

Sculpting with Light

Contemporary Artists and Holography

Aug 20 — Nov 24, 2024 | The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA, US

Holograms elicit a magical experience for the viewer by creating the illusion of objects floating in space.

An innovative but little-known project in the 1990s introduced internationally renowned artists to holography, a medium that continues to inspire creatives today.

Sculpting with Light: Contemporary Artists and Holography, on view August 20 through November 24, 2024, at the Getty Center, presents holograms by modern and contemporary artists.

The exhibition is divided into three sections. The first two galleries present holograms produced by the C Project, where C stands for the mathematical symbol for “speed of light.” Founded in 1994 and operating in the tradition of a fine-art print workshop, this team of art professionals and holography technicians invited prominent artists of the day to translate their creative practices into this unique medium emphasizing light and dimensionality. The C Project collaborated with more than a dozen artists, and planned to engage another dozen, but ceased operation five years later, when the vast stock of film it purchased proved to be defective. Preparatory plates and related working materials by John Baldessari, Ann McCoy, and Dorothea Rockburne are on view, as well as holograms by Louise Bourgeois, Chuck Close, and Ed Ruscha that were reissued some 20 years later once a new photosensitive material on glass was identified.

The second section presents work by Deana Lawson, who is best known for her intimate portraits of Black subjects inspired by the traditions of social documentary photography, studio portraiture, and vernacular snapshots. Lawson began incorporating holograms into her practice in 2020, intrigued by the multiple perspectives they provide when viewed from different angles. By juxtaposing holograms with photographs, she challenges us to consider how her images can both document the real and allude to more spiritual or mystical realms. *Black Gold* (“*Earth turns to gold, in the hands of the wise,*” Rumi) (2021) demonstrates this juxtaposition with a hologram of Los Angeles-based food activist Ron Finley embedded in an inkjet print of a sidewalk vendor selling gold chains and watches; together the two portraits create a dialogue about resources and sustainability.

The final section presents work by Matthew Schreiber. While studying painting and art history as an undergraduate in the late 1980s, Schreiber became increasingly interested in physics and holography. The ideas of light, perception, and spectacle are central to his practice, which incorporates drawing, sculpture, photography, video, and installation, in addition to holography. Appreciative of holography’s grounding in physics (specifically, in the recording of the interference pattern of light waves), Schreiber also acknowledges the magical and emotional qualities of the medium, which derive in part from its novelty and frequent perception as kitsch.

“The science required to make holograms may be complicated, but the magic of experiencing them is immediate,” says Virginia Heckert, curator of the exhibition. “The artists who collaborated with the C Project in the 1990s explored how the qualities of luminosity, three-dimensionality, and hyperreality that are specific to holography might expand their practice in other media, just as photographer Deana Lawson has in more recent years. Though separated by a quarter of a century, these two moments are connected by Matthew Schreiber, who worked with all the artists in the exhibition.”

Sculpting with Light: Contemporary Artists and Holography is curated by Virginia Heckert, curator in the Department of Photographs. A companion exhibition, *Abstracted Light: Experimental Photography*, on view August 20 through November 24, 2024, at the Getty Center, features work that demonstrates the dynamic interplay between still photography, experimental film, and the dazzling time-based artworks by Thomas Wilfred called “Lumina instruments.”

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