



Robert Doisneau: *Le baiser de L'Hôtel de Ville, Paris* (also known as "The Kiss"), 1950)

There is scarcely a photograph of our times that has achieved the popularity of Robert Doisneau's *The Kiss in Front of City Hall*. The image of a fleeting embrace has become an icon of Paris par excellence. Moreover, as a gripping metaphor of the sense of post-war life, the photograph brought its creator not only fame and wealth.

This time, he dared to come in closer. Usually, however, he kept his distance and tried to remain unnoticed. Robert Doisneau was fond of citing his intrinsic shyness as the reason for his restraint as a photographer. Making necessity a virtue, he had eventually transformed keeping his distance into a pictorial style that applied to the entire social and architectural environment of the city. Doisneau is the photographer of the big picture. But if the French term *chasseur d'images* - literally, picture hunter - is recognized throughout the world as a description for the action of the photographer, Robert Doisneau always understood himself in contrast as a *pecheur d'images*, a fisher of images, that is, a photographer who waited patiently until the stream of life cast its more or less rich booty before his feet - a "bystander", who lifted discretion to a pinnacle and placed it at the heart of all his work. In this sense, Doisneau has entered the history of photography as the master of the 'candid camera'. Or rather, he would have liked to have been so recognized, if a widely publicized series of international law suits toward the end of his life had not revealed that he - Doisneau himself - had helped set up the events that are depicted in his photographs.

In any case, what is probably his most famous picture, "The Kiss in Front of City Hall", was, as we now know, the result of a scene staged with the help of a hired actor and actress. But what does this fact mean for the reception and understanding of a photograph that functions as a 'popular icon' and is one of the most well-known photographic creations of its century?

In 1950 he created his most recognizable work for Life – "Le baiser de l'hôtel de ville (Kiss by the Hôtel de Ville)", a photo of a couple kissing in the busy streets of Paris, which became an internationally recognised symbol of young love in Paris. The identity of the couple remained a mystery until 1992.

Jean and Denise Lavergne erroneously believed themselves to be the couple in "The Kiss", and when Robert and Annette 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 initially photographed because of his natural reserve, but he approached them and asked if they would repeat le baiser. He won the court case against the Lavernes.

"I would never have dared to photograph people like that. Lovers kissing in the street, those couples are rarely legitimate." The couple in *Le baiser* were Françoise Delbart, 20, and Jacques Carteaud, 23, both aspiring actors. In 2005 Françoise 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."

<http://onlyoldphotography.tumblr.com/post/27941436702/robert-doisneau-le-baiser-de-lh%C3%B4tel-de-ville>