

ON ART, TECHNOLOGY, AND HOLOGRAPHY

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The pencil is technological—as are paints, chisels, pens, and ink. Rejection of technological art by a portion of the “art establishment” is misconceived. Lawrence Alloway in his introduction to “5 Artists/5 Technologies,” a recent exhibition by five Center for Advanced Visual Studies artists, including myself, at the Grand Rapids Art Museum, Michigan, stated: “Technology is part of the condition of all work, not simply the alliance of art and engineering. . . . The artists in 5/5 do not believe that new systems are expressive in themselves apart from the intention of the artist. . . . Art originates in the artists, not in the hardware.”

Equally misconceived by many holographers and others is the idea that the medium or science or technology of itself generates art. Otto Piene writes for the same exhibition/catalog: “the research in the arts which makes eminent sense—and must have priority over scientific understanding of research—is the search for new imagery, i.e. new images, new languages, new vocabulary. . . . Techniques can become important determinants in the ‘total picture’ of a work of art. . . . Without conceiving, perceiving, and guiding artists, however, they are useless.”

Holography does not make one an artist. For myself, it is a means of expression and communication. If I were not concentrating on holography—if Dennis Gabor had never invented holography—I would be working with other aesthetic media. Actually, by virtue of my own intensity as well as by museums and art/academia, at times I feel caged into holography. This was never my intention. I am opposed to bars and boxes. Does it matter if it is holography? The holographic artist employs the technique of holography for its special inherent qualities, but the value of the finished work is determined by its strength of concept and content.

The installation or environment is as important to my expression as each piece. I am wary, therefore, of group holography exhibitions. My preference, indeed an essential element of my work, is the composition of “environments occupied or energized by the works that they contain. . . . [T]he works include factors of physical entrance, occupation and participation. . . . The public shares the space of the work.” (Alloway)

I am wary for other reasons: the conglomeration of forces in holography apart from the few committed artists—the arena is much like early movie-making—the commercial activists, the entrepreneurs, even some scientists, all of whom see the art world as a means of

display, as they call it, and promotion, motivated by a drive for immortality (unconscious) or money (very conscious) or both; the general intrigue with the technology and lack of discrimination—too often at group exhibitions spectators are awed by holographic technique, or they stand in the entrance and decide there is no art at all. Of course, holography cannot be viewed that way. A few allow their eyes to grasp the image as it reveals itself in space, to discover and experience the spatial distribution of light, the kinetic play, and the philosophical or psychological content. In some holograms, or better, in some holographic environments, these elements do exist.

Regarding research in the arts and sciences: surely a cure for cancer is more important than an art project. But it seems to me that too low a priority is afforded development and experimentation in art relative to science. I speak of technological art, particularly holography. Artists can and do expand the technology, at the same time contributing their perception and insight. For artists to create fine art holograms of scale and impact, they require sophisticated facilities and equipment. Add an ironic note: science can fail and publish the reason for the failure; art must produce. It might be argued that this expensive art medium is unnecessary. But the ever-increasing interest in the art of holography indicates otherwise. And its potential for communication is undeniable.

Throughout my exploration of the medium, from 1969 through my abstractions formed by laser light alone—no objects within the system—I worked toward a time when I would communicate more directly. Of the two works in this exhibition, "Equivocal Forks I" is an extension of "Phalli" 1975. But "Forks" is fe/male. The forks emerge from a circular form, prongs heading away from the spectator—pseudoscopic equivocal. Phallic prongs thrusting toward the viewer would project only hostility. There is more subtlety, grace, and ambivalence—conceptually important—in the recedence. Positive and negative spaces fuse and separate, causing kinetic visual interplay with the movement of the spectator. "Forks" is also an example of my frontally projected imagery. Ideally the environmental ambience should cause the plate to disappear, leaving the forks to float in space unattached and unhampered except by spectator/participants who reach out to the image.

"A Woman," my most recent work and a self-portrait, is a result of experimental endeavor, which I believe successful, to extend the boundaries of integral holography. The mass of hair is reminiscent of "Cobweb Space." But emerging in a tangle through the film, it is a jungle.

Currently, my interest lies in investigation of holographic movies by holographing the subject directly. The combination of theatre arts background and ten years of holography makes this a natural direction for me to follow. My personal choice of content derives from a humanistic—as an extension of “feministic”—sociological orientation.

Whatever form it takes, holography is sculpture of light . . . enlightenment . . . immaterial energy. It is shaping imaginary spaces. It is fantasy, reality, politics, change.