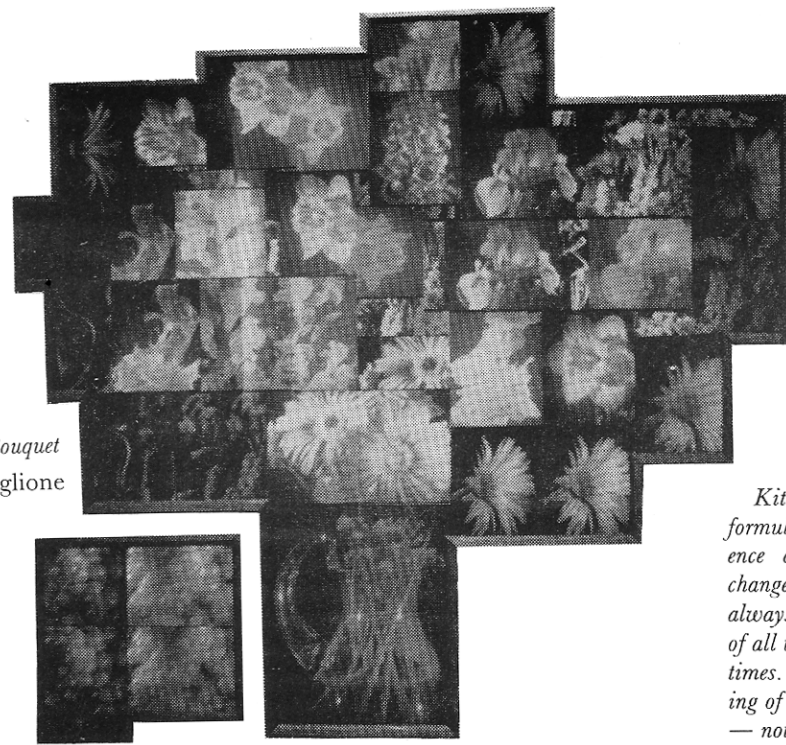


HOLOS GALLERY: THE RISE OF COMMERCIALISM AND KITSCH



Bouquet
by Nancy Gorglione

By AL RAZUTIS

This summer, *Wavefront* visited Holos Gallery in San Francisco to assess its present status and review its current exhibition, **Laser Affiliates' 10-Year Retrospective**, featuring the work of Nancy Gorglione and Gregory Cherry.

Holos Gallery has operated since February 1979 as a combined production, distribution and exhibition enterprise under the guidance of founder and director Gary Zellerbach. It resides in the famous Haight-Ashbury district, now populated with trendy '80s shops instead of the light-show psychedelic emporiums of the late '60s.

Holos is the only continuing gallery operation on the west coast that is entirely dedicated to holography. Its entrepreneurial position is strangely complementary to the "fine arts" interests of Richard Kennedy's Los Angeles gallery, MVC (see review of MVC in this issue) in that Zellerbach's expressed

aims are to distribute and promote low-cost commercial products, be they 4x5" reflection plates by Kaufman, "dazers", stickers, dichromate pendants or any number of novelties.

Zellerbach's operation is in reality a small conglomerate of companies (the DZ company manufactures the "dazers"; Holos Gallery exhibits them) and he distributes for a number of manufacturing firms (Holocrafts, Light Impressions, etc.). By Zellerbach's estimation, his operation is both healthy and slowly expanding. Holos is primarily focused on inexpensive consumer items (pendants, buckles, paperweights, stickers). Other companies, like General Holographics in Vancouver, are modelled after this type of operation.

A look at the Holos catalogue reveals a preponderance of generic holography that could only be described in the manner that Clement Green-

berg attributed to "kitsch" ("Avant-Garde and Kitsch" 1939).

Regardless of its marketability and its immediate (read adolescent) appeal, this collection of imagery features subject matter which is almost inconsequential, usually banal and novelty-oriented and sometimes puerile and grotesque.

The Holos Gallery catalogue features holographic art with imagery which is mostly exploitative of the 3-D novelty aspect of holography. Most are kitschy or just plain trashy (unicorns, eyes, *The Kiss* by Multiplex, *Dr. Strange* by Lon Moore, for example). But this collection seems to be paying for itself.

Zellerbach's commercial holography is based on his representation of a select number of holographers, notably Lon Moore, John Kaufman, Randy James, Bob Hess, Gregory Cherry and Nancy Gorglione. He draws up individual

contracts with each artist for exclusive or non-exclusive representation in a given format (e.g. glass or film). These contracts, similar to private gallery practice worldwide, usually specify a minimum sales figure for each artist and options to get out of the contract if sales do not meet expectations.

The stable of artists seems primarily to reflect an interest in small plates (4x5s and 8x10s) of a multi-color reflection type. The subject matter is primarily novelty oriented images which exploit 3-D qualities of holographic mimetic representation or present us with weird scenes like Lon Moore's *Bert and Sadie*. The work is by and large "technical" in that technique is foregrounded over concept or content. Zellerbach's commercial 4x5s sell for \$35 to \$100, while the 8x10s sell for \$350 and up.

The precondition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends.

— Clement Greenberg

Although Zellerbach is uncomfortable with "fine arts" versus "commercial" distinctions — his appreciation of holography appears to be across the board and includes all applications — some attention to these terms (and their distinctions) is useful if we are to understand the informing ideology of the gallery and its represented art.

The gallery shop is the focus of the gallery; the items on display and for sale are the main product. Holos Gallery is quite small, and any exhibition of work there is almost certainly limited to wall pieces of a reflection kind. The relatively inexpensive (\$35 versus the thousands-of-dollars price tags for "fine art") prices for the small holograms reveal an interest on the part of Zellerbach to popularize the medium rather than to develop certain "fine arts" directions.

It is fair to say that generally much of "fine art" requires an informed, discerning and perhaps critical audience which is no longer interested in novelty or shock effects. Such an audience, one may presume, would require that artists investigate the medium of holography in a sophisticated and conceptual manner that exceeds simply making holograms of small figurines or model sets and presenting them as framed 3-D pictures.



Dr. Strange by Lon Moore



Bert and Sadie by Lon Moore

Because it can be turned out mechanically, kitsch has become an integral part of our productive system in a way in which true culture could never be, except accidentally...Kitsch's enormous profits are a source of temptation to the avant-garde itself, and members have not always resisted this temptation...

— Clement Greenberg

The issues of "fine art" and "commercial" really crop up with the current exhibition featuring the work of Nancy Gorglione and Gregory Cherry. What is interesting in this exhibition is that both holographers present work (sometimes identical in subject matter) that appears on both the "fine arts" wall and the "commercial" wall (the first facing the gallery shop display counter, the latter immediately behind the display counter). On the fine arts wall, the price tags are quite high — for example, Gorglione's most expensive piece, *Bouquet*, is \$9,200 — whereas on the commercial wall their jointly produced 8x10s are \$250 and up, depending on

individual pieces. The connections between these two tendencies will be discussed later.

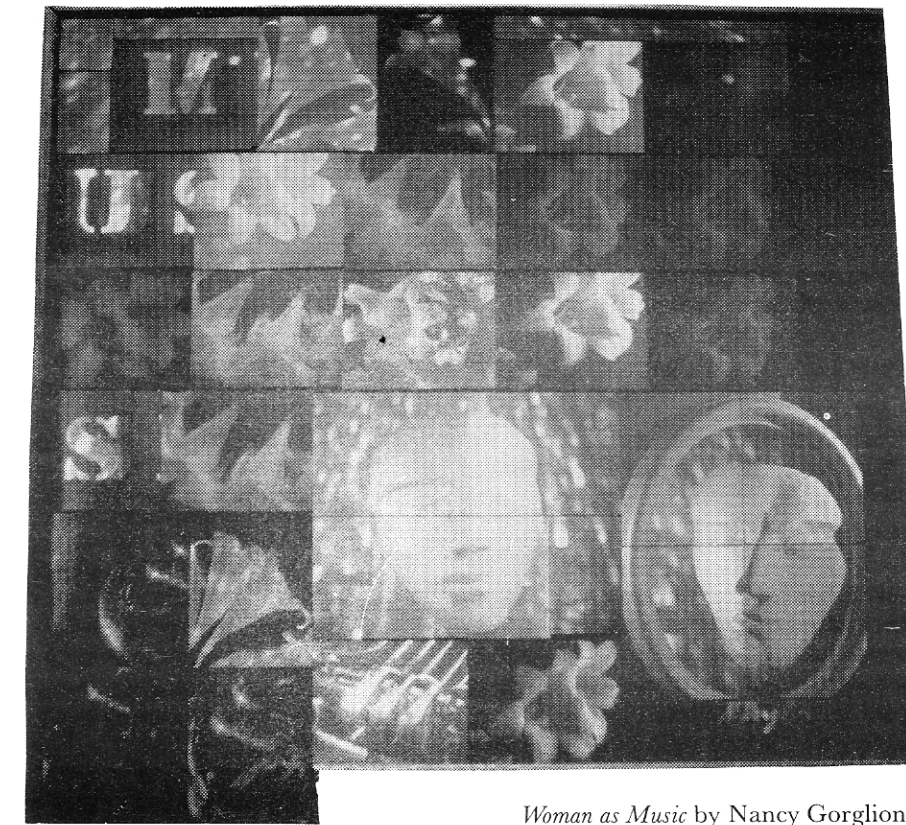
Nancy Gorglione has exhibited art since the mid-70s, whereas Gregory Cherry began exhibiting in the '80s. Both are key figures in the San Francisco art holography scene and both are technically accomplished holographers. Gorglione's work is very decorative, colorful and technically refined and clean. Its physicality is tied to mimetic representation of objects in colorful hues and her reflection composites are extremely sensual upon first impression.

The pieces she presented were mostly reflection hologram composites that contained 4x5 (with a few 8x10) plates arranged in a serial-image manner to present a number of details in an otherwise larger composition. For example, her most successful (and most expensive) piece, *Banquet*, has a number of 4x5s with flowers colored red, green and blue; *Double Time or Second Thoughts for the Amazon* features a mosaic of plants and insects; *Woman as Music* contains flowers, masks, letters and musical instruments; *Magic Carpet* features three rows of three 4x5s depicting moiré patterns.

On first impression, Gorglione's holograms stand out and tantalize the viewer with their color and textures. But that seems to be the extent of her art: it is basically decorative and lacks any strong metaphoric investigation. Her titles reflect the theme; the holograms articulate the details of the theme as "scene" or "representation". Once the initial impact of light, color and luminescence wears off, the viewer is left wondering why only the surface of the concept has been explored and what happened to the depth.

Gorglione's work is very reminiscent of much figurative, decorative art that hangs in private galleries up and down the coast of California — art geared to a sensibility that is interested in decorating interior spaces or walls of homes: with paintings of stylized scenes of landscape or still life. Gorglione's work falls into that category of production and appreciation, an unsophisticated category at best. And while her technical skills are considerable (the hologram: are bright, resolved and noise-free), her conceptual base is rather facile. Even in the most striking composite, *Banquet* the floral holographic image arrangement — colorful as it is — sets some simple limits for the aesthetic concept.

The aesthetic limit of Gorglione's work seems to be informed primarily by formal compositional concerns which deal with serial imagery, adjacent color patterns — the surface of things in art. Her work also recalls the serial composi-



Woman as Music by Nancy Gorglione

tion pieces by Anait Stephens in the mid-70s. Although technically inferior (they were fairly dim for image-plane reflection work of that time), her pieces nevertheless exhibited a wider range of aesthetic concerns and a deeper commitment to exploring metaphor, dimension and surface.

In fact, what is missing in Gorglione's work is precisely the lessons one could have learned from Stephens: the conceptual and aesthetic base of holography will remain the interest, not the brightness or colorful qualities of surface representation. In other words, conception and aesthetics will produce a legacy and history — technique is something that is constantly in flux and ultimately a basic requirement in any art, one that does not merit in-depth discussion.

Gregory Cherry's work by comparison is inferior to Gorglione's and is

kitsch personified. Cherry combines a fascination with mysticism (*Egyptian Memories*), or with kitsch (*Talk To Me*) or UFO fantasies (*Runway #2*) with good technique. This fascination might have been appropriate on Haight Street in,

The Gorglione/Cherry commercial byproducts seem closely linked to their fine-art interests. On Zellerbach's commercial wall, behind the dichromate pendant counter, are 8x10s which feature a mask, plants, bananas, telescope with a star field, cake — subject matter that is at times a detail of the fine arts work across the room. There seems to be no aesthetic distinction made or intended between fine arts and commercial except in terms of price tag and scale of piece. This in itself leads one to believe that scale and cost are at issue here rather than aesthetics or concept or creativity.

So let's collapse the distinctions between "fine arts" and "commercial" and temporarily forget that on one wall are pieces going for nine grand and similar subject matter on the other for \$250. What is left? Holographic work — let's even forget or ignore that it is even "art" — that strives to establish its worth on the basis of targeting different audiences.

There is nothing inherently wrong with decorative work — millions of walls around North America and millions of offices testify to its popularity. In future, there certainly will be millions of decorative holograms hanging on those walls as well. Decorative art explores and exploits the surface of representation — it gives us pleasing and sensuous compositions and little else. Gorglione's work is exemplary in this regard; Cherry's work is unfortunately both unsuccessful and pretentious. But if viewers are unsatisfied with this work, they must not merely pass judgment, but demand more — of the artist, of the medium, of the possibilities of expression. They must demand more than decoration or kitsch.

Perhaps some artists have assumed their work is something that it is not. Most curators today — and a good example is the recent Chicago exhibition — still have difficulty assessing decorative work like Gorglione's in the context of more conceptual work like, for example, that of Dieter Jung. In Chicago, both artists were exhibited in the same context.

Zellerbach, however, does not seem either confused or concerned. His exhibitions are primarily commercial and the holograms he presents are for sale at market prices. Beyond that, Holos Gallery has yet to scratch the surface of "fine art", its place in holographic history and its relationship to kitsch.