



Detail from "Who Rattled My Cage?"

"RECENT PULSED STUFF and OTHER DELIGHTS"

Ed Wesley's Show at Benny's Casino

D. Tulla Lightfoot

In August of 1986 Ed Wesley exhibited a collection of holograms at Benny's Casino, an alternative artist space in the heart of Chicago. His body of work consisted of eight pieces, four of them were deep scene, laser reconstructed, transmission holograms produced with a JK pulsed laser, while the other four "delights" were collages with white light transmission holograms included. Wesley entitled his show "Recent Pulsed Stuff and Other Delights," a name that he said came

from the title of a classic Tijuana Brass album. The artist was very much influenced by the album and its cover photo, a shot of a young woman completely covered with whipped cream, and followed this theme in his work.

His realistic pieces, done with the pulsed laser, were of nudes placed in poses reminiscent of something one could imagine a thirteen-year-old adolescent boy seeing in his first wet

dream. I don't remember any music from that album, but signs of bondage and S&M were widespread in the show. The actual word "Pulsed" also seemed to have greatly influenced the artist. In one piece, "Who Rattled My Cage," the naked female model was masked, sported leather, and carried a whip. The companion hologram was of a male nude, hung upside-down so that he appeared to be dangling from the ceiling. Both holograms were displayed in a cage-like stand making

them appear to be behind bars as in an animal show in the circus or zoo. Wesley's message was clear: the defenseless male controlled by the sadistic, all powerful woman... a not uncommon male fantasy.

The female nude with whip appeared again in another piece called "Homage to Johnny H." One sat at a booth this time and inserted a credit card which lifted the shutter and illuminated the hologram in a "peep show" fashion. When time was out the credit card had to be re-inserted for another "peep."

The only pulsed laser work that was not of a nude was a self-portrait of Wesley himself. Apparently, the artist is camera shy of his own nudity. To me, his pose seemed rather aloof and smug, as if he were placing himself above the rest with his cleverness and access to expensive machinery. He too was in leather, on a motorcycle (Japanese), his helmet tucked neatly in the crook of one arm for safety's sake. Thus the artist assures the viewer that he is not a reckless driver.

It was a strange show. The realistic work was tasteless. One could find more artistry in a book shop, blaringly dealing in smut, and I was left to wonder why. With all of the possibilities, with all of the amazing things there are for holography to explore, why pick this crap? Why portray exploitation of women without apology, sensitivity or perhaps, sadly, even awareness? Why portray sado-masochistic erotica? Give us a break! With so many talented artists emerging in the field of holography, why give this person access to one of the largest lasers in the country?

When queried about this, the artist wrote, "I can hear it now, 'give a tech a big laser and then... [he'll]... bring in the naked girls' But this was the opportunity of a lifetime. Somebody had to do it just to say that it was ever done, and I was in a position to do it. Some of the butch feminists may not

approve, but sometimes the artist must do things just for the experience of it." In the opinion of this writer, one doesn't need expensive laser beams to produce images that can easily be found right out on the street on X-rated movie house posters, and the injustice that high-tech holographic equipment is creating should be of concern to all of us, not only "butch feminists"

The quality of these laser viewable holograms was also disappointing. The laser beam itself causes typical spotting phenomena, but aside from this the work appeared rather dirty (although the artist has assured me that persons in authority have compared his work favorably to those produced by John Webster and Nick Phillips). The models were also shot at so far a distance that they barely seemed 3-dimensional at all to this writer. Aside from the conceptual appreciation of the difficulty presented in shooting scenes of such depth (over 2 meters long), once a holographer chooses to exhibit work as art different aesthetics must come into play. Not all 3-D viewing is interesting. After all, we normally see in 3-D and we don't consider everything we see to be art, and to be valued.

Thankfully, the white light transmission work was more interesting. Wesley incorporates what he describes as Holographic Optical Embellishments (or as he calls them, HOE's) in his work and writes that "...they appear to be some sort of modulated diffraction gratings, with abstract color explosions which move around in space holokinetically." His exploration for this show was of the nude female anatomy, focusing in on—your guess it—the crotch area.

One work, "Connie B," is a black and white transparency of a bound, naked woman divided into sections and embellished with his rainbow holograms. Unfortunately the subject matter detracts from the appearance of

the work. When asked why he consistently does this, Wesley explains that, "...it is fun to mix up something that is interesting to look at, the spectral patterns, with something taboo, that most people, men as well as women, would have an aversion to. A conflicting confrontation." He is thumbing his nose at "artists and critics who claim to be open-minded but are the most uptight and square."

Although his abstract work of female genitalia is probably meant to be as crudely humorous as the rest (I was informed that in one entitled "HP" the initials stood for "Hair Pie"), they actually appeared quite moving and sensitive. The sparkling gratings mixed with frosted glass and broken into sections with dark, black lines are not slick, or art school polished. They are vaguely reminiscent of Doug Tyler's work. But where Tyler is a master of design—his work can sometimes appear remote, cold and distant as the evening sky—Wesley's work is human, flawed and alive. Elements of design are off-balance, creating tension. Things are not where they should be, some things are missing and yet everything is there, and created not by a computer or an equation, or a machine, but by a person. And in this work the person is very much present, fragile, carefully walking through life and pointing important things out to us. Beauty is there, so is fear, confusion and great awe, yes, even in the female body.

These abstract pieces signal that as an artist, Wesley has potential to communicate something of interest. Whether he can recognize this potential now that he has experienced this pubescent or even prepubescent period, and develop and build on it will be interesting to watch.

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