

## **Brassai's Brouillard, Avenue de l' Observatoire (Observatory Avenue), 1934**

The J. Paul Getty museum recently offered an interesting exhibit by a well-known photographer, Brassai. *Brouillard, Avenue de l' Observatoire* (Observatory Avenue), 1934. Brassai's photograph offers a story of mystery and intrigue.

The image was shot at night on black and white film, depicting a car with its lights on parked near what looks like a park. The lighting gives an eerie, uneasy feeling to the observer. The street lamps highlight the fog and add interesting silhouettes of the park, but it is still not enough light to see the subjects in the car. Are there actually people in the car? What is happening?

Probably shot in Paris like a majority of his works, Brassai captures the light with such mystery and brilliance that you are not sure if you are observing the high life or the low life of Paris. One can imagine two lovers embracing; two Mafiosos exchanging secrets or a drug dealer and a wealthy addict making an exchange. That is the charm in the picture. Your imagination works overtime trying to decide what the eyes are seeing. It is what the "eyes" (or camera) doesn't see that adds a cold mystery.

The bottom third of the picture is almost completely black, again hinting to the mystery of the event. The lights from the car move diagonally toward the bottom corner of the picture giving it a beautiful, well thought out sense of composition. In addition, the intensity of the light (going from very strong to very soft and unfocused) adds texture and a sense of space to the photograph. The well thought out composition is also evident in the placement of the automobile, which is in the far right hand side of the photograph.

Observatory Avenue is full of symbolism. The leafless trees present a cold, almost evil feeling to the observer. The silhouette of the lone bench, the tall dark statue of a man hidden behind the car and another statue of a man barely visible in the background (toward the middle of the photograph) all help to suggest that something dark and mysterious is going on. It feels as the statues are secretly watching the event as it unfolds.

The sense of space in the photograph brings out a sort of gloomy, mysterious feeling. The dark bottom portion contrasted by the scattered bright light brings out the perplexity of the event. The vertical skinny trees scattered throughout the middle of the photograph and the small building in the center balances well with the horizontal lights from the car. There is no doubt in my mind that Brassai's *Brouillard, Avenue de l' Observatoire* is worth seeing. It is truly a beautiful masterpiece.

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