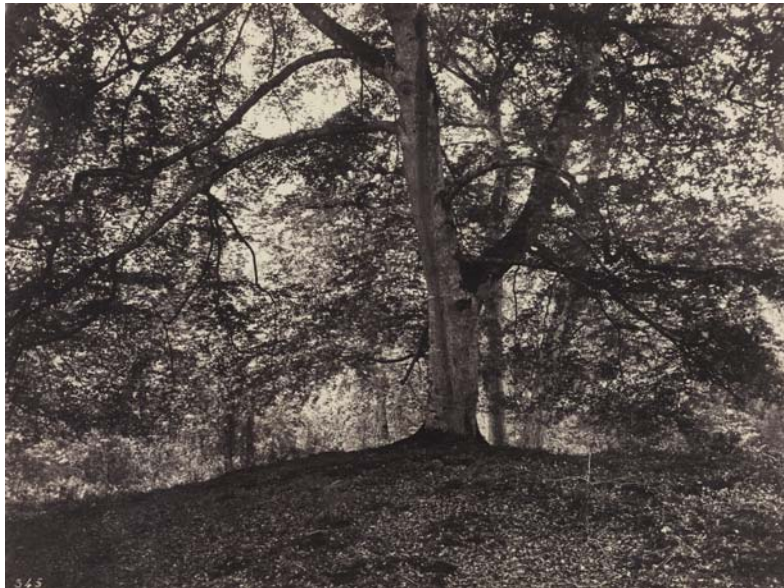


Press Release

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SOTHEBY'S TO OFFER *AN IMPORTANT COLLECTION OF EUGÈNE AND ADALBERT CUVELIER* ON APRIL 13, 2007



Pictured above: Eugène Cuvelier, *Hêtre pres du Bodmer*, est. \$80/120,000

SALE TO INCLUDE STUNNING PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE MYTHIC FOREST OF FONTAINEBLEAU

New York, New York - On April 13, 2007, Sotheby's will auction an unprecedented offering of photographs by Eugène Cuvelier, one of the 19th century's most fascinating, though little-known, photographers. *An Important Collection of Photographs by Eugène and Adalbert Cuvelier* will feature 41 photographs by Eugène, and two by his father, Adalbert. While a number of these rare photographs have been exhibited at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, and the Musée d'Orsay, many will be seen by the public for the first time at Sotheby's. The sale is expected to bring \$1.4/2.1 million*.

Working primarily in the mythic forest of Fontainebleau, Eugène Cuvelier was a cohort of many of the key painters in the Barbizon school. Cuvelier counted among his friends Camille Corot, Jean-François Millet, Théodore Rousseau, Charles-François Daubigny, and others. Like his painter friends, Cuvelier drew creative inspiration from the wild and varied terrain of the Fontainebleau forest. For both Eugène and Adalbert, photography was strictly an artistic pursuit – neither worked as a professional photographer, nor exhibited widely. And, while most of Eugène’s images are known in only one or two prints, only a handful of Adalbert’s are known to exist. The collection being offered by Sotheby’s is by far the largest group of Cuvelier photographs to be sold at auction, and it is distinguished by the superb quality of the prints, their nearly pristine condition, and their extraordinary provenance. The photographs were discovered in a Rhode Island auction in the late 1980s, in 19th-century packing crates with the stenciled address, ‘John C. Bancroft, Newport, R. I.’ As a young man, the New Englander John Chandler Bancroft studied painting in France in the early 1860s, and was connected to the painters of the Barbizon school. Sent to America in the 19th-century, the photographs remained unknown until their appearance at auction.



Many of Eugène’s Fontainebleau images capture the idyllic wildness of the forest’s interior, such as his masterful **Hêtre pres du Bodmer** (pictured on page 1, est. \$80/120,000), and **Village de Rivière** (pictured above, est.



\$60/90,000), both of which were featured in the Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition, *Eugène Cuvelier, Photographer in the Circle of Corot*, in 1997. **Franchard** (pictured here, est. \$40/60,000), documents the rugged and spare rock formations in the western portion of the forest. In other images, Eugène seems to delight in the chaos of nature: in **Belle-Croix** (pictured on page 3, top right, est. \$20/30,000) and **Près la Reine Blanche** (pictured on page 3, middle left, est. \$30/50,000), the wonderful confusion of branches and undergrowth

shows a photographer fascinated by the complexity of the natural world before him. Another image, of the dramatic oak tree known as **Le Clovis**, represented in this collection by both a salt print (pictured on page 3,

bottom right, est. \$40/60,000) and an albumen print (est. \$30/50,000), demonstrates the occasional starkness of the forest.

Born and raised in Arras, Cuvelier learned photography from his father, Adalbert, an accomplished practitioner of the new art. In an age when a photographer, by necessity, mixed his own chemicals and prepared his own paper negatives and printing paper, the Cuveliers were craftsmen of the first degree. Adalbert is known to art historians for having introduced first Corot, and then other Barbizon painters, to the *cliché-verre* process, a photographic method of printmaking in which the artist draws or etches on a prepared glass plate, which is then contact-printed onto photographically-sensitized paper. This process became



tremendously popular with artists, and both Adalbert and Eugène printed the glass plates for Corot, Rousseau, Daubigny, and others. One of the two photographs by Adalbert in the collection, **Along the Scarpe River, Near Arras** (pictured on page 4, est. \$80/120,000), shows a group of artists sketching under umbrellas along a picturesque river bank, and highlights both Cuveliers' involvement with artists.

Eugène first visited Fontainebleau in the 1850s. In 1859, he married Louise Ganne, daughter of Barbizon's principal innkeeper, Père Ganne (who billed himself as *hôtelier des artistes*). Corot and Rousseau served as official witnesses to their union. With its 42,000 acres of wild and varied topography – including old-growth forests, massive oak trees, dramatic rock formations, and picturesque glades – the royal forest of Fontainebleau provided 19th-century painters with a wealth of natural subject matter. By the 1850s, Fontainebleau forest and its towns, Barbizon among them, had become a welcoming rural bohemia to artists escaping the upheaval of the industrial revolution, the crowded conditions of the city, as well as the strictures of academic painting. Although Eugène worked in the company of the Barbizon painters, his work was in no way



imitative of the painting of his day. His photographs, all taken in the 1850s and 1860s – only the second and third decades of the medium’s existence – are subtle and sophisticated beyond expectation. In their keen-eyed, quiet objectivity, they strike us as precociously modern.



*Estimates do not include buyer’s premium

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For More Information, Please Contact Sotheby’s Press Office, 212 606 7176