

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition is a homage to Al Razutis and his contributions to the arts at Simon Fraser University. Razutis came to Burnaby Mountain in 1978 and is leaving to work in Los Angeles this year. The parallel between Al Razutis' work in the Centre for the Arts and John Wayne in Hollywood film is obvious to anyone who thinks about it. Razutis is large in life and large in art — especially art-film. Razutis' art film shoots from the hip: his shots are quick, straight and always on target. John Wayne's frontier was the 19th century "lawless" American west. Razutis' frontier is our 20th century "lawful" world of Canadian censors and Freudian art critics.

But Al Razutis works on another frontier, electron microscope technology. *CLASSIC SUITE AND OTHER STORIES* is an exhibition that was curated by Al Razutis. It is an installation of holographic art that reproduces the "John Wayne-in-art" tradition established by Razutis in other works such as *A MESSAGE FROM OUR SPONSOR* and *AMERIKA*. The technically refined shoot-out with moral and academic "bad guys" is clearly seen in the installations but if you miss the point, all this is explained in the notes provided by Razutis.

The Gallery is grateful to the artist for his notes and help in mounting this show. It is also grateful to the Centre for the Arts for the financial support it gave to the exhibition. The work that the Gallery staff willingly undertook is a thank you to Razutis for his large contribution to the arts at Simon Fraser University. Life on Burnaby Mountain will not be the same when our John Wayne-in-art goes home to Hollywood. Al Razutis will be missed.

Dr. Edward Gibson
Director
Simon Fraser Gallery

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CLASSIC SUITE AND OTHER STORIES

Holographic Art by Al Razutis

Any statement by an artist curating his own exhibition is flawed by his own perceptions. However, since the medium of holography is new and curators knowledgeable about it are few, this introduction seeks to reach beyond mere assertion and to account for historical and technical factors contributing to this new art form.

Holography, the spatial representation of three dimensional images by means of what is called "wavefront reconstruction" and laser imaging began as an invention exclusively for use in science. In 1947, the Hungarian scientist Dennis Gabor developed holographic theory in the course of optimizing electron microscope resolution. Only after the invention of the laser in the early 1960's did holography become practical and accessible to artists. Since these beginnings, holography has spread rapidly to many areas of applied optics: advertising displays, credit cards, greeting cards and most notably, the arts. Yet, many members of the public remain mystified as to how it is done. Even some art critics and curators, attuned to more traditional art forms, are not sure how to treat holography.

Canadian art holography began in the United States in the late 60's with the work of Jerry Pethick. In 1972, I founded *VISUAL ALCHEMY* and, with the assistance of two senior arts grants from the Canada Council, began developing laboratory facilities for holography, offering courses in holographic theory and practice, and working towards the development of a fine arts vocabulary in this emerging medium. My work was conducted in almost total isolation since at the time there were few holographers in North America and no centres for exhibition or information. A few years later, Michael Sowdon and David Hlynsky founded Fringe Research in Toronto. This second base of operations has grown steadily to feature state-of-the-art lab facilities, as well as gallery and educational programs.

Michael Sowdon was technically responsible for mounting the highly successful holography exhibit at EXPO 86 in Vancouver featuring the work of Michael Snow.

It is fair to say that most of the work conducted in the 70's by holographers in North America was almost exclusively concerned with technical "replicas" of objects (toy trains, figurines, etc.), work which was primarily evaluated on the basis of its fidelity to the original (mimesis) or simply its brightness and noiselessness. My work of the 1970's in holography differed from the main body of holography. My focus has remained on the "sculptural hybrids" and "graphic hybrids" which intergrated concerns from several media and art traditions. *VISUAL ALCHEMY* was the culmination of five years of my work in the studio. It premiered in the Burnaby Art Gallery in 1977 and went on to tour Canada in 1977-78, with a final exhibition in Seattle.

Holography has developed in a variety of ways and is now capable of featuring holograms up to 80 inches in size and computer-generated holograms, as well as motion-picture effects. Although affected by post-modern influences such as pastiche, parody and private language, it retains important traces of modern forms, especially collage, surrealism, and abstraction, as this exhibition demonstrates. For me, working through collage has become a method of integrating holography with a wider range of aesthetic, psychological, social and political concerns.

ANGEL BABIES is a series of wall mounted constructions, inspired by stories of the many childhoods that an adult can reflect on. Embedded in each construction is a narrative whose details are contained in objects, metaphors or suggested ambiguities. Most notably, several of the narratives touch on psychological violence emanating from stories of incest and child abuse, inspired, as it were, by friends

whose past touches on that hidden landscape. The male artist who ventures into the domain of incest survivors runs the risk of not comprehending and not projecting in his art the fear and powerlessness of victims whose psychology is populated with unconscious symbols of violation. These pieces emerge from Vancouver's conservative society, doing business as usual during the day while maintaining sexual hostages at night. There are sufficient examples covered in almost daily newspaper reports to warrant the description of incest and child abuse as a kind of Vancouver unconsciousness.

CLASSIC SUITE is an installation in which holography captures, in a sculptural form, a frozen moment of domestic psychological violence, a nuclear family's totemic and symbolic burden. This constructed interior suggests that movement and process are rendered ineffective in the face of a kind of unconscious and determining "law of metaphors".

STRESS TOPOGRAPHY is perhaps the most "technical" of the installations, featuring a series of eight holographic works (1984-1986) which involve a technique of interferometric contour mapping. In this technique, material is stressed between double exposures to reveal the "contours" of the stressed material substrate. Originally, this technique was applied by scientists working in non-destructive testing of metal or other materials. In 1977, I applied this technique to the expression of what I termed "states of matter sculpturally formed" with the intention of evoking a kind of qualitative equivalent to the interaction of artist and material. The primary interest in using interferometry is the creation of the lines which attest to the wavefront interaction between two states of matter. The ribbon forms are produced by summation and cancellation of light waves emanating from the surface of the material. As such, they attest most directly to the nature of holography itself as an imaging medium. *STRESS TOPOGRAPHY* proceeds in a kind of series from the most abstract piece (*FIELD* - a stainless steel

separate places producing two wave contours), to more recognizable objects interferometrically recorded. Finally, the two collage pieces, *NOSE CONE* and *GIVING HEAD TO SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY*, explicitly refer to the technique of "non-destructive testing" in the hands of war technology or in the hands of a kind of "science for science sake". This spectrum of meanings uses the medium's capacity to be a purely aesthetic experience or a representational process or in the latter case a political comment on the technology itself and its applications.

CLEARLY HOLOGRAPHY IS.....

Holography is a child of the late 20th century and will continue to be developed into the 21st century. Some holographers speculate that it will displace photography and other two-dimensional art forms from the centre stage of culture. One thing is certain: holography reveals an entirely new holistic method of imaging and provides clues for the development of an entirely new kind of aesthetic, one based on the realization that we can produce images (referential to the real or computer synthesized) from "wavefronts" of light. Whether critics of modern and post-modern persuasion understand these new developments is not at issue here. What is important is that holography expands our conception of spatial reality, energy and the expression of relativistic ideas about the universe. This exhibition is less "futuristic" than it is an expression of the links between holography and the more traditional media. For this artist and writers like Habermas modernism is yet an incomplete project and it is possible to engage modernism even with the foresight of holography. Hybrid works, such as this exhibition contains, are accessible at a variety of levels, suggesting one thing to an art historian, another thing to a scientist, another thing altogether to a child coming face to face with the mysterious images comprised of light. There are other stories to be told.

Al Razutis