

Travel

Museum exhibits reach out, but can't touch someone

By **ROBERT ANDERSON**
Sentinel correspondent

Chicago, Ill. — Museums generally don't want visitors to touch the exhibits. But at the Museum of Holography on the near west side, it seems as if the exhibits will touch the visitors.

"It's unbelievable," said one man, marveling at the seemingly three-dimensional merging of science and art. "You walk around that museum and the flat pictures hanging on the wall actually jump out at you. You reach forward to touch the image that sticks out of the picture. It's weird."

Indeed. A visitor perceives the flat image of a hand reaching out to touch his. He walks around a "pitchfork" because he's afraid of getting speared by a ghost-like image. It's a fun place to visit.

Pop music icon Michael Jackson thought so. In fact, he bought some of the holograms when he visited. Hopefully, they won't scare his giraffes or Bubbles, his chimpanzee.

Holography is a relatively new science that sprung from the development of the laser in 1960. A hologram — created with the help of a laser and a beam splitter — is a

recording of the pattern of light waves as they are reflected from an object. This pattern is recorded on a photographic plate. When a laser light is shone on the plate, it recreates the original object as a three-dimensional image — literally, as points of light focused in space.

That's why you duck around those museum holograms that seem to reach out to touch you.

None of this is strange to museum director and founder Loren Billings.

"We can record three-dimensionally as the eye sees an object," Billings said. "This kind of thing has applications in medicine, engineering, architecture, the arts and entertainment, to name a few."

"Out at Fermi Lab, for example, through holography, they are viewing things that are otherwise hidden from the human eye. It's a new science and has great potential."

"Also, many companies are utiliz-

ing this holographic technology in credit cards and security documents, greeting cards, corporate advertisements, and the like."

So now we are graced with three-dimensional images of Elvis in performance pose. We carry holograms on our VISA cards. Why should a "pitchfork" forged from points of light seem weird?

Billings' museum — one of six holography museums in the world — is more than a series of displays. Also here are a research center and school. Billings is affiliated with a number of prestigious firms, helping them in their research. Her school for beginners and advanced students is the only one like it in the world.

As you pass through the rooms of the museum, all the "pictures" (holograms) appear to be outside the flat frame hanging on the wall. A basket of eggs seems to hang from the top of the frame. Three-dimensional women

appear to beckon, but how do you touch light waves?

The lobby gallery and three others exhibit about 100 holograms. Some are small, measuring about three inches on a side. Others are as large as four feet square. You can buy the works to hang in your home at prices ranging from a few dollars to several thousand dollars.

The museum is housed in a former Methodist publishing building and still has lots of wood paneling showing. Billings and the museum have been here since 1976.

Billings considers herself and her staff pioneers in this art. And she puts the stress on art.

"Like anything new, we are looked upon with skepticism," she said. "Some look at holography as a technological novelty or artistic oddity. The arts community isn't ready yet to view our work carefully. I see this when I apply for grants to carry on our research."

Some visitors to the museum simply want to gawk. Others pepper

Billings and her staff with questions, which they gladly answer. In fact, it's best to ask for a guided tour. It adds a lot to a visit.

The museum, at 1134 W. Washington Blvd., is open to the public from 12:30 to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Tours for groups of 25 or more can be reserved at other times as well. Standard admission is \$2.50 per person, and the museum has group rates. For more information, contact the museum at (312) 226-1007.

Loren,

Thanks for waiving the admission fee on my last visit.

Best regards,

Bob A.

Robert Anderson

ROBERT ANDERSON

305 CENTER STREET
ORMOND BEACH, FLORIDA 32074
Telephone 304/873-1000

ROBERT ANDERSON
305 CENTER ST.
ORMOND BEACH, FL 32174



*Respond
to written
Article*

Loren Billings
Holography Museum
1134 W. Washington Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60607

