



Swiss Camera Museum, Vevey
1927 & 1955- The first colour photos of the Fête des Vignerons

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Preview on 4 April 2019 at 7 p.m.

Exhibition open from 4 April to 1 September 2019

Press Release

Directly downloadable at www.cameramuseum.ch



Two young participants in the Fête des Vignerons 1927. Autochrome by Emile Lardet.
Collections of the Swiss Camera Museum – Vevey.

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www.cameramuseum.ch



A Dialogue with the Fête des Vignerons

The year 2019 is being celebrated in Vevey with a globally unique event: the Fête des Vignerons (18 July -11 August). Organised once every generation, part of the UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage List, the event celebrates the winemaking tradition of the whole region. Opening at the Place du Marché in Vevey, where the Fête des Vignerons will take place, the Swiss Camera Museum will be a part of this highly colourful occasion.

It was not until the 1927 edition that photographic evolution was able to offer the rich quality of the chromatic process. An even more spectacular radiance was achieved during the following edition in 1955 with the growing popularity of colour film, as much among professional photographers as amateurs. By presenting a series of largely previously unpublished, very moving images, the museum pays homage both to the Fête des Vignerons and to the progressive conquest of colour in photography.

The Exhibition

From its origins in the first half of the XIXth century to the beginning of the XXth century, photography recorded the Fête des Vignerons in black and white. The treatment is often superb, but it cannot capture one of the essential components of this sunny spectacle - its wealth of colour. Some images have certainly been coloured later by hand, but these remain the exceptions. This monochrome situation lasted right up until the Fête des Vignerons of 1905. As the first industrial colour photographic process – autochrome – was commercialised in 1907, it could not be used until the next Fête des Vignerons in 1927.

Cumbersome and relatively delicate, autochrome, which was invented by the Lumière brothers of Lyon, portrays the event in a pictorial way. Its process, based on tinted potato starch, gives a pointillist appearance to image positives on glass plaques. It is perfectly suited to the representation of the popular festival with its actors participating in traditional costume, its scenography, settings, and especially its exuberance, emotion and vitality.

The subsequent edition in 1955 signalled the general use of colour film by the public at large and professional photographers. Thanks to Kodak, Agfa and their competitors' films, spectators could now preserve in colour the memory of an event, which happens only once in a generation. Both on paper and slides, colour film lasts for around a decade together with the memory of the popular festival, noted for its optimism and faith in progress.



The evolution from monochrome to polychrome in the photographic representation of the Fête des Vignerons has other effects, including that of bringing past festivals closer to our own time. Black and white appears far back in time, but colour much less. The colour photo also reduces the gap between the image and reality, adding realism and visual similarity, not to mention the values of happiness and the tonic effect associated with colours.

The photographs exhibited at the Swiss Camera Museum are appearing mostly for the first time. They come from the collections of the Winemakers Brotherhood, the Nicollier family, the Sandoz Foundation, the Swiss Camera Museum, the Yves Debraine Archives, Photo Maxim and other anonymous sources. The exhibition is rounded out with old magazines, documents and projections.

The Autochrome of the Lumière Brothers

Photography was born in black and white, as there was no colour technology. Throughout the XIXth century, researchers tried to bridge that gap through additive synthesis (the addition of coloured light) or the subtractive method (the absorption of at least three colours to obtain a chromatic range). French physician Gabriel Lippmann won a Nobel Prize for his discovery of an interferential colour reproduction system. However his complicated invention obtained inconsistent results and attracted only a limited number of followers.

It fell to the Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis, from Lyon, to come up with the first industrial colour photography process. Autochrome was patented in 1903 and then commercialised in 1907. Although it was expensive and not always easy to use, especially the calculation of the exposure time, it experienced an international success, which continued until the appearance of the first Kodak and Agfa colour films in 1930. For over two decades the Lumière factories produced several million autochromes in various formats.

Readopting the principle of the additive method, or trichrome synthesis, the autochrome technique takes advantage of an organic material: minute particles of potato starch. These particles are coloured red-orange, green and blue-violet. They are placed on a glass plaque before receiving a layer of isolating varnish, then a layer of photosensitive emulsion.



Once the plaque has received an imprint in the camera, it is sent back to the Lumière laboratories for development. The positive image can then be projected onto a screen thanks to a backlighting system.

The luminosity of autochrome colour slides, their subtle granulation and their sumptuous colour tints have often resembled the painting process, for example with their impressionism and pointillism. A century later, they remain immediately identifiable.

Kodachrome and Agfacolor

In spite of a beautiful commercial career, autochrome did not become so widespread as to compete with black and white processes. Its cost and delicacy of use kept it beyond the grasp of the general public. The real revolution in colour photography took place between the wars, thanks to the novelties from Kodak (USA) and Agfa (Germany). Kodachrome and Agfacolor Neu, which came out in 1936, were based on the subtractive method, the chemical synthesis of yellow, magenta and cyan colourings finally obtaining a colour slide. Taking advantage of the enthusiasm at the time for the first cinema films in colour (Technicolor), these 35mm films quickly attracted a lot of interest. However, progress was impeded by the declaration of the Second World War. The films did not need any special photographic equipment and were above all aimed at the general public. With these films came the family ritual of slide shows. Kodak did not take long to get ahead of its competitor Agfa, taking advantage of Germany's defeat. The Rochester company continually improved its emulsions, almost imperceptibly at first. It launched Kodacolor in 1942, whose negative-positive process enabled printing onto paper. Ektachrome followed in 1946 and Ektacolor in 1947, which enabled enthusiasts to develop their own films in a dark room at home.

It was in the following decade – during the 1950s – that colour photography became a sociological phenomenon, shared by an ever increasing circle of amateurs, as well as professionals, who relied on the progress of the industrial printer, particularly for magazines.



Charles Nicollier

Unless stated otherwise, the autochromes presented in the exhibition were taken during the Fête des Vignerons in 1927 by Charles Nicollier (1874-1963). At that time director of the purchasing department of Nestlé & Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Co., ancestor of the present Nestlé Company, the Veveysan was a competent amateur photographer, especially at ease with the portrait genre. He also photographed mountains, glaciers, flora, Lake Geneva, the Vevey region and his own family.

Charles Nicollier was extremely enthusiastic about the autochrome that he had used until the end of the 1930s, even when the process was being replaced by Kodachrome and Agfacolor films and its development was no longer assured by the Lumière brothers' laboratories. He himself used to develop his autochromes in a dark room at his house in La Tour-de-Peilz.

Charles Nicollier was also an enthusiastic mountain hiker, sailor, pilot, watercolour painter and astronomer. He introduced his grandson Claude to star gazing, who later became an astrophysicist and astronaut. Charles Nicollier had married Marguerite Peter, daughter of Daniel Peter (the inventor of milk chocolate) and granddaughter of François-Louis Cailler (founder of the Cailler chocolate factory). Charles Nicollier, whose family on his mother's side were winegrowers at Vevey, was an active member of the Brotherhood of Winemakers. He took part in the 1889, 1905, 1927 and 1955 editions of the Fête des Vignerons.

His autochromes of the 1927 edition are conserved by the Brotherhood of Winemakers and by the Nicollier family.

A Joint Programme

The exhibition entitled "1927 & 1955 - The first colour photos of the Fête des Vignerons" is part of a shared programme of exhibitions offered by the Swiss Camera Museum, the Historical Museum and the Musée Jenisch Vevey. They have all participated in the organisation of the Great 2019 Summer Event in Vevey and are all previewing on 4 April 2019. The Historical Museum is presenting: "July 1965 – The Fête des Vignerons Photographed"; the Musée Jenisch: "Oskar Kokoschka. A Dream Arcade" and "Friends, etc –The Pierre Keller Collection".



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Captions :

1. La porteuse du coffret mystique. Fête des Vignerons 1927. Photo : Charles Nicollier, collection de famille Nicollier.
2. Deux jeunes figurants. Fête des Vignerons 1927. Photo : Emile Lardet, collections du Musée suisse de l'appareil photographique.
3. Le grand chœur. Fête des Vignerons 1927. Photo : Charles Nicollier, collection de famille Nicollier.
4. L'Abbé-Président au milieu de ses Conseillers. Fête des Vignerons 1955. Photo : Archives de la Confrérie des Vignerons.
5. Le messager boiteux (Samuel Burnand). Fête des Vignerons 1955. Photo : Archives Yves Debraîne.
6. La Fête des Vignerons 1955. Photo : Archives de la Confrérie des Vignerons.

Short text

From its origins, the Fête des Vignerons has always been highly colourful. However, it was not until the 1927 edition that photography was able to record the full impact of colour. The autochrome process of the Lumière brothers enveloped the participants in a quasi-pictorial setting. The following edition in 1955 marked the wider acceptance of colour photography, as much among professionals as amateurs. Through the prism of the great Vevey celebration, the exhibition gives an account of a fundamental evolution in the history of the photographic technique.

If you need more specific information for journalistic purposes, don't hesitate to contact us on 021 925 34 80.