OPENERS

Pioneering in holography

● Once a casket company, the building on West Washington Boulevard about eight blocks north of the University of Illinois Chicago Circle Campus today looks entirely to man's future. It is now the Fine Arts Research & Holographic Center, a museum-school-research complex dedicated to the art and science of holography, a process with the potential to affect countless areas of human life and endeavor.

Holography is a two-step process of recording images of objects on special photographic film and projecting from this film not flat images on paper or a screen but three-dimensional "light pictures" of the original objects seemingly suspended in mid-air. First discovered in 1948 by the English scientist Dr. Dennis Gabor, the technique saw no significant development until 1960, when laser light became workable and began to be used as holography's light medium.

"Since then the development has been rapid and significant," says Loren Billings, the center's director. "I myself was first drawn to holography as an art form, and I still see it as such. Just think of a holographic movie that can be viewed as if it were a live theater-in-the-round performance. But I've also come to see its scientific and technological side and its applications not only to the arts but to medicine and engineering and architecture, and this, too, is fascinating and challenging."

While a student at the Art Institute in the early 1970s, Billings was among the first to produce 4-by-5-inch holograms, then a major advance from earlier 2-by-2-inch holograms. In 1976 she and Dr. Tung H. Jeong, a Lake Forest College physics professor credited in 1965 with a landmark achievement in holography, headed a group that held an international holographic exhibit in Chicago. From that project was born the center, with the school offering its first courses that same year.

"Our program is perhaps the only one in the country that gives the student, from beginner to advanced researcher, full opportunity to explore holography as an artist, a scientist, and an engineer," says Billings. "We have introductory, intermediate, and advanced courses in holography proper and in such related fields as optics, photochemistry, and holography as an artistic and entertainment medium. We also have tutorials and seminars and conduct an exhibit and lecture series both here and at other organizations and institutions."

The center's faculty and staff of about 13 include many who, Billings says, have done pioneering work in holography and are nationally acknowledged as experts in their respective fields. Course credits are recognized by the U. of I. Circle Campus and Chicago's city college system, and soon also, Billings hopes, by other area colleges.

For more information about the school's courses, the exhibit and lecture program, and the museum's permanent display of current and historic holograms, write or call the Fine Arts Research & Holographic Center, 1134 W. Washington Blvd., Chicago, Ill. 60607, (312) 226-1007.

Photo by Charles Osgood

Loren Billings displays a hologram, a three-dimensional "light picture" that is first recorded on special film and then projected from that film by laser light.