



Swiss Camera Museum – Vevey  
In the footsteps of Reiss

## In the footsteps of Reiss

Exhibition open from 26 January to 20 August 2023

Press release

Downloadable at [www.cameramuseum.ch](http://www.cameramuseum.ch)



Mugshot of Rodolphe Archibald Reiss by Alphonse Bertillon, Paris, 1900.

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### **A collaboration between the museum and the University of Lausanne**

Rodolphe Archibald Reiss (1875-1929) founded the world's first forensic science school at the University of Lausanne in 1909. As a chemist, photographer and criminalist, Reiss put his mastery of chemistry and photography at the service of his science, developing photographic techniques that are still used today.

Produced in collaboration with the School of Criminal Sciences of the UNIL, the exhibition details Reiss' photographic methods applied to crime scenes, murderers' weapons, tattoos, fingerprints or false documents. Using his scientific knowledge, the criminalist-photographer was able to clearly reveal latent traces or traces that were barely visible to the naked eye. He used a wide range of techniques: colour filters, direct, low-angled or reflected light, special darkroom processes, microscopes, and photographic equipment designed according to his own recommendations. Reiss made the invisible visible for one purpose only: to help reveal the truth through the systematic study of material traces.

The exhibition compares the instruments used by Reiss a century ago with their equivalents used today in forensic science. It shows the scientist's more personal photographs, in particular beautiful autochromes. It also offers interactive workshops, a rich mediation programme for young and old, a riddle to solve in the museum, and meetings with experts in criminal science. The programme was set up with L'éprouvette, the UNIL Science and Society Laboratory.

The exhibition originates from the University of Lausanne's desire to make its institutional heritage accessible to as many people as possible. After several years of work, the photographic collection of Rodolphe Archibald Reiss has been fully inventoried and digitised. It is now integrated into the UNIL digital collections portal, offering free access to a unique heritage.



### **Rodolphe Archibald Reiss (1875-1929)**

Rodolphe Archibald Reiss was born in 1875 in Germany. He joined the University of Lausanne at the age of 18 to study chemistry, which he completed with a doctorate in science in 1898. He became a Swiss citizen in 1901.

A great enthusiast of photography, he was editor of two photographic magazines (*Journal suisse des photographes* from 1900 to 1909, *Revue suisse de photographie* from 1902 to 1906), in which he wrote several articles related to the chemical and technical processes of photography.

From the end of the 19th century onwards, Reiss made the most of his passion. He became head of photographic work at the University of Lausanne and gradually became interested in medical and scientific photography. He then extended his interest to the judicial applications of photography. Around 1900, the young man went to Paris for an internship with Alphonse Bertillon, head of the identification service of the Préfecture de la Police. At the time, Bertillon was a French forensic scientist and the founder of judicial anthropometry, or bertillonage (a system of identification based on a certain number of bone measurements). Bertillon introduced Reiss to the mugshot and to the processes of descriptive photography. In 1902, with his new knowledge, Reiss gave his first course on the judicial applications of photography at the University of Lausanne. In 1906, the State Council of the Canton of Vaud appointed him extraordinary professor of scientific photography with application to judicial research. It was not until 1909 that forensic science was officially recognised as an academic discipline, with the creation by Reiss of the Institute of Scientific Police at the University of Lausanne (now the School of Criminal Sciences), which offered a university diploma in forensic science studies.

The institute quickly gained an international reputation. Reiss made a name for himself among the pioneers of forensic science. Recognised for his skills and ingenuity, he was invited to numerous conferences, international congresses and by foreign police forces to pass on his know-how. The popularisation of the general public, including other crime scene participants, is important to him in order to make them aware of the value of traces and their conservation. This popularisation remains limited, as it could prove counterproductive. If it reveals the scientific procedures used in too much detail, some criminals might be more cautious.

During the First World War, Reiss went to Serbia. He devoted himself to documenting and denouncing the war crimes committed by the Austro-Hungarian army. In 1919, Reiss resigned from the Institute and settled in Belgrade until his death in 1929.



### **The School of Criminal Sciences of the UNIL**

The School of Criminal Sciences (ECS) is attached to the Faculty of Law, Criminal Sciences and Public Administration of the University of Lausanne.

Born from the teaching in forensic photography given at the beginning of the 20th century by Professor Rodolphe Archibald Reiss, it was the first forensic science school in the world and remains one of the only institutions in Europe to offer a complete training in forensic science.

Forensic science is at the crossroads of science, law and humanities, technology and its application to law. Forensic science, forensic science and criminology, criminal policy and criminal law are concerned with a phenomenon of society, crime and its aberrations, as well as with the means of combating, preventing or repressing it.

Mobility and technology have served to internationalise crime. They fuel criminal aberrations through terrorism, trafficking of all kinds (drugs, arms, human beings, etc.) and methods of converting ill-gotten gains through organised financial channels (money laundering, corruption, etc.). The political, economic and judicial consequences require responses that the ECS addresses through its research, methodological developments and training. Through pilot projects and collaborations with local and international judicial bodies, the ECS has a particularly recognised position.



## Sections of the exhibition

### Historical part

1. Introduction
2. The Photography of Places and Bodies
3. Tool marks: the Seewer case
4. Traces of firearms: the Jacquet case in Orges
5. The expertise of banknotes: the Friedrich case
6. Photographs of tattoos
7. Photographs of fingerprints
8. Photographs of documents
9. Microphotography

### Contemporary part

1. Papillary traces: selective absorption and photoluminescence
2. Photographs of tools, 3D traces or elements of ammunition
3. Document analysis
4. Comparison of casings and projectiles



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### Photos captions:

1. Reiss's mugshot taken by Bertillon, Paris, 1900. Credit: UNIL, Reiss photographic collection
2. Reiss at his office at UNIL. Credit: UNIL, Reiss photographic collection
3. Reiss during the re-enactment of a crime. Credit: UNIL, Reiss photographic collection
4. Tripod invented by Reiss for vertical photography. Credit: UNIL, Reiss photographic collection
5. Tattoos, July 1912. Credit: UNIL, Reiss photographic collection
6. Fingerprints on an alarm clock. Credit: UNIL, Reiss photographic collection
7. Autochrome taken by Reiss. Credit: UNIL, Reiss photographic collection

### Short text, approx. 750 characters

Rodolphe Archibald Reiss (1875-1929) was an internationally renowned criminal lawyer and founder of the world's first forensic science school at the University of Lausanne. He put his mastery of photography to use in his science, developing photographic techniques that are still used today. The exhibition details his photographic methods applied to crime scenes, counterfeit banknotes, murderers' weapons, burglars' tools, tattoos or fingerprints. A comparison is made with the instruments used a century ago and those used today in forensic science. The exhibition is produced in collaboration with the School of Criminal Sciences of the UNIL.

If you need more information, please contact us. Tel : + 41 21 925 34 80

Swiss Camera Museum - Grande Place 99 - CH-1800 Vevey

Internet : [www.cameramuseum.ch](http://www.cameramuseum.ch) – E-mail : [cameramuseum@vevey.ch](mailto:cameramuseum@vevey.ch) Tel : +41 21 925 34 80

Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 11.00 to 17.30 and bank holidays.