

Press Release

Date of Issue: 11 March 2026

MASTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY JACQUES HENRI LARTIGUE CELEBRATED IN NEW EXHIBITION AT MK GALLERY

Jacques Henri Lartigue: Life in Colour
20 June – 4 October 2026



Jacques Henri Lartigue, *Florette Lartigue, Vence* (1954); Jacques Henri Lartigue, *Silvana Empain* (1961); Jacques Henri Lartigue, *Monaco Grand Prix* (1956). All works © Ministère de la Culture France / Association des Amis de Jacques Henri Lartigue

For press images, please visit: <https://tinyurl.com/lartigue-mk-gallery>

MK Gallery will present a major exhibition dedicated to the rarely seen colour photographs by pioneering 20th-century French photographer and painter Jacques Henri Lartigue, from 20 June to 4 October 2026.

Jacques Henri Lartigue (1894–1986) is best known for his black-and-white photographs capturing the elegance and *joie de vivre* of high society and modern life, particularly during the early 20th-century Parisian Belle Époque. Although he did not receive widespread critical acclaim until later in life, Lartigue was at the centre of France's golden era of creativity, moving within a social circle that included cultural icons such as Jean Cocteau, Grace Kelly and Pablo Picasso.

Lartigue also became known for his interest in documenting the speed and movement of new innovations such as motor racing and aviation, and photographs of life on the French Riviera. He is regarded as a pioneer of the 'spontaneous' snapshot – a departure from the formal portraits that were typical of the time – which would later become known as street photography and popularised by Instagram.

Lartigue began experimenting with early colour photography as a teenager, at a time when the process was still technically demanding and rarely used. His colour photographs from this period show intimate portraits of his family, friends and everyday life. However, the long exposure times and cumbersome equipment led him to focus on painting throughout the 1930s, until the use of modern colour photography became more widespread in the 1950s.

Jacques Henri Lartigue: Life in Colour will explore Lartigue's lifelong experimentation with colour. The exhibition will feature over 150 works, focusing on his lesser-known colour photographs. It will also include his early experimental stereoscopic images, which produce three-dimensional effects, as well as vintage prints, unique works on paper and archival documents.

The exhibition will showcase the breadth of Lartigue's career, from drawings he made as a child in the 1900s to his work in the fashion world of the 1960s, and his abstract floral photographs of the 1970s. Until recently, the majority of Lartigue's colour photographs had never been seen, despite representing a third of the 120,000 images in his archive, the Donation JH Lartigue.

About Jacques Henri Lartigue

Born in Courbevoie, in western Paris, to an affluent family, Lartigue began taking black-and-white photographs as a child after receiving a camera from his father. In 1912, he became interested in autochrome, an early technique used to apply colour to photographs, which had recently been invented by the Lumière brothers. In 1915, Lartigue attended painting classes at the Académie Julian in Paris before embarking on a career as a painter. In 1928, he stopped his autochrome practice.

After the Second World War, photography became Lartigue's main focus and he began receiving commissions from illustrated magazines and the Rapho press agency. In the early 1960s, Lartigue's work was introduced to John Szarkowski, Director of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, culminating in a major solo exhibition in 1963, which brought him international recognition as a professional photographer. Throughout his later life, Lartigue continued to photograph, paint and write, and published collections of his work, including *Diary of a Century*, edited by Richard Avedon and designed by Bea Feitler. Lartigue died in 1986, leaving behind a vast archive of photographs, paintings and diaries that capture a century of French society and technological change.

Jacques Henri Lartigue: Life in Colour is organised in collaboration with the Association des Amis de Jacques Henri Lartigue, Ministère de la Culture, France and diChroma Photography.

Jacques Henri Lartigue: Life in Colour

20 June – 4 October 2026

MK Gallery, 900 Midsummer Boulevard, Milton Keynes MK9 3QA

Tuesday – Sunday 10am – 5pm. Closed Mondays

<https://mkgallery.org/>

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Notes to Editors

About MK Gallery

Since opening in 1999, MK Gallery has developed a reputation as one of the UK's leading public art galleries, commissioning and presenting British and international art. Programming multiple major exhibitions a year, MK Gallery is the only visual arts organisation within a 40-mile radius that commissions and showcases innovative and high-quality international contemporary and modern art.

The Gallery has an outstanding track record of presenting critically acclaimed and high-quality exhibitions, including shows by Vivian Maier, Ingrid Pollard, Paula Rego, Saul Leiter, George Stubbs, and Andy Warhol. Its international partnerships provide a connection between Milton Keynes and the wider world, channelling ambitious ideas and artistic excellence into the region.