

ARTISTIC PROJECTIONS IN BELGIUM

Part 1. Artistic lecture presentations

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A little-known form of projection was organised by the Association belge de photographie (ABP, 'Belgian Photographic Association') starting from approximately 1892 and eventually ceasing during the First World War, and certainly by the early 1920s.¹ The Association was founded in 1862 by the Belgian Edmond Fierlants, an active member of the Société française de photographie (SFP, 'French Society of Photography') in Paris.² The ABP had its headquarters in Brussels, but brought together several other 'sections' based in cities such as Ghent, Leuven, Liège, Antwerp, etc.

Their *Bulletin* published, among other technical topics, reports on private or public screenings with lanterns ('*projections lumineuses*'). The members of the ABP prepared internally-selected pieces for annual public screenings. The first report of such lantern projections is found in an ABP *Bulletin* from 1892, although it is highly likely that the projections started earlier, perhaps at the International Congress of Photography in Paris in 1889.³ One distinguishing feature of these projections is their 'authorist' perspective, promoting photography as an art form before a broad audience.⁴ In specific cases, music accompanied the projections showing the beauty of a region in colour, as is the case in *La Bretagne* by Gustave Marissiaux, to be discussed in the second part of this article.

The French-speaking photographic societies certainly wished to 'break the monotony' of the projections at their meetings. In 1893 the SFP asked photographers to accentuate the narrative of their subjects and to reinforce their "personal touch."⁵ The reproduction of "natural colours" also became a way to fight against monotony and, consequently, the SFP made some tests of three-colour projection.⁶

At a general meeting of the ABP on 12 April 1896, the screenings were diverse and showed documentary images as well as more creative views. *Matin à Profondeville* ('Morning at Profondeville'), produced by the Belgian pictorialist photographer Léonard Missonne, stood out among the screenings for its "soft and dreamy poetry" which "render[ed] the effects of backlighting in a delightful way."⁷

The public screenings looked like concerts, in that the photographs were accompanied by orchestral music. Some of their themes may be related to regional folklore, and thus the 'picturesque' was indeed part of the programme. Most of the early shows towards the end of the 19th century included music from the classical repertoire as well as a variety of slides from different creators. A form of propaganda supporting the colonisation of the Congo by King Leopold II also characterised a few sessions. In Ghent, for instance, a charity event was held on 21 March 1896 at the Grand Theatre, organised by the ABP for the benefit of the education of young Congolese and the martyred children of the region. Three lanterns were brought together for the session; a master of ceremonies presented various subjects in succession, including the infrastructure of the Congo. There was also a screening of the well-known Lumière film *Sortie d'usine* ('Leaving the factory'). After an intermezzo in which Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* was performed by the orchestra, meteorological photography was presented as the highlight of the show: "Clear weather, dark weather, fog, rain, storms, rising and setting suns in the mountains and on the sea successively excited the admiration of the amazed public."⁸

This type of show with music is reminiscent of lantern performances at the Royal Polytechnic Institution in London, where 'illustrated concerts' took place throughout the later 19th century, although the slides at the latter venue were mostly drawn representations rather than photographs.⁹ The cultural connections between England and Belgium were quite strong at the end of the 19th century, and pictorialism, which was already established in Britain, was to have a considerable influence on the Belgian side. The ABP *Bulletin* doesn't refer to projected colours during these shows, indicating either that colours weren't there or that they were not considered key artistic elements.



The programme for the public screening on 19 April 1901 and a slide used by the ABP for projection

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The Belgian Association of Photography operated under the patronage of the King.
2. Steven F. Joseph, *Belgian Photographic Literature of the 19th Century*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 2015, p.77
3. M. Spector, 'A propose de projections', *ABP Bulletin*, Vol. 19, 27 January 1892, pp.164-168.
4. This was often the primary purpose of Life Model Illustrated Songs; the songs were illustrated in order to better promote them to a popular audience.
5. H. Fourtier, 'Les Projections en séries', *Paris photographe*, No. 6, 30 June 1893, p.243
6. In 1889, Frederic Ives and Dr R.L. Gray made a lantern with a four-lens system (condensers and lenses) in the USA, and then modified it to a three-lens projection system. These experiments were repeated in England with a lantern called the Kromskop. The SFP became interested in Ives' invention and in three-colour projection (otherwise known as 'polychrome' projection in French). The first demonstration of three-colour projections on a screen took place at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers in Paris on 7 February 1892, organised by Le Cercle de la Librairie. The public demonstrations were repeated on 4 and 9 March at the SFP. The equipment used was a Molteni triennial projection lantern mounted with three red, green and blue filters on each lens. See Léon Vidal, 'Projections polychromes,' in G. Masson, *La Nature*, Librairie de l'Académie de médecine, Paris, 1892, pp.539-543 – especially p.542
7. 'Assemblée générale annuelle, tenue à Bruxelles le 12 avril 1896', *ABP Bulletin*, 3rd series, Vol. 3, 1896, pp. 327-331 (here pp. 329-330)
8. 'Soirée de projection de la section de Gand du 21 mars 1896', *ABP Bulletin*, 3rd series, Vol. 3, 1896, pp. 268-272 (here p.272).
9. Jeremy Brooker, *The Temple of Minerva: Magic and The Magic Lantern at the Royal Polytechnic Institution, London, 1837-1901*, Magic Lantern Society, London, 2013, p. 143.