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Let There Be Light, in Three Dimensions

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PICTURES FROM THE MOON
Artists' Holograms
1960s-2000s
New Museum

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LOVE IS A TWO-WEEK ROMANCE

Crossword Edited by Will Shortz

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Let There Be Light, in Three Dimensions

By MARTHA SCHWENDENER

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The current silence around holograms — “Pictures From the Moon” at the New Museum could easily be titled “Remember Holograms?” — is particularly interesting. Fifteen years after the discovery of holography by the physicist Dennis Gabor in 1947, actual holograms were made possible with the development of laser technology in 1962. A hologram is created when a laser beam is split, with one part of the beam reflected off an object onto a photographic plate and the other part projected directly onto the

plate; the interference among light waves from the two beams creates the image. (Mr. Gabor’s invented term came from the Greek words “holos,” for whole or entire, and “gramma,” for picture or message.)

Artists jumped on the technology in the mid-1960s, and a Museum of Holography was founded in SoHo in 1976, with a first exhibition that went on to travel around the world for more than a decade. But then digital

technologies eclipsed the medium, and holography got downgraded to mass-production status: key chains, jewelry and magazine covers, later postage stamps and credit card logos. (The Museum of Holography closed in 1992.)

As the New Museum's installation demonstrates, art holograms are finicky beings. Like orchids or certain animal companions, they take up space and demand particular lighting. They also rely on the viewer to move in front of the image to create the illusion of the hologram's three-dimensionality.

The earliest work here is [Bruce Nauman's](#) "Hologram H" (1969) from his "Second Series: Full Figure Poses (A-J)." Mounted on a pedestal several feet from the wall, the hologram, on a glass plate, is illuminated from above and behind with a blood-red light. The theatrical lighting, combined with the absurd pose of the subject (Mr. Nauman himself) leaning forward to grab his foot, creates something akin to a performance of a Samuel Beckett play, but with a figure appearing and disappearing as you watch.

A more recent work, Chuck Close's "Untitled #4" (1997/2007), also hinges on the uncanniness of the human body, seen here in three dimensions with every pore and ear hair visible, but also appearing and disappearing as you move in front of it. Mr. Close, the most celebrated artist of the otherwise moribund movement of photo- and hyperrealists from the '70s, uses holography to perfect, creepy effect. (He has also worked with daguerreotypes, one of the earliest forms of photography, which likewise reproduce an astonishing degree of detail.)

Abstraction and color are the focus in Eric Orr's four untitled holograms from 1995 and James Turrell's "Untitled (22NSGB)" (2008). Mr. Orr's works feature vertical planks of color hovering in complementary color fields, a bit like a 3-D Blinky Palermo painting except that the color planes move like louvered blinds as you pass in front of them. Mr. Turrell's work, like his larger light installations, involves color represented in ethereal, geometrically abstract form; its two curved triangles appear to merge with each other and the space around them.

The other four works are by Ed Ruscha and Louise Bourgeois. The pair by Mr. Ruscha, "The End #1" and "The End #2" (both 1998/2007), replicate in three dimensions the two on-screen words that mark the end of a film. Ms. Bourgeois's untitled deep red holograms from 1998 depict empty chairs suggestive of dollhouse furniture, one on a pedestal under glass, that fit with her lifelong project of undomesticating the accouterments of domestic life.

“Pictures From the Moon,” which was organized by Jenny Moore, an associate curator at the New Museum, is an adjunct to “Ghosts in the Machine,” the museum’s main exhibition, which explores the conjunctions of midcentury art, technology and humanity (although that show’s approach is framed somewhat more poetically as the “dreamlike life” shared by humans and machines).

But “Pictures From the Moon” is really more of a teaser than a full-blown show; it leaves you wanting a much broader treatment of the subject, which includes the pioneers and practitioners mentioned in the wall text: [Margaret Benyon](#), [Rudie Berkhout](#), Jody Burns, Harriet Casdin-Silver and [Dieter Jung](#). (Other artists who dabbled in holograms include Salvador Dalí, Simone Forti, Michael Snow and Stan VanDerBeek, whose “Movie-Drome” of 1963-66 is one of the highlights of “Ghosts in the Machine.”)

The show is skewed instead toward well-known artists who used holography and toward works made well after its heyday. But there is no question that holograms aptly demonstrate the quasi-mystical relationship humans have with technology — and photography in particular, which has often been harnessed to represent the supernatural.

(Holograms are not unlike 19th-century ghost photography and ectoplasm experiments, and there’s also a wax-museum chilliness to them that conjures a long history of photographing the dead.) No surprise, then, that holography inspired artworks and a dedicated museum or that it was quickly stifled into bureaucratic forms, like the postage stamp, or sublimated onto the already addictive medium of the credit card.

“Pictures From the Moon: Artists’ Holograms 1969-2008” continues through Sept. 30 at the New Museum, 235 Bowery, at Prince Street, Lower East Side; (212) 219-1222, newmuseum.org.