



# A Deep Look at Lenticulars

review by Britt Salvesen

Sciences Sociales and an instructor at the École du Louvre, Timby demonstrated her considerable skills (and her affinity for 3-D) in the 2001 landmark exhibition and publication *Paris*

in 3-D: *From Stereoscopy to*

*Virtual Reality, 1850–2000*. In this new volume, she presents the full scope of her research on lenticular photography, still concentrating mainly on the French context but ranging across various subjects and formats from the 1890s to the 1990s.

Timby's interpretive framework is indicated by the book's subtitle: *Between Utopia and Entertainment*. Innovators of lenticular imaging cherished a utopian dream of "a completely lifelike image, representing the world as our sense perceive it—especially all of its movement and depth" (p. 9). But the other motivation driving the history of lenticular imagery was, as Timby puts it, "the desire to entertain—or to find attractive forms of the process that would sell" (p. 18). Between the hyperbolic claims for lenticular realism on the one hand, and casual dismissals of its trivial applications on the other, Timby finds fascinating

episodes of innovation, adaptation, and serendipity.

Timby starts with a concise overview of the history of stereoscopy, establishing a cultural context for optical imaging technologies promising both education and entertainment. She also explains at the outset how lenticular technology can be used to produce a stereoscopic or animated effect—an important distinction, particularly for those readers who are only casually acquainted with lenticular. The history begins around the turn of the twentieth century, with the line-screen meth-

Kim Timby's *3D and Animated Lenticular Photography* is a long-awaited addition to the literature on 3-D history and technology. In addition, it convincingly situates this particular 3-D format within broader histories of art, photography, film, material culture, and technology. Thoroughly researched, well organized, and engagingly written, Timby's study will be an essential resource, gathering together episodes that have heretofore only been published in articles and weaving them into a substantial interpretive history. Whereas a parallel 3-D technology—holography—has been the subject of several book-length studies (by practitioners and curators), from the time of its invention to the present day, the literature on lenticular imagery is comparatively sparse. Fortunately the subject attracted the attention of a historian of Timby's caliber. The recipient of a doctorate from the École des Hautes Études en

Publirama. Animated autostereoscopic advertisement for Le Parfait canning jars, 1956-1961, color transparency and lenticular screen, 20 x 24 cm, private collection.  
(Photo by Kim Timby)



## **3D and Animated Lenticular Photography: Between Utopia and Entertainment**

by Kim Timby. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. Paperback 306 pages, ISBN 978-3110413069, Studies in Theory and History of Photography 5. [www.degruyter.com/view/product/45092](http://www.degruyter.com/view/product/45092).

ods proposed by A. Berthier, Eugène Estanave, and Frederick Ives. Next, Gabriel Lippmann introduced integral photography, using a screen composed of a network of lenses, to create a “window onto reality.” Other key figures in this early chapter are Bonnet and Lumière, whose methods of industrial production and marketing strategies are discussed in illuminating detail. During this pre-World War II era, the process was associated with stereoscopic realism, most strikingly demonstrated in photographic portraiture. After World War II, animation became more popular, and this type of lenticular imagery appeared prolifically in advertising and marketing campaigns. Innovation during this second period occurred less in the optical realm and more in the product-design realm. Lastly, Timby outlines two interesting non-commercial areas of lenticular production: its use by artists in the 60s and 70s, and its use by amateurs in the 80s and 90s.

Timby establishes an intellectual context for the salient technical innovations, while also filling in the social and economic contexts for the products of that research and development. She provides examples of popular formats for mass-produced lenticular imagery (such as portraits, keychains, and postcards), explaining how they were made, distributed, and collected. Crucially, she also considers the reasons for the demise of certain formats, reminding the reader of the importance of novelty as a driving force. Although Timby is clearly an enthusiast for all things lenticular, she is not an apologist nor does she ignore dead-ends and failures. She closes with a brief but provocative consideration of how lenticular photography might be affected by digital technologies in today's image-saturated world. It is certainly possible—even probable—that lenticular imagery in different forms will continue to rise and fall in popularity, because, as Timby contends, its illusions are perennially pleasurable and perennially marginal. Costs, complexity, and competition will always limit its mainstream adoption, while curiosity and collectability will sustain it on the fringes. With this compelling history at hand, the reader can assess future

developments with both skepticism and eagerness.

As all devotees of 3-D and animation know very well, the objects we love suffer from being difficult to reproduce. While this paperback volume does not include an actual lenticular object on the cover as did *Paris in 3D*, the illustrations are plentiful and effective. When necessary, multiple images are used to show how effects of depth and/or animation were achieved. Caption text is clear and precise. While there is no bibliography, all sources are fully cited in endnotes, which in turn point to any number of further research topics. It is to be hoped that Timby's study will inspire others to pursue some of these threads and to augment her history with more episodes and case studies from other countries. (Christopher Pinney's work on Hindu devotional lenticulars, manufactured in China for the Indian market, suggests that the reading of depth and flatness is quite different there than in Europe and the Americas). It will also be good to connect this history to research in the fields of conservation and preservation, for as Timby points out, several of the manufacturing processes and materials are highly susceptible to deterioration.

While in some ways overdue, *3D and Animated Lenticular Photography* is also timely. It is relevant to current developments in both the art world and consumer market. In the art world, a limited number of artists (George LeGrady, Julian Opie, Rafael Rozendaal, among others) are producing lenticular editions, and Timby's thesis prompts us to consider the balance of spectacle and substance in this newer work. The stakes may be higher in the commercial world, where autostereoscopic screens are being developed for trade and consumer markets, even in advance of a steady supply of content. Timby's book helps explain the desire for these glasses-free 3-D systems and perhaps predicts their fate.

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## NewViews

(Continued from page 7)

- 11/23/16: • *Moana*  
• *The Great Wall*
- 12/16/16: • *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (+IMAX)
- 12/??/16: • *Ghosts of the Lusitania* (Rough Cut Pictures)
- 12/??/16: • *Predators* (BBC Earth & Giant Screen Films)
- 2016: • *Biology 2.0* (La Compagni des Taxi-brousse)
- *Leonardo da Vinci* (Camera Lucida Productions)
  - *Spaced Out* (Tycho Brahe Planetarium)
  - *Wild Flight 3D* (Atlantic Productions, Colossus Productions)
  - *African Safari 3D*
  - *Amazing Might Micro Monsters 3D*
  - *Chuuk Lagoon 3D*
  - *The DNA Key*
  - *Electropolis*
  - *Kitty Hawk*
  - *Martains*
  - *Moon*
  - *Mystery of the Ebo Gogo*
  - *Ocean Giants*
  - *Patagonia 3D*
  - *Secrets of the Royal Garden*
  - *Secret of the Universe*
  - *Smart Cities 3D*
  - *The Story of Cells*
  - *Volcano*
  - *Wild Light*

## 3-D Movies are the Top Five

With *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* wonderful success in 3-D, the top five box office grossing films are now all 3-D films. Domestically they rank:

- 1) *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*
- 2) *Avatar*
- 3) *Titanic*
- 4) *Jurassic World*
- 5) *Marvel's The Avengers*

Worldwide they rank:

- 1) *Avatar*
- 2) *Titanic*
- 3) *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*
- 4) *Jurassic World*
- 5) *Marvel's The Avengers*

(*Titanic* was originally released in 2-D, making most of its money from that release, but James Cameron was already making 3-D documentaries and probably would have made *Titanic* in 3-D, if today's digital theaters had existed in 2007.) 📖