Autochromes by Etienne Clémentel (1864-1936):
An enlightened approach to early color photography

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This article is dedicated to the memory of Marie-Adrienne Arizzoli-Clémentel (1918-2008), Etienne Clémentel’s daughter. With her sister Marie-Thérèse Barrelet-Clémentel, she donated her father’s autochrome collection to the Musée Rodin and to the Musée d’Orsay, and she was the first to encourage me to rediscover these family memories. I also would like to express my gratitude to Pierre Arizzoli-Clémentel, for his unconditional support and his experienced advices. My thanks also go to Madame Dominique de Font-Réaulx and Monsieur Thomas Galifot for helping me access and examine Etienne Clémentel’s autochrome collection, but also for preserving and studying it with knowledge and dedication.

Etienne Clémentel was primarily known in France for his career in politics during the Third Republic. However, he also was an art collector, a patron of artists of his time, and an artist himself. He had been a painter since his earliest years, and his multifaceted talents brought him to explore the medium of color photography - called autochrome - in its early stage. This paper examines several examples of Clémentel’s production of stereoscopic autochromes, most of which lie at the edge between art and documentation, while questioning the viewer’s perception of reality. Clémentel’s daughters, Marie-Thérèse and Marie-Adrienne, understood the value of their father’s autochromes and decided to preserve this lesser known aspect of his artistic endeavor by donating them to public collections: thirteen plates went to the Rodin Museum in 1988, and five hundred and ten plates were transferred to the Musée d’Orsay between 1988 and 1990. Thanks to this donation, Clémentel’s autochrome collection has not only been preserved as a whole, but can also be accessed and studied easily, while the process’s well-known fragility benefits from monitored storage conditions. This paper attempts then to unveil Clémentel’s overlooked achievements as an early amateur color photographer, while simultaneously working to rediscover a collection now divided between the two Parisian museums.
The autochrome was the result of intensive experiments with color photography that achieved concrete results with the Frères Lumière, who commercialized their glass plates on a large scale in 1907. However, their fragility, technical complexity, and preservation issues gave the autochromes a fairly short life. Professional photographers also challenged the medium theoretically. As other autochromists of his time, Etienne Clémentel was considered as an amateur photographer, and this is one of the main reason why his photographs have been overlooked. Clémentel’s collection of autochromes is composed of five hundred and twenty-three plates, including ones which document his friendship with Claude Monet and Auguste Rodin, whom he captured in their ateliers. They constitute the first attempt to depict in color two geniuses of modern art in their working environment.  

Despite his political career, Clémentel was engaged in the cultural and artistic life of his time. Mostly depicting his private life, his photographs are telling witnesses of the way of life of an era and by exploring Clémentel’s cultural world, we can help clarify the context and the intellectual motivations behind his autochrome production. Moreover, since Clémentel’s works are stereoscopic autochromes, they have a specific status within the realm of early color photography. They not only faithfully record the colors of nature but also its three-dimensionality: this dimension of his work offers to the viewer the possibility of a virtual world.

Etienne Clémentel: Statesman, Artist and Patron of the Arts

Etienne Clémentel used stereoscopic autochromes plates most likely starting in the early 1910s until the mid-twenties. He also practiced painting and drawing his all life, even though he had been active in the French government since the beginning of the twentieth century. As he became more influential, he dedicated part of his time to the patronage and collection of contemporary artists. As early as 1905, he became Minister of the French Colonies, and he collected a great number of photographs documenting these countries, which are part of the donation now housed in the Musée d’Orsay. During World War I, he directed four ministries: Commerce and Industry, Labour and Agriculture, Navy and Trade, Post and Telegraph. He then became responsible for the civilian economy and for supplies to provide to the whole country during wartime. He also played an important role within Georges Clemenceau’s government during the peace treaty, which concluded the First World War. His heavy work schedule could have resulted in a departure from the art world. To the contrary, however, his political influences served the arts in many ways. He supported them as well as artists of his time, and he had intense intellectual exchanges with poets such as Stéphane Mallarmé and with the artists whose work he collected, such as Claude Monet, Auguste Rodin, Édouard Vuillard and Antoine Bourdelle, among others. He befriended art-dealers such as Ambroise Vollard and Bernheim-Jeune, and in 1926, he exhibited his own artworks in their galleries.
Clémentel met Auguste Rodin in 1915 and Claude Monet in 1916. These experiences were pivotal for the course of his intellectual life, and his correspondence sheds light on the meaning of their friendship. His admiration for Rodin and Monet transformed into a vivid dialogue with both artists, a development which led Clémentel to intercede for them during difficult times. He helped Monet to find art-supplies during the war, and he handled the complex situation related to Rodin’s will, in which the sculptor planned to give his artworks to the state after his death. Clémentel played a significant role in the creation of Rodin’s museum in Paris. The dealings with the state were complex and controversial, becoming particularly unproductive with the beginning of World War I. At this point, Rodin needed and accepted the help of the statesman, who enthusiastically supported the creation of the museum. In 1915, this supportive friendship brought Rodin to ask Clémentel to be his model for what would be his last sculpture: a bust of the statesman. (fig. 1) It was within this rich network of intellectual relationships that Clémentel’s autochrome production took place. It was then as an enlightened amateur that the statesman documented his world.

Stereoscopic Autochromes

Auguste and Louis Lumière first presented their discovery to the French Academy of Sciences in 1904, and by 1907, they not only had perfected it but also brought the plates into commercial production, by making them available to photographers. This process, even if much acclaimed, had several drawbacks: its long exposure required static subjects. Being a positive image on glass, autochromes could not be reproduced, and the printing of it was also very expensive. L’Illustration was in fact one of the only...
journals to undertake the challenge. As a consequence, autochrome images were difficult to move and to exhibit. They needed bright lighting, and the most convenient way to see them was through projection, which accentuated the painterliness of the medium and its easy comparison with Impressionists’ paintings.\textsuperscript{11}

The autochrome process was indeed very similar to Impressionists’ and Post-Impressionists’ theories, where color is divided into infinitesimal dots which give the image a beautiful luminosity, a naturally soft focus, and dreamy impressions and nuances. The picture remains fuzzy, and the perception of reality is altered. In France, professional photographers, such as Antonin Personnaz, Jules Gervais-Courtellemont, Léon Gimpel and Jacques-Henri Lartigue tried to raise their autochromes to the status of artistic works, by privileging landscapes, \textit{plein air} and beaches scenes or portraits. A member of the \textit{Société Française de la Photographie}, Antonin Personnaz defined his work as “\textit{autochromie artistique},”\textsuperscript{12} and he documented his sources of inspiration in his writings: Impressionist masters, especially Claude Monet, whose works he also collected.\textsuperscript{13} As a theoretician of the autochrome process, Personnaz was convinced that color photographs could be improved through a close study of painted models, and through the color harmony within the composition.\textsuperscript{14} Personnaz believed that the color image should be projected and seen enlarged on a screen, and therefore could acquire a format similar to that of a painting, as this presentation would enhance its atmospheric depth.

Autochrome was a process mostly undertaken by amateurs like Etienne Clémentel.\textsuperscript{15} Similarly to other autochromists of his time, he spontaneously selected Impressionists’ subject matter like intimate scenes of everyday life and \textit{en plein air} motifs. However, Clémentel used only stereoscopic autochromes which had the peculiarity not only of reproducing the colors of nature but also, its volume. The stereoscopic autochromes were commercialized in 1907 and were widely distributed. They had to be used with a special stereo camera called \textit{Vérascope} patented by Jules Richard in 1894 and viewed through a stereoscope.\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{Vérascope}, the camera that Clémentel owned, was a stereoscopic camera, which guaranteed a refined three-dimensional view, and maintained the natural proportions of the object photographed. Stereoscopic views, which presented two slightly different images side by side in order to simulate three-dimensionality, were often used with the autochrome process for the degree with which it reproduced reality. The wonder it generated is well described in an article dated 1907, when stereo and autochromes were first used together:

\begin{quote}
« En effet, les stéréoscopies déjà si satisfaisantes par l’illusion de relief, d’espace, deviennent absolument merveilleuses lorsqu’elles sont en couleurs. On ne peut s’imaginer la sensation que l’on éprouve à la vue d’une diapositive stéréoscopique trichrome […] On a l’impression absolue de réalité. »\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

The stereoscopic color photograph enhanced the intimate relationship that the viewer established with the image. The feeling of diving into another world, perfectly reconstituted in its volumes, proportions and colors, was a very unique experience. The stereoscopic view not only awakened the sense of sight but also, the sense of touch. Certainly, the trichromatic mosaic was enlarged in such a small format, and the single grains were more visible; however, every minute detail was easily perceived. The stereoscopic autochrome was therefore a singular object, for it projected a perfect virtual world. Nonetheless, some problems arose from the very nature of its viewing. Printed, the stereoscopic autochrome loses a large part of its charm and purpose; and its vision cannot be shared by a large number of people. Léon Gimpel,\textsuperscript{18} a professional
photographer who undertook the autochrome process for his reportages, invented a special projector able to restitute the volume of the picture. He, however, commented on the stereoscopic autochrome’s main disadvantage:

« Ces collections stéréoscopiques devaient jusqu’ici être examinées individuellement et égoïstement, soit au stéréoscope à main, soit au stéréoscope aménagé en « meuble-classeur » en privant leurs possesseurs de pouvoir faire goûter la joie de cette vision à une assemblée d’amis réunis devant un écran. » 19

As a consequence, Etienne Clémentel’s collection of autochromes has yet to be discovered by a large public, but certainly the fragility of the medium and its requirement of individual viewing hindered the capacity for such images to become widespread and widely known.

Auguste Rodin and Claude Monet in Color: Etienne Clémentel’s Friendly Reportages.

As mentioned above, Etienne Clémentel’s collection was donated by two of his daughters in 1988 and 1990 to the Musée Rodin and Musée d’Orsay in Paris. It was divided between the two museums: the thirteen pictures representing Rodin were given to the Hôtel de Biron, whereas the other five hundred and ten stereoscopic autochromes, including Monet’s views, belong to the Musée d’Orsay. Most of the plates are still preserved in their original boxes with Clémentel’s former arrangement criteria, while some of these boxes still bear his handwriting, providing some general indications of places, dates and persons photographed. Unfortunately, these notes are not always precise; they are personal aide-mémoire that were certainly conceived for his personal use. Some of these autochromes thus remain difficult to date and to identify.

Clémentel documented mostly his private life, capturing all kinds of subjects. His photographs can be dated through the identification of people and places related to salient events of his biography. While we do not have a precise date for the purchase of his Vérascope Richard, it can be assumed - through identification of the ages of his children, his travels and his houses - that he started his production of autochromes during the early 1910s. The earliest autochromes within Clémentel production are dated 1911, and were taken on the grounds of his summerhouse in Combronde, Auvergne.20 His daughters from his marriage with Gabrielle Baron, Marie-Thérèse born in 1911 and Marie-Adrienne born in 1918, often appear in the statesman’s photographic production and help to date these images.21 Another element which helps in the reconstruction of his photographic production was the purchase of the statesman’s country house, in Prompsat, Auvergne in 191922, which is often captured in his photographs of the 1920s. Clémentel documented his journeys in France and abroad, in which his travel to Italy, dated 1914, was particularly interesting and will be analyzed further, as well as World War I’s armistice, in which he participated on Clémenceau’s side. His works were certainly indebted to the Impressionist paintings that he also collected. His long lasting practice of painting and drawing can be perceived in his autochromes, in their composition and in the delicate relationships between colors, all of which offer a general harmonious result. Indeed, some of his most successful plates go beyond the mere documentation of his world, but stand as proof of his artistic sensibility and intuition.
Etienne Clémentel, however, is now best known for the photo-reportages he executed of Auguste Rodin and Claude Monet in their living sites. Both these series have been published and exhibited because they offered an unusual glimpse into these artists’ worlds. Clémentel photographed Rodin in 1915, while the statesman was posing for the sculptor, who was executing his portrait: they exchanged roles for a moment. Clémentel’s autochromes bore the informality of a friendly reportage and offered an idea of the nature of their relationship, one of admiration and respect. A rare testimony of the bond that allowed the two friends to capture portraits of each other rested in a few words, that Clémentel wrote to relate the experience:

“This was on the eve of the war, it was at the beginning of 1914, it seems to me, that I finally obtained his consent to visit his [Rodin] studio while he worked. More important for me, I had obtained the favor of making some sketches of his work under his scrutiny. I kept them as the most precious things, in six albums that have not been retouched. He did not touch a pencil while he gave advice...and it was a magnificent instruction. I only regret one thing, which was that I did not note down day by day what he told me. He spoke to me in abridged form of his studies of the cathedrals and of antiquities...He sensed that I had the same way of feeling and thinking as he did and one day he said to me: ‘will you give me a great pleasure? Will you give me sessions in which to work? They will be very numerous: I would like to make your bust. I must warn you that you are my patient and that you must put up with long, very long suffering.’”

Clémentel’s portrait by Rodin and his and thirteen autochromes are an invaluable witness of this moment. Indeed, these autochromes constituted rare views of the sculptor’s home and studio that combined three-dimensionality and color. They proved especially interesting because they made the volumes of Rodin’s sculptures perceivable, within the space of the atelier. Clémentel’s series had the character of reportage, but...
his pictures provided an intimate and respectful look inside the atelier, by disclosing the secrets of Rodin's creation in its context. Rodin was deeply connected to his environment and his sculptures were consciously displayed within the Hôtel de Biron. Though the autochrome process required a long exposure, the sculptor did not appear particularly rigid in his pose. Even if the photo session was certainly planned, it had rather the aspect of a friendly tour, and of a moment that they shared. The framing had something casual as well. Clémentel began his photographic tour in the garden, by documenting warmly its wilderness; he then switched to views of the sculptor on the steps of the building, prior entering the atelier (fig. 2): this strategy welcomed the viewer before he finally took some views of the sculptures alone, displayed inside. It can be noticed that Rodin was never captured posing near his works. This seemed to be a deliberate choice on the part of the photographer, as if the intent was to show the man in his humanity, in an inhabited home, rather than the artist at work in his atelier. This statement can be supported if Clémentel’s pictures are compared to other images of the sculptor, such as the well-known portraits of Rodin by Edward Steichen, for example. In these plates, Rodin was rather emphasized via his role as a creator, and thus, he was photographed in an emphatic, unnatural pose, beside his work. They romantically enhanced Rodin’s genius and the relationship with the sculptures, which underlined the fusion of the man with his creation.

The stereoscopic autochrome served the purpose of giving to the sculpture a volumetric presence, as well as the real quality of light and atmosphere in which they were immersed; aspects like these were working with Rodin’s conception of sculpture and the display of his works. Therefore, Clémentel’s plates honored his friendship while capturing Rodin in his beloved house, and also representing his sculpture with the values of volume and color that were two fundamental concepts in the sculptor’s work.

The idea of celebrating an intellectual bond through the documentation of the man in his human and artistic context, by also paying homage to his art, could well be detected in the series that Clémentel executed in Giverny. (fig. 3) Monet’s autochromes were done a few years after Rodin’s series, around 1920, during one of the several visits the statesman payed to the artist. Clémentel deeply admired Monet’s art, which was for him an example to follow in his own artworks. Monet’s influence appears in fact in both his paintings and his photographs. At the time during which they met, Monet was working on his last monumental achievement, the series of the Nymphéas, inspired by
his garden of Giverny. As Antoinette Ehrard suggests, Clémentel was surely impressed by these canvases, for they were Monet’s apogee regarding the treatment of color and light:

“Clémentel, as soon as he saw the Nymphéas, was dazzled. He was not overpowered but stimulated. He will keep all his life a fervent admiration for Monet. His paintings, Hortensias bleus, and Rosiers or Jardin à Versailles are the work of a well-behaved disciple. Clémentel did not retain from the maître what announced his lyric abstraction.”

During his visits at Giverny, the statesman probably saw Monet at work, while the Nymphéas’ series was in progress. Indeed, the autochromes mainly focused on Monet’s Japanese garden. It was likely that Clémentel executed his plates in the garden of Giverny through the filter of Monet’s paintings. He not only transposed the warm and dissolved colors of Monet’s palette in his photographic vision, but he also captured the sense of composition, and the fleeting movements of light. These autochromes not only captured the emotional bond that tied Monet to his garden but also paid homage to his work. Rodin’s and Monet’s series go well beyond the mere documentation and disclose a wide range of meanings, from the private view to the perception of both artists’ creations, in the attempt to elevate the color photograph toward a mode of artistic expression.

Family Scenes and World War I

If the series about Rodin and Monet are better known, the statesman infused his artistic intuitions in his lesser-known photographs as well. Most of them were indeed primarily intended to document his closer environment. Now in the Musée d’Orsay, they show the same desire to provide a coherent vision, through a delicate balance of color, in which descriptive details fuse with the whole. The collection is mainly composed of views of Clémentel’s family as well as landscapes where he lived or that he visited; blurred figures are generally immersed in landscapes. As in Monet and Rodin’s series, the figures are not posing; they are often not even looking at the camera, as if they were caught spontaneously. The figures are not straightforward portraits but rather, subtle, soft-focused allusions, where the play of light and colors retain the primary attention. These figures that sometimes are nothing more than silhouettes, inhabit the landscapes and represent rather a romanticized evocation than an accurate documentation of his domestic life. He investigated subjects and compositions well-known to the Impressionists: a women reading near an open window, vivid beach scenes, figures contemplating the turmoil of the sea, the delicacy of a sunset, winter landscapes, still lives, and so on. They all suggest the dream-like beauty of an arrested time, suspended beyond reality. Amateur photographers such as Clémentel attempted to catch the formal interplay of light and color in their snapshots, as this had been the pursuit of Impressionism some decades earlier:

« Parmi les sujets de scènes familiales que l’on rencontre chez les amateurs, les personnages posant sur une terrasse ensoleillée ou sous les arbres autant que le goût pour les atmosphères de bords de mer et les compositions avec le motif de la fenêtre comme source d’éclairage naturel signent une façon de transposer en photographie des effets de la lumière sur les objets et les corps à l’instar de Monet. »

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Among the numerous pictures that Clémentel took of his family, which by far was his favorite subject, various groups can be discerned: beach and sea views in Saint Malo, on the island of the Grand Bé and in Blonville; these can be dated around 1915-16. In a stereoscopic autochrome taken in Blonville, Normandy, three figures under a white and red striped tent enjoy summertime on the beach, in a dream-like atmosphere (fig. 4). The five-year-old Marie-Thérèse is sitting on the knees of her mother, Gabrielle. They are not posing but rather shown in conversation with a soldier, Gilbert, Clémentel’s son from his first marriage, who must have been around twenty years old at the time. He is wearing the French uniform “bleu horizon”, which takes us back to the reality of wartime; in this photograph, he must have been on leave. In 1914, his first-born Stéphane decided to enlist in the military in Bayonne, and he left for the Front as a volunteer. This decision caused his father great pride, though mixed with anxiety. Clémentel was involved in the war politically, as he played an important role in the French government at that time. The statesman recorded the war daily in a journal that he kept in the summer of 1914. The thought of his son at war, his political role, and his witnessing of the day-to-day events that surrounded him were however far removed from the dream-like beauty of that summer day in Blonville:

« Ma solitude en ces jours poignants me fait atrocement souffrir, coincé par la pensée jour et nuit de mon cher grand [Stéphane] qui est là-bas […] Je l’ai approuvé de mon côté, je lui ai dit : « Tu es deux fois mon fils », mais je souffre. Je ne sais pas ce qu’on a fait de lui, ce qu’on en fera, ni où on l’emmènera quand même et à quels péris de mort. »

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As mentioned earlier, Clémentel played an important role in World War I, being the head of several ministries; he had also participated in the peace conference as leader of the economic commission since January 1919. While his actions within the peace conference are well-documented, an interesting small group of stereoscopic autochromes taken in 1918 at the end of the war in Paris prove to be much lesser-known. *L’armistice à Paris, 11 novembre 1918, un canon* is a good example of this very focused production. Indeed, it stands as an important witness of a critical time for France and for Europe in general.

(Fig. 5) Counting six stereoscopic autochromes, this group was not as typical of Clémentel’s production, as it departs significantly from the private environment he used to photograph.

Fig. 5. Etienne Clémentel, *L’armistice à Paris, 11 novembre 1918, un canon*, 1918, stereoscopic autochrome, 4,5 x 10,5 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France © droit réservé - photo musée d’Orsay / rmn

Fig. 6. Etienne Clémentel, *Gabrielle lisant, Ministère du Commerce, between 1915 and 1919*, stereoscopic autochrome, 4,5 x 10,5 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France © droit réservé - photo musée d’Orsay / rmn.
Some snapshots of his wife Gabrielle and his daughter Marie-Thérèse, taken inside and outside of the Ministère du Commerce, can also be dated to the years of the First World War, between 1915 and 1919, years in which Clémentel held his appointment as Minister of Commerce and Industry. A good example of this group can be found in *Gabrielle lisant* an image of his wife Gabrielle, which represents a typical motif of the Impressionist repertoire. (fig. 6) Clémentel also frequently photographed his native region of Auvergne: before 1919, his photographs were located in Combronde. In them, we generally see the three children he had from his first marriage, with the young Marie-Thérèse. By contrast, after 1919, he documented regularly his family in his new house in Prompsat (fig. 7); his latest photographs among this group can be dated around 1923-24, as we see the youngest of his children, Marie-Adrienne, born in 1918 who was around four or five years old at this time. Some autochromes represent Stéphane Clémentel in Versailles and can also be dated to 1924, a date that can be considered the term post-quem for Clémentel’s production of stereoscopic autochromes.

![Fig. 7. Etienne Clémentel, Villa, vacances 1922, Prompsat, 1922, stereoscopic autochrome, 4,5 x 10,5 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France © droit réservé - photo musée d’Orsay / rmn.](image)

**Voyage en Italie, 1914**

Within Clémentel’s five hundred and twenty-three autochromes, the Italian series, which counts nearly seventy plates, is outstanding. Clémentel and his wife Gabrielle, went to Italy during the early summer in 1914. This was the last leisure trip the statesman took before World War I; in fact, Germany declared war on France a few weeks after their return, on August 3rd 1914.
These travel photographs should be analyzed separately from the rest of his production, as they relate to a specific tradition of pictures of Italy, rooted in the Grand Tour imagery, both painted and photographed. Moreover, the autochromes that pictured his travel in Italy represent good examples of the multiple layers of interpretation, both cultural and formal, that constructs Clémentel’s images. His Italian landscapes occupy a space in-between the traditional idealized view of Italy, and a more intimate one that comes from the personal experience of a traveler, who wants to capture one particular vision of well-known sites. His images of Venice, Florence, Rome, and Pompeii certainly belonged to the same trip, especially for the coherent formal choice they display.

Compared to his other landscapes, these views appear to be quite different because of the predominance of architecture within the image. Indeed, Clémentel focuses on architecture for its own sake: this element is especially predominant in his images of Florence, Rome and Pompeii. By contrast, his views of Venice actually capture some fleeting movement and thereby prove livelier. As far as his photographs are concerned, architectural landscapes were quite uncommon. However, his compositions become more understandable if we relate the series to the tradition of images of Italy, a history that can be dated back to Claude Lorrain’s idealized landscapes, to the images produced by eighteenth century travelers during their Grand Tours. Most importantly however, this focus becomes clearer if we consider the first travel photographs. Indeed, picturing Italy has never been a simple task, since it involves a direct confrontation with the classical past. For many centuries, Italy has been a steady source of inspiration for artists, who have often conveyed the idealized grandeur of its architecture. Clémentel’s Italian series conveys cultured references, idealization, stillness and eternity as he retraced the journey of the Grand Tourists.
Etienne Clémentel’s stereoscopic autochromes of Italy can be seen within this tradition, but they also add some new elements to the traditional depiction of the classical past. His images of Italy are imbued with a personal touch that clearly indicates the individual discovery of famous sites through a private, ‘intellectual’ journey. Clémentel’s trip in Italy occurred while the practice of travel amateur photography flourished, together with the multiplication of leisure travel and the invention of the Kodak Camera by George Eastman in 1888. Since the end of nineteenth century, tourists had recorded their travels by giving a personal touch to their pictures in order to convey their private experiences. We can find this individual style in Clémentel’s pictures of Italy, especially in his views of Venice. He oddly cropped the images, enhanced their atmospheric qualities, and captured everyday life moments. (fig. 8) Indeed, the Italian series can be better valued if seen in a chronological/geographical order, as if part of a same photo-album. In fact, the images signal a precise itinerary that ended with the discovery of Pompeii. Undoubtedly, Clémentel engages consciously the tradition of picturing Italy and its beauty alone, which conveys an awe for the classical past.

Clémentel’s Italian trip starts in Venice, where he took snapshots of the city’s most famous monuments and locations: Piazza San Marco, the Bridge of Sighs, San Giorgio
Maggiore Island, some *gondole* in the *Canal Grande*; these images elide the typical postcard feel, however (fig. 9).

Going south, the traveler progressively changed the way he captured ancient sites and landscapes, by casting aside lively aspects of café scenes and *flâneurs* that inhabit some photographs of Venice. Clémentel moved towards depictions of the monuments alone. Florence seems to be an intermediary step before Rome, with again some unusual cropping of famous squares, statues and monuments and with the introduction of Tuscan landscapes surrounding the city. (fig. 10) The three-dimensionality of the stereoscopic autochrome enhances colors and atmospheres of Italian cities and convey the heat of the Italian summer. (fig. 11)
The use of the stereoscopic autochrome is even more interesting when it concerns the representation of architecture. In fact, this aspect is perceptible in the photographs of Rome, where the sacred relationship with the classical past is enhanced. (fig. 12) The city is cut off from its contemporary life and the personal experience of the traveler seems to disappear in order to achieve a wider goal, that of picturing antiquity. (fig. 13) These autochromes are indeed connected with the traditional archeological veduta. They are suspended in time, in a stillness, silence and warmth characteristic of traditional Italian landscapes; but they definitely also show the photographer personal vision through unusual cropping of famous monuments, and his predilection for atmospheric renderings. (fig. 14, 15).

As in the rest of Clémentel’s production, the Italian series has some recurring characteristics. It certainly shares some affinities with the photo albums of amateur travelers who try to convey their personal experiences by taking their own pictures of their trips. However, this series tries to go beyond mere documentation by picturing an idealized classical past. Clémentel’s photographs communicate all these characteristics with a peculiar and new medium, capable of restoring its volumes and its colors to the visited sites, even while it simultaneously maintains a dream-like and picturesque atmosphere, suspended above reality. Thus, Clémentel seems to oscillate between several possibilities: the artistic or pictorialist, attempt - where the eye is
tricked by the resemblance with a painting - and a more private vision of the early color photographer who follows the track of western European travelers.

Fig. 15. Etienne Clémentel, *Pompéi*, 1914, stereoscopic autochrome, 4.5 x 10.5 cm, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, France © droit réservé - photo musée d’Orsay / rmn.

Etienne Clémentel’s autochromes can be considered as a rare collection of objects; they not only witness the preference for color photography prominent among amateurs but they also reveal the interesting profile of a man who tried to challenge the new medium to express his own personal artistic intuitions. This collection of glass plates finds its place in a net of intellectual and artistic interests, and expresses the artist’s enthusiasm for capturing the world in its natural colors.

NOTES

1. According to the manuscript list related to the donation to the Musée d’Orsay, established in 1986 by Clémentel’s heir, the autochromes were divided according to a first and second choice: the Monet series, the trip to Italy in 1914, Gabrielle Clémentel in Saint-Malo and Blonville, the park of Versailles with Gabrielle and their daughter Marie-Thérèse, the house of Combronde, the Ministère du Commerce, the armistice in Paris in 1918, are photographs that were part of this first selection and that will be discussed in this article. The manuscript list regarding the Clémentel donation is now preserved at the Musée d’Orsay. For Clémentel’s autochrome production see: Thomas Galifot, « 'l’embrasure fait spectacle'. Sur quelques photographies de fenêtres d’Etienne Clémentel » in *Mélanges en l’honneur de Françoise Heilbrun*, Paris, Flammarion/Musée d’Orsay, forthcoming.


3. When he was young, Clémentel hesitated to pursue an artistic career; however, financial needs encouraged him to take a more secure path: he studied Humanities and Law and began to work as a notary in Riom, his home-town in central France, in 1889. However, as early as 1892, he turned to a career in local politics. In 1900, he was elected congressman for the Puy de Dôme, was mayor of the city of Riom from 1904 - a commitment he held almost thirty years - and Minister of the Colonies in 1905. As he was already playing a leading role locally, he began to have increasing national responsibilities between 1905 and 1912. He reached the apogee of his career during

4. See the manuscript list with details of the donation preserved at the Musée d’Orsay.


6. See the exhibition catalogue *L'Oeuvre Artistique d'Etienne Clémentel* edited by Edmond Haraucourt (Paris, 1926). Clémentel presented 150 works at the Berheim-Jeune gallery, the gains of which were distributed to the Hospital of Riom, his hometown in Auvergne in central France.


11. For the similarity of autochromes and Impressionist paintings, see: Nathalie Boulouch, “Peindre à la machine: la photographie autochrome dans le sillage de l’impressionisme” in *En Couleurs et en Lumière*, 20 - 29.


20. “Groupe de gens dans le jardin de Combronde, 1911, Musée d’Orsay (PHO 1990 27312), and “Deux hommes posant dans le jardin de Combronde”, 1911, Musée d’Orsay (PHO 199027311).

21. Etienne Clémentel was married three times: from his first marriage with Adrienne Fournier-Roux, who died in childbirth in 1895, he had three children: Stéphane, Gilbert and Jane; he then married briefly Marie Duval-Knowles (1905-1906), and finally Gabrielle Baron in 1907, with whom he had two daughters.

22. Clémentel owned several impressionist paintings and with the sale of two artworks by Auguste Renoir, he was able to purchase the house of Prompsat in Auvergne. See Guy Rousseau, *Etienne Clémentel (1864 – 1936)*, 14.

23. Rodin’s series was exhibited and published in 1988, right after the donation of his autochromes to the Musée Rodin: Hélène Pinet (ed.), *Couleurs du temps*. *Photographies en relief d’Etienne Clémentel*, 1915. A small focus show on Clémentel’s autochromes was held in 1994 at the Musée d’Orsay. Monet’s autochromes have been published in Daniel Wildenstein, *Claude Monet*, and more recently in the catalogue dedicated to the *Nymphéas* for the reopening of the Musée de l’Orangerie in 2006.

24. Clémentel’s portrait is now exhibited in the Musée Rodin in Paris and in the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Tennessee. Moreover, the Musée Rodin conserves all the bozzetti that Clémentel donated to the museum.

25. Clémentel’s account is an excerpt of his testimony to a trial held in Paris against some counterfeits of Rodin’s sculptures, dossier n. 5.044-7, Musée Rodin, cited from the translation by Albert E. Elsen in *All the Masks Fall Off*, 6-7.

26. For the sequence of the photographs see: Hélène Pinet (ed.), *Couleurs du temps*, 16-29.


28. Both these aspects should have pleased Auguste Rodin, who had a well-known aversion for photography, among other reasons also for its flatness and for its absence of color. For Rodin’s relationship with photography see Hélène Pinet (ed.), *Rodin et la photographie*, Paris, Gallimard/Musée Rodin, 2007.


32. A few of these stereoscopic autochromes with beach scenes and views of Normandie have been published in *En Couleurs et en Lumière*, 142-143.


36. For example, see numbers: PHO 1990 27 173, PHO 1990 27 73.

37. See numbers: PHO 1990 27 447, PHO 1990 27 446.

38. For the date of the trip to Italy see the manuscript list compiled by Clémentel’s heir in 1986 and Guy Rousseau, *Etienne Clémentel (1864 – 1936)*, 47.

39. For Clémentel and his role during World War I see Guy Rousseau, *Etienne Clémentel (1864 – 1936)*, 61-109; see also Clémentel’s journal in Guy Rousseau, “Impressions dans la tourmente”, 89-103.
40. In the first decades of the twentieth century, France was a pioneer in the field of autochromes and experimented rapidly with the possibility of reproducing the world in color. In fact, travel photography benefited immediately from this invention. Albert Kahn, a French banker, who collected photographs documenting the entire Earth in his *Archives de la planète*, together with Gervais-Courtellemont’s travel photographs of the Orient, can be showcased as among the most extraordinary collections of travel autochromes. These examples cannot be related directly to Clémentel’s production; however, they are important signs of an intellectual trend that could have been detected in France, particularly in Paris, during the very early twentieth century.

41. Autochromes of Italy can be found in Albert Kahn’s *Archives de la Planète*, (1910-29). This collection presents very original aspects especially because the results lie between art and documentation. In fact, photographers who worked for Kahn had a sociological agenda; they intended to document every kind of people beyond any limitations of ethnicity, religion or culture. The pictures of Italy present an interesting mix of traditional and idealized views of monuments in which Italy is clearly interpreted as an heir of classical antiquity. They also include other views which document aspects of Italian everyday life, customs and sensibilities. See: Grendi Hirschkoff (ed.), *L’Italia negli archivi del pianeta. Le campagne fotografiche di Albert Kahn, 1910-1929* Milano, Electa, 1986.


**ABSTRACTS**

Etienne Clémentel is primarily known in France for his carrier in politics during the Third Republic; but he also was an art collector, patron of artists of his time, and an artist himself. He was a painter since his earliest years but his multifaceted talents and interests brought him to explore early color photography, through the means of stereoscopic autochromes. Clémentel remained an amateur photographer, whose photographs lie on the edge between art and documentation, while questioning the viewer’s perception of reality. This study focuses on a collection of images now divided between the Musée d’Orsay and the Musée Rodin in Paris. It looks at the friendly reportage he did of his friends, Auguste Rodin and Claude Monet, at the records he left of his private and public life - his wife and children, his houses, his witness of World War I - and also at a well-documented trip he made throughout Italy in the summer of 1914.

Etienne Clémentel est surtout connu en France pour sa carrière politique pendant la Troisième République; mais il était aussi collectionneur d’art, mécène d’artiste de son temps et artiste lui-même. Il était peintre depuis ses jeunes années, mais ses talents variés et ses intérêts l’ont amené à explorer les débuts de la photographie couleur par le biais des autochromes stéréoscopiques. Clémentel est resté un photographe amateur, dont les photos se situent à la lisière entre l’art et le document, tout en questionnant le spectateur sur sa perception du réel. Cette étude porte sur
une collection d’images actuellement répartie entre le Musée d’Orsay et le Musée Rodin à Paris. Elle se penche sur le reportage qu’il a fait de ses amis Auguste Rodin et Claude Monet, sur les archives qu’il laisse de sa vie privée et publique - sa femme et ses enfants, ses maisons, son témoignage de la première guerre mondiale -, ainsi que sur la large documentation d’un voyage à travers l’Italie en été 1914.

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**Mots-clés:** Autochrome, Stéréoscopie, Etienne Clémentel, Troisième République, Claude Monet, Auguste Rodin, Amateur, Grand Tour

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