Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Photographing people in places

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, November 4th, 2020

The feature image …

… taken by **R. Doisneau,** shows clearly the ***mutual interaction of people and place in defining a particular situation***, in this case the use of a derelict blank wall as a blackboard by a young girl playing at being a school mistress to her younger sibling.

In this post I have selected some images taken by **R. Doisneau** and others by his compatriot **M. Riboud** in order to compare the different way they photographically handle that mutual interaction of people and place.

Introducing R. Doisneau and M. Riboud

Whereas, **Doisnea*u*** is the typical poetic ***people-observing Parisian flaneur***, **Riboud** is the typical sharpshooting ***globe-trotting event and place recording photographer***.

What attracts **Doisneau,** is the *direct capture of the expression, the posture, the unique and the personal* ***with no intermediate*** … and he does it with sensitivity and humor.

As I see it, ***Doisneau*** considers **people as the essential ingredient in establishing *a photographic sense of situation,*** (as shown below).

Doisneau: the two brothers, Paris 1934

What attracts **Riboud**, is the *capture of a* ***whole scene,*** *with what elements of* ***place and people*** *contribute to understanding it,* and he does it clearly, and sometimes inventively.

As I see it, ***Riboud*** considers **place as the essential ingredient in establishing a *photographic sense of situation,*** (as shown below)

Riboud: Hydroelectric construction, Turkey, 1955

The selection

I have selected three pairs of images based on similar situations in order to illustrate the different approaches of **Doisneau** and **Riboud.**

A café scene

In **Doisneau's** image, taken from behind the counter, nothing detracts from the congeniality of the Parisian café, *with attention given to the personal situation and the particular relation of the standing customers to the server*: a coal delivery man, a wedding party and an office clerk on a break (as shown below)!

Doisneau: Black and white café, Paris 1948

Riboud's image is taken of an Istanbul mosque-neighboring café through a window, *partly covered with religious and political posters and with photographs of the customers-filled café, framing a glimpse of the outdoor terrace and the streetscape beyond … with not a live person in it! (as shown below).*

Riboud: A neighborhood café, Istanbul, Turkey, 1998

A sidewalk scene

In this image, **Doisneau** records a gathering of employees and/or residents taking a break on the sidewalk in front of the building they work in, *the direct and clear view of the scene, produces in the viewer a sense of being part of it. (as shown below).*

Doisneau: Mailmen and pedicures, Paris, 1949

In this image, **Riboud,** elects to place his point of view behind a store window *that structures the image in three parts, roughly corresponding to the various groupings of people.*

Doing this seems to arise the curiosity of children in the street who, peeping at him through the store window, giving the scene an added situational dimension. (as shown below).

Riboud: Peking, China, 1965

People in the street … streets with people

Doisneau chose to call his image of a young family group standing at a street corner " *The children of Place Hébert – Paris 18ème – 1957" … by doing so he confirms his attraction to* ***people's expression, posture and dress in order to socially characterize their relationship to a place.*** *(as shown below)*

Doisneau: The children of Place Hébert, Paris, 1958

Riboud chose to call his image simply *"Leeds, England, 1954*" and, by doing so, ***assumed that the obvious working-class neighborhood of the place would by itself socially characterize the situation of the people in it.*** *(as shown below)*

Riboud: Leeds, England, 1954

End words

These belong to the two photographers quoted in the volumes devoted to their work. (See Credit and bibliography)

Doisneau said of Paris that it was like a " ***… theatre where you book your seat with time waiting. And I am still waiting"***

Riboud mentioned that Henri Cartier-Bresson once told him: ***"Marc, you were born with a compass in your eye***"

Credit and bibliography

The images and their legends, by **R. Doisneau,** were taken from: **Gautrand, J-C**, *Robert Doisneau 1912-1994*, Taschen, Köln, 2003

The images and their legends, by **M. Riboud,** were taken from: **Riboud & B. Eveno**, *Marc Riboud – paroles d'un taciturne*, Delpire, Paris, 2012

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