

HolartTM Report

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SPECIAL EDITION

AUCTION OF THE NEW YORK MUSEUM OF HOLOGRAPHY

On January 9, 1993, in a nondescript warehouse in Hawthorne, New York, all assets of the New York Museum of Holography were sold by auction to the highest bidder. As this was the largest public auction ever of holographic art, Holart Report is suspending its usual format to bring our readers this exclusive report.

"Museum For Sale" Comments on the Demise of the Museum of Holography

by Ronald R. Erickson

"We could tell that the Auction Site must be near by -- the vultures were circling and the gray day had a chilling dampness."

Seeming like the start of a mystery novel, the demise of the Museum of Holography by Bankruptcy Auction was in fact the end of a 15 year story of some significance. However, the purpose of these few words is not to 'flashback' to chronicle the history of the organization, but to caption the recent events described and listed in this issue. If not to place these events in the full perspective of history, this will at least cast them in a local context so that, with fair warning to all, they will neither exemplify nor represent anything more than what they were.

A Bankruptcy in the United States has been described as the closest thing we can experience to 'Marshal Law' or perhaps 'Frontier Justice.' That is, there are no extenuating circumstances nor arguments to bring on either side that might stay the process from its ultimate conclusion -- the liquidation of all assets to the benefit of the creditors. It matters not that the assets are those of a Museum. It matters not that history and the artifacts of a new technology



Photo by Peter Scheir of AD 2000 INC

Final preview before the auction begins

have no 'value' beyond what someone is willing to pay to OWN them. It matters even less that a grouping of items documenting the founding of holography known as the "Collection of Gabor with Nobel Prize and Papers" and held by many to be 'priceless' received a top bid of only \$4500. In all cases the decision of the TRUSTEE of the Bankruptcy Court is final and irrevocable.

So the Bankruptcy Auction of the Museum of Holography provided a very public review of what the Museum had been able to collect, preserve, and on occasion, exhibit for the public entertainment and enlightenment. Even as it was unable to preserve itself.

The PUBLIC was invited to attend and participate in the Auction, and judging from the more than 110 individuals that registered, and perhaps even bid on an item or two, we the public appeared to fall into three categories. There were the very few major bidders -- those who knew of the Auction long before it appeared in the New York Times and were ready to make a good effort to pick up the entire collection at a bargain price. There were many in the group of us, holographers and friends of the Museum, who were there to observe yet one more chapter, the final one, in the Museum's existence. We might bid on a particular favorite item, until the price rose toward a fair value

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(and thus far above our meager resources). And there were a surprising number of casual observers who heard or read about the Auction and were curious on that cool gray Saturday. The bulk of those in this last group, the actual PUBLIC, departed after about an hour of the rather tedious Auction itself.

This was not an auction of art, it was an auction of assets. This was not Christie's or Sotheby's but the Henry A. Leonard & Co., Inc. - LIQUIDATORS. The holograms were not 'displayed' but arranged on tables and walls for 'inspection' prior to the actual auction. There was no adequate lighting, insufficient heat, and the auctioneer sat on top of a step ladder (which I admired, as the auction lasted more than four hours). The audience was not drawn from the most knowledgeable collectors (though many well known galleries and buyers were represented from Europe and the US), and it seemed only one bidder present was capable of making a significant offer on the collection as a whole. Therefore, the bid prices at this auction do not represent "fair market value" of the works or of the artists represented -- but only the highest bid at a forced sale of assets.

Of course there were some well known works by artists (also well known to those bidding) that danced nicely up to "Estimated Values" (note: no estimated values were provided, no catalogue was published, and no one took the time or expense to appraise the works). Yet, other artists and works of merit received very low bids, perhaps because of unfamiliarity coupled with very limited resources. A friend of mine who knows how auctions can work heard the description of this one and noted that "there wasn't enough money in the room to support all the works, so the familiar got the action." His 'rule of thumb' for an auction to begin to measure the market is that the 'money in the room' should be from 3 to 5 times the estimated total value of all the items in the auction. In this case there wasn't even 1.5 times the estimated value present to bid.

Oh Yes, we have been through a 10 year recession, and not only did the Museum fall on hard times in recent years, but so did the holographic art market and holographic artists in general. Perhaps if there had been more capital available in the holographic world, the Museum would have received greater support and averted its demise -- or at least the bidding would have been stronger for all the major works presented in the Auction.

The MIT Museum did place the sufficient high bid allowing it to receive all the holographic art works and the books and periodicals, and we hope, the archives. This is a small victory in that all these resources will remain in a single location and can be accessed, in time.

As you review the listing of 'lots' and their bid prices, remember that what you are reading is only the facts -- those were the bid prices at this auction, a liquidation auction. There is nothing more that can be reliably drawn from this information. Those who make grand generalizations or site specifics to make a point -- well, caveat auditor.

Ronald R. Erickson
February 1993

Ron Erickson's ties to the MOH date back to 1972, when he was a lab instructor in Dr. T.H. Jeong's holography course at Lake Forest College. One of that year's students, Posy Jackson, co-founded (along with Jody Burns) the Museum of Holography in 1976. Mr. Erickson was, as he stated, "sometimes in the fray and sometimes on the perimeter" throughout the Museum's history. In 1989, he became Editor of *Holosphere Magazine* and served as Business Manager of the MOH from 1990 until the doors closed March 1, 1992.



"Missing" From The MOH

Before closing this chapter in holography's brief history, it should be stated that a number of holograms "disappeared" from the MOH. At the time the collection was put in storage, a hand written list was made of works that were supposed to be in the collection but could not be located. Holart obtained a photo-copy of that list, indicating that the works itemized below were missing. Omitted from this list are works of very little value (ie. embossed stickers), a couple of works whose names and/or artists were unintelligible on the photo-copy, and works that actually turned up at the auction.

BERKHOUT, Rudie • 12 MILLIWATT BOOGIE
BERKHOUT, Rudie • RUBEN
BURNS, Joseph R. • LIBERTY
BURNS, Joseph R. • LUNA
BURNS, Joseph R. • LUNA #4
BURNS, Joseph R. • SIMON WITH CAMERA
CONDUCTRON CORP. • CHESS PIECES & MAGNIFYING GLASS
HARRIS, Ken • CRYSTAL CREATIONS
KASTELANAS (sp?) • ANTITHESIS
LISSACK, S. & RUCHIN, C. • MANDALLA
MOORE, Lon • DESERT MIRAGE
NEMTZOW, Scott • CREME DE MOTION #6
ORR, Edwina • TIME SQUARES
PERRY, Hart • BIRTH OF VENUS
PERRY, Hart • PETE HAMILL
RALLISON, Richard • WOMAN WITH ROSE
SAPAN, Jason • WARHOL (MASTER)
SCHWEITZER, Dan • THE GALLERY
UNTERSEHER, Fred • MANTRA (sp?) SERIES
WESLEY, Ed • MAN ON A MOTORCYCLE
WUERKER, Ralph • BULLET IN FLIGHT

Dr. Stephen Benton of MIT was kind enough to check over this list prior to publication. Noting that the MIT Museum is slowly and carefully unpacking the works, he was unable to verify the list. However, he felt it likely that the Nemtzow and Wuerker pieces were at MIT, and perhaps also the Lissack & Ruchin piece and the Unterseher. The Berkhout and Schweitzer pieces are definitely missing -- they are valuable works, and the holography community should keep an eye out for them and the others.