

Jacques-Henri Lartigue, Renée Perle, 1930-1932

"John Galliano calls Renée Perle, the inspiration behind his fall show, "a kittenish Parisian coquette." Jacques Henri Lartigue, who immortalized her in his pictures, had another term: angel. The revered photographer met his muse in 1930 on the Rue de la Pompe. He thought she was Mexican, but he guessed wrong; Perle was Romanian, and a model once employed by the French dressmaker Doeuillet. "She is beautiful," Lartigue told his diary. "The small mouth with the full painted lips! The ebony black eyes. From under her fur coat comes a warmth of perfume. The head looks petite on her long neck." The pair spent two years together, cavorting as if on eternal vacation in Cannes, Juan-les-Pins, and Biarritz, with Lartigue's camera always at the ready. In the "shadowless heaven" of his photographs, glamorous women, including his first and second wives, Bibi and Florette, abound, but Perle's lacquered hair, slender silhouette, modern T-shirts, armfuls of bangles, and talonlike nails shone the brightest. "Around her," Lartigue wrote, "I see a halo of magic.""

—Laird Borrelli