



Controversies

A legal and ethical history of photography

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Since its invention in 1839, photography has provoked numerous legal, ethical and political controversies. A history of these conflicts reveals how society and ordinary people have related to the image of their time. In every area and genre – art, politics, science, journalism, fashion or advertising – photography has been subjected to the judgments of law courts, public opinion or private individuals. It is at the crossroads of artistic licence and the rights of individuals to control the use of their own image. Photographs have therefore regularly been confronted with censorship, destruction or manipulation and most of the major photographers of the 19th and 20th centuries have had to face legal proceedings.

The Musée de l'Elysée presents a large selection of photographs, well known and lesser known, which were the target of legal proceedings and various intense controversies. The photographs cover the history of photography from its early days until contemporary expression. The selection helps us to better understand how different societies and cultures have interpreted images from their own times. Today, such photographs allow us to debate the images with a critical eye. A book published by Actes Sud and the Musée de l'Elysée accompanies the exhibition.

“Controversies, a Legal and Ethical History of Photography” is produced by the Musée de l'Elysée. Curators of the exhibition: Daniel Girardin, curator of the Musée de l'Elysée, and Mr Christian Pirker, lawyer based in Geneva.