

# ARTCURIAL

Press release



## *Willy Ronis, Iconic & Unseen*

Stéphane Kovalsky Collection  
Sale on 15 December 2021, Paris

On 15 December 2021, Artcurial will pay tribute to the photographic work of Willy Ronis, with some 200 exceptional photos coming under the hammer. There are both iconic and more intimate images tracing the career of this renowned photographer. An event not to be missed by collectors worldwide who will have an exclusive opportunity to discover both emblematic and previously unseen prints.

PARIS – Following the highly successful first sale of photographs from the Stéphane Kovalsky Collection in 2016, Artcurial is delighted to present the second part of the sale : *Willy Ronis : incontournables & inédits, Collection Stéphane Kovalsky*, taking place on 15 December in Paris. In the run-up to the sale, a selection of lots will be unveiled from 10 November during Paris Photo, for the delight of collectors. The sale, comprising over 200 works of both iconic and more intimate images, looks back at the career of this important artist photographer, who was friends

with Henri Cartier-Bresson, Robert Doisneau and Edouard Boubat.

The photographs in the sale all come from the estate of Willy Ronis, one of the collections of Stéphane Kovalsky, the artist's grandson. He would like, with this sale, to pay a personal tribute to his grandfather, as well as recall his place in the history of photography during the second half of the 20th century.

***« I am pleased to be involved with another important stage in the history of my grandfather's work. With this sale, I am happy to be giving individuals access to the intimacy of his work, by selling prints that he conceived, refined and painstakingly perfected. Amongst the photos, there are certain iconic images of Paris, Provence as well as rarer, little seen images of the GDR. I think that my grandfather would have been happy to know that his photos were continuing their existence in this way. »***

- Stéphane Kovalsky,  
Willy Ronis's grandson

***« You saw the world with your own sweet and melancholic sensibility. You only took photos filled with love and gratitude for what was given to you to see : the beauty of light, the compassion of small moments, the gracefulness of women, the tenderness that children inspire in us. However, you have never hidden your anger, your sense of solidarity, and have accompanied social struggles through your images, portrayed the most deprived faces, those that we never saw, and above all, you defended the dignity of their image, their nobility and their beauty. »***

- Francine Deroudille,  
Robert Doisneau's daughter



Willy RONIS (1910 - 2009)  
*Fondamenta nuove - Venise*, 1959  
Silver print signed in ink in the  
lower right-hand margin  
129,50 x 87 cm including margins  
Estimate : 8 000 - 12 000 €

Willy RONIS (1910 - 2009)  
*Le petit parisien - Paris*, 1952  
Silver print signed in ink in the  
lower right-hand margin  
129,50 x 87 cm including margins  
Estimate : 8 000 - 12 000 €



Willy RONIS (1910 - 2009)

*Carrefour Sèvres-Babylone*

Paris, 1948

Silver print signed in ink in the lower right-hand margin

129,50 x 87 cm including margins

Estimate : 8 000 - 12 000 €

Willy RONIS (1910 - 2009)

*La péniche aux enfants*

Paris, 1959

Silver print signed in ink in the lower right-hand margin

40 x 30 cm including margins

Estimate : 8 000 - 12 000 €

*« Willy was like me, a lover of life and photography. We all miss his subtlety and sensitivity. So many conversations and good times at the Rapho agency. Happily, his images are still here, a witness to his tender gaze focused on the world around him. »*

- Sabine Weiss,  
Photographer

## *Willy Ronis, the humanist eye*

Willy Ronis was born in Paris in 1910, in modest surroundings. His father owned a photographic studio and gave his son his first camera at sixteen. Willy Ronis began by taking photos of the Eiffel Tower and he signed the family photos.

He soon abandoned stereotypical subjects, preferring to record what he saw on the spot. He was present during the workers' demonstrations in the 1930s. Society was changing and he was a witness to this. His father died in 1936 and the family business went into bankruptcy. This was an opportunity for Ronis to change his life and he decided to become a freelance photographer, taking images of society as it changed, with the rise of the Popular Front and the social advances of 1936.

Newspapers began to commission reports from him. He threw himself into the working-class world with his first report on the Citroën factories in Javel, for the *Regards* magazine in Paris in 1938. It was at this time that he became friends with colleagues David Seymour, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Robert Capa.

After the interruption of the Second World War, which he spent in the south of France where he met Jacques Prévert, he returned to Paris. His camera was immediately put to use again, immortalising scenes of everyday life : the arrival of prisoners from 1945, the joy of Parisians at the Victory...

It was at the same time that he joined the Groupe des XV and the Rapho agency, founding the French humanist school. Paris and its regions became his favourite subject. He worked tirelessly to capture simple moments of the capital's inhabitants and the raw beauty of the city. In the 1950s, he focused his attention on Belleville-Ménilmontant. He continued to report on current affairs, particularly the communist movements, always focusing on the working classes.

Modern society transformed the environment he was used to photographing. The car invaded Paris in the 1960s. Willy Ronis preferred to take refuge in the South, while continuing to travel regularly to the capital to follow the changes taking place in the city (the construction of the RER, the appearance of the Pompidou Centre...) but his idealism didn't flourish in this new industrial straitjacket.

In his later years, he returned to Paris and negotiated that the state pay his rent for the rest of his life, in exchange for the donation of his entire body of work. The photographs of these last decades were marked by a return to form. In 2001 he decided, in spite of everything, to put his camera away for good, and he died 8 years later, in 2009.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

Public viewing :  
During Paris Photo  
From Wednesday 10 November  
to Tuesday 16 November 2021

Sale :  
Wednesday 15 December 2021 - 19.00

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## PRESS MATERIAL

HR images available  
on request

The full catalogue available  
to view on [artcurial.com](http://artcurial.com)

### *About Artcurial*

Founded in 2002, multidisciplinary Paris based auction house Artcurial confirmed its leading position on the international art market scene in 2020. With three sale venues in Paris, Monaco and Marrakech, the auction house achieved an overall sales total of 149,2 million euros in 2020.

Artcurial covers all the major specialist fields including Fine Arts, Decorative Arts, Collectors' Cars, Jewellery, Watches, Fine Wines and Spirits...

With a strong international bias, Artcurial maintains its presence abroad with offices in Brussels, Milan, Monte-Carlo, Munich, Vienna and Spain  
In October 2015, Artcurial held its first sale in Hong Kong and Morocco.

[artcurial.com](http://artcurial.com)

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