

● Evolution of Royal Portraits

Do British Royals still control their image?

1 Queen Victoria (1819-1901)

- A. Look at these two photographs and describe them briefly.
- B. What message is conveyed in each one?
- C. Read the article to learn more about Queen Victoria's passion for photography. Use [Worksheet n°22](#).
- D. Choose one of these two pictures to illustrate the article and justify your choice.



Prince Albert, Queen Victoria and their nine children, 1857



Official portrait of Queen Victoria as Empress of India, 1887

Fame may seem a 20th-century phenomenon, but Queen Victoria was the first public figure to exploit its promotional potential and the earliest – and least likely – international celebrity of the photographed world. [...]

- 5 Victoria and Albert, married in 1840, became significant champions of the new medium. When the queen died in 1901, she left a collection of 20,000 photographs that charted historic events, cultural advancements and artistic experimentation over the course of her rule, spanning the first six decades of photography. [...]

Countless official portraits of the queen circulated in the public sphere to symbolize the stature of the monarchy. Equally, a trove¹ of personal portraits of her, Prince Albert and their nine children, which reside in albums and boxes at Windsor Castle, were distributed to establish Her Majesty not as a stern², prudish monarch but, unexpectedly, as a doting³ mother warmly engaged

- with her family. These photographs constitute a surprising visual record of Queen Victoria herself behind the scenes. [...]

As Philippe Garner, international head of photographs at Christie's, recently said, "She surely recognized the power of photography to underscore to a huge audience the iconic status of the royals." [...] In 1877, despite the public disapproval, Victoria, Queen of England, was also proclaimed Empress of India. While she never visited that country, she relied heavily on her official portraits' being distributed there. They became symbols of the monarchy, her visual identity creating the aura of a deity, further securing her hegemony beyond the British Isles — and deep into the roots of 19th-century photography.

1 collection • 2 austere • 3 affectionate

Philip Geffer, *The New York Times*, 18 April 2014