

# Art: Holograms in Their Infancy

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• April 25, 1970 PAGE 24



I WISH I could wax more enthusiastic, as they say, about the esthetic potential of holography — which, as every preschooler seems to know, is the making of three-dimensional photographs by laser beam. But while “N Dimensional Space,” a show of

holograms by artists at the Finch College Museum of Art/Contemporary Wing, is earnest and enlightening, it doesn't go far toward convincing me.

Meticulously installed and nicely paced, the exhibition still comes off as more lab demonstration than art show. (Why does most “technological art” only succeed in making technology seem more technological?) But holography is very much in with artists these days and, as the first group show here of artists' work in the medium, it must be considered something of a landmark.

Holograms are produced by placing an object behind a photosensitive glass plate and exposing both plate and object to laser beams. The exposure fixes a permanent “informational” pattern on the plate and, each time the pattern is reactivated by a special light-source, a three-dimensional image of the object appears, so “real” you reach out to touch it.

What you actually see, though, is not an image of the object, but a record of the reflected light waves emitted by it. Thus, the image is literally in the eye of the beholder, reconstructed from the pattern on the plate.

So. The show begins with a 1964 “historical” work by E. N. Leith, a holography pioneer at the University of Michigan, who might be styled the 3-D Daguerre. Mr. Leith's contribution is a hologram of a toy train with what appears to be a minuscule cyclist before it; and the whole has all the esthetic kick of a postcard from Montauk.

But never mind. In an other, suitably darkened room ablaze with lasers, more sophisticated holograms await you. There are works by three “name” artists— George Ortman, Robert Indiana and Bruce Nauman, and three lesser-known: Gerald Pethick, Allyn Lite and Lloyd G. Cross (actually a physicist instrumental in producing the show.)

Interestingly, the three better-known artists have simply holographed their own “brand” imagery: Indiana, the word “LOVE” assembled in metal; Nauman, his own face making a face, and Ortman, a field of eggs. The others have made far more explorative (though highly tentative thrusts into the medium. Mr. Lite contributes a couple of essays in color achieved by varying his light sources; Mr. Cross shows, among other works, a “special needle” made by holographing a point of light, and one of Mr. Pethick's, the most interesting of the lot, is a spatially ambiguous hologram of sand that, viewed from a reference mark on the glass plate, resembles an earthwork seen from the air.

Don't, as I've said before, expect an exotic esthetic experience. Even as a techno tool, holography is still in its infancy and, judging by this show, artists' use of it can only improve.