

France 1987

In the summer of 1987, I was 26 years old, a couple years out of graduate school, and living in a derelict apartment outside of Boston. I had received an artist's residency in the South of France, and so, in August, I flew to Paris.

At the time, the photography world was pivoting to large color prints, to staged tableaux, and to various postmodernist gestures, but none of this concerned me. I was lost in the great work of the 1920s and 30s, particularly the photographers and filmmakers (Renoir, Vigo) of Paris. Back in 1985, the Museum of Modern Art in New York had shown the last of four installments on The Work of Atget - this remains for me photography's pinnacle. When the eye of Hurricane Gloria passed over New Haven in September of 1985, I was pouring over books on André Kertész in the basement library of Yale's Art and Architecture building. Kertész died in his sleep the following day in his Greenwich Village apartment. Brassai had died one year before Kertész, and I saw a memorial exhibition for him that MoMA quickly assembled. I also remember the Brassai exhibition at the University of Iowa Museum of Art that my mother, who was French, brought me to see when I was twelve.

When I arrived in Paris, I stayed a few weeks with close family friends in a top floor apartment on the Avenue de Wagram. My friends were working in fashion and film, and I was told my bed had once belonged to Jane Fonda before she became Barbarella. The weather was getting colder, and they gave me a brown corduroy jacket to wear that Jean Seberg (Godard's *Breathless*, Preminger's *Bonjour Tristesse*) had cried on. I would eat some breakfast and run around Paris photographing all day - hardly eating because I had no money - returning to their apartment for dinner and a glass of champagne.

Later in the year, I went to the South to begin my artist's residency at the Camargo Foundation, in Cassis, a town on the sea not far from Marseille. The writer Virginia Woolf, the pointillist Paul Signac, the fauvists André Derain and Raoul Dufy, and the Provençal poet Frédéric Mistral, had spent extended periods of time in Cassis. I took day trips from Cassis to Arles, Aix, Marseille, and Nice, and could process my film in the simple darkroom that was supplied to me. The Camargo Foundation helped me to gain access to a bullfight, a birthday party, and a boys' choir practice.

My uncle lived near the rose-brick city of Toulouse, and when I came to visit, we drove past fields of sheep into the Pyrénées. I spent time in the small town of Vers (my friends from Paris had a place there), near the Pont du Gard, the magnificent Roman aqueduct spanning a primordial river valley.

In 1987, there were no cell phones or digital cameras. To meet up with someone you had to set a time and a place and each of you had to stick to the plan. The seasons seemed to linger around more, and in general, everyone seemed to have more time. The parks, museums, and subways were less crowded. The rhythm of daily life was more relaxed. People were worried in 1987, but not as worried as we are now.