

L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

Beyond the print : Interview with Patrick Gagey by Nadine Dinter

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Nadine Dinter

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I met **Patrick Gagey** back in 2022, when I was strolling along the rue du Docteur Fanton and discovered his shop-boutique “**La Valise Arlésienne**”. Once entered, I entered his very unique universe, bringing together photographic antiquities, valuable prints and curiosities, and asked him for a little tour... the rest is history. So let us take you to Patrick’s world – enjoy the read!

Nadine Dinter: When was “**La Valise Arlésienne**” founded? And what does it stand for?

Patrick Gagey : La *La Valise Arlésienne* was founded in 2021 following a long period of reflection. For several years, as antique hunters and collectors of ‘historical’ photography, we had found that only a handful of specialist fairs and markets allowed us, on occasion, to discover a few fine pieces. That is why we wanted to create a space that showcases these objects by placing them within the history of photography and, in doing so, to act as custodians.

Who came up with the name “La Valise Arlésienne” and why?

PG : In 2011, Les Rencontres de la Photographie presented ‘La Valise Mexicaine’ in Arles, which recounted the incredible story of these 4,500 photographs by Capa, Taro and Chim, lost for nearly 50 years and miraculously rescued from oblivion. It struck us my wife Céline, who is the gallery’s director, and I that this nod to *La Valise Mexicaine* perfectly symbolised our desire to showcase the hidden treasures of the history of photography. *La Valise Arlésienne* was born.

At your “boutique”, you bring together photographic subjects that people would have to look for in several places : vintage photographs, old photographic devices and curiosities as well as memorabilia. Describe your concept in one sentence, please.

PG : Beyond the concept itself, it is our passion for photography that drives us to showcase, share and pass on these little stories within the grand tapestry of history. Like a cabinet of curiosities, we offer original prints, collector’s-grade cameras, technical and monographic editions, and rare and unique photographic artefacts dating from the 1840s to the 1930s. We have created the place we have always dreamt of discovering...

Before opening the boutique, you worked as a curator, photographer, journalist, jury member... what activity/role do you miss the most?

PG : Indeed, I have been fortunate enough to work in the cultural sector, for the most part as a director of cultural affairs. It is in this capacity that I have been able to take on a variety of roles that have been as exciting as they have been enriching. All these experiences have enriched me, and each one has helped to ensure that every encounter is a shared experience. I still have vivid memories of this, which stay with me every day...

What was the object you started out with and the one that sparked your interest to keep on doing what you do?

PG : In 1989 (that was a long time ago!...), as a young student on a Master’s degree in Cultural Studies, I discovered the exhibition ‘The Invention of a Gaze (1839–1918)’ at the Musée d’Orsay which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year to mark the 150th anniversary of the birth of photography. It was an aesthetic revelation that has stayed with me ever since. Although, in my role as a curator, I have frequently exhibited the work of modern and contemporary photographers, this era of photography’s pioneers has always fascinated me to such an extent that I am now one of its proud ‘ambassadors’.

Is there a best-selling category or object that people acquire about ?

PG : Sometimes we focus on a particular object, technique or themed exhibition, so it’s only natural that our customers are drawn to our presentation. But overall, we see ourselves as specialists in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and we know how to tell

the story behind every object and print; we are dealers in history.

You are based right in the heart of the photo capital Arles. Do you think that “La Valise Arlésienne” would work in any other city as well as it does in Arles?

PG : Yes, but without us! Arles is a captivating city, a capital of photography with a wealth of cultural events all year round. Its strong Roman heritage gives it a rugged atmosphere and that fabulous light so dear to Van Gogh. We're lucky enough to live there on holiday...

As of this summer, you have added a gallery space to the boutique. Please tell us a little bit more about it.

PG : La Valise Arlésienne is a showcase that can only display a small selection of our collections. We were very keen to organise themed exhibitions, and we are finally bringing this project to fruition with a space dedicated to 19th-century photography. Here, we will offer several 'journeys' through the history of photography.

What show will be premiering during Les Rencontres?

PG : For this inaugural exhibition, La Valise Arlésienne presents 'Le Voyage en Égypte' (A Journey to Egypt), a collection of original prints from the 1850s to the 1880s – a pivotal period when photography, still in its infancy, became a tool for discovery and documentation, revealing the magic and mysteries of nineteenth-century Egypt. Through around a hundred period prints, these photographs – which are both historical documents and works of art bear witness to the encounter between the West and the East, and to the birth of tourism in Egypt following the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. They also offer a unique insight into a country undergoing profound transformation. Each print in this collection is both an intimate work of art and a historical document.

What's the drive that keep you going?

PG : Passion, dedication and the joy of sharing this passion with our visitors, from the complete beginner to the most experienced. To grow, exchange ideas and learn, every day.

**“Le Voyage en Égypte” is on view from July 4th through October 4, 2026
At La Valise Arlésienne, 8 rue du Docteur Fanton, 13200 Arles, France**

**For more information, please visit: www.lavalisearlesienne.com and follow:
[@la_valise_arlesienne](https://www.instagram.com/la_valise_arlesienne)**