

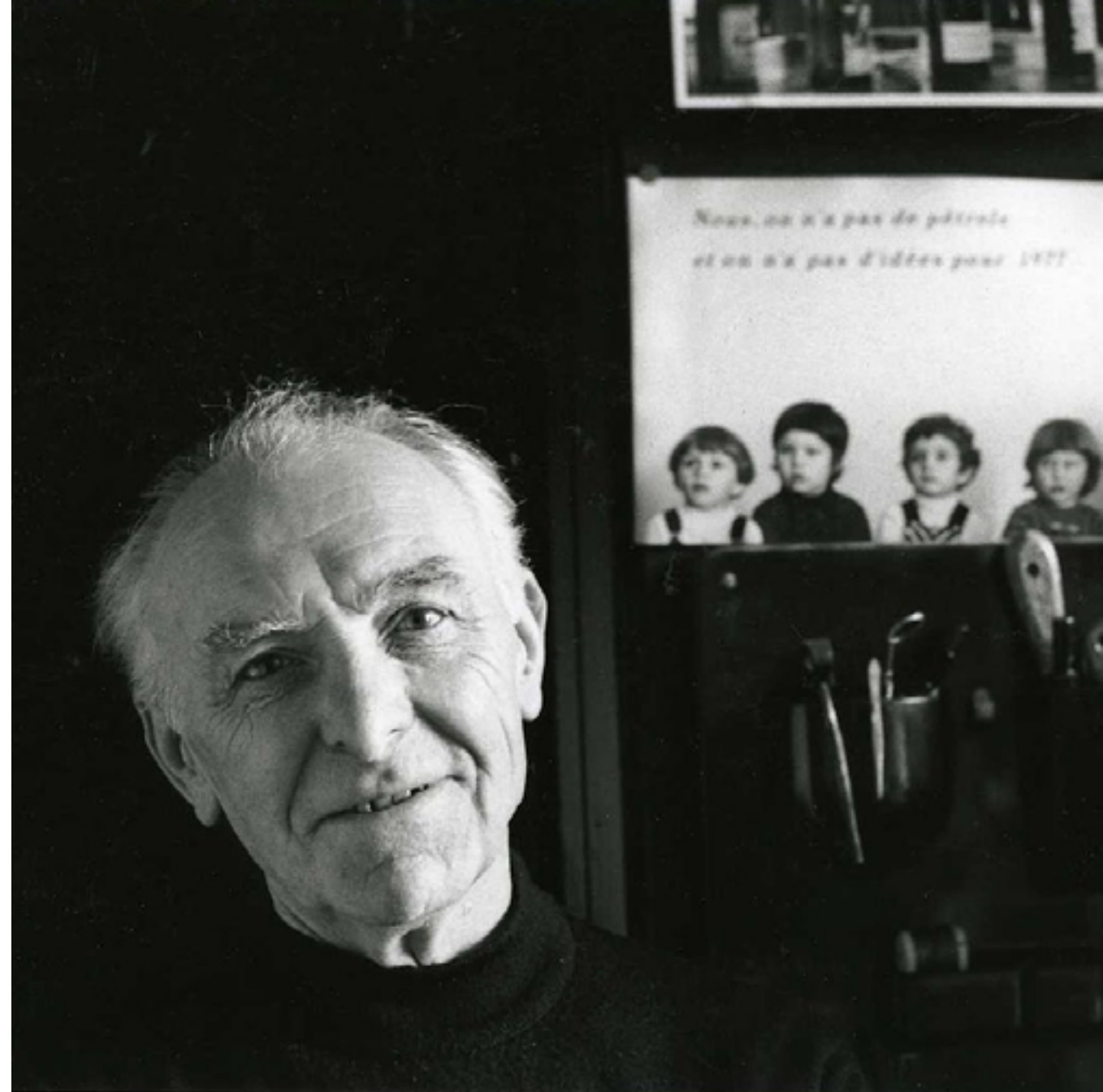
*Robert
Doisneau*

**FRENCH
PHOTOGRAPHER**

*Doisneau
photographed by
Bracha L. Ettinger*

Moutrouge, 1992

ROBERT DOISNEAU was a French photographer. In the 1930s he used a Leica on the streets of Paris. He and Henri Cartier-Bresson were pioneers of photojournalism.² He is renowned for his 1950 image *Le baiser de l'hôtel de ville* (*Kiss by the Town Hall*), a photograph of a couple kissing in the busy streets of Paris. Doisneau was appointed a Chevalier (Knight) of the Legion of Honour in 1984.



BORN	Robert Doisneau 14 April 1912 Gentilly, Val-de-Marne, Paris
DIED	1 April 1994 (<i>aged 81</i>) Montrouge, Paris
CAUSE OF DEATH	Acute pancreatitis
RESTING PLACE	Raizeux
NATIONALITY	French
EDUCATION	École Estienne, 1929 graduate, diplomas in engraving and lithography
OCCUPATION	Photographer, engraver
KNOWN FOR	Street photography
INFLUENCED BY	Henri Cartier-Bresson, André Kertész, Eugène Atget
TITLE	Chevalier of the Order of the Legion of Honour
SPOUSE(S)	Pierrette (<i>née Chaumaison</i>)
CHILDREN	Annette (<i>born 1942</i>) Francine (<i>born 1947</i>)

Photographic career

Doisneau was known for his modest, playful, and ironic images of amusing juxtapositions, mingling social classes, and eccentrics in contemporary Paris streets and cafes. Influenced by the work of André Kertész, Eugène Atget, and Henri Cartier-Bresson, in more than twenty books he presented a charming vision of human frailty and life as a series of quiet, incongruous moments.

Doisneau's work gives unusual prominence and dignity to children's street culture; returning again and again to the theme of children at play in the city, unfettered by parents. His work treats their play with seriousness and respect. In his honour, and owing to this, there are several Ecole Primaire (primary schools) named after him. An example is at Vézetz (Indre-et-Loire).

*The marvels of daily life are so exciting;
no movie director can arrange the
unexpected that you find in the street.*

— ROBERT DOISNEAU

Early life

Doisneau's father, a plumber, died in active service in World War I when Robert was about four. His mother died when he was seven. He then was raised by an unloving aunt.^{1,3}

At thirteen he enrolled at the École Estienne, a craft school from which he graduated in 1929 with diplomas in engraving and lithography. There he had his first contact with the arts, taking classes in figure drawing and still life.

When he was 16 he took up amateur photography, but was reportedly so shy that he started by photographing cobble-stones before progressing to children and then adults.³

At the end of the 1920s Doisneau found work as a draughtsman (lettering artist) in the advertising industry at Atelier Ullmann (Ullmann Studio), a creative graphics studio that specialised in the pharmaceutical industry. Here he took an opportunity to change career by also acting as camera assistant in the studio and then becoming a staff photographer.^{3,4,5}



Le Remorqueur du Champs de Mars

Paris, 1948

Photography in the 1930s

In 1931 he left both the studio and advertising, taking a job as an assistant with the modernist photographer André Vigneau.^{3,4,5}

In 1932 he sold his first photographic story to *Excelsior* magazine.¹

In 1934 he began working as an industrial advertising photographer for the Renault car factory at Boulogne-Billancourt.³ Working at Renault increased Doisneau's interest in working with photography and people. In 1991 he admitted that the years at the Renault car factory marked "the beginning of his career as a photographer and the end of his youth." Five years later, in 1939, he was fired because he constantly was late. He was forced to try freelance advertising, engraving, and postcard photography to earn his living. At that time the French postcard industry was the largest in Europe, postcards served as greetings cards as well as vacation souvenirs.⁶

In 1939 he was hired by Charles Rado of the Rapho photographic agency and travelled throughout France in search of picture stories. This is where he took his first professional street photographs.

War service and resistance

Doisneau worked at Rapho until the outbreak of World War II, whereupon he was drafted into the French army as both a soldier and photographer. He was in the army until 1940 and from then until the end of the war in 1945 used his draughtsmanship, lettering artistry, and engraving skills to forge passports and identification papers for the French Resistance.

Post-war photography

Some of Doisneau's most memorable photographs were taken after the war. He returned to freelance photography and sold photographs to Life and other international magazines. He briefly joined the Alliance Photo Agency but rejoined the Rapho agency in 1946 and remained with them throughout his working life, despite receiving an invitation from Henri Cartier-Bresson to join Magnum Photos.^{1,6}

His photographs never ridiculed the subjects; thus he refused to photograph women whose heads had been shaved as punishment for sleeping with Germans.³

In 1948 he was contracted by Vogue to work as a fashion photographer. The editors believed he would bring a fresh and more casual look the magazine but Doisneau didn't enjoy photographing beautiful women in elegant surroundings; he preferred street photography. When he could escape from the studio, he photographed ever more in the streets of Paris.

Group XV was established in 1946 in Paris to promote photography as art and drawing attention to the preservation of French photographic heritage. Doisneau joined the Group in 1950 and participated alongside Rene-Jacques, Willy Ronis, and Pierre Jahan.

The 1950s were Doisneau's peak, but the 1960s were his wilderness years. In the 1970s Europe began to change and editors looked for new reportage that would show the sense of a new social era. All over Europe, the old-style picture magazines were closing as television received the public's attention. Doisneau continued to work, producing children's books, advertising photography, and celebrity portraits including Alberto Giacometti, Jean Cocteau, Fernand Léger, Georges Braque, and Pablo Picasso.

Doisneau worked with writers and poets such as Blaise Cendrars and Jacques Prévert, and he credited Prévert with giving him the confidence to photograph the everyday street scenes that most people simply ignored.¹

*Le Baiser de
l'Hotel de Ville
Paris, 1950*



Le baiser de l'hôtel de ville

In 1950 Doisneau created his most recognizable work for Life — *Le baiser de l'hôtel de ville* (*Kiss by the Hôtel de Ville*), a photograph of a couple kissing in the busy streets of Paris,⁷ which became an internationally recognised symbol of young love in Paris. The identity of the couple remained a mystery until 1992.⁸

Jean and Denise Lavergne erroneously believed themselves to be the couple in *The Kiss*, and when Robert and Annette (his older daughter and also his assistant at the time) met them for lunch in the 1980s he “did not want to shatter their dream” so he said nothing. This resulted in them taking him to court for “taking their picture without their knowledge”, because under French law an individual owns the rights to their own likeness. The court action forced Doisneau to reveal that he posed the shot using Françoise Delbart and Jacques Carteaud, lovers whom he had just seen kissing, but had not photographed initially because of his natural reserve; he approached them and asked if they would repeat the kiss. He won the court case against the Lavergnes.^{1,3,9,10}

The couple in *Le baiser* were Françoise Delbart, 20, and Jacques Carteaud, 23, both aspiring actors. In 2005 Françoise Bornet (née Delbart) stated that, “He told us we were charming, and asked if we could kiss again for the camera. We didn’t mind. We were used to kissing. We were doing it all the time then, it was delicious. Monsieur Doisneau was adorable, very low key, very relaxed.” They posed at the Place de la Concorde, the Rue de Rivoli and finally the Hôtel de Ville. The photograph was published in the 12 June 1950, issue of Life.¹⁰ The relationship between Delbart and Carteaud only lasted for nine months.⁹ Delbart continued her acting career, but Carteaud gave up acting to become a wine producer.⁸

In 1950 Françoise Bornet was given an original print of the photograph, bearing Doisneau’s signature and stamp, as part of the payment for her “work”, and thus her subsequent attempt at litigation in the 1990s was rejected by the court.^{3,8} In April 2005 she sold the print at auction for €155,000 to an unidentified Swiss collector via the Paris auctioneers Artcurial Briest-Poulain-Le Fur.^{3,8,11}



Le Violoncellist

France, 1957

Personal life

In 1936 Doisneau married Pierrette Chaumaison whom he had met in 1934 when she was cycling through a village where he was on holiday. They had two daughters, Annette and Francine. From 1979 until his death, Annette worked as his assistant.³

Pierrette died in 1993 suffering from Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease. Doisneau died six months later, having had a triple heart bypass and suffering from acute pancreatitis. Annette said "We won in the courts (*re: The Kiss*), but my father was deeply shocked. He discovered a world of lies, and it hurt him... Add that to my mother suffering from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, and I think it's fair to say he died of sadness."³

Doisneau was in many ways a shy and humble man, similar to his photography, still delivering his own work at the height of his fame. He chastised Francine for charging an "indecent" daily fee of £2,000 for his work on a beer advertising campaign.

He lived in southern Paris (Gentilly, Val-de-Marne, Montrouge, and 13th arrondissement of Paris) throughout his life and died in 1994. He is buried in the cemetery at Raizeux beside his wife, Pierrette.

Awards and commemoration

Robert Doisneau was appointed a Chevalier of the Order of the Legion of Honour in 1984.¹ He won several awards throughout his life, including: the Balzac Prize in 1986 (*Honoré de Balzac*), the *Grand Prix National de la Photographie* in 1983, the Niépce Prize in 1956 (*Nicéphore Niépce*), and the Kodak Prize in 1947.

A short film, *Le Paris de Robert Doisneau*, was made in 1973. In 1992 the French actress and producer Sabine Azéma made the film *Bonjour Monsieur Doisneau*.

In 1991 The Royal Photographic Society awarded Robert Doisneau an Honorary Fellowship (HonFRPRS) which is given to distinguished persons having, from their position or attainments, an intimate connection with the science or fine art of photography of The Society.¹²

The Maison de la photographie Robert Doisneau in Gentilly, Val-de-Marne, is a photographic gallery named in his honour.

The photography of Doisneau has had a revival since his death in 1994. Many of his portraits and photographs of Paris from the end of World War II through the 1950s have been turned into calendars and postcards, and have become icons of French life.



*Les jardins du
Champ de Mars*

Paris, 1944

Exhibitions

1947 Exhibition / SALON DE LA PHOTO, BIBLIOTHÈQUE, PARIS

1951 Exhibition with Brassai, Willy Ronis, and Izis / MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, NEW YORK

1960 Solo exhibition / MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, CHICAGO.

1965 *Six Photographes et Paris*, with Daniel Frasnay, Jean Lattès, Jeanine Niépce, Roger Pic, and Willy Ronis / MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS, PARIS

Exhibition with Henri Cartier-Bresson and André Vigneau / MUSÉE RÉATTU, ARLES

Solo exhibition / BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE, PARIS

Exhibition with D. Brihat, J. P. Sudre, and L. Clergue / MUSÉE CANTINI DE MARSEILLES

1972 Solo exhibition / INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY AT
GEORGE EASTMAN HOUSE, ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

1972 Exhibition with Edouard Boubat, Brassai, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Izis, and Willy Ronis / FRENCH EMBASSY, MOSCOW

1974 Solo exhibition / UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT DAVIS
Solo exhibition, / GALERIE DU CHÂTEAU D'EAU, TOULOUSE

1975 Solo exhibition / WITKIN GALLERY, NEW YORK
Exhibition / MUSÉE RÉATTU ARTS DÉCORATIFS, NANTES
Exhibition / MUSÉE RÉATTU, ARLES

1975 Solo exhibition / GALERIE ET FILS, BRUSSELS
Solo exhibition / FNAC, LYONS
Expression de l'humor: group exhibition / BOULOGNE BILLANCOURT
Solo exhibition / GALERIE NEUGEBAUER, BASEL

1976 Exhibition with Brassai, Cartier-Bresson, Jean-Philippe Charbonnier, Izis, and Marc Riboud / KRAKÓW

1977 Solo exhibition / BRUSSELS
Six Photographes en quête de banlieue, with Guy la Querrec, Carlos Freire, Claude Raimond-Dityvon, Bernard Descamps, Jean Lattès / CENTRE GEORGES POMPIDOU, PARIS

1978 *Ne Bougeons plus*: solo exhibition / GALERIE AGATHE GAILLARD, PARIS
Solo exhibition / WITKIN GALLERY, NEW YORK
Solo exhibition / MUSÉE NICÉPHORE NIÉPCE, CHARLON-SUR-SAÔNE

1979 *Les passants qui passent*: solo exhibition, / MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE, PARIS

1980 Solo exhibition / AMSTERDAM

1981 Solo exhibition / WITKIN GALLERY, NEW YORK

1982 *Portraits*: Solo exhibition / FOUNDATION NATIONALE DE LA PHOTOPRAPHIE, LYONS

Solo exhibition / FRENCH EMBASSY, NEW YORK

Robert Doisneau, Photographe de banlieue / TOWN HALL, GENTILLY

Solo exhibition / PALACE OF FINE ARTS, BEIJING

Exhibition of portraits / TOKYO

Robert Doisneau: Photographie du dimanche / INSTITUT LUMIÈRE, LYON

1986 *De Vogue à femme*: group exhibition / RENCONTRES INTERNATIONALES
DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE D'ARLES

1987 Solo exhibition / MUSÉE DE ST. DENIS

Solo exhibition / THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, KYOTO

1988 *A Homage to Robert Doisneau* / VILLA MEDICIS, ROTME

1989 *Doisneau-Renault* / GRANDE HALLE DE LA VILLETTE, PARIS

1990 *La Science de Doisneau* / JARDIN DES PLANTES, PARIS

1992 *Robert Doisneau: A Retrospective* / MODERN ART OXFORD

1993 The Summerlee Heritage Trust / COATBRIDGE, SCOTLAND

Exhibition / ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL, LONDON

Exhibition / MANCHESTER CITY ART GALLERY

Exhibition at the *O Mes da Fotografia* festival / CONVENTO DO BEATO, LISBON

Exhibition / MUSÉE CARNAVALET, PARIS

1994 *Hommage à Robert Doisneau* / FESTIVAL DES RENCONTRES D'ARLES, FRANCE

Exhibition / MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL, CANADA

Exhibition / GALWAY ARTS CENTRE, IRELAND

A Homage to Robert Doisneau / GALERIE DU CHÂTEAU D'EAU À TOULOUSE

Doisneau 40/44 / CENTRE D'HISTOIRE DE LA RÉSISTANCE ET DE LA DÉPORTATION, LYON

Robert Doisneau ou la désobéissance / ECOMUSÉE DE FRESNAIS

1995 Exhibition / MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, OXFORD, ENGLAND

Exhibition / ABERDEEN ART GALLERY, SCOTLAND

Exhibition / THE MEAD GALLERY, WARWICK ARTS CENTRE, COVENTRY

1996 *Montpellier Photo-Visions* / GALERIE MUNICIPALE DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE
Exhibition / ISETAN MUSEUM OF ART, TOKYO
Exhibition / DAIMARU MUSEUM, OSAKA, JAPAN

2000 Exhibition / GRAVITÉS, PARIS
Exhibition / GALERIE CLAUDE BERNARD, PARIS

2002 Exhibition / MUSEO NACIONAL DE BELLAS ARTES, SANTIAGO, CHILE

2003 Exhibition / BUDAPEST, HUNGARY
Exhibition / BUCHAREST, ROMANIA
Exhibition / GALERIE CLAUDE BERNARD, PARIS

2005 *Robert Doisneau from the Fictional to the Real* / BRUCE SILVERSTEIN GALLERY, NEW YORK
Robert Doisneau / GALERIE CLAUDE BERNARD, PARIS

2010 *Robert Doisneau, Du métier a l'oeuvre* / FONDATION HENRI CARTIER BRESSON, PARIS
Discoveries: group exhibition / BRUCE SILVERSTEIN GALLERY, NEW YORK
Robert Doisneau, the fisherman of images / THE SPACE FOR ART OF CAJA MADRID
ZARAGOZA, ARANJUEZ, MADRID

2011 *Night*: group exhibition / BRUCE SILVERSTEIN GALLERY, NEW YORK

