

Holography comes alive at local museum

by Michael Messinger

Looking at the blank gray frames hanging on the walls — each one no different than the next — you'd think you just wasted \$2.50. Then you look at them from the proper distance and angle, and the magic begins.

Light appears and forms shapes like squares, triangles, cars, dogs, and even Michael Jackson. Color erupts and moves, creating the illusion that the images are real. No, it's not a hallucination — it's a holograph.

The Museum of Holography, 1134 W. Washington Blvd., is an institution determined to "display, promote and encourage the advancement of holography as an art form."

Founded by Loren Billings in 1976, the building houses three exhibit areas, a research center and a school of holography.

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21st century," said Billings, a holographer herself.

For anyone who hasn't seen an episode of *Star Trek* lately, a holograph is an analogous recording of the light emitted from

an object down to the molecular level. Both the holographic plate (photographic emulsion) and the image the plate produces are referred to as a hologram. Holography was discovered by accident in 1948 but didn't develop further until the advent of lasers in the '60s.

"It'll take another leap to take holography to the next step," said Billings, adding that "we should spend money on 'star wars' because otherwise we'd stay dormant like countries like Africa."

Billings, who is the museum's curator when she isn't teaching holography classes, is quick to point out the uniqueness of holographic art.

"There aren't many artist holographers," said Billings. "It takes 8 to 15 years to understand your medium well enough to project your ideas with holograms."

And what ideas they project. Inside the main exhibit area, there are over a dozen displays. Some hang on the wall like traditional paintings, while others "float" from thin wires that are barely visible in the dark room — adding to the illusion that holograms are alive.

One piece that comes to mind is *Orb* by Randy James. This work features an emerald sphere shrouded by yellow spikes and orange glow.

Some holographs can be seen better from across the room than from up close, like *Sunset on Jupiter* by Robert Connolly. This time it's a blue sphere, surrounded by a green hue and if you step back far enough, the image leaves the frame and hovers in space.

Connolly combines contrasting images with unusual titles to project his ideas. *Post War Centaur* has a man who looks like Ward Cleaver on a motorcycle. One wonders if the crack on the photographic emulsion is intentional or the mark of a

too curious observer?

Off in a separate room are 9 more displays. Instead of the long dark corridor of the main exhibit hall, these are in a small, bright white room.

In *Portrait of the Artist*, a work with no artist credited, there is a hologram of two heads looking at the viewer, but almost facing each other. The 'holo' looks so real, you'd swear the two heads are attached to two live women forced to sit in the wall (when they're not busy filming an obsession commercial.)

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Christus Hypercubus, another piece by Connolly, features a plaque with Jesus Christ positioned as if he were nailed to a cross (but there is nothing behind him). Look closely and you see a red polygon behind him.

Other artists apparently like to combine physical elements with their holograms.

Travel Case by Mary Harman is a travel case filled with sand and those severed hands holding hangers. In the mirror of the case is a hologram of dozens of hangers flying off like birds.

Not all the holograms look totally convincing. *Clowning in the rain* by Charles Lysogorski, for example, has a clown that looks real, but the rain can't help but look artificial.

If you haven't guessed by now, the museum's sole purpose is to promote and advance holography. Even the donation box has a holo hand over a bag!

The museum is open to the public Wednesday through Sunday from 12:30 to 5 p.m. Donations of \$2.50 get you in and for an additional dollar, you can get a guided tour of the museum, school and research center. For more information, call 226-1007.

Artwork can also be purchased from a few dollars to several hundred. Souvenirs are also available, such as key chains, book markers, earrings and even watches. (One watch in particular had a hologram of a skull, perhaps a statement on time running out?)

In the Museum's School of Holography, classes run from \$175 to \$375, and schools such as the University of Illinois at Chicago, Columbia College, and the City College System recognize grades received from the school in their own degree programs.

Holography, according to the museum's press kit, promises to have a profound affect on every area of human endeavor.

"Holography is involved in high technologies, like data storage, optics and medicine," said Billings, pointing out that architecture, engineering, entertainment and advertising industries use holograms on a day-to-day basis.

"You should save CTA bus passes, bookmakers, credit cards and anything else with a holographic image on it," said Billings. "They're going to be really valuable some day."