

Around town



Illustration by Mitch O'Connell

A holiday of holograms, hats . . .

By Rick Kogan

The policeman's horse was wearing a Santa Claus hat. But more about that later. We were out, as we are every year at this time, trying to take the pulse of the Christmas city.

We started, as we have done every year for as long as we can remember—though since the mall was built, the street has lost much of its holiday luster—staring into the windows of the Marshall Field store on State Street.

We moved west, through a mostly deserted Loop, walking west on Madison. Near Halsted Street, we encountered a pair of men, wobbly from too much something or other and dressed shabbily.

"Can I have a buck?" said one of the men in a tired voice.

We gave bucks to these relics of the time when the blocks of Madison west of Halsted formed the sorrowful epicenter of the city's down-and-outers. Flop houses and shot-and-a-beer joints dominated the street. It was tragic and it was scary but now it is quiet and mostly empty.

A few blocks later we turned north, to Washington, and into a place that makes us feel hopeful about the future, which is a good way to feel as a year starts to end.

It is the Museum of Holo-

graphy, 1134 W. Washington (226-1007). And though some of our otherwise wise and worldly editors have yet to take holograms seriously, the museum is one of Chicago's most unusual and eye-popping establishments.

Loren Billings, who runs the place with her husband Bob, was there. She is always there, sharing her passion for the possibilities of holograms.

The current show, "Interpretation of Space," is one of the most spectacular art exhibitions we've ever seen.

Art? Though some might argue, yes, most of what is hanging in the gallery is art.

Holography has gone far beyond the simple three-dimensional object studies we first encountered and the current show testifies to that.

It is a five-person show and one of the artists, Rudie Berkhout, is also having a one-man show at another, perhaps more well-known museum, New York's Whitney Museum of American Art. The Whitney has six of Berkhout's pieces. The Museum of Holography has seven.

Undoubtedly more people know of the store in North Pier that sells holograms than know the Hologram museum. That store is a commercial outlet, not a museum and school, and Billings is so committed to the future of holography that she does not see any place as competition.

"Maybe people who visit that store will eventually come here," she said. "That might be their introduction. I don't mind."

We were standing in the small gift area at the entrance to the museum. There were small, reasonably priced holograms on the wall; hologram watches, earrings, Christmas cards, pens, glasses and other items in cases.

"The kids love it the most," Billings said. "They are our fu-

ture and in holograms they see the future."