

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY

EXHIBITION NOTES FOR TEACHERS JACQUES HENRI LARTIGUE: BIBI 11 OCTOBER 2013 – 05 JANUARY 2014

And now it is up to you, modest photographs, to do what you can – very little, I know – to tell everything, explain everything, make everything be imagined. Everything, even and above all what cannot be photographed.

J H Lartigue, Diary, 1931



These exhibition notes give an introduction to the exhibition and suggest points for discussion and activities.

Admission to Jacques Henri Lartigue: *Bibi* and *Home Truths : Photography, Motherhood and Identity*, the other exhibition on show, is free.

We recommend you make a pre-visit before bringing your group to the gallery.

To book a group visit, tour or workshop please see 'Group Visits' on the 'Visit Us' section of our website: thephotographersgallery.org.uk

For more information please contact: Jai Tyler, Education and Projects Organiser
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These notes have been written by Jai Tyler, Education and Projects Organiser at The Photographers' Gallery

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

This exhibition *Bibi* presents work by the renowned French photographer Jacques Henri Lartigue. The exhibition focuses on photographs from the 1920s depicting the story of Lartigue's marriage to Madeleine Messenger, known as Bibi, his first wife and the mother of his only child.

The photographs are presented in chronological order and divided into three sections. These trace Lartigue and Bibi's relationship from their early days as a loving couple and glamorous socialites to subsequent upheavals and calamities, which eventually led to their separation.

1918 – 1921



Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Bibi, Voyage de nocés à l'Hotel des Alpes, Chamonix, 1920*

Lartigue is 24 years old when he meets Madeleine Messenger, known as Bibi, at Aix les Bains in June 1918. This *'sweet little thing who leaves you quite indifferent to her charms'* has an English mother; her father is André Messenger, a composer and the director of the Grand Opera Syndicate in Covent Garden and the Opéra de Paris. Lartigue immediately resists an emotional attachment that may hinder a life of light-hearted flirtations played out in Chamonix in Winter and Biarritz in Summer. But Bibi's tranquil and sensual character quickly gets the better of his single life, as it does the conservative reservations of Lartigue's mother. They marry on 17 December 1919 and spend their time between the Lartigue family home in Rouzat and Cap d'Antibes, enjoying a life of leisure activities and travelling. During this time Lartigue begins painting for a living and their son Dani is born on 23 August 1921.

1922 – 1925



Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Yvonne, Koko et Bibi, Royan, 1924*

Abandoning the family's town house, where an English nurse takes care of Dany, Lartigue and his wife lead the idle, restless life of Parisian society folk discovering the bustling modernity of tea dances, shows and evenings at the 'Bœuf sur le Toit' restaurant and cabaret.

Two life changing events soon follow – in 1923 the family home in Rouzat is sold, which Lartigue describes as having created "a huge hole" in his heart and in 1924 the couple's second child Véronique dies a few months after her birth. The tragedy casts Bibi into despair and drives her to seek comfort from her father.

Lartigue, in the meantime, spends increasing time with French writer and film director Sacha Guitry and his actor/singer wife Yvonne Printemps, a fashionable couple of the demi-monde and the world of theatre. In Guitry he finds what he aspires towards: a creative force and intelligent man of culture. In Yvonne Printemps, he finds a new subject for his affections and falls deeply in love.

1926 – 1930



Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Bibi, Freddy et Margot, Aix-les-Bains, 1928*

In the third and final section of the exhibition the couple's marital decline is witnessed throughout. The collapse of his marriage is alluded to in Bibi's gaze, which is no longer accompanied by a smile. No longer the sole object of his desire, Bibi is now pictured in the company of other women, often in the background, at times looking out of place. Although she remains Lartigue's ideal companion, he nevertheless indulges in a series of affairs. The death of Bibi's beloved father in 1929 is the impetus she needs to break away from the marriage and the couple divorces in 1931. The split comes as a shock to Lartigue who writes "my broken heart only wishes her well".

More than 1600 handwritten pages and 20 albums of photographs with worn leather covers, leave us these vivid memories of the marriage of Jacques Henri Lartigue and Madeleine Messager.

INFORMATION ON THE ARTIST



Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *J.H. Lartigue au tennis, Rouzat, 1920*

Jacques Henri Lartigue (b. France, 1894) was given his first camera at the age of eight by his father and never stopped documenting every aspect of his life. Alongside his photography Lartigue also kept a life long journal to help him remember details of events and express his thoughts and feelings.

In 1918 he began painting as a way to earn a living and had several exhibitions of his work in Paris and the south of France. It is not until 1963, at the age of 69, that he first presents a selection of his photographs in New York's MoMa. In 1974 he is commissioned by the President of France, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, to take his official portrait. The first retrospective of his work is held in 1975 in Paris' Musée des Arts Décoratifs. In 1979 Lartigue becomes the first living French photographer to donate his work to the nation. He continued his work as a photographer, painter and writer until his death in Nice on September 12 1986. He was 92 years old. Lartigue is best known for his photographs of automobile races, airplanes and Parisian women.

Jacques Henri Lartigue left behind more than 100,000 photographs, 7,000 pages of diary and 1,500 paintings. www.lartigue.org

DISCUSSION POINTS FOR YOUR VISIT



Jacques-Henri Lartigue, *Tempête à Nice*, 1925

Before introducing the exhibition ask your group to look around the show and consider:

- Is there a story or a theme to the images?
- Are all the images taken by the same person?
- Are there any people or places that are repeated in the photographs?
- Do you think the photographer knew the people he/she was photographing?

Regroup and feedback; what did they think about each of the questions you posed? What clues did they find that led them to their answer?

Now, reveal the theme and story behind this exhibition and point out its chronological hang and key periods over the 1920's.

Discuss;

- What types of photographs do they take of themselves, family and friends?
- How and where do they keep the photographs they take?
- How is the way they keep and look at photographs different from an exhibition, or, if they don't use one, a photo album?
- Why might the photographs in this exhibition be interesting or important?

POST VISIT ACTIVITIES



Jacques-Henri Lartigue

Making a series

Ask your group to make a series, or select images from Facebook, Instagram or another source, (minimum 10 images) about one or more people they know well, considering;

- How their images will work as a series - think about colour, presentation, and compositional style.
- What will best convey their relationship with the person they are photographing?
- How will they make sure the images don't become repetitive? Will they take some photographs that don't include people?

Editing

Using their series of images, ask them to select an edit of 5 photographs that create a narrative.

Next, ask them to choose one photograph from their edit of 5 and use this as a starting point for a new edit. Ask them to try to create a different narrative.

Discuss, how the reading of an image can change depending on the images that surround it and the context they are showing them in: online, in an album, in an exhibition or elsewhere.



Cooky Mobile Phone Advertising Image

How does the advertising context for this photograph make or change our reading of a group of friends?

VISITOR INFORMATION

ADMISSION FREE

OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK

Monday – Saturday 10.00 – 18.00

Thursday 10.00 – 20.00

Sunday 11.30 – 18.00

THE CAFÉ IS OPEN

Monday – Friday 9.00 – 18.00

Thursday 9.00 – 20.00

Saturday 10.00 – 18.00

Sunday 11.30 – 18.00

GROUP VISITS

To book a group visit, tour or workshop please see 'Group Visits' on the 'Visit Us' section of our website.

CONTACT US

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