

Life in Color by Jacques Henri Lartigue

Opening: Thursday, April 28th from 6 to 9 pm
Show: April 29th until July 2nd 2016

FIFTY ONE TOO is pleased to present the second solo show of the French painter-photographer Jacques Henri Lartigue (Fr, 1894-1986) "Life in Color" : intimate colour snapshots of Lartigue's elite world of the 20th century. One third of his voluminous photographic oeuvre is consisting of early colour photographs, giving a new perspective on the vitality, the poetry and the enchantment of his renders.

Although Jacques Henri Lartigue is best known for his timeless and joyful black-and-white pictures, he was convinced that the use of colour in his photographic practise was indispensable, enhancing the charm and allurement of life. It goes without saying that his tandem practise as a painter had a vital role in his visual language.

His early experiments with the autochrome colour process (1911 until 1927) prove this vision, but the medium didn't capture the instantaneity and therefore abandoned its use, continuing his black-and-white images.

From late 1940s Lartigue started to experiment with colour again, being sensible to its modern feel, its realism and it was no longer a constraint to catch movement on film. Considering himself an amateur and photographing for his own particular amusement, he followed his instinct and ignored the unreliable and mediocre aspect of colour film dominating that period.

In the exhibition a selection of his colour photography from the 1940s onwards will be presented, as from then on the vibrant and energetic colour use is really extraordinary. Lartigue's colour photos were much more than documentary, often they had a composition like paintings such as "Opio, 1963": a still life of a red tulip on the bottom of a classical vase or "Florette, Megève, mars 1965" (cover of the French catalogue) wherein the bright colours of picnic tools with the photographer's third wife surrounded in the plain snow, caught the attention. The square-sized format of the images reinforce the effect of paintings as well. The visual language is never full of details, frequently it are quasi-monochrome compositions and stripped down to the minimum to centralise his subjects. A certain abstraction sets in such as the "Sylvana Empain, Juan-les-Pins, août 1961": a close-view of Mrs. Empain, surrounded by two fields of blue shades, which give a reduction of form and thus a contemporary feel. Further Lartigue loved to capture small wanders that bewildered him like "Appia, Anitca, Rome, janvier 1960" in which he caught two birds filtering the sunshine with their wings. The idyllic observations during his travels in France and abroad like Italy and Cuba didn't escape his camera. Due to his exquisite entourage Lartigue also made colourful portraits of fellow contemporaries and friends like Pablo Picasso, Edward Steichen, Bill Brandt, Marie Bailey and many more. But Florette was his greatest inspiration and he shot her constantly as he described her as "ma petite fleur des champs": hidden in the landscape or the main subject.

Throughout his entire life he kept rigorously self-composed photo-albums to maintain a vivid memory of all the beautiful things, events or people he came across. Based on these albums the Donation J.H. Lartigue in Paris, who represents Lartigue's legacy worldwide, made a selection for these posthumous prints. As black-and-white is no longer the only artistic form for photography that it was in the past, the Donation felt it was important to give a more complete perspective. His early colour images underline the cross-over with his paintings, capturing his personal 'joie de vivre'-moments in these nostalgic snapshots.

His breakthrough came with the exhibition at the MoMA in NY in 1963 where the young director, John Szarkowski described Lartigue's early colour works as pioneer. Nowadays more than 250 shows are already devoted to his work worldwide.

His work can be found in museum collections like the MoMA and the MET in New York, The National Gallery of Art in Washington, the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum in Japan, Musée d'Orsay in Paris to name a few.