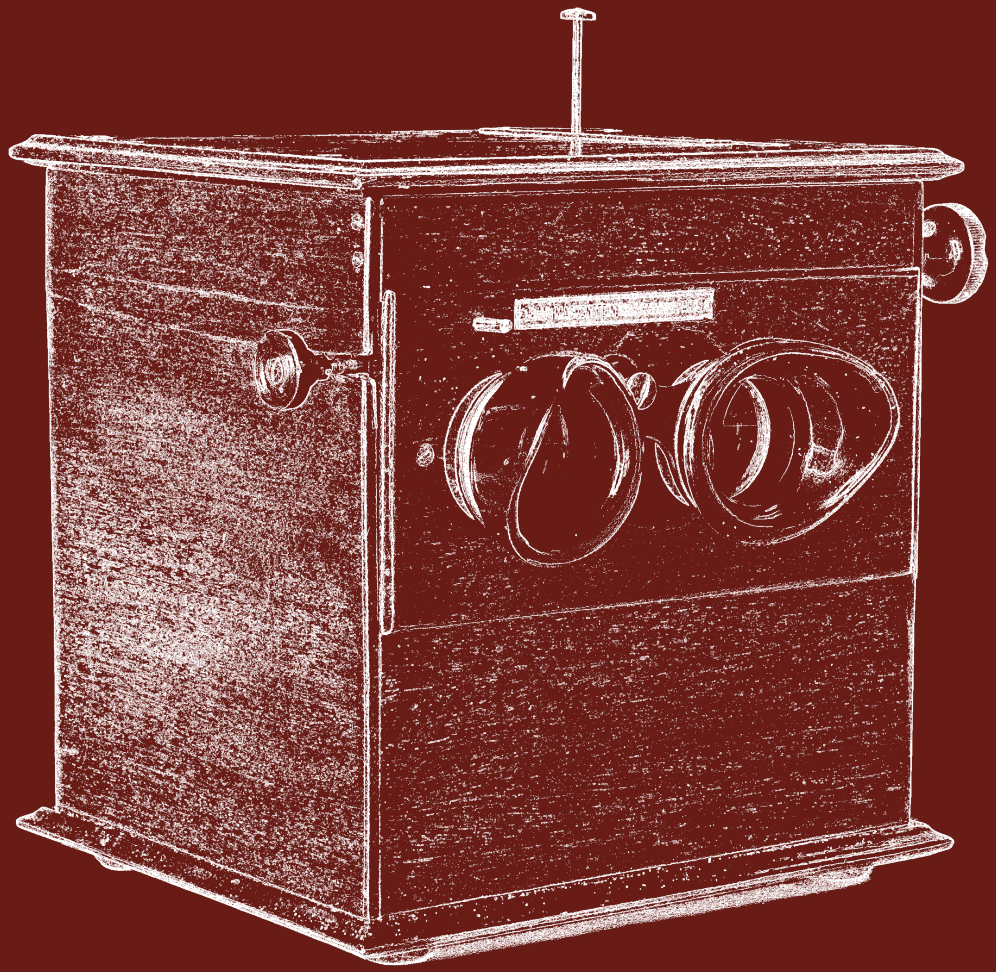

Stereoscopy History Series

Designers & Manufacturers

Mackenstein

ANDRÉ RUITER

Mackenstein

A German maker of cameras and stereoscopes in Paris, whose life was intertwined with the wars between France and Germany.



The *Stereoscopy History Series* explores the history of stereoscopy in Europe between 1850 and 1930, unveiling the stories of the people, companies and their remarkable instruments and images that captured the imagination of an era.

Mackenstein

Hermann Josef Hubert Mackenstein was born in Doveren, Westphalia (present-day Germany) on 17 December 1846. Trained as a carpenter, he left for Paris in 1867 to refine his craft. At the end of 1868 he was called up for service in the Prussian army, where he served as a bugler. When the Franco-Prussian War broke out on 19 July 1870, Mackenstein found himself once again in Paris, now besieging the city in which he had recently lived.

Demobilised in 1872, Mackenstein returned to Paris and established a carpentry workshop. He married Ihrama Augusta Fontaine d'Ocq in 1875. Two years later the couple had a daughter, Marie.

By the late 1870s Mackenstein had turned to camera production. From around 1887 his business was based on the Rue des Carmes. In 1902, the firm Établissements Mackenstein was founded, and a shop was opened on Avenue de l'Opéra. Here Mackenstein sold not only devices of his own manufacture but also products from other makers. Mackenstein's firm grew to become a leading camera manufacturer in Paris, producing conventional and stereo cameras, photographic accessories, and stereoscopes. In 1897 he founded the photography magazine *Arc en Ciel*, which continued publication until 1915.

Mackenstein was repeatedly obliged to stress the French identity of his company, as anti-German sentiment in France was strong at the beginning of the twentieth century. With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, the situation worsened. Following Germany's declaration of war on France, Mackenstein's factory was placed under police guard amid suspicions that he was a German spy. In 1915 the firm was renamed Francia[1], a name already used for one of its camera lines. The name was intended to emphasise the French character of the company. That same year, however, Mackenstein's property was confiscated, and in 1916 he fled to the neutral Netherlands. Business operations in Paris were continued during the war by the remaining management.

After the war, Mackenstein regained his possessions only after a lengthy legal process, and he returned to Paris in 1922. Mackenstein died on 24 March 1924. The company was then taken over by two of his employees, Henri Suffize and Léon Molitor, and continued under the name Suffize & Molitor. The two successors continued the company until 1939[2].



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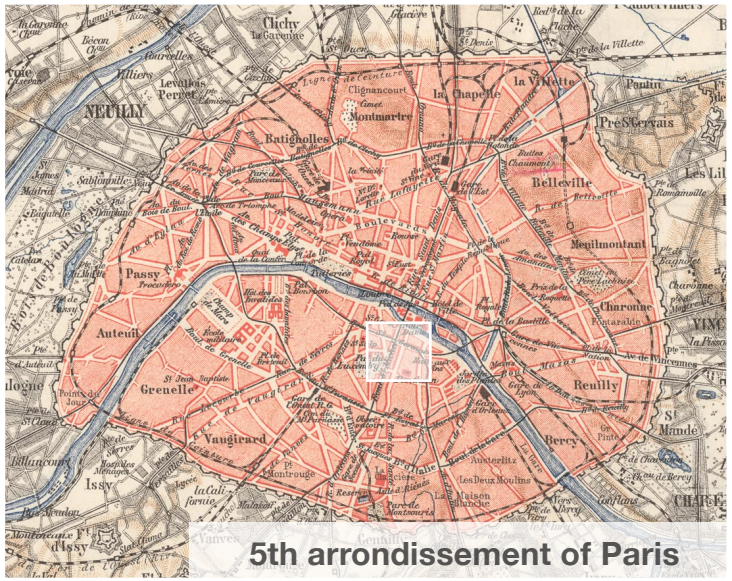
L'Arc en Ciel was published by Mackenstein from 1897 to 1915. The magazine contained articles on photography and served to promote Mackenstein's products.

Companies and people

	H. Mackenstein	**Établissements Mackenstein** (From 1915, Établissements Francia)	**Suffize & Molitor** (Ancienne Établissements Mackenstein)
Duration	1872–1902	1902–1922	1922–1939
Addresses in Paris	16, Rue Cuvier (1872–c.1879) 34, Saint Severin (c.1879) 71, Saint Jacques (c.1879–c.1887) 23, Rue des Carmes (c.1887–c.1895) 15, Rue des Carmes (c.1895–1902)	15, Rue des Carmes (1902–1922) 7, Avenue de l'Opéra (1902–1922)	15, Rue des Carmes (1922–1932) 7, Impasse des Bœfs (1932–1938) 34, Rue de la Montagne Sainte Geneviève (1939)[3]
People	Hermann Josef Hubert Mackenstein * 17-12-1846, Doveren (Germany) † 24-03-1924, Paris Société Française de Photographie (1883)	Hermann Josef Hubert Mackenstein	Henri Suffize * 05-05-1871, Vermenton sur Yonne † 06-10-1951, Vermenton sur Yonne Léon Molitor *(no birth or decease information)*

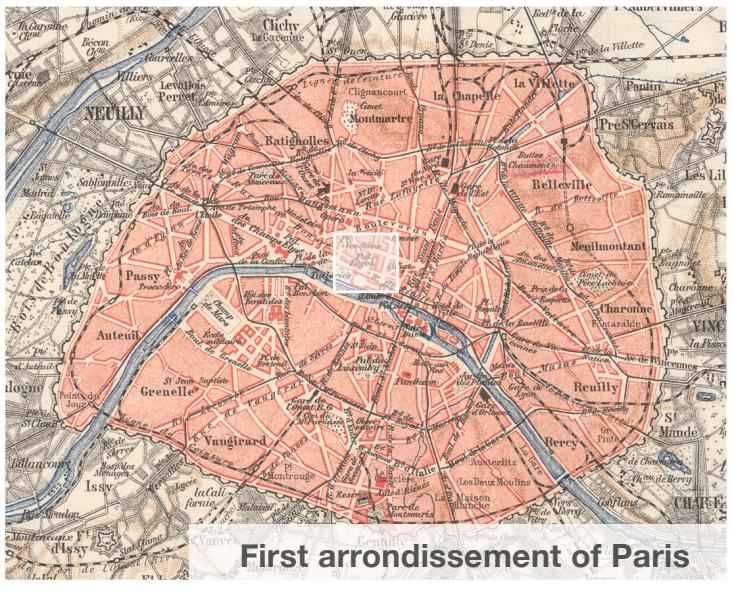
15, Rue des Carmes

The location of the factory of Établissements Mackenstein and Suffize & Molitor.



7, Avenue de l'Opéra

Shop of Établissements Mackenstein



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Extrait de *La Vie Heureuse.*

Adresser toujours la correspondance comme suit : **Etablts MACKENSTEIN** *7, avenue de l'Opéra, 7* **PARIS**

Chambre Noire Série III B

Throughout its existence, Mackenstein developed and produced a wide range of cameras. The overall catalogue included several series of wooden folding cameras, compact box cameras, and metal jumelle cameras[4], in both conventional and stereo formats. Virtually every type of camera in common use at the time was introduced by Mackenstein. The Chambre Noire Série III B formed part of the Série III product line, which comprised four models designated by the letters A to D. The series consisted of large, folding wooden cameras.

The Série III B was designed for 18 × 24 cm glass negatives. It was produced between c.1888 and c.1915. Its lens panel could be exchanged, allowing the camera to be used either as a conventional or as a stereo camera, depending on the chosen panel and number of lenses. The camera itself was not equipped with a shutter, but could be fitted with lenses incorporating their own shutters.



Chambre Noire Série III B with serial number 13616 and equipped with a stereo lens panel



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La Nature, 1901

Jumelle Stéréo-Panoramique Francia No. 4

The Francia or La Francia camera line comprised a series of conventional Jumelle type cameras and stereo panoramic cameras. It was introduced around 1903. Some models carried a number that corresponded to the supported negative format. The Francia 4 through 8 were Jumelle Stéréo-Panoramique cameras, designed to produce both stereo and panoramic photographs. Variants were made for the 45 × 107 mm, 6 × 13 cm, and 8 × 18 cm formats. By shifting the lens panel, one of the two stereo lenses could be centred in the middle of the camera for panoramic photography, while the other lens was deactivated by covering it with the lens cap.

The model shown here is a Francia No. 4, intended for 6 × 13 cm glass negatives. The camera was introduced around 1903 and was manufactured until about 1915. The camera could be fitted with an interchangeable magazine for either 12 or 18 plates and was offered with a range of lenses.



Francia No. 4 with serial number 8986, manufactured around 1911. This camera has two 90 mm Mackenstein Anastigmat série VI f/6.8 lenses with six aperture settings. The aperture settings of both lenses can be adjusted simultaneously via a controller that connects both lenses.



La Nature, 1910

Stéréoscope-Classeur Portatif

Le Stéréoscope-Classeur Portatif is a tray-based stereoscope with a unique mechanism. “Portatif” means portable. Although compact, the device is too heavy to be classified as a true hand-held stereoscope.

The viewer was introduced in 1911, but it appears not to have been a commercial success, as it no longer featured in the catalogue of Mackenstein’s successors, Suffize & Molitor, after the First World War. Production probably ceased around 1915, which also explains why the viewer is today a rare collector’s item.

The distinctive feature of this stereoscope is that the tray, which holds 25 glass stereoviews, remains fixed in position while the images are viewed. A turning knob is located on the side. By rotating this knob clockwise or anticlockwise, an image is selected. In doing so, the entire viewing assembly, including lenses and tray, moves. On the top of the viewer, an index with 25 numbers indicates the selected image, accompanied by a push button.

Inside, beneath the tray, is a mechanism with 25 fingers. When the button on top is pressed, the finger corresponding to the selected image is activated and pushes the slide upwards into viewing position before the lenses. Releasing the button returns the image back into the tray.

The Stéréoscope-Classeur Portatif was manufactured only for the 45 × 107 mm format. A wooden cabinet accommodating



Stéréoscope-Classeur Portatif 45 x 107





With the viewer opened at the back, the mechanism with its 25 fingers becomes visible. The upper image shows how the viewing assembly with lens panel slides out of the wooden housing when an image is selected by turning the side knob. The push button on the top activates the corresponding finger, bringing the image into view.

Stéréo Classeur

Mackenstein's Stéréo-Classeur is a tray-based stereoscope with a more conventional mechanism. It was probably introduced around the same time as the Stéréoscope-Classeur Portatif (1911). The first version was made for the 45 × 107 mm format, followed later by models for 6 × 13 cm and 7 × 13 cm. The viewers were equipped with a cabinet for storing the bakelite trays.

To load the device, the front panel is opened and a tray of 25 glass slides can be inserted. By turning a side lever, one of the images is pushed upwards from the tray by two metal fingers from below, allowing it to be viewed. Continuing turning the lever returns the slide to the tray, which then shifts slightly forward to position the next image. A pull knob on the side allows the tray to be advanced or reversed rapidly, making it possible to jump directly to a specific image.



Stéréo Classeur 45 x 107. The viewer has a cabinet for 12 trays that can store 300 glass stereoviews.



Stéréo Classeur 45 x 107



Stéréo Classeur 6 x 13. This viewer is said to come from the estate of Henri Suffize.

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Other stereoscopes

Not all stereoscopes bearing a Mackenstein nameplate were in fact manufactured by the company. At his shop on Avenue de l'Opéra, Mackenstein also sold products made by other firms, which were then fitted with a Mackenstein label. Since some catalogues included both his own products and those of other makers, certain stereoscopes have been wrongly identified as Mackenstein devices. Here are three hand-held stereoscopes bearing a Mackenstein nameplate, but are in fact made by the firm Mattey.



6 x 13 cm paper and glass stereoviews.



Stéréoscope à doucine for 8.5 x 17 cm paper and glass stereoviews.



45 x 107 mm glass stereoviews.

Cameras

Name	**Negative**	**Format**	**Lens(es)**	**Shutter speed** (in sec.)	**Introduction**
Chambre Noire Série III B	Glass	18 x 24 cm	Multiple	No shutter	c. 1888
Jumelle Stéréo-Panoramique Francia No. 4	Glass	6 x 13 cm	Fixed focus, including: 90mm Darlot f/10 90 mm Goerz III f/6.8 90 mm Tessar Krauss f/6.3 90 mm Anastigmat 90 mm Mackenstein f/6.8 85 mm Eurygraphe Berthiot f/4.5	11 shutter speeds	c. 1903

Multi-view stereoscopes

Name	Mechanism	Stereoview support	Format	Number of views	Lens focus	Ocular adjustment *	Introduction
Stéréoscope-Classeur Portatif	Tray-based	Glass	45 x 107 mm	25	Yes	No	1911
Stéréoscope-Classeur	Tray-based	Glass	Models for 45 x 107 mm, 6 x 13 cm and 7 x 13 cm	25	Yes	Yes	c. 1911

* This feature allows the distance between the two eyepieces to be adjusted to accommodate different eye widths.

Stereoscope patents

Number	Title	Filing	Publication	Applicants	Application
FR436338	*Appareil pour la vision d'une série de vues photographiques sur verre*	19-01-1911	25-03-1912	Établissements Mackenstein	Stéréoscope-Classeur Portatif
FR471602	*Appareil stéréoscopique pour la vision des épreuves photographiques sur verre et sur papier*	02-05-1914	05-11-1914	Établissements Mackenstein	Hand-held stereoscope

Notes and references

1. *Photo-Revue* (September 1915). The cover of the magazine shows “Francia - Ancienne Établissements Mackenstein”.
2. *Archives commerciales de la France* (29-11-193), p. 2606.
3. This address is mentioned only in connection with the dissolution of the company.
4. Jumelle or photo-jumelle cameras were popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first camera was introduced by Jules Carpentier in c. 1892. Jumelle means “twin” or “binocular” in French. Jumelles had a narrow lens board and a wider plate holder, giving the cameras a shape that looked like a pair of binoculars. Both single-lens and stereo Jumelle cameras were manufactured.

Bibliography

Princelle, J.L.; Scheiba, D. (2013) *Mackenstein – Suffize & Molitor*

Revisions

1.0	13-10-2025	First edition
1.0.1	24-01-2026	Advertisement from 1901 added

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Special thanks to Pascal Martiné, who shared his knowledge and images from his collection.

Website: stereoscopyhistory.net