

Jacques Henri Lartigue

AT THE ORIGIN OF CONTEMPORARY
PHOTOGRAPHY

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AT THE ORIGIN OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

E X H I B I T I O N N O T E S

promoting body	MEF - Museo Ettore Fico
under the patronage of	Regione Piemonte - Città di Torino
in collaboration with	L'Associazione des Amis de Jacques Henri Lartigue Ministère de la Culture - France Fondazione Ettore Fico, Torino
organization	MEF - Museo Ettore Fico
exhibition curator	Andrea Busto
venue	MEF - Museo Ettore Fico, via Francesco Cigna 114, Torino
press conference	Friday 20 February, h 12.00
opening	From Saturday 21 February to Sunday 21 June 2015
opening times	Wednesday, Thursday, Friday 14 - 19 Saturday 11 - 22 Sunday 11 - 19
press office	Giuseppe Galimi Email giuseppe.galimi@museofico.it Call +39 011 853065

Cover :
Picasso,
Cannes, August 1955

Bibi,
Marseille, 1928

AT THE ORIGIN OF CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrea Busto

The Exhibition

Tardily discovered by John Szarkowski – then a young curator of the Department of Photography at New York's MoMa – and at the same time by a big master such as Richard Avedon in 1962, after his first important solo exhibition at the MoMa JHL became one of the cornerstones of world photography. His pictures, which he had taken since 1902 at the age of eight, hidden into an album and minutely archived as important traces of personal memory, opened up a world of images which immediately became a community heritage as well as a historical, social and cultural witness of the XX century.

His extreme photographic meticulousity – he would spend even several hours awaiting the perfect shot – records recurrent themes and subjects which mark not only the passage of time and seasons, but also the passage of trends and mechanical inventions, of the microcosm of a family unit and of a whole nation, France, as a paradigm and a symbol of XX century Europe.

JHL, ever since his first shot, shows a journalistic attitude when recording the time he is living in, even though he doesn't seem to realize that his work will be crucial to decode the changes of the age and in the society during the first half of the XX century.



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Jacques Henri
Lartigue

His work can be compared only to Proust's oeuvre, where the recording of the present bears witness to History. Shots, notes, diaries, drawings, pictures, everything is meticulously annotated, recorded, pigeonholed like in a memory library where, rather than memories, it is the tangible witness of the photographs that is put into use. The need to organize in order not to lose, to forget, allowed this immense artist to reveal an extremely developed aesthetic thought ever since the very beginning of his poetic pathway.

The models in JHL's pictures – such as planes, cars, his family, all of them always on the move – highlight the aspirations to modernity of the European continent which frantically thrusts itself towards the dynamic evolution of progress. The car races with their protagonists behind the wheel, the first planes floating in the French sky, as well as friends jumping into the water of a swimming pool or leaping off the staircase of his family house, bear witness to a process of description of reality which is filtered through a very particular and personal expressive style. His transversal shots, like the oblong cuts of his photographic formats, reveal some taste for pictorialism, which is not ersatz painting, but it is the autonomous expression of the sensibility of an independent artist who develops a brand new language through a personal alphabet and in tune with his times, if not anticipating them.

If it had been known by his contemporaries, JHL's art would have inspired

At the racecourse,
Auteuil, 1911



Bichonnade,
Paris, 1905



the early XX century dynamic painting, from Futurism of Boccioni (*The City Rises*, 1910) and Balla (*Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*, 1912) to Duchamp's work (*Nude Descending a Staircase*, 1912). But also Bragaglia's simultaneous photographs and his 1911 essay *Futurist Photodynamism* would have been influenced by Lartigue if he had publicized his own work.

JHL has an exceptional gift: he is elegant, not necessarily for the style of the subjects he portraits – even though the jet set is elegant for wealth and natural inclination – but for the way of living characterized by details and particulars inferred from the photographs, not common and trivial, chosen with a *blasé* attitude and never *parvenu*.

His work is serene, light-hearted, happy to exist in an era which is not only the Belle Époque, but goes further on, even through World Wars I and II, to Picasso (1955) and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's (1974) portraits.

The 136 photographs displayed at the MEF, besides the 50 album pages, are an anthological compendium of the artist's work, where all the themes he loved most are displayed: from the first photographs of the 1910s where familiar subjects are more recurrent, to the portraits of family friends who become the inventors of quite strange machines, to those of plane pilots and car drivers and of the natural power of the sea and the wind.

Biography

Jacques Henri Lartigue was born in 1894, at Courbevoie, to a wealthy family – his father was a businessman fond of photography – who moved to Paris in 1899.

In 1902, at the age of seven, he received his first camera as a present from his father: his artistic career started from then. He snapped and processed his own photographs depicting the world around him: relatives, friends and middle-class everyday life. He collected his photographs in about 130 volumes, which include dozens of thousands of shots. At the same time, he kept a diary, a sort of written parallel to his pictures: reflections, descriptions, sketches of his own photographs.

Afterwards, he began his first experiments, such as superimpositions in order to create "pseudo-ghosts" and stereoscopic images, that is tridimensional photographs.

The whole Lartigue family, thanks to their financial ease, began to develop a passion for cars, motors and various "gadgets": in this context, the young photographer, having a less bold nature, played the role of "eyewitness", focused on immortalizing what was happening around him. One of Lartigue's favourite subject was represented



While I Still Have a Shadow,
Opio, 1980

Previous page :
Renée, Biarritz, 1930



by the elegant ladies walking around the Bois de Boulogne, who he began to photograph from 1910 making him become one of the foregoers of fashion photography. Furthermore, in Paris Lartigue made his first portraits of famous people, shot his first home movie with the film camera that his father gave to him, attended the Sorbonne, and, most of all, the magazine «La Vie Au Grand Air» published some of his photographs which would stand among his most famous ones (*Louis and Jean during the bobsled race at Rouzat, Zissou in the swimming pool, Roland and Simon Garros at Issy-les-Moulineau*).

During World War I, he wasn't recruited and dedicated himself to painting. In 1919, after the war, he got married to Madeleine "Bibi" Messenger; they had two children, but the second died a few months after his birth.

During the 1920s, his career progressively evolved; he showed at prestigious salons, he painted flowers, cars and portraits of important people such as Kees Van Dongen, Sacha Guitry, Marlene Dietrich and, in 1930, the model Renée Perle, who also became his partner.

During World War II, he worked as an illustrator for magazines, but also as a set designer; during the Nazi occupation he moved to the French Riviera and lived painting and cataloguing his photographs. There he got married, for the third time, to Florette Orméa, a 20-year-old girl.

Ever since the end of the war, Lartigue's photographs became more and more popular. Especially famous the portraits of Picasso and Jean Cocteau made in 1955.

His art was unceasingly acknowledged. He held some important solo exhibitions: at New York's MoMa in 1963 and his first complete retrospective at Paris's Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1975. In 1979 he donated his whole photographic work (negatives, original albums, diaries and cameras) to the French State. The Association des Amis de Jacques Henri Lartigue (afterwards named Donation Jacques Henri Lartigue) was established under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture. During his life he produced more than 100.000 photo shots, 7.000 magazine pages, 1.500 paintings. Jacques Henri Lartigue died in Nice on 12 September 1986, aged 92.

Main Exhibitions

- 1955 - Collective exhibition at Galerie d'Orsay (with Brassai, Robert Doisneau and Man Ray), Paris, France
- 1963 - *The Photographs of Jacques Henri Lartigue*, solo exhibition at Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
- 1975 - *Lartigue 8x80*, solo retrospective at Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France
- 1980 - *Bonjour Monsieur Lartigue*, welcome exhibition of Lartigue's donation, Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, Paris, France
- 1981 - *Vingt années de découverte à travers l'oeuvre de Jacques Henri Lartigue*, opening of a permanent exhibition hall, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1981 - *Sacha Guitry et Yvonne Printemps*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1981 - *Paysages*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1981 - *Tennis*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1982 - *Bonjour Monsieur Lartigue*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1983 - *Femmes de mes autrefois et de maintenant*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1984 - *Pages d'Albums*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1984 - *Londres*, Olympus Gallery, London, Great Britain
- 1984 - *Les 6x13 de Jacques Henri Lartigue*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1986 - *Le troisième oeil de Jacques Henri Lartigue*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France

Renée at Eden Roc,
August 1931

Dani and Gérard Willemetz,
Royan, August 1926



- 1987 - *Le bonheur du jour 1902-1936*, Teatro Valli, Reggio Emilia, Italy
- 1988 - *Moi et les autres*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1989 - *Les envols de Jacques Henri Lartigue*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1990 - *Rivages*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1990 - *Volare*, Galleria Eralov, Rome, Italy
- 1991 - *Jacques Henri Lartigue à l'école du jeu*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1991 - *Jacques Henri Lartigue*, Tarazona, Spain
- 1993 - *En route Monsieur Lartigue*, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, Paris, France
- 1994 - *Souvenirs de mon bonheur*, Art Hall Gallery, Seoul, Korea
- 1994 - *Lartigue Centenary*, The Photographers' Gallery, London, Great Britain
- 1994 - *Lartigue a cent ans*, Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie, Arles, France
- 1995 - *Rétrospective d'un amateur de génie*, Bunkamura Museum of Art, Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan
- 1997 - *La côte d'azur de Jacques Henri Lartigue*, Hôtel de Sully, Paris, France
- 2002 - *Jacques Henri Lartigue au Pays Basque*, Casino Bellevue, Biarritz, France
- 2003 - *Lartigue en hiver*, Musée Alpin, Chamonix, France
- 2003 - *Lartigue, l'album d'une vie*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- 2004 - *Jacques Henri Lartigue: a Boy, a Camera, an Era*, The Harn Museum of Art, Gainesville, Florida, USA
- 2004 - *Il faudra inventer d'autres mots quand on voudra raconter le paradis*, Galerie Blondeau, Geneva, Switzerland 2006
- 2006 - *Lartigue ou l'art du fugitif*, Fédération Française de Tennis, Paris, France
- 2007 - *La Belle Époque*, The Moscow House of Photography, Moscow, Russia
- 2008 - *J.H. Lartigue pendant la Belle Époque*, Gaungdon Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China
- 2009 - *Lartigue, effort et volupté*, Maison du Lor et Cher, Blois, France
- 2010 - *Double je, Jacques Henri Lartigue, peintre et photographe*, Musée d'art et d'histoire Louis Senlecq, L'Isle-Adam, France
- 2010 - *Jacques Henri Lartigue, un monde flottant*, Caixa Forum, Barcelona, Spain
- 2012 - *Movement* (with Martin Munkacsi), Fundación Municipal de Cultura, Valladolid, Spain
- 2013 - *Bibi, Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie d'Arles*, Eglise des Trinitaires, Arles, France
- 2013 - *Jacques Henri Lartigue, a Vida em Movimento*, Instituto Moreira Salles, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil
- 2013 - *Shoji Ueda and J.H. Lartigue, Play with Photography*, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Japan
- 2014 - *A Vida em Movimento*, Instituto Moreira Salles, São Paulo, Brasil
- 2014 - *Jacques Henri Lartigue*, Photopoche, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium
- 2015 - *Jacques Henri Lartigue. Alle origini della fotografia contemporanea*, Museo Ettore Fico, Turin, Italy

