

Unveiling the Shadows: The Life and Career of Suzanne Laroche, A Marginalized Photojournalist (Louise Francezon)

Abstract

This presentation aims to explore the life and career of Suzanne Laroche (1906-1992), an overlooked female photojournalist whose work offers valuable insights into the gendered challenges of the reporter's profession. Laroche, who belongs to the doubly marginalized community of female photojournalists, faced a fragmented career due to gender constraints and societal expectations that relegated her to the shadows of history.

Using a combination of primary – and patchy – sources, including photographs, newspapers, and archival records, I will reconstruct her early experiences in photography to her reporting job during the Second World War and beyond. Through a biographical lens, this contribution aims, therefore, to reconstruct Laroche's professional journey, from lecturer to part-time journalist before becoming a photographer and a press agency director. Her career, characterized by eclecticism and interruption, reflects the broader struggles of women in journalism, where access to opportunities and professional legitimacy was often unstable.

Her contributions to the genre of war photography during the Second World War will also be scrutinized to disrupt the predominantly masculine canon of this genre. This situation has resulted in the exclusion of many women photographers who have nonetheless produced images within the “war photography complex”, a broad network of images composed by the military, the media, or other commercial institutions invested in the documentation of war.

Finally, this contribution offers an opportunity to explore how some figures have been rendered invisible in historical records and how historians can circumvent these absences using alternative methodologies. Therefore, while acknowledging the legal, institutional, and cultural legacies that have led to the erasure of women from public archives, I will try to overcome these seeming voids through innovative methodological approaches that look *differently* at historical sources. I will, thus, uncover Laroche's story by investing details, annotations, and other subtle signs presented in the margin of archival records, giving her voice recognition in history.

Biography:

Louise Francezon is a PhD student in History (Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne) and Art History (Université du Québec à Montréal). Her doctoral thesis focuses on the experiences and contributions of women war photographers working in France between 1939 and 2014. She is examining their roles, challenges, and how their work has been historically received and remembered.