

"Autochromes from the Albert Kahn Collection/Tonkin 1915-1916" on display in Mandeville

September 14, 1979

Early color photographs are featured in an exhibit called "Autochromes from the Albert Kahn Collection/Tonkin 1915-1916," on display from September 27 to October 25 in the Mandeville Art Gallery at the University of California, San Diego.

The photographs in the collection were taken by an officer named Mr. Busy who was stationed in Hanoi from 1914 to 1916. The collection shows the people and culture of a region which was being slowly transformed under French colonialization. Women fishing and cooking, a funeral cortege, a village chief, an outdoor restaurant and children playing are among the scenes depicted in the 58 prints.

The prints were made using a process called Autochrome. The method had been introduced commercially in 1907 and it was instrumental in bringing color photography out of the laboratory and into the realm of popular and commercial photography.

At the time the Tonkin photographs were taken, however, the method had yet to be perfected. In order to get a print, the camera shutter had to be open for several seconds. Obtaining a quality photograph under these conditions took considerable skill.

The photos were commissioned by Albert Kahn as part of his Archives of the Planet project. The European millionaire's dream was to establish a photographic record of the events and people of the early 20th century. Kahn went bankrupt in 1936 after a series of financial losses and his ambitious project never was fully realized.

The exhibition will be on display, courtesy of the French Cultural Services in New York, from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday through Friday and 7-10 p.m. Wednesday in the Mandeville Gallery.

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