



Ted S. Warren/The Associated Press

A shark seems to be swimming around 11½-year-old Melanie Doblja as she views the large hologram by New Jersey artist John Perry at the Museum of Holography in Chicago. The 25-year-old museum is one of the city's lesser-known cultural attractions, almost hidden in a former warehouse about a mile west of the Loop.

Light-arted

Chicago's Museum of Holography offers art of the laser beam

By **F.N. D'ALESSIO**

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CHICAGO — Newspaper columnist Mike Royko died in 1997, so it's a bit disconcerting to see him turning around slowly inside a Plexiglas cylinder in a darkened room.

He's in full color and somehow insubstantial, so he's not a statue; but his monumental nose is there in all its three-dimensional glory, so he can't be a photograph, either. Suddenly, Royko breaks into a grin — and disappears.

He's a type of hologram, says Loren Billings, curator and executive director of the Museum of Holography.

As one of the city's lesser-known cultural institutions, it has only an unassuming sign in front and is almost hidden in a former warehouse district about a mile west of the Loop. In recent years, though, the stream of visitors to Oprah Winfrey's nearby Harpo Studios has brought increased walk-in business to Billings' odd gallery.

"We're the only not-for-profit museum of

holography in the United States — perhaps the world," Billings said.

She explains that the Royko hologram was created when artist Sharon McCormack had Royko stand on a revolving platform and photographed him with a movie camera.

Then the individual frames were transferred holographically to a strip of diffraction grating. That's what's revolving inside the display case," she said. "You look through the diffraction grating and see Mike inside."

Michael Jordan is in another cylinder a few feet away, also grinning. He executes a tricky move by passing the basketball behind his back, and continues doing so endlessly.

In the same room with the tiny Royko and Jordan are large-scale traditional holograms by New Jersey artist John Perry. In one, a shark seems to be swimming out of its picture frame and a huge red hand reaches for — and finally grasps — the frayed end of a rope dangling in front of it.

In another room, Perry has holograms of a full-sized Tyrannosaurus rex skull and a tarantula enlarged to the size of a basset hound. He

also has a work in which a painter reaches out from inside a picture frame with two brushes and seemingly smears swathes of red and yellow paint in the air in front of the viewer.

Some of the images by other artists are a bit disturbing, like the green woman who smiles, and then spews glass shards out of her mouth toward the visitor.

But none of it fazes Billings, who has been in charge of the museum since its founding 25 years ago.

"We also run a school of holography right here in the building. Some of our students are artists, and others are physicists and biologists from local universities," she said.

Some of the student works are mixed in among the small uncredited holograms hanging on the walls near the museum's reception desk. A visitor who went no farther into the museum might leave with the mistaken impression that holographic art consisted of nothing but kitsch, or gee-whiz technological stunts. There are super-realistic pictures of fluffy kittens and puppies, and several images of grinning skulls and Star Trek aliens.