? How do tourists photograph Paris? What photographic styles did they use? What aspects of the city did they emphasize, and how did they portray it? Why are these photographers significant? And finally, how has being in Paris personally deepened my understanding of both the photographers and the city itself?

My time in Paris allowed me to access museum collections and works that are not widely published, giving me a richer foundation for this analysis. I will also explore the evolution of photography by examining the photographers in chronological order, focusing solely on the work they produced in Paris. This approach highlights the direct connection between their photography and my own experience in the city.

To start, I will analyze Parisian Photographer Félix Tournachon, primarily known as, Nadar. Nadar was born in 1820 and died in 1910. He was one of the first famous photographers and pioneered many styles of photography. This is important as it showcases the progression of photography, the technical and creative aspects of the medium. For some context, photographers at this time were using liquid chemicals to coat a metal or glass plate and exposing it to light to print the image onto the plates. Nadar famously "patented the idea of using aerial photographs in mapmaking and surveying" (Britannica) and, in 1858, he took his

most popular photograph in his hot air balloon named, *Le Géant*. This shows that Nadar wanted to showcase Paris and preserve its image. Nadar was also the first person to use artificial lighting and did so in the catacombs with his staged set. His use of light is explained in his book, *"When I Was a Photographer"*. He states, "I tried to attenuate my light by placing frosted glass between the lens and the model, which did not help me much;" (Nadar, 111). A photo example of this is a photo titled "Workmen in the Paris Catacombs" by Nadar himself (Figure 3), this photograph shows his success with artificial lighting. Again, he was mastering a technique which would help future photographers in their work. It was crucial as the stationary aspect of the photography set the scene for how Nadar took photographs. He is very significant to the history of photography as he shows what it is like as an early Parisian photographer and can give context to how photographers in the more recent century have conceptual idea of photography and not technical. His most popular work was his portraiture. A famous portrait he took is of French play actress Sarah Bernhardt (Figure 4), It shows Bernhardt with a heavy cloth covering her body, and she is facing the side of the photograph. Nadar posed her this way to show her elegance and confidence for her acting. I note this as Nadar wanted his models to be comfortable and feel at home. He would chat with them, and this atmosphere is what drew celebrities and other people to his studio (Hambourg, 23). Therefore, Nadar knew his subjects and each portrait is personalized and meaningful. This aspect of his work was so interesting to me as I experienced Parisian hospitality firsthand, any time I asked a French person if they would be able to take a photograph for me, I was met a lot of smiles and willingness to do it. A lady was even instructing me on how I should pose, and we had a long laugh. It was nice talking to her even though we had to use a translator app. This put me in the position that Nadar would

have put his models in when he was getting them comfortable for their portrait. Thus, Nadar paved the way for the next photographers to use his photographic advances.

Florence Henri was American born in 1893 and died in 1982. I chose to talk about Florence Henri to show other styles of photography compared to earlier photographers and demonstrate how diverse Paris' art scene is. Henri studied in Germany at the school Bauhaus before opening a studio in Paris (Linehan, ICP). From Bauhaus, Florence Henri's was influenced by Cubism and Constructivism styles in their work. Cubism,

“emphasized the flat, two-dimensional surface of the picture plane, rejecting the traditional techniques of perspective, foreshortening, modeling, and chiaroscuro and refuting time-honored theories that art should imitate nature.” (Britannica).

and Constructivism came after and was,

“to produce artworks and buildings using modern materials and designs that would awaken the proletariat to imperialist class divisions and other bourgeois inequalities.” (TAS).

Knowing this information will help give context to my analysis of their work. Florence Henri utilized mirrors in their photographs for that cubist style often being the subject of the photo. The Image I want to talk about is a self-portrait of Henri in a mirror and two balls touching the mirror away from her (Figure 5). The mirrored image of the two balls signifies a gender-neutral tone that is a constant theme in Henri's work. The choice using the two metal balls was deliberate as it alluded to the anatomy of both male and female body parts. The bright background creates a beautiful composition with Florence Henri herself wearing dark clothes (Kriebel). She saw Paris as place to explore their art and make statements. This self-portrait truly

was a statement as it challenged gender norms in the 1900's. The next image I wanted to dig into is an image that utilizes the contrast between white background and black sphere and ring shapes as well as the mirror filling in the gap, thus achieving the constructivist style (Figure 6). Another image that fits into this is one of a mirror on a balcony showcasing another home's window (Figure 7). This image expresses Henri's preference to use mirrors and style influences from the Bauhaus. The use of the mirror alone shows that Henri was crucial to photo history and the evolution of photography and art styles. It provided a new perspective never seen before and combined with the abstract art styles allows viewers to take their time pulling apart the image, I personally love playing with negative and positive space, so I took a photo of this building when I was in the Luxemburg Garden (Figure 8), and I tend to prefer an emptier image so I compromised with myself and took this photo by including more treetops than I was going too. This was a deliberate choice, as I wanted the viewer's eyes to be drawn to the green trees before noticing the building in the background. Being there to take that photograph was an incredible experience that deepened my understanding of Florence Henri and her contributions to the development of photography and its stylistic evolution

Next, I will go over American photographer Lee Miller. Lee Miller was born in 1907 and died in 1977. She was taught photography by and worked with popular surrealist artist in Paris. Miller would take and manipulate images in the darkroom with postproduction editing to achieve that surrealist look. The art style they work with was called surrealism and it is, "creating images where conventional reality dissolves into dreamlike perceptual territories" (Sebbag). This is important to mention since I am following the progression of photography from the previous photographers as it gives context for all of Miller's work. In Paris, we visited

the Speos photography school and saw an exhibition of Sanjyot Telang that is described by Speos as “a visual project consisting of photography and hand painting that honors the unheard voices of Sanjyot Telang’s female ancestors.” (Alloy). I included a photo I took of the show (Figure 9). I include this as it shows that women today still use the concepts of the past and the progression of photography. Lee Miller is technical and creative; this is present in a photograph featuring a man’s boots and what looks to be a dark goo with different textures in it (Figure 10). The goo is uncanny and ties into surrealism well. The unknown of the image leaves viewers to question it more and represents a shift in art and how people’s mindsets change. It also showcases how she isn’t afraid to stray from the societal norm and implement her surrealist background to her professional work. She worked for Vogue as a photographer and focused on fashion photography until she became a war correspondent. You really can see how surrealism has been implemented in her Vogue shoots as they were unique and dreamlike, nothing the fashion industry as seen before. She went onto being War correspondent and documented the liberation of Paris from German occupation during World War II. Lee Miller demonstrates the perseverance and dedication that women, despite the limitations of the time. This image of a fashion model by Miller (Figure 11), is the definition of defiance. The description of the image from the Lee Miller Achieves states

“After the austerity of clothes rationing in England, the excessive use of cloth in the French styles caused some jealous comment. In fact the French fashion was a statement of defiance – the excessive use of cloth denied material to the enemy.” (LMA)

Her work continues to have symbolism. A woman being the face of strength through a fashion shoot is a power move and a deliberate statement against misogyny. She spent her time

creating art in Paris and expressing herself through her art and professional work. In the end, Lee Miller saw Paris as a canvas.

Next, Robert Doisneau, another Parisian photographer and born in 1912 and died in 1994. He is well known for his street photography. He set out to capture the heart of the city, its people. When I was in Paris myself seeing what Doisneau could've seen was eye opening to the kinds of compositions he could have had. Of course, everything is different from his time in the city but we both could have seen a similar scene of people interacting and he would've captured it. Being there in person was exactly what I needed to see how good it felt watching the city live and how again Doisneau felt taking his images. One of my favorite parts of Paris was the street, Rue Daguerre, and the markets along the street were amazing to go through and get freshly pressed orange juice. Here is an image I took of Rue Daguerre in June of 2025 (Figure 12)

Doisneau's street photography focused on people and one image specifically of an old man in line at a market looking at a hanging cow head (Figure 13), sticks out to me. It does so because of the juxtaposition of the old man closer to death and the dead cow, the symbolism is what drew me in and how it differs to today's markets. I did not see any cow heads, but I saw delis, and they had sandwiches in the window case. I would not have known this had I not seen it in person. Furthermore, Doisneau captured everything about Paris. Doisneau's work is a direct representation of the advance of photography as now cameras handheld and film were used. He is able to shoot faster and have a greater volume of photographs compared to the past where planning a photo's outcome was more manual. His most famous work is of a young couple titled, "The Kiss at City Hall", (Figure 14) was posed with the people and environment around them being slightly blurry thus creating a vignette around the couple. This image was

sold as a poster, and this became a beacon to tourism. Doisneau was deeply human and his photographs of the suburbs in Paris exhibit this beautifully. It shows the people as if they are exploding with light. They were candid and sometimes posed to match his vision of Paris. These shots were postwar, so it gave an insight to how the Parisian people bounced back from the German control. His other famous work is a collection of photographs named "*La Banlieue de Paris*". This can be translated to "The Suburbs in Paris". "He searched for stories of human interest that showed the frailties of his photo subjects, or, most characteristically, treated them with gentle humor", (Craddock). This ties right back to the image with the old man and cow. His work is so important to include because it showcases how timeless Paris is even with modern technologies. With my experience, the candid moments bring the life to the Paris, the people sitting and chatting at the Luxemburg garden, the kids playing soccer, the fresh orange juice, it is all the same from in the past but more phones and technology.

Agnes Varda was born in Belgium in 1928 and died in 2019. She moved to Paris with her family to flee German invasion during World War II when she was 18. She was a filmmaker, photographer and artist. Her photography in Paris consisted of a surrealist style (Poirier). Varda blurs the lines between what I have considered non-Parisian photographers, but Agnes Varda lived in Paris for almost her entire life as well, so she gives the perspectives of both tourists and Parisians. She is the photographer that laughed in the face of misogyny. She mentions how she saw the discriminations in an interview saying, "Nobody came to me saying, "You are a photographer and that is something because you are a woman." When I was too small, I would take a chair and stand on it." (Varda, Levitin, p.g. 92). She didn't allow the sexism in the film industry to hold her back from her success. She is influenced by art styles and worked with

newer technologies, thus diving back into the progression of photography in Paris. Agnes Varda's early work in Paris is being exhibited at the *Musee Carnavalet* in Paris (as of June of 2025). This exhibition "reveals the importance of the French capital in a free and prolific body of work that never took the easy way out but skillfully wove a dialogue between documentary and fiction." (Carnavalet). I was able to see this exhibition in person. Her past work really did carry a sense of whimsy to them. they had amazing compositions and surrealism. Being there helped me understand her early work more as there was a lot of never-before-seen work. She encapsulated the idea of a dream and that is reflected in her work. To highlight her surrealism, I am going to include two photographs from the exhibition to drive my point. The first image is of her cat Nini, and she is leaving paw prints in the snowy ground with her car and home in the background (Figure 15). The background of the image is still, and the cat is the sole movement in the photo, it leaves room for questions and fits in the surrealist realm. The stark contrast between the cat's black coat and the white snow was a conscience decision. It shows the connection between her and Florence Henri with the stark distinction of black and white in an image. This connection means future generations do learn from the past. The second image is from a group of images of people in animal masks (Figure 16). This drives surrealism home as it is unreal and unconventional, thus creating that dreamlike piece. Seeing these images in person was crucial to my research, as many of the photographs had never been publicly shown before. Without being in Paris, I would not have been able to reach a well-rounded conclusion. Agnès Varda is especially important to include, as her experiences in Paris reflect both her dedication to her art and the resilience of women in the field of photography.

All in all, I set out to explore how Parisian and tourist photographers documented Paris and used different artistic styles capturing both its evolution and memory. I dove into influential photographic styles like Cubism and Surrealism. Furthermore, used the experience I gained to greater support my paper. I analyzed photographers to learn about the progression of photography. Early portraiture and pioneered technical developments were credited to Nadar for his aerial and artificial light techniques. Florence Henri provided insight to early artistic experimentation and influenced future artistic styles. Lee Miller carried her artistic work, Surrealism, into her professional world and paved the way for women in the male-dominated field of photography. She was also both technical and artistic showing advancement from the previous photographers. Street photography was utilized by Robert Doisneau to capture Parisians and everyday life. He helped shape the image of Paris to a global audience promoting the city with his famous works. Agnes Varda used the city's image as a base to her art. Her work was creative and challenged gender norms. She blurred the lines of being a local and a tourist thus allowing her to represent the bigger picture of the progression of photography in Paris. My experience in Paris has helped me see how all the artists worked thus, putting myself in their shoes and shaping Paris to my lens. I was also inspired more than I am in a library or on campus researching from my laptop, I saw the buildings and people and took photographs to document their moment, and it felt like a dream to able to experience what a photographer might've felt when they captured a perfect moment at the right time. Being able to research in Paris has boosted my paper and provided me direct evidence to the ongoing theme of the progression of photography through the work of many photographers through time by connecting their artistic styles, the technical parts and what they were taking photos of, and this reinforced my research.



Figure 1. Boulevard du Temple by Louis Daguerre

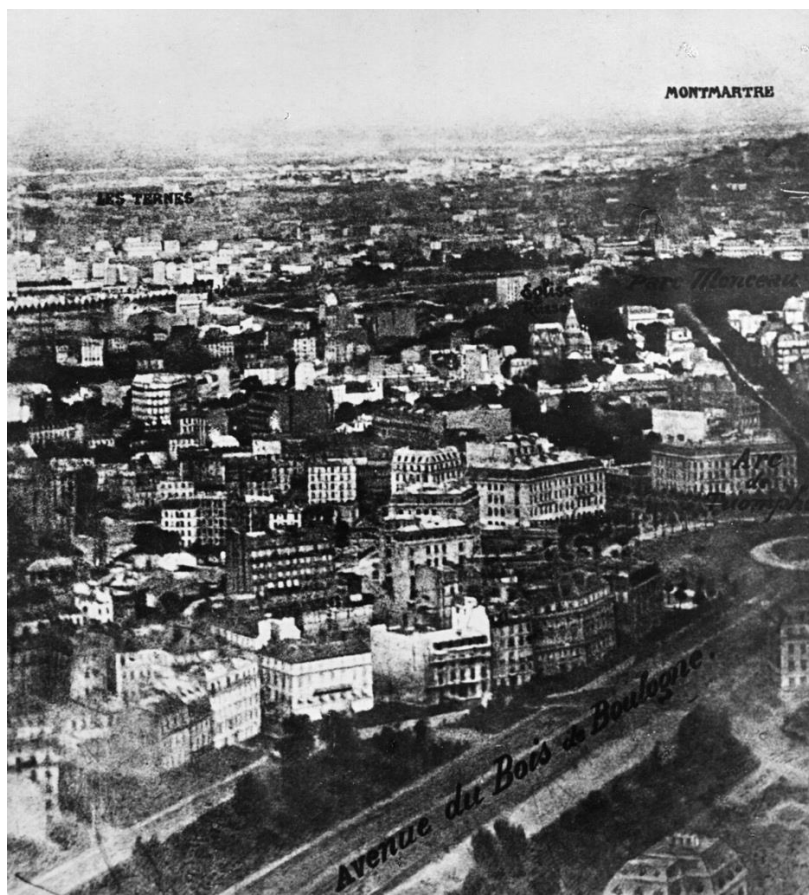


Figure 2. The First Aerial photograph of Paris. by Nadar



Figure 3. Workmen in the Paris Catacombs by Nadar



Figure 4. Sarah Bernhardt by Nadar



Figure 5. Self Portrait by Florence Henri



Figure 6. Composition No 10. By Florence Henri



Figure 7. Parisian Window by Florence Henri



Figure 8. Luxemburg Garden by Ilayda



Figure 9. Sanjyot Telang's Exhibition by Ilayda



Figure 10. Untitled (man and tar) by Lee Miller



Figure 11. Fashion Model, Paris, France, 1944 by Lee Miller



Figure 12. Rue Daguerre by Ilayda



Figure 13. *L'innocent* by Robert Doisneau



Figure 14. *The Kiss at City Hall* by Robert Doisneau



Figure 15. unknown (Agnes Varda's cat Nini) by Agnes Varda



Figure 16. Unknown by Agnes Varda

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