

The Art Scene

By Leon Graham

leong@lakevillejournal.com



Jacques-Henri Lartigue's portrait of Florette

The little boy is running home from the neighborhood boulangerie, his family's daily baguette tucked under one arm. You can almost sense his motion, feel his excitement. It's 1952, and you are in Paris with him.

"Le petit Parisien" is only one of the stunning photographs in

Merideth McGregor's "Icons of French Photography" at Joie de Livres Gallery in Salisbury Wines. Selecting from works by six 20th-century masters of the camera, she has curated a show that seduces with its singular French locations, most in Paris, and very French sensibility, that unique and sometimes even forbidding combination of high style, elegance and design.

Jacques-Henri Lartigue's fame rested largely on his carefully composed yet spontaneous-feeling pictures of race cars, airplanes and fashionable Parisian women in pre-World War II France. A photo of a single grand prix car seems to speed left off the print, while a luggage-laden, open roadster meanders along a Mediterranean cornice, its driver in soft helmet cap with ear flaps.

There is a stunning image of a woman in Biarritz — Renée, she's called — with huge dark eyes and wearing an enormous afternoon hat. And then there is the beautiful Florette, eyes closed, supine with forearms and long-nailed hands above her head. Erotic yet unattainable.

Among images from Edouard Boubat is the charming photograph of a young boy and girl in a Montmartre bar, their backs to the camera. His left arm is under her right, while her right hand rests on his *derrière*. (How early they learn in Montmartre.) Another is a gorgeous photo of the formal park at St. Cloud — the famous, long-destroyed chateau above the Seine beloved by Louis XVI and both Napoleons — with its *allée* of trees leading upward through a slight mist.

Three Boubat images capture a still essence of Paris: moody, leafless trees surround an empty bandstand, a couple seems unmoving on a tandem bicycle, and a stunning picture of an apartment building

facade combines a formal arrangement of open and shuttered windows. People look at each other or outward from the open windows, while mystery lies behind the shuttered ones.

Willy Ronis, who shot the running boy with his bread in Paris, captures lyrical moments of city life. His photograph in Venice of the Fondamente Nuove, the seaside street along the city's northeast border, is a masterpiece of geometrical composition.

Robert Doisneau's famous photograph of Pablo Picasso and his mistress Françoise Gilot from 1952, only a year before their breakup, places Gilot in the forefront seeming already detached from the artist, sitting calmly on a bed in the background. He would soon betray her and their two children. (She would later become an appreciated painter herself and, rather surprisingly, the wife of Jonas Salk.)

Doisneau's "La Dernière Valse" freezes a man and woman dancing alone in front of a bar presumably late at night. Her big skirt is a ruffled swirl. His image of a fox terrier looking at us while its owner looks away at an artist painting near a bridge over the Seine is a wonder of composition and narrative. Another picture of a kissing couple, a gendarme, a mother and her son is amusing and surreal.

Finally there is a wonderful shot from Sabine Weiss: a broom seller, laden with brushes and brooms of all sizes, makes his way through a dark arcade toward the light of intersecting streets. You can almost hear the sounds of his brushes rubbing each other and his voice calling for business from concierges and housewives.

"Icons of French Photography" continues at Joie de Livres Gallery in Salisbury Wines, 19 Main St., through the end of the year. Hours are 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Call 860-248-0530 for information or go to www.joiedelivres.com