

CHICAGO

EXHIBITION AND SYMPOSIUM

Debate on the Arts

By ED DIETRICH

From Nov. 8 through Nov. 30, 1985 the School of the Art Institute of Chicago hosted an invitational exhibition called Holography, with about 30 works by artists from around the world. On the weekend of Nov. 8-9 the School also hosted a symposium featuring presentations by six holographers.

Each artist was given the opportunity to exhibit work recently shown at the i International Exhibition of Holography at Lake Forest College or to send a piece of their own choosing. For logistical reasons, many let us retain the works shown at Lake Forest. However, many sent different works and these, combined with works from some artists who did not participate in the Lake Forest show, gave this exhibition a unique character.

My objective was to create an exhibition which would survey some major themes and forms that artists working in holography had employed in their work, that would show where we as artists have come from and where the future of holography as an art medium might be headed. A grant from the Illinois Arts Council allowed us a valuable addition to the exhibition - a symposium devoted to exploring some of the ideas as presented by the artists themselves.

One objective was the design of an exhibit which preserved each work's integrity while allowing for the integration of all into a cohesive body. This meant limiting the works to 25-30 in order to allow sufficient space for each. The show was extremely well received by the SAIC community and did much to raise awareness of holography as a unique medium for artistic expression, as well as highlight the fact that exploration of these possibilities is still in its infancy.

One significant direction in art holography has been the concern with sculptural integration and presentation and the extension of the medium through interaction with other media. Sally Weber utilized a corner of the gallery to create an installation of her transmission HOEs which forced the viewer to explore different viewing positions and heights in order to fully experience the potential of the work. The work also explored the pure physical properties of the interaction of various spectral hues at different viewing points.

Other works representative of these ideas were Window II by Al Razutis, Roto by Becky Deem and works by Michael Croydon and Wenyon & Gamble. John Boesche combined reflection holograms of a casting of a Louis Sullivan ornament with a slide projection of a quotation from Sullivan's "A System of Architectural Ornament".

The subject of collage, montage and assemblage, both of holography with other media and on its own, was amply represented by works by Setsuko Ishii, Fernando Catta-Preta, Anait Stephens, Sydney Dinsmore and Doug Tyler, among others. Doris Vila's Those Were Your Words was an example of the possibilities of layered film montage which expanded the scale and broke the boundaries of conventional film formats. Nancy Gorglione's large-scale reflection assemblage of 4x5 inch color-controlled plates drew associations from several viewers of the photographic work of Gilbert and George.

Melissa Crenshaw's *Levels With Light Blocks* draws from the ideas of collage and constructivism, but extends these with a masterful and subtle use of color interrelationships. Dieter Jung's *Present Space* and *Different Space* utilize the unique color and spatial possibilities of holography in such a way as to position them as signposts for the aesthetic future of the medium.

The two day symposium on art and holography began with a presentation by Sydney Dinsmore, director of Interference Hologram Gallery in Toronto. Her talk focussed on the history and philosophy of Interference as a gallery devoted to the development of holography as an art medium. Dinsmore discussed the gallery's interaction with its audience and the art community in Toronto and presented documentation of several of its exhibitions. She expressed her concern - echoed by many in the holographic community - about events surrounding the Frankfurt and Hamburg shows and the value of large international shows in general.

Sally Weber's talk, entitled "Intention in Space: Architecture and Holography", was a thorough discussion of her sources and aspirations for the possibilities of holography on an architectural scale. She developed concepts of space, light and form using many ancient as well as contemporary examples of various architectural modes worldwide. Examples of her own works dramatized her understanding of these ideas and explained some of the challenges and problems inherent in trying to integrate holograms into an architectural context.

Michael Sowdon, director of Fringe Research Holographics in Toronto, started his presentation with a slide show which juxtaposed sources for his work in holography and art with an audio tape on the art of moose calling. After that comic relief, he chronicled the development of Fringe Research, discussed his feelings on aesthetics and artists working in holography, and spoke of his collaboration with Canadian artist Michael Snow on Snow's holography exhibit for Expo '86 in Vancouver this summer.

Becky Deem described her background and inspiration for her sculptural extensions of holography. Al Razutis closed Saturday's session with an extension and conclusion to his "Art and Holography", which appeared in *Wavefront*, Volume 1. Razutis refined his concepts from the original article and offered a possible scenario for the development and use of holography as an art form in a political context. On Sunday

Fred Unterseher discussed his personal artistic development via Ant Farm in the 1960s, culminating in demonstrations of perceptual phenomena which supported his ideas regarding what many have termed holocosmology.

The symposium closed with a panel discussion where the presenting artists were joined by Dieter Jung, Doris Vila and myself. The panel was a controversial and sometimes tense mixture of emotions and ideas, some of which I think had been waiting for an opportunity to vent for some time. Michael Sowdon attacked holocosmology, claiming the theory offered little towards a true understanding of holography as art and that it distanced holography from the other fine arts by placing it in a privileged position. Other arguments regarding the issues of international shows, the relationship between scientists and artists working in holography and personal philosophical positions were discussed in a session that lasted approximately 1 1/2 hours.

Some significant insights came out of this weekend. First, the time has come to stop focussing debate on the technical validity of holographic

artworks, or the artists that produce them. Most of us working in the medium have acquired skills and a level of competency equal to the challenge of the work we produce, or know of the resources we need for either educational or production purposes. If an artist chooses to have a technician produce the works that he or she conceives, there is no reason to consider them any less valid, or to feel that the artist's role as conceiver is any less powerful for not having made the work. The most important challenge facing us at this point is the need to develop the vehicles for understanding and evaluating the value of the works we produce from an aesthetic foundation.

It seems apparent to most of us who have worked in the medium for some time that neither the large international group shows nor the technical symposia held frequently are aiding the development of holography as an art medium. It's obvious that the international shows only heighten the image of holography as a technological novelty and are being staged to generate profits for the organizers. Unfortunately, the artists are not sharing in these profits in the degree to which their contributions to the success of these shows should entitle them. Michael Sowdon, in his paper, suggested that artists strive to show only in established art museums and galleries, a suggestion I strongly support.

The recent technical symposia which have included and encouraged artists to attend have also been disappointing in the amount of time devoted to artistic issues and needs. There is a lot of talk about the links between science and art, but precious few scientists seem ready to engage themselves when it comes time for the artistic presentations at such conferences.

This is not to imply that all scientists are not interested in the artistic development of holography; we know that is not the case. But if a conference is offered with the intention of devoting a significant amount of time to artistic issues, than that time must be respected as being as fundamentally important to the growth of holography as any technical or economic report might be. If there is going to be an interchange between us, we both have to make it happen.

The artistic growth of holography is at a point where it deserves and needs conferences at reasonable intervals devoted primarily to artistic issues and needs. The weekend symposium only began to point towards what we might be able to accomplish, given a week-long conference devoted to lectures, critiques and exhibitions of art/holography.

The most personally rewarding moment of the entire weekend came on Sunday afternoon when a number of us gathered in the gallery and critiqued each other's work. I think we all had a sense of how much we needed to be there with those works and how beneficial some extended periods of time spent with them might be for all of us. I hope the symposium was a start towards those goals.

THE SIXTIES REVISITED

Perspective By Michael Sowdon

When was the last time you listened to hippies babbling cosmic nonsense? Five years ago. ten perhaps? It came as a surprise, then, to encounter this on two recent trips to Chicago.

But the context did not include visits to an Amsterdam hashish club or a psychic trade fair. On both occasions I was attending conferences concerned with the interface of science, technology and art, sponsored by established educational institutions.

The first was the Second International Symposium of Display Holography, held last summer at Lake Forest College outside Chicago. More recently I was a speaker at a Symposium for the Artistic Development of Holography, sponsored by the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Both times, proceedings were marred by the inordinate amount of time spent discussing holocosmology. For those ignorant of its tenets, "it is like wow, man, the universe is just a big hologram" or, "we're all just reference beams in the interferogram of life"; in short, a wildly speculative and halfbaked philosophy, appealing but unsubstantial.

I was at Lake Forest to hear some of the most important scientists and artists in holography discuss their current work. But the conference suffered from an unfortunate but common occurrence: the people with the least to say took up most of the time. People with virtually no experience in holography rambled on and on, while experts like Nick Phillips or Stephen Benton held their talks to the allotted time. At any conference there will be poor presentations, but what does Tibetan chanting, yogic nonsense, rainbow worship or sacred numbers have to do with what I assume is an electrooptical branch of physics?

I believe the theory of holography is a profound concept with many technical applications in science, industry and the arts. I do not believe looking at holograms leads to total enlightenment, instant or otherwise. I would expect such childish speculation from pygmies given mirrors for the first time. These holographers should know better. Normally, I am most annoyed by makers and purveyors of garish holographic trinkets. But when compared to the "mystics", these people earn one's respect for their hardnosed economic realism.

Having so much of my time wasted at Lake Forest was annoying but I thought: "This conference represents many aspects of holography - warts and all. Why not overlook the negative aspects?" The recent symposium at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago was another matter entirely.

Why does a respected school cram all five speakers with credible backgrounds in fine art and holography into the first day, then give most of the second and last day to Fred Unterseher's rambling, disjointed sermon on holocosmology? He may have been around holography for a long time, but he knows little about art, and was totally inappropriate for a symposium ostensibly about the serious aesthetic concerns of holography as an art form.

The most immediate problem with holography's development as an art form is not so much the quality of artworks currently produced, but the inability of conference and exhibition organizers to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Michael Sowdon is undoubtedly one of the founding members of the Canadian holographic movement. He co-founded Fringe Research Holographics Inc. in Toronto (1974) and Interference Hologram Gallery (1983) and has participated in numerous holographic exhibitions dating back to the mid- 70s.

"In spite of, or perhaps because of his love for fast motorcycles and good scotch, Mr. Sowdon has become an accomplished holographer."

"Sowdon's work is a distillation of all that is senseless, meaningless, and ugly about mankind."

Christopher Dewdney Vanguard Magazine, 1982

David Hylnsky Image Nation Magazine #22, 1980

For the past year, Sowdon has been producing large-format holograms for the Michael Snow exhibition, to take place at Expo 86 in Vancouver, Canada. This gave him a rare chance to work in a variety of formats, including pulsed transmission plates. He has similarly refined his work in two-color, rainbow white-light transmissions as well as white-light reflections.

Sowdon is an impassioned speaker for aesthetic integrity in holography. At the recent Chicago symposium on art and holography he said much of art holography is a sham and that most exhibitions feature redundant and unimaginative work which serves only to advance the careers of marginal talent and unqualified curators. Sowdon maintains that it is imperative now, more than ever, to directly address questions concerning the arts and criticism of holography in a manner that does not equivocate or patronize.

I met with Sowdon in Vancouver, where he was installing the Expo exhibit. What follows is a discussion that is wideranging: from his criticism of the McGowan exhibition, to art, to a discussion of the Snow Expo exhibit, to the behind-the-scenes decision-making that proved a hindrance to his continuation in the Expo project. At the time of our meeting, he had just resigned.

- Al Razutis

AL RAZUTIS: *You said at the Chicago conference that you were not interested in exhibiting in any group shows. Is your position still the same?*

MICHAEL SOWDON: That depends on the group. And the circumstances. But by and large I would say I wouldn't be that interested, unless' . . . Everything's situational. It depends on who's doing the show, where it is...

What will be your connection to the McGowan exhibition, if any?

I can't see myself getting involved.

If they asked you for some work for the exhibition, would you refuse?

Yeah, I'm not favorably disposed to providing things for those kinds of shows. If they were going to buy something outright, I suppose I'd think twice about it.

Strictly pecuniary?

I'm getting more and more mercenary by the day. I really don't see the show happening, to tell you the truth. I don't think they're going to get it together. They'd have to change their over-all policy a good deal for me to support it.

What about the curating issue ?

Well, I don't think it's a very good situation. The Canadian people are involved mainly as a support group to help the international people liaise with the locals. And no contracts have been signed.

So the show may end up being strictly a technical show, with some art holograms that they've been able to find.

I think if they do come up with a workable budget, (British curator Eve) Ritscher will be able to put together a show that will probably look all right, and that will do all right in the context of science museum shows. I think any holographer who's been around the block a few times is going to think twice about being involved in an exhibition like that. I'm not the only one with misgivings about big shows.

Who 's curating good shows ?

In holography? I suppose it would be a natural preference to Syd (Sydney Dinsmore, director of Interference Gallery). I like the shows we do in Toronto. Some of them - quite a lot - are modest in scale, but usually fairly nicely lit. And we don't repeat ourselves.

What about the U. S. ?

Well, I'm not familiar with what's going on in the U.S. other than the group shows. I think the group in England called Light Fantastic, the show they brought over from Russia, was pretty good.

What about Eve Ritscher?

Well, I don't think she has a real background in fine art and therefore they all tend to feature a lot of hype, trying to show a little bit of everything. I don't see her as a fine art curator. I see her as an entrepreneur who presents big exhibitions for a very general audience.

What about the New York people ? Is the Museum of Holography collapsing ?

Well, I don't know about their internal politics and I haven't seen that many of their recent exhibitions. My general impression, from visiting there a few times in the last year is that it is slipping. Just overall presentation - it looks tired, frayed at the edges. There doesn't seem to be the same kind of vitality that it had in the 70s, when Rosemary Jackson was director. And I think if they want it to compete in the New York market, given the neighborhood they are in - Soho - they want to make it look hightech and modern...

Is part of their demise due to Jackson s departure ?

It may just be a casualty of Reaganomics. They had a lot more funding in the 70s than they're getting now. And I think it has something to do with Rosemary leaving. She had a lot of dynamic energy and was quite creative in the way she handled the program. It was very exciting to be involved with, for the first few years anyway.

Is your own finding position precarious now with regards to the continuation of the gallery, the continuation of the lab?

We seem to have levelled off in terms of the amount we're being funded.

From Ontario and the Canada Council ?

Various levels - municipal, provincial and federal. And I don't see any vast new sums of money becoming available in the near future. They're having a hard enough time just maintaining the status quo at this point. But I think our challenge in the next little while is to continue to expand operations, doing things that generate revenues - custom work, sales, commissions.

When you say custom work, do you mean commercial product?

Yeah. I'm not interested in mass production, but I am quite interested in doing masters that would eventually be embossed for clients. I want to see more creative projects get off the ground. There seems to be an increased demand for our services.

Getting back to this business that's down the road - Expo.

Oh yes. Mega-site.

What is the show?

I don't know of any other installation that's been done to this scale. It's not that the holography is especially advanced technically. We didn't have a budget to say, work in computergenerated stereograms, which now seems to be the leading edge of the technology. Because Michael had not had any previous direct experience in holography, he seemed reluctant to pursue any really complicated stuff.

He was more interested in dealing on a straight-forward image basis. So we concentrated primarily on reflection and transmission work.

But that's his strength - conceptual work in images.

Yeah, exactly. And within that, he's done some very nice-looking stuff.

What's the scale of the show? What was the budget for production and installation? How many pieces are there and what are they ?

Well, there are 45 holograms. I never saw the final budget for the exhibition, so I don't know what his commission was or the total budget costs. I think it's in the ballpark of \$200,000 to \$300,000 spent on all aspects of the exhibition.

What's the content?

The title of the exhibition is Spectral Image. The initial piece, as you go into the exhibition, is a long ramp, 60 feet in length, its color changing from yellow-green to deep blue as the viewer progresses. There are singlecolor, white-light transmission holograms mounted at eye level every six feet or so. This piece was designed with the younger audience in mind and in a very whimsical way, it deals with the history and development of transportation. The first hologram is of a baby taking its first steps and the second one shows horses. They're 8x10 inch and 30x40 centimetre. The first six are 8x 10s and the last four are 30x40s. They're mounted in plexiglass that changes the angle of the hologram as you go along the ramp. So if you were a child, the first one would be almost at your eye level. If you were an adult, you'd be looking down at the floor at it. Then gradually the angles change and the holograms get higher. The glass boxes increase the height of the ramp, so it gradually takes you up, and of course, the last hologram is of a rocket, a

spaceship, taking off, ending the progression. We've got a jumbo jet flying through clouds and a helicopter in sort of a Miami Vice scenario.

These are models ?

We used children's toys, primarily, for the subjects and built little tableaus with them.

These were done in your studio ?

Yeah, these were the first holograms we worked on, starting a year ago January. Generally speaking, the exhibition is broken down into several thematic areas. The second one we were involved in producing is a very large sculpture called Redifice. It's a giant red wall made of arborite and designed to be viewed from both sides. It's eight to 10 feet high, about 30 feet long, by about three feet deep.

There are three rows of openings, like pigeonholes, about 12 by 16 inches. These were all reflection holograms. In some of the openings are holograms and in others are sculptural tableaus. A lot of them are figurative and some of them are very funny. Some of the constructions are reminiscent of Joseph Cornell's assemblages from objects. I think Michael's done that before. He's built little sets which he's used in his photographs. In some cases, the hologram appears on one side of the wall, and when you go around it, you see the actual objects, only they've been transformed.

The third large series of holograms is a series of eight, called Still Life, that all hang in a row. They're singlecolor, white-light transmission holograms produced by Holographic North in Vermont.

How large are they ?

They're about two by two feet. It's a sculptural installation in that the holographic image in each is of a tabletop, and there's a life-size, small end table. The installation starts off with conventional tabletop objects on it - a telephone, a lamp, a coffee cup, a pair of sunglasses, some keys and a pencil. In the first hologram, you see that very realistic still-life composition. It's hanging down and on the floor there's a square carpet and a chair and four wooden legs that are in position with the hologram. The legs all fit into the corners of the illusion of the tabletop

There are eight of those carpets, eight chairs and eight sets of legs and the holograms hang vertically between the real table legs. They're hung very low - so that it's like looking at a table at the normal height. But as you progress from one table to the next, it's kind of a lesson in art theory. He does variations - a cubist rendering, a futurist rendering, and there's one where the whole subject has exploded, with shards of all the objects which are still recognizable. It's just disintegrated and there's this cloud over the table. We did it with a series of templates and jigs. The final hologram was, I believe, transferred from three masters and sandwiched together. When you get to the last hologram, everything has returned to its original state, except that the lighting on the last one is totally different from the lighting on the first one.

And that takes you into the pulsed work. There's a definite thing that happens when people look at holograms. If you watch at exhibitions, they all go through the same little manoeuvre where everybody is bending over and craning their necks and checking out the hologram from all the different angles, kind of bobbing and weaving. And that's exactly what the subject, which in this case is me, is doing in

the pose. It's a series of four holograms. They're checking out and looking back at the viewer in the same way, checking them out from different angles.

Which of the holograms do you feel are the most conceptually sophisticated - dealing with holography and its relationship to sculpture and installation ?

I think probably Still Life, although I'm personally very fond of Redifice. I think that for reflection holograms, some of them are really quite spectacular and they're really nice ideas. But they're all over the place in terms of their subjects, and not so structured a development of an idea as the Still Life series.

The exhibition is in the original railway roundhouse, which has been divided into two pavilions - one for Spectral Image, which will be a permanent art gallery after the fair is over, the other for the Czech pavilion. The initial impact of going into Michael's show is that of a sculpture installation.

Well, that would have been the assumption, that Michael's work would have tended towards sculpting and perhaps even the whole photographic process.

Yes. there are some references to photography, but it's mostly sculptural.

Potentially, millions of viewers will be seeing this. That obviously must have had something to do with how the show was installed. You obviously must have back-up plates, concerns for the viewing conditions - how large is the space to accommodate the mass audience ?

It's 12,000 square feet. I believe they're projecting 2,000 to 3,000 people an hour. In terms of traffic flow, there's going to be a path that's defined by different-colored floor tiles, to suggest how to follow through the show. But you'll be free to walk around. And it doesn't look that futuristic, either. I would expect there'll be holography in other pavilions, from other countries, and chances are they'll look much more futuristic. Michael's show looks like an art exhibit, not like a show dealing with futurism and technology.

Getting to the background to the show . have N'OU been fi/ ed or ha Ve you resigned ?

I walked.

What was the context ? The Luke Rombout School of Management ? (Rombout, former director of the Vancouver Art Gallery, curated the Snow exhibition.)

Yeah, I don't think I would ever get involved in another project that he had anything to do with. He's pretty manipulative, but there's probably a lot of arts people like that.

What's the payoff for him? I mean, manipulation can be just a character trait.

Well, I think he thinks the show is going to be a landmark show. He's billing it as the first "serious" exhibition of holography. Everybody that checks into this game - like McGowan - they all think they're the first to really do anything with it. How long can that go on? There have been an awful lot of shows over the years.

That's the whole historical oneupmanship that goes down. Is that why he picked Snow?

I'm sure it is. Michael is one of the more high-profile artists in the country and he's known for his experimentation in different media.

Part of that profile comes from the fact that people like Rombout have been supporting him.

Oh yeah, you don't get to be a major artist in a contemporary sense without institutional support. It's just not possible. The critics don't write about you; curators don't use your work; you're not officially sanctioned.

What is Rombout's interest in holography ?

I think he was interested in the medium because it's new and fresh. He falls into the role of independent curator extraordinaire. He brought the Ramses exhibit into Expo too. These two exhibitions are the only two that Expo actually commissioned and officially sponsored. Neither of them go out on a limb, really. The Ramses is a totally conservative thing to do. With Spectral Image it's fifty-fifty. Maybe he took a chance on a new medium, but he certainly went for a very established artist as opposed to going out and commissioning work from artists who had actually worked in holography. That was entirely his personal decision, I guess.

What about Snow's involvement? Is he taking a risk with a new medium ?

I can't see the show getting panned, because I think it's pretty good. It's probably good for him, because people will say: "Mike's still doing new stuff; he's never done this before; he's not static." It's been great working with him. I've learned a lot. It's a fabulous experience just to see how an artist handles a really major commission, and to see how he's dealt with it over the course of a year.

What input did you have as consultant and co-producer?

Well, he came to me and wanted to know about holography. So I told him in very general terms what was available, what the different kinds of holograms were, the pros and cons of, say, reflection over transmission, potential sources for production. I gave him a rough cost estimate and suggested he go to a few other places for more information.

So he went down to New York and spoke to some of the people at the Museum of Holography and went to Boston and talked to Steve Benton. Then he started planning the structure of the thing and we talked about concepts and how they possibly would be produced and what would be more applicable, given the way he wanted to do the final display - whether it should be reflection or transmission. Then he started fabricating the initial objects and there was a lot of running back and forth to say: "Do it this way and this size, because otherwise you'll have something stuck in the reference beam that you don't want." Or: "It's too deep, too big not stable enough." Or: "Do it like this, because it'll look a lot better!" I gave him a lot of advice on actual fabrication of the subjects. Not on ideas and concepts, but on design and composition I had a lot of input. I also had to research other suppliers and producers to do some of the things we weren't able to do at Fringe - like large formats.

I'm surprised the commission didn't result in a Canadian facility.

Expo didn't have the budget - and there wasn't time.

What about upgrading your facility ?

Well, we're sinking the money we made for the commissioned work back into the studio, so in fact they have upgraded us.

What's the deadline for installing the show ?

It was all supposed to be done by the end of this week (Feb. 7). Theoretically, there was to be two weeks for installation. If all the systems and equipment that had been ordered had been in place and the space had been finished... We have managed to position a lot of the things and have a pretty good idea of where the lights have to go.

You were supposed to do all this in February, but your contract expired in December.

Yeah. When I found out that my contract had expired and they were still expecting me to do the installation for them - you see, I never actually had a signed contract with anybody. Rombout refused to sign a contract with me and said I had to do it with Michael. Michael and I decided on a very cut-and-dried arrangement, that I present him with an invoice at the end of the month for services rendered. And he paid.

When they told me the contract had expired, I said: "We'll renegotiate a price for the installation." And I came in high, protecting my interests, then negotiated down to what I thought was an agreeable fee.

At this point, Luke got his back up and said: "This is totally unprofessional. You agreed to do this and that. You're changing the price on us." And I said: "Well, if you were that concerned with nailing everything down, why didn't you sign a contract with me?" So they said: "Okay, we'll take you at your rate - for one week - and you're going to have to get everything done." So I came out here on that understanding, but also on the understanding that there was to be a per diem for expenses as well. Then I found out that the per diem was only for five days, even though they expected me to work seven! So I finally said: "Look, I'm an independent businessman, and if you don't meet my conditions, I'm walking." And Luke said: "Fine. Walk."

So you spend a week here doing nothing because the site isn't ready and necessary equipment hasn't arrived on schedule; now you've walked and the show is yet to be installed. Who's going to install it?

I don't know. What they'll probably end up doing is getting somebody from California, who'll charge them four or five times what I am.

Don't people recognize these very basic, simple facts?

Well, the trouble is that Rombout is intractable. Once he establishes a position on something, that's it. They're getting foolish. They're going to end up compounding the* problems. It's difficult enough getting anything done down there anyway. They'll end up spending a lot more money. It won't be done as well as it would have by someone with a lot of experience doing holography exhibitions. I like Michael enough that I don't want to see the show not look good. I'd be prepared to step in and try to salvage it.

It will be interesting to see who is contacted and on what pretences - probably some lighting designer from theatre.

That might be all right. By now Snow has a pretty good idea of what you basically have to do.

In what direction is your own work going now?

I'd like to become more offensive, I think - start developing some new themes that could be a little disturb*ng. And of course it'll involve graphics and holograms.

It sounds like you're still spread out in so many directions: you've got R&D, tech, you've got your color project, which is separate; you're running the artist-in-residence thing and the business component.

Yeah, I'm spread a little thin right now. But fortunately we've got a really good staff in Toronto.

Who are the new holographers, Canadian or international, that you feel are going to come out with some astounding work?

Well, I'll confine myself to people I see as being fine art holographers, as opposed to more commercially oriented ones. I think Wenyon and Gamble in England are doing very good work. We've spent some time in Europe in the last few years and of everything I've seen over there, Wenyon and Gamble's work to me is the most exciting. Pascal Gauchet and John Collins really have a lot of promise. They're based in Paris.

They're doing some very nice art pieces and some very competent commercial work - custom pieces - as well.

What about Canadians? Or American?

North Americans! I've always liked Rudie Berkhout's work. It's very beautiful, exploiting the medium's sensuousness. I like Melissa Crenshaw's work with reflections. In Quebec, Marie Andre Cossette has done some interesting things. And there's been some exciting work from the graduates of the Ontario College of Art.

Where is Interference Gallery headed in terms of curating interests?

I think it has to do two things. It has to move to a better location at some point. And we have to keep trying to curate the best shows that we can afford to put on. I don't want to get too big, though. I like one- or twoperson exhibitions.

VISUAL MUZAK

By MELISSA CRENSHAW

Holography is gearing up for another technological giant step. In the next three to five years our labs will be changing. Delicate fibres - and perhaps diode lasers - will replace heavy metal. Pulsed facilities are popping up all over the world and soon no integral worth its salt will be produced without computer-generated designs.

There is also the issue of BIG holograms. No one talks about big WHAT, just BIG.

Wavefront reconstruction is on the verge of technological change. There is no lament here. We all knew when we put away our Nikons and paintbrushes that we would spend a good deal of time with our noses in "Laser Focus" and "Photonics".

But perhaps a bit of caution is advised in our quest for the big and the bright. Parallel progress is the issue. We all know about walking before running. You must learn to manipulate optics before you load the film plate. Likewise, it is essential to have an historical perspective on art to make any sense out of your creative wanderings.

There may be simple technical approaches for complex visual statements. Such approaches might be overlooked in our quest for visual impact and we might end up with a sophisticated visual muzak which is ultimately meaningless.

If you don't have corporate or institutional backing, an inheritance, or access to pulsed lasers, large vacuum- frame holders or pneumatic-leg isolation systems, don't get discouraged and seduced away from your own vision. The bottom line is: people have to look at these things - not just at the technology.

CANADIAN HOLOGRAPHY

The Politics of Dissent

By AL RAZUTIS

At the first Canadian Holography Conference held in Ottawa last March, a national touring show of art and science holography was announced by Bill McGowan, director of the National Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa. McGowan said he had already chosen British curator Eve Ritscher to supervise the show, and that she would receive assistance from Toronto curator Sydney Dinsmore in organizing Canadian content.

The announcement led to immediate controversy. McGowan had gone outside the country to find a curator without consulting the Canadian holographic community, and without investigating curatorial prospects at home. This rankled several holographers at the conference, one of whom, Michael Sowdon of Fringe Research, immediately objected to the marginalization of Canadian curating personnel in favor of imported curators.

After the conference, six holographers wrote McGowan to express their concern that Canadian expertise had been overlooked. The letter, co-signed by Michael Page, Michael Sowdon, Al Razutis, Bernd Simson, Marie-Andree Cossette and Debbie Mermelstein-Roberge, pointed out that Canadians had mounted successful national and international exhibitions since 1975, most recently the Canadian Holography Now exhibition which toured Europe last year.

The holographers suggested a compromise curatorial position - a five-person board of directors which would have final authority on all aspects of the exhibition. This would be comprised of two people from the Canadian holographic community, one from the design community and two Museum appointees.

In an August letter, McGowan responded that there was no question Ritscher would curate the show, and that Debbie Mermelstein-Roberge would consult on technical uses, Dinsmore on Canadian art. He added that

he had hoped to solicit input from the Canadian community at the conference and instead found "not a unified community but a group of individuals who, for the most part, were interested in focussing on their own problems and not on a community effort."

Presumably this "community effort" was to take place under the aegis of Ritscher. McGowan was candid about his unfamiliarity with the Canadian holographic scene, saying in his letter that when he first contacted Ritscher a year and a half before the conference, "I didn't know any of the holographic community in Canada". In fact, it was Ritscher who informed him of the work being done here by Michael Sowdon and Sydney Dinsmore.

McGowan also maintained that it was necessary to keep final decision-making under one person as he was categorically opposed to decision by committee. He also indicated there were plans to arrange for a "competition" (to be coordinated by the Canada Council) to allow holographers to apply for production costs. The exhibition was to open in conjunction with Expo '86 in Vancouver.

Sowdon responded, criticizing the organization of the show and the selection of Ritscher. He also pointed out that any exhibition planned for Expo '86 should have been finalized by September or October at the latest and plans for artists' competitions were ludicrous in view of the late date.

In fact, the show dates were eventually changed - the travelling national exhibition was postponed until the fall of 1986, when it opens in Ottawa to start the tour, slated to reach Vancouver in 1988. McGowan confirmed in an October letter to Sowdon that plans were still underway, final arrangements had not been made and production funding for artists was still being sought. Nor has it been resolved whether Sydney Dinsmore will play a part, if any, in the selection of works.

The Canadian cultural politics of dissent appears to revolve around several traditional poles. First is the issue of whether exhibition organizers feel indigenous Canadian talent is on a par with international talent. McGowan's position is that a travelling international exhibition requires the input of a person of Ritscher's established calibre. Sowdon's position is that there is sufficient talent and experience in Canada to produce even better results.

The second issue is more fundamental: museum directors appear loath to parcel out their decision-making process to artists, committees or other than selected candidates.