

Jardin de Luxembourg

Paris, France

Photographs by Alan Ward 1991-93, 2009, 2023

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Originally a private garden, the Jardin de Luxembourg is now one of the largest and most popular public spaces in Paris. Located in the sixth arrondissement between the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district to the north and Montparnasse to the south, the site was purchased by Marie de' Medici to build the Palais du Luxembourg and gardens, beginning in 1612. It was one of the earliest French sites to be modeled after Italian Baroque landscapes, recalling her early years in Florence at the Palazzo Pitti and Boboli Gardens.

The original garden had been neglected following the Queen's death until being extensively rebuilt in 1864-66 as part of Louis-Napoléon's transformation of Paris. Georges-Eugène Haussmann, the prefect of Paris, appointed Jean-Charles Adolphe Alphand the supervisor of the public ways of Paris. Alphand's designs included Parc des Buttes-Chaumont and Parc Monceau, both picturesque designs influenced by English gardens. Alphand extensively modified the layout of the Jardin de Luxembourg by adjusting the north to south central axis from the palace with terraces, promenades, and the planting of bosquets and allées of chestnuts in broad areas of crushed stone. This main axis was extended south with gardens to the seventeenth-century Observatoire de Paris (27-29,33-34). The Boulevard Saint-Michel was cut through along the eastern edge and a visual link was made to the eighteenth-century Panthéon to the east (7,8). Alphand also relocated and modified the Medici Fountain (10-12).

Beyond the geometrically ordered central spine, Alphand made a series of gardens with curvilinear paths around lawns surrounded by massed planting of trees and shrubs with figurative sculptures along the route - that now number over one hundred pieces (23-26). The sinuous paths through green gardens are a new layer of design on the site, and are consistent with Alphand's designs for other new parks in Paris (23-26).

The Jardin de Luxembourg has been the subject of photographers, almost since the invention of the medium. With thousands of existing images, how do you make a fresh interpretation of the place? Rather than pursue a new and innovative approach, these images aim to represent the everyday experience of the Jardin de Luxembourg. I photographed the most familiar and recognizable features of the design in a simple and direct way. The photographs show the changing patterns of use of this beloved garden that is open from dawn to dusk, attracting locals, as well as visitors. Recreational uses include tennis, basketball, pétanque, children's play, as well as other attractions such as chess tables, an apiary to teach beekeeping, and even an orchard to display forgotten types of apples (16-20). Children launch rented toy sailboats around the central basin of water (17). Several photographs show people taking advantage of the movable metal chairs to locate the ideal spot for the sun or shade, and define a personal space to read in the garden with some degree of seclusion (3-5, 25-26).*

List of Photographs

1. View northeast to the Luxembourg Palace, 2023
2. Early morning, west terrace, sculptures of French queens, 2023
3. Mid-morning, west terrace, 2023
4. Grand Bassin and palace from the east terrace, 2009
5. Palace from the east terrace, 2009
6. Gardens on the east side of the palace, 2009
7. View east to steps to the view corridor of the Panthéon, 2023
8. View to the Panthéon, 2009
9. View southwest of sculpture The Greek Actor, 1991-93
10. Medici Fountain and urns, 2009
11. Medici Fountain basin, 2009
12. Cyclops over the lovers Acis and Galatea, 2009
13. Grid of trees and benches, 2009
14. Shelter for the supervisors of the Jardin de Luxembourg, 2023
15. Buildings and children's play area, 2023
16. Children's play area, 2023
17. Guiding sailboats in the basin, 1991-93
18. Pétanque courts, 2023
19. The chess players, 2023
20. Apiary, 2023
21. Orangerie, 2023
22. Monument to Eugène Delacroix by Dalou, 2023
23. Sculpture l'Hiver and others on west side, 2023
24. Sculpture of Théodore de Banville on the east side, 2023
25. Garden on the west side and Paul Verlaine monument, 1991-93
26. Bust of Paul Verlaine, 2023
27. View south to L'Observatoire, Scheurer-Kestner monument, 2023
28. Scheurer-Kestner monument, 1991-93
29. Homage to Atget, 1991-93
30. View from allée north to palace, early morning, 2023
31. View from allée north to palace, mid-morning, 2023
32. View from allée north to palace with usable lawn, 2023
33. Fontaine des Quatre-Parties-du-Monde at south end, 2023
34. South entry, Place André-Honorat and Rue Auguste-Comte, 2023
35. Flyover, *le quatorze juillet*, 2023
36. Paris when it drizzles, 1991-93









































































Notes

* Some of these views may be reminiscent of the photographs by Eugène Atget, who chronicled Paris during the transformation of the city by Louis Napoléon, Eugène Hausmann and Jean-Charles Alphand. I very much admired and studied Atget's work. He photographed old Paris that was being demolished and rebuilt, as well as Alphand's redesign of sites, such as the Jardin de Luxembourg - one of his most frequently photographed subjects. American photographer Berenice Abbott, who saved Atget's work following his death, described seeing his work for the first time in her book *The World of Atget*. She identified an approach to photography by Atget, that let the subject come forth in the images that resonated with me.

The first time I saw photographs by Eugène Atget was in 1925 in the studio of Man Ray in Paris. Their impact was immediate and tremendous. There was a sudden flash of recognition – the shock of realism unadorned. The subjects were not sensational, but nevertheless shocking in their very familiarity. The real world, seen with wonderment and surprise, was mirrored in each print. Whatever means Atget used to project the image did not intrude between subject and observer.”