

Centre
de la photographie
de Mougins



Icons:



Press kit

Icons:
Fantasised Images

31.10
2026 –
7.02
2027

Curators
of the exhibition:

François Cheval,
Yasmine Chemali,
Christelle Rochette

Opening
Friday 30.10.2026
18:30

4 Introduction

5 Icons:
Twelve chapters

16 Contacts
/ Informations

17 200 Years
of Photography



Icons:

Fantasised Images

Icons: Fantasised Images is part of a collaboration spanning several years with the Musée de l'Image in Épinal, under the direction of Christelle Rochette, who initiated a reflection on the status of iconic images drawing on its collections and contemporary additions. In 2024, the exhibition in Épinal (February 24 - September 22) explored myths and legends, extraordinary destinies, magnetic aura, and mass devotion, shedding light on the making of the image and the fantasy of the icon. For Mougins, the selected body of work has been adapted and reimagined through the prism of the photographic industry and its role in humanity's need to project itself into the body of another – not just any other, but a quasi-divine being, stripped of all ambiguity or imperfection and, above all, cut off from the world.

Introduction

The contemporary world is saturated with images. Among them, some acquire a particular force, even rising to the status of icon. Derived from the Greek *eikôn* ('image'), the term originally designated the sacred representations of the Eastern Christian tradition. It gradually extended into the secular realm to describe figures whose image seems to transcend their very existence. This transformation depends as much on the image as on those who look at it. The icon exists only through a community of worshippers, believers, or viewers who grant it symbolic value, who contemplate it, reproduce it, and thereby contribute to its power. It becomes the site of a collective belief, somewhere between fascination, veneration, and projection. In the biblical tradition, however, the icon is distinct from the idol. The idol claims to enclose the divine within a visible form. The icon, by contrast, has value only in what it reveals of the invisible – of an imagined beyond. It is not worshipped for itself, but as the sign of a presence that transcends it. With the advent of photography, followed by cinema and mass media, this relationship to images was profoundly transformed. Mechanical reproduction multiplied the figures capable of attaining iconic status, from saint to hero, from martyr to icon reborn. The exhibition explores this tension between image and belief, between those who are represented and those who, through their gaze, admiration, or devotion, help give them an autonomous existence, beyond the real.

This exhibition is structured into twelve chapters, each centered around an iconic figure:

Christ: The True Icon
Guerrillero Heroico
Marilyn, Norma Jean, Zelda Zonk
The Hand of God, or the Life of Saint Diego
Mausoleums
The Transverberation of Padre Pio
Beatlemania
Alias Johnny
BB: The New Eve
Diana and the Thirteenth Pillar
18 June: Speech as Act
Frida Kahlo, or Mexican Dolorism

Icons

Christ: The True Icon

The face of Christ is undoubtedly the most universally recognised image, even though no text describes his appearance. The Gospels remain silent, and the earliest representations appear only two centuries after his death. The history of Christianity is thus, in part, the story of the gradual construction of a figure who became unquestionable. From the Byzantine Pantocrator to the Holy Faces, from the Mandylion to the Suffering Christ, and later the Good Shepherd, each era shapes an image that reflects its own spiritual and political expectations. In the nineteenth century, Christ became a closer, more consoling figure. With the work of Warner Sallman, disseminated from the 1940s onward, the Western image of a Christ with light-coloured eyes became definitively established as the most widely reproduced religious icon in the world.

© Jean-Marie Donat
JESUS UBIK
2021
(Painting of Christ
– Warner Sallman),
1970-1990s
Gelatin silver prints
and Polaroids



Henri Meyer (dessinateur)
Le Veau d'or/ The Golden Calf
Reproduction based
on Le Petit Journal
no 110, December 31, 1892
Collection of Musée d'Art
et d'Histoire du Judaïsme,
Paris

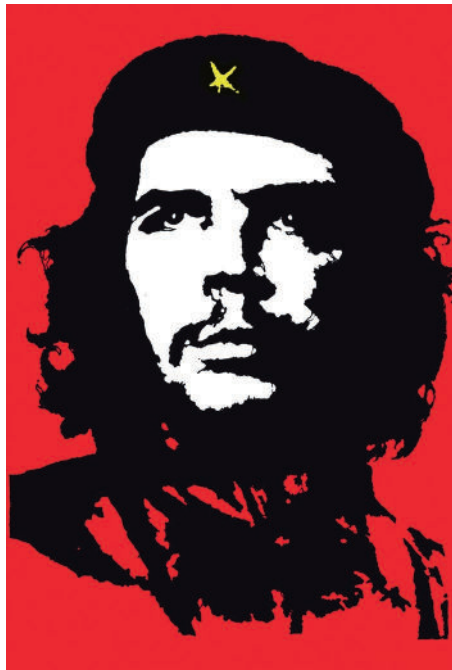


Icons

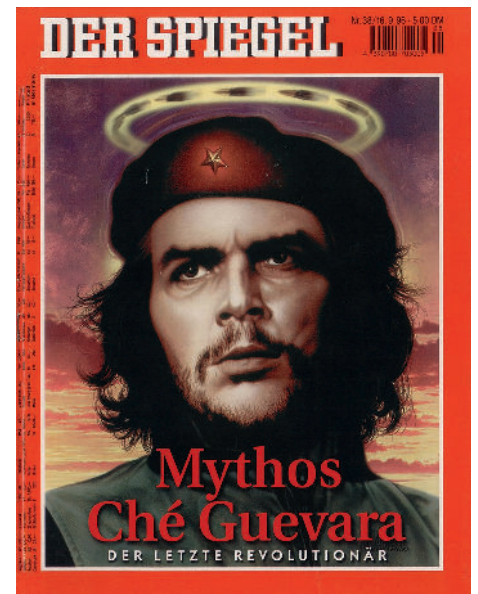
Guerrillero Heroico

Taken in 1960 at a memorial for the victims of the *La Coubre* explosion, Korda's *Guerrillero Heroico* became, following Che Guevara's death in 1967, one of the most emblematic images of the twentieth century and a true cult icon. His face, frontal and hieratic, transcends the mere political portrait to join a Christ-like iconography of martyrdom. His death in Bolivia, and the later photographs of his body on display, recall scenes from the Passion. The defeated guerrilla becomes a sacrificial figure, destined for symbolic resurrection. The cropping of the portrait, isolating the gaze and the star on his beret, effects a kind of transfiguration. Like a religious icon, the image detaches itself from the man to become a universal sign of revolt and redemption. Circulated after 1968, it acquired the force of a modern Mandylion, before gradually losing its political charge amid commercial reproduction.

Jim Fitzpatrick
Viva Che!
Reproduction based
on a silkscreen
by Jim Fitzpatrick
1968
© All rights reserved



Mythos Che Guevara
1996
Magazine cover
Der Spiegel no 342,
September 16, 1996
Private collection
© All rights reserved



Icons

Marilyn, Norma Jean, Zelda Zonk

Marilyn Monroe embodies the icon in human form, a Golem born of total exposure of the self, in which Norma Jean pays the price for her transfiguration into a universal object of desire. Her myth, built on tragedy, requires identification through the gaze of others, a life fashioned like a photo-novel, somewhere between melodrama and sacrifice. Attempting to escape her image, Marilyn oscillated between Marilyn and Norma Jean, before inventing herself as Zelda Zonk. Torn by a divided self visible in her photographs, each pose reveals her inner struggle. Her quest for control over her image, through black-and-white photo sessions, becomes a form of visual psychoanalysis, with no way out. Guilt and inner conflicts, exposed in her writings and therapy sessions, lead inexorably to a tragic end, sealing her fate as an icon. After her death, her real body becomes superfluous, for the icon already belongs to the whole world.

Marilyn Monroe
Tear-off poster
by Ciné-Révélation
1956
Collection of Musée Nicéphore
Niépce, Chalon-sur-Saône
© All rights reserved

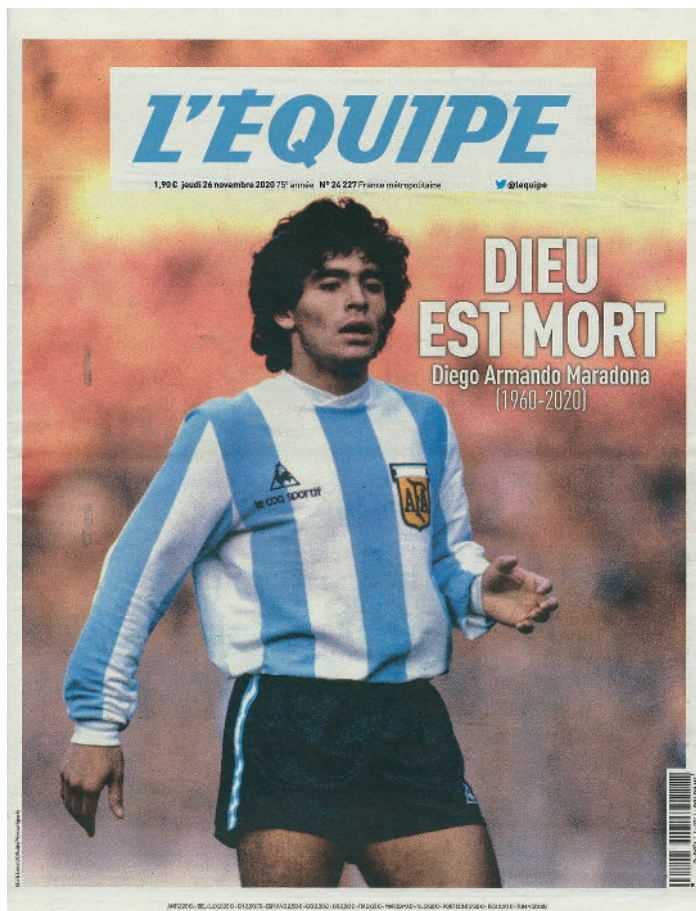


Icons

The Hand of God, or the Life of Saint Diego

Maradona built his myth through a succession of contradictory images, caught between absolute glory and an inevitable fall. The 'Hand of God' in 1986, Argentina's triumph, and the *scudetto* he brought to Naples elevated him to the status of a popular icon. His face became a relic of working-class neighbourhoods, preserved like that of a secular saint. Yet images of his decline – drugs, excess, and physical frailty – did not destroy his cult. On the contrary, they deepened his identification with the people, who forgave the weaknesses of the man who had avenged and represented them. Maradona thus became a Christ-like figure, a sacrificial hero whose contradictions are the very foundation of his immortality.

Dieu est mort
2020
Cover of L'Équipe
no 24277 following
a photograph by Mark Leech,
Diego, May 13, 1980
England – Argentina
Courtesy Galerie Jean-Denis Walter
© All rights reserved



Icons

Mausoleums

Since the Entombment of Christ, the sacred body has oscillated between disappearance and presence, caught in an eternal tension. The remains of Lenin, Atatürk, Eva Perón, and Padre Pio, preserved from decay through embalming, extend this refusal of finitude. Behind the glass of mausoleums, the body becomes an image, tangible proof of a promised survival in which death is reduced to a passage. These modern relics, objects of belief and pilgrimage, answer the need for visible signs that can bind the living, the dead, and eternity together. Eva Perón, mummified in her glass coffin, embodies the untouchable icon, offering the *descamisados* a tangible form of redemption. Her myth, born of her commitment, transforms her remains into a sacred relic, venerated by crowds seeking certainty. These embalmed bodies, symbols of the transcendence of contradictions, assuage societies' anxiety in the face of the void. The political or religious icon weaves a sacred bond between past, present, and a radiant future, beyond time.

The Transverberation of Padre Pio

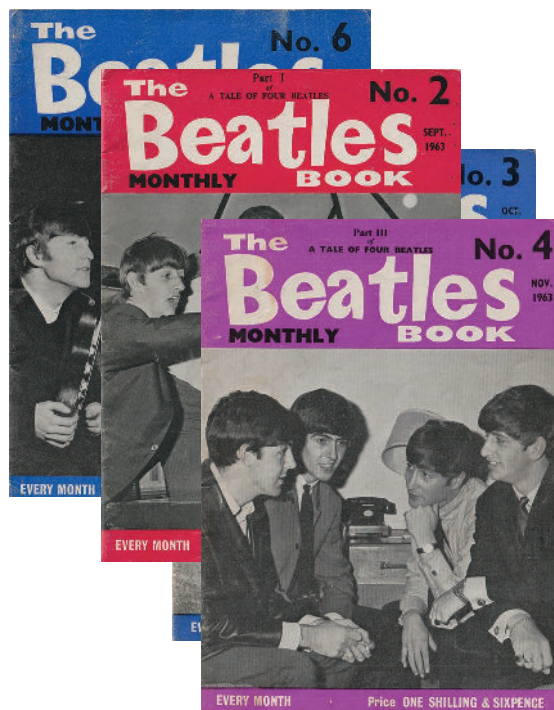
The image of Padre Pio has become one of the defining figures of contemporary Catholic devotion. His transverberation in 1918, experienced during the Eucharist and accompanied by the appearance of the stigmata, drew him closer to the suffering Christ and established the image of the 'second Christ'. From this mystical experience onwards, his body became the vehicle of a belief, while his image spread far beyond Italy. Despite reservations within the Church and rationalist criticism, San Giovanni Rotondo became an international pilgrimage site. His cult, supported by political authorities and associated with charitable works, blends the religious, the social, and the symbolic. Canonised in 2002, his body became an icon-relic, extending the power of a figure situated between the human and the sacred.

Icons

Beatlemania

Between 1963 and 1966, Beatlemania turned the Beatles into a true mass icon, inspiring a fervour akin to religious worship. The screaming, fainting, and adoration of fans testified to a fascination that went far beyond their music. Their image, disseminated through the press, television, and merchandise, became a powerful object of consumption. Their worldwide success was amplified by the rise of mass media, huge concerts, and programmes such as *The Ed Sullivan Show*. In 1967, their performance of 'All You Need Is Love', broadcast worldwide via *Our World*, consecrated their status as global icons. The Beatles embodied the cultural and social aspirations of the 1960s while also provoking fierce controversy, particularly after John Lennon's claim that the group had become 'more popular than Jesus'. Exhausted by Beatlemania and by an image that had become uncontrollable, they abandoned touring by 1966.

The Beatles Book
(Beatles Monthly),
no 2, 3, 4 and 6
1963-1964
Magazines
Private collection
© All rights reserved



Four lenticular badges,
1964
Varie-vue, Mont Vernon,
United States
(manufacturer)
Private collection
© All rights reserved

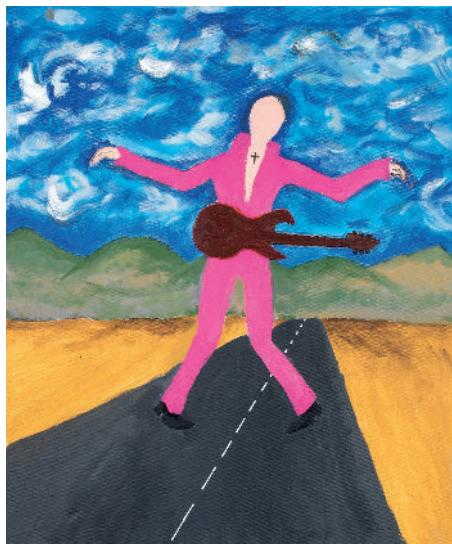


Icons

Alias Johnny

The 'Johnnys' (Johnny Christ, Johnny Rock, etc.) are not simply copies of Johnny Hallyday, but worshippers seeking an impossible fusion with the icon, attempting to embody the sacred image through rigorous discipline: imitating his gestures, voice, and clothes, to the point of effacing themselves. Their imitation goes beyond simple admiration. It is a form of voluntary servitude, a profound belief that refuses the void and fills the fear of absence. By relinquishing their identities, the Johnnys find their reward in the gaze of others, becoming image-subjects – reflections of an icon in which reality and imagination merge. Their lives, a freely chosen sacrifice, become a form of ecstasy, perpetuating the idol's image at the cost of their own existence. For them, imitation is a form of transcendence, a mystical quest in which appearance becomes essence. Their autonomy lies in this absolute fidelity, through which the ideal self is realised in the infinite repetition of the fixed image. Their fascination with identification anchors them in a reality where the copy becomes truer than life itself.

Anonymous
 Untitled, no date
 Gouache on canvas,
 cross-stitch canvas
 Private collection
 © All rights reserved



Icons

BB: The New Eve

Brigitte Bardot asserted a new kind of femininity, freed from the moral conventions of the post-war era. Natural and sensual, she associated desire with the freedom to choose without guilt. Simone de Beauvoir described her as an 'Eve before original sin', while Marguerite Duras saw her as a figure of emancipation. Her apparent innocence, combined with provocation, upended representations of femininity. Until the end of the 1960s, BB was emblematic of a modernity in which women's autonomy asserted itself through the body as much as through attitude.

Brigitte Bardot
1957
Magazine cover
Cin  monde no1182
Private collection
  All rights reserved



Simone de Beauvoir
Brigitte Bardot
and the Lolita Syndrome
1961
Publisher:
London Andre Deutsch and
Weidenfeld & Nicolson
Private collection
  All rights reserved



Icons

Diana and the Thirteenth Pillar

The tunnel beneath the Pont de l'Alma, on 31 August 1997, ceased to be the mere setting of an accident and became the founding site of the myth of Lady Diana, a symbolic entrance to Hades. This dark passage, a threshold to the afterlife, marks her descent into the underworld, leaving the profane world behind for a sacred realm. The absence of images of her agony, hidden away like a taboo, reinforces the mystery of a modern martyrdom bordering on sainthood, leaving room for a succession of signs and imaginary images. Her body disappears in favour of an elusive figure, preserved from all alteration, while the tunnel, a thirteenth funerary pillar, seals her passage into the invisible. The stripped wreckage releases her soul from earthly constraints, transforming the accident into a rebirth, according to a logic in which death precedes resurrection. The tunnel is therefore not an end, but a passage into eternity, where Diana, an untouchable icon, enters a world freed from human contradictions. Her Parisian martyrdom confers upon her, in the collective imagination, a form of contemporary sainthood, as a news item tips over into legend.

Qui a (vraiment) tué Lady Di ?
1997
Magazine cover
L'évènement du jeudi,
September 4, 1997
Private collection
© All rights reserved



Icons

18 June: Speech as Act

Although the original recording of the Appeal of 18 June 1940 has been lost, it remains etched in history through a later photograph, taken on 30 October 1941, in which de Gaulle, alone before a Marconi microphone at the BBC, embodies France's resistance. Radio, central to his strategy, enabled him to overcome his political isolation and turn words into action, despite the initial lack of understanding. Although little heard at the time, his message was relayed by the press, creating a clandestine link with the French people. Far more than a simple channel of communication, radio gave his words a unique resonance through his tone, rhythm, and silences, creating a political theatre in which each address strengthened the legitimacy of Free France. The microphone, a symbol of both his solitude and his perseverance, turned 18 June into a founding myth, far beyond its immediate impact. It became the founding act of a legitimacy – that of an 'eternal' France. The power of the speech lies in its performative form: words become an act that commits their speaker and brings a political reality into being, ultimately sealed by the Liberation of Paris in 1944.

Anonymous photographer,
Information and Press Service
of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
General de Gaulle speaking
into the BBC microphone,
June 18, 1940
Gelatin silver print
Collection of Musée
Nicéphore Niépce,
Chalon-sur-Saône
© All rights reserved



Icons

Frida Kahlo, or Mexican Dolorism

Frida Kahlo's body, marked by polio and the tram accident, became the centre of a body of work in which suffering is transformed into creation. Her dolorist imagery, inspired by Mexican *ex-votos* and the Passion of Christ, resonates with the figure of Saint Teresa of Ávila, for whom wounding becomes an experience of revelation. In Kahlo's work, physical and emotional pain are transfigured into an artistic language and a means of asserting her identity. Her self-portraits and painted corsets bear witness not simply to a wounded body, but to a resistance to social and aesthetic norms. 'Fridamania' has helped to cast Frida Kahlo as an artist-martyr, obscuring the political and subversive dimension of her work. By making the wounded body the vehicle for an unprecedented iconography, she transforms suffering into aesthetic power and an affirmation of self.

Contacts

**Centre
de la photographie
de Mougins**

**43 rue de l'Église
06250 Mougins**

0033 4 22 21 52 12
centrepotographiemougins.com
centrepotographie
@villedemougins.com
@mougins_centrephoto

Press:

Ludivine Maggiore
Imaggiore
@villedemougins.com

Florence Buades
com.mouginstourisme
@gmail.com

Informations

Open

**31.10.2026 → 7.02.2027
13:00 → 18:00
Closed on Mondays
and Tuesdays**

Admission

**Adult → 6 €
Student → 3 €
Group (10 or +) → 4 € / pers.
Guided tours → 10 € / pers.**

Free

**1st Sunday of each month
Under 18, students
from the region PACA,
job seekers,
disabled visitors and one
accompanying person,
ICOM / ICOMOS / CIPAC,
Friends of the Center,
teachers, press,
guide-lecturers.**

**Guided tours (express)
every Wednesday
and Saturday
→ 15:00**

**Book your
guided tour + workshop
for schools, groups
and associations:
Sinem Bostanci
sbostanci@villedemougins.com**

The Mougins Center
of Photography is supported
by the Regional Directorate
of Cultural Affairs (DRAC PACA),
06 Department
and Region SUD ;
and is a member of Botox(s),
Plein Sud and Diagonal
networks.

200 Years of Photography:

Let's Celebrate

From September 1, 2026, to September 30, 2027, the **Ministry of Culture** is organizing the **Bicentennial of Photography**, a major, open, and festive celebration that highlights **collections, contemporary creation, photographic publishing, and the various professions within the field of photography.**

Perspectives

Several hundred accredited events (exhibitions, symposiums, audiovisual screenings, photographic literacy projects, etc.) will take place in metropolitan France, the overseas territories, and some thirty other countries.

The Bicentennial of Photography is organized by the Ministry of Culture, supported by a scientific committee chaired by Dominique de Font-Réaulx – an art historian specializing in the 19th century and photography, and chief curator at the Louvre Museum – and involving a wide range of stakeholders from the fields of culture, education, and research.

Find the program at <https://bicentenairephotographie.fr>

