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**ROBERT DOISNEAU EXHIBITION AT THE MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN : A NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE STARTING JANUARY 21**

Montreal, January 12, 1994. The Musée d'art contemporain presents, starting January 21, an important retrospective of a major figure in the history of French photography, Robert Doisneau. Organized by the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, England, the **ROBERT DOISNEAU** exhibition brings together over 250 photographs taken between 1929 and 1992. A North American premiere, the exhibition continues until April 24.

**A humanistic approach**

While the **ROBERT DOISNEAU** retrospective uncovers images taken with a profound sense of humanity, it also illustrates the role of Doisneau's *reportage* photography as a witness to the standards of living of French society's working class.

The curator responsible for the exhibition in Montreal, Sandra Grant Marchand, states that "throughout his artistic career which spanned more than 60 years, Doisneau maintained a humanistic approach to a primarily urban reality, and his favourite theme was always the everyday life of the working class, in Paris and its suburbs."

Known primarily for his *Le Baiser de l'Hôtel de Ville* (1950), Doisneau and his photography have led us to consider his work, according to the curator of the exhibition, Peter Hamilton, "from an exclusively romantic perspective, thus overlooking the considerable contribution made to increasing awareness of the social realities of France, and of the conflicts and barriers that tear it apart... The spirit of "insubordination", to which Doisneau often repeatedly refers, has nourished his entire career, from his earliest works picturing street children in the firing ranges of Parisian suburbs in the 1920's, to his most recent photographs of the inhabitants of his home town, Gently."

The exhibition brings together for the first time, in addition to 250 photographs, an important and as yet unseen collection of contact sheets, original prints and publications in which Doisneau's first photographs appeared. Personal correspondence, family portraits and his cameras complete the exhibit.

**The Modesty of Robert Doisneau**, a text written by the Musée, relates a moving portrait of the artist. Danielle Legentil underlines the delicacy with which Doisneau treats his subjects. "He believes that there are secret areas into which one should not enter. Whenever there is a scene that is overly personal taking place before him, he is perturbed:

*In apology for having been a witness, a voyeur of such a tender and moving moment, I leave...and I take refuge in humour.*

It is this discretion, this consideration and concern for his subjects, which allows Doisneau to capture his "snapshots of the soul.""

Robert Doisneau was born in the Paris suburb of Gentilly on April 14, 1912. After training as a lithographer, he became a letterer for the Atelier Ullmann, a commercial art studio in Paris. It was there that he made his move into photography as a profession. It would become a long adventure leading to his employment as an industrial photographer at the Renault factories among others, then at *Vogue* as a fashion photographer and later at *Life* as a reporter. In 1939, having decided officially to make photography his lifelong profession, he joined the Rapho agency which still distributes his photographs to this day.

This exhibition was presented for the first time in Oxford on 1991 and has since been shown in the European cities of Aberdeen, London, Manchester and Lisbon. It will be on view in Ireland in April '94 and next year, in Paris.

The **ROBERT DOISNEAU** exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue of 107 photographs by the artist. This book constitutes the first text which spans the entire career of the celebrated artist. Written by Peter Hamilton, curator of the exhibition, it situates Doisneau's work within its proper context and analyses the approach which produced such a remarkable diversity of images. The catalogue sells for \$29.95 in the Artexpte bookshop at the Musée.

Journalist Nathalie Pétrowski will comment on the works of Robert Doisneau, **Sunday, January 23 at 3 p.m.** Free admission.

## **2 lectures on Doisneau's work**

In addition, the Musée will hold two lectures on "Photography and History". On **February 9**, philosopher and historian André Gunthert, who teaches at the Université de Paris - Saint-Denis, will speak about the beginnings of instant photography in Europe in the late 19th century. On **February 16**, Pénélope Cousineau, a historian teaching at Concordia University, will present a panorama of the last fifty years of Canadian photography in relation to Robert Doisneau's aesthetics. Lectures are at 6:30 p.m. in the Cinquième salle at Place des Arts and admission is free.

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