

Holograms: seeing is believing

Forget television. Forget movies. Instead, bank your money on holograms.

Although the medium is still in its infant stage, holograms are finally getting the looks they deserve.

Technically, holography is the three-dimensional imaging of an object, recorded with lasers on a light sensitive material. It is also the process of producing film representation in full dimension down to molecular exactness.

In other words, holograms are not photographs but actual reproductions of objects seemingly frozen in time. Although flat like a photo or film, holograms let you see things three-dimensionally instead of the two-dimensional pictures we're accustomed to.

While researchers of holography are working all across the world to put the science and art form into the spotlight, one of the best displays of holography is located right in Chicago.

Saddled between the factories and warehouses on the city's Near West Side, the Fine Arts Research and Holographic Center is a fascinating preview of our future.

"Holography is at the point photography was 100 years ago," explains the center's executive director Loren Billings. "It's at a



PHOTO BY ANNE FISHER/PHOTORESERVE

Holographers John Hoffmann and Loren Billings at work.

very embryonic stage. Yet the results are amazing."

Billings said the Chicago center, the only one like it in the country, serves two functions: To bring holograms to the public as an art form and to explore the medium as a science (the center's prestigious school of holography covers the latter point).

Although its gallery is of moderate size, the museum is filled with holographic wonders. While some holographic stills seem to bounce out of their frames, others seem to recess deep into the walls. With others, miniature replicas of

Chicago landmarks seem frozen in time and space.

The still holograms, which the center changes every so often, are a combination of both student work and the art of holography masters from England, Russia, France and even Bulgaria.

A sampling of moving holograms, meanwhile, include King Kong, Dracula and a toast from W.C. Fields. Although at this stage the moving holograms are in rough form and only a few seconds long, it's easy to see how the three-dimensional medium will one day replace video and film.

Although the museum and school has been around for some seven years, Billings said it is still struggling to enlighten the public about holography.

"The problem is we have to realize we've been taught all things are objects instead of energy," she explained. "That's why adults rather than kids have a hard time accepting holography. We're such a two-dimensional generation."

The center, located at 1134 W. Washington Blvd., is open 12:30 to 5 PM Wednesdays through Sundays. Admission is one dollar, tours are two dollars. For further information you can call (312) 226-1007.

—Jim Sulski

in this issue

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DURAN DURAN.....	
MARILYN McCOO.....	
JAMES CHANCE.....	

features

page four profiles.....	4
history of chirock.....	6
ma nugent's mail.....	12
folk world.....	14
media.....	15
stereo.....	16

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