

Museum of Holography presents an art of many dimensions

Loren Billings, founder and curator of Chicago's Museum of Holography, can see a left-brain person, a linear thinker, a mile away. They're the ones who insist on understanding how holograms — these amazing, ghostlike images that emanate from glass — are created.

"In order for you to understand holography, you have to know a lot about particle physics and the basic physics of light," Billings says.

Her remark seems designed to get even the rigid thinkers into the museum's dramatically lit, wood-paneled gallery and enjoy.

It is quite an experience — many of the pictures seem positively three-dimensional. A dinosaur head projects off the wall and out into the gallery space. Holograms of people make you feel they are in your presence.

Other works of holographic

museumscene

Jay Pridmore

art seem animated as you walk past the plane of the glass surface. The image of a hand, for example, is open at first, then it grasps the end of a rope.

It all sounds otherworldly. And here, again, you're struck by a technology that's hard to fathom. So Billings explains, patiently, that holograms are created from a split beam of laser light. Somehow, the two beams meet on a photographic emulsion where they conspire to create three-dimensional "information."

When the emulsion is transferred to a translucent panel, light passing through creates these remarkable images.

Operating her own museum, which she founded 21 years ago,

Billings has reason to be proud. She was an inquisitive art student at the time, working primarily in ceramic sculpture. Then she saw a hologram and decided that was her future.

She forged relationships with the physicists working in the medium, which was discovered in 1948 by a physicist at the Imperial College of London. She also set out to meet artists who use holography as a medium of expression, and she collects their work.

Today, in her West Loop loft building, which used to be headquarters of the Free Methodist Publishing House, she and her husband have created a museum as well as a holographic laboratory and school.

Yet, Billings thinks her museum has not gotten the respect that it deserves. The museum has received a measure of financial support from the city and the state, but recent

grant requests have been refused. "I don't really care," said Billings. "Those decisions are made up by people who support each other and their friends."

Without grants from the arts community, the museum supports itself partly through a small industry that the museum has developed — making small pieces of holographic art for sale and turning out simple holograms for use on credit cards, tennis racquets and other products that are danger of being copied illegally. (Holograms are hard to counterfeit.)

"I don't bother much with the art world anymore," Billings said. "I like to concentrate on children." In fact, many student groups, high school age and even younger, come to the museum for tours from all over the Midwest.

Meanwhile, she promotes

holography's artists, deflecting criticism that it's too technical.

"There's always a marriage between art and science," she said. "The French Impressionists were scientific in how they looked at light."

She also compares holography to photography, which evolved from an utterly primitive technology a century and a half ago.

So people should look at holography as a new art form. "It's the first major change in visual communications in 100 years," Billings said. And they shouldn't worry too much about how it works. "To tell you the truth, it still amazes me."

The Museum of Holography is at 1134 W. Washington St. Hours are 12:30 to 5 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays. Individual admission is \$2.50. For information call 312-226-1007.

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