

Wenyon & Gamble
New Holograms



forward and reverse views

Calculating Space, 1984

450 × 450 mm opal perspex set-square with holographic miniatures,
illuminated with coloured spotlights

Duped By Their Art

Most people enjoy their first experience of holograms, but not because of the technology involved. Holographic images are interesting because they fall within a much older tradition, a tradition as old as the history of art.

We all enjoy a clever piece of benign deception. We are fascinated by anything pretending to be something else – stick insects, rock formations that look like human heads, drag artists – the more convincing the artifice the better, as long as the deception is not complete. In fact, we are deceived every day by the craft of TV advertisers: we never realise it is yellow paint and not real custard, but what pleasure and insight does that knowledge provide? To appreciate a deception, we have to know we are being fooled.

In art, the long and fairly respectable tradition of *trompe l'œil* (deception of the eye) painting embodies this proclivity in one of its most undisguised forms. When French noblemen of the 17th century commissioned artists to paint detailed images of flowers, it was not because real flowers were too expensive. It was so they could show off the painter's skill and artfulness to their friends, and make their brain-cells tingle as they flipped between seeing apparent reality and witty artifice.

Holography is perhaps the ultimate *trompe l'œil*. But the artist is able to play with the fact that we *know* that holograms are illusions: we may be tempted – and many do try – to look behind or grab hold of that floating pair of spectacles, but we are not surprised when our fingers encounter only thin air. It was worth trying.

Susan Gamble and Michael Wenyon exploit our willingness to be duped by their art. They have become experts at exploring the visual possibilities of holography.

The subject matter of their work often belies our expectations of holography as the high-tech art of the future. A pair of spectacles, an egg whisk, a string vest – are these fitting subjects for holography? Apart from being chosen for their technical suitability as holographic subjects – they are rigid and inanimate, or let light through them – our attention is focussed on mundane objects normally passed over in

daily life. As holograms they become transformed.

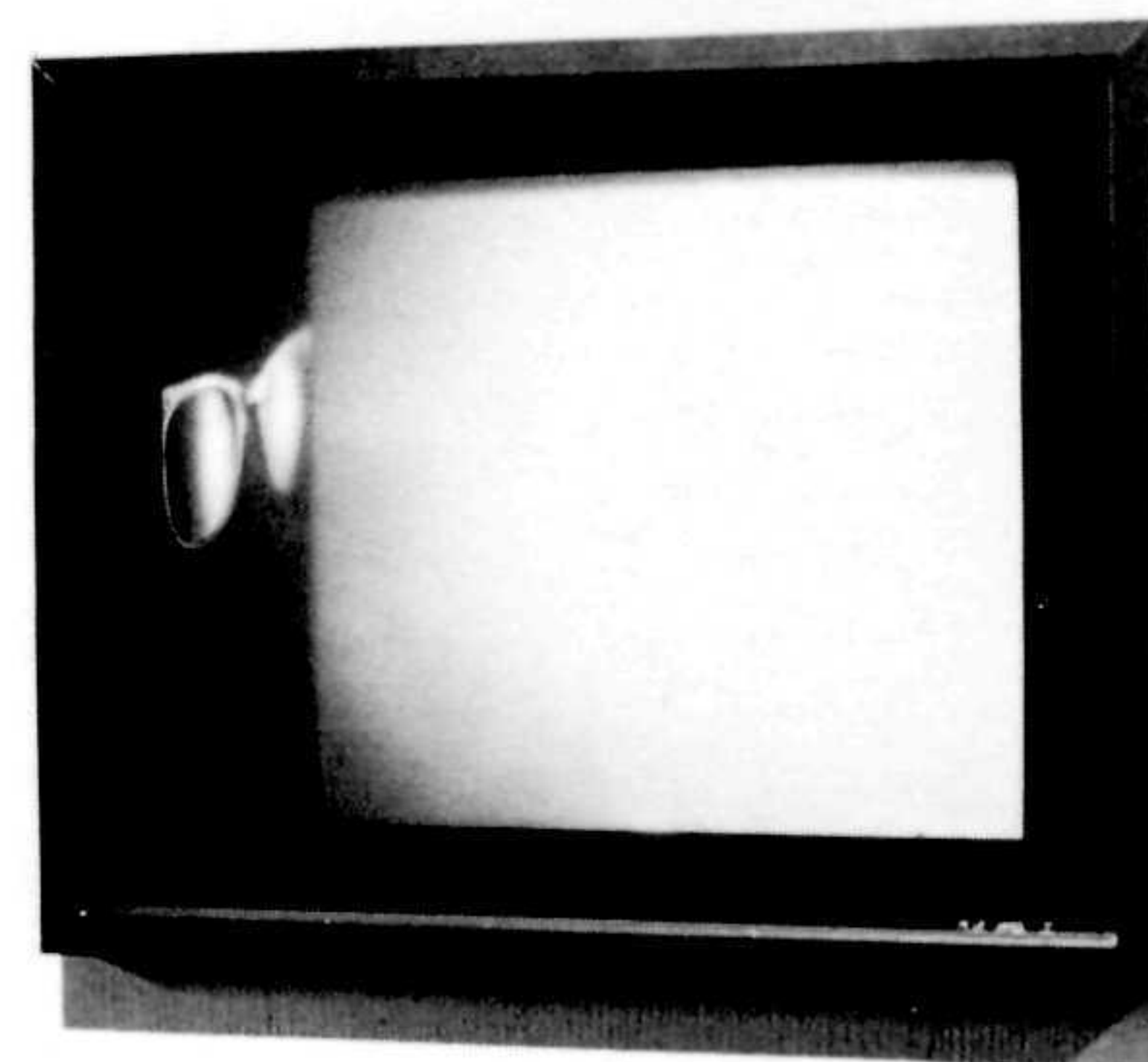
The whisk, egg and saucepan in Wenyon & Gamble's recent triptych of holograms relate to the 'speckle' pattern that stands either behind or in front of each object. This pattern occurs, if allowed, as a side-effect of the laser light used in the holographic process. The random shapes of its reticulations cannot be controlled, but the overall size and colour of the pattern can. The patterns are chosen here to be associated with such properties as boiling, heat or as a completely artificial 'play of light'.

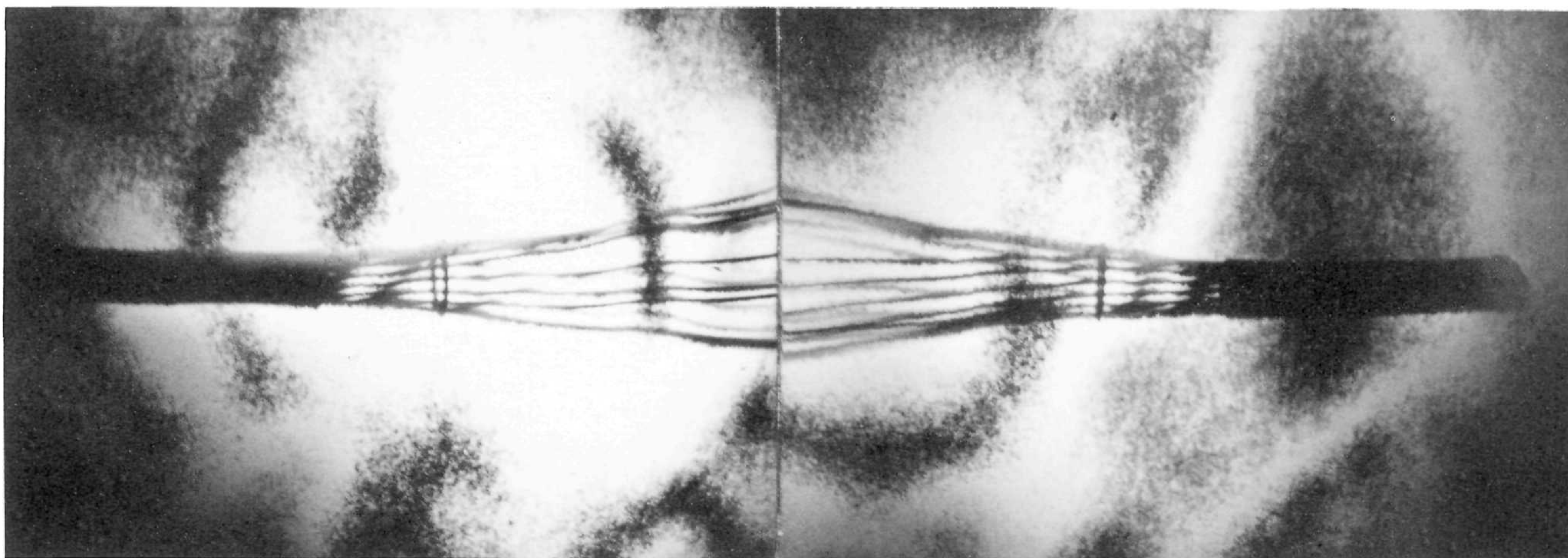
In the free-standing 'double-plate' works, **Propeller** and **Expander**, the same patterns are deployed to give less literal associations of turbulence or even violence, deflated when we eventually realise that these are not fearsome war machines but mirror-images of kitchen utensils.

Our Beach elicits bathos of a different sort. We immediately recognise the beach, with its romantic and commercial connotations, and we are drawn to study closely the marvellous 3D detail of the sandals, pebbles and detritus. You can even see a fingerprint on the lens of the sunglasses – and a reflection too, but not from real sunlight, or even from where we are in the gallery, but from a laser beam. So we may remind ourselves of the total artificiality of this tableau, and how the familiarity of its contents has misled us even into ignoring its quite unreal overall red colouring. **Our Beach** existed only on the holographers' bench in a dark workshop, and despite its realistic 3D appearance, it is pressed up against the glass as if in an aquarium, the whole completed with a plastic frame engraved with images of sea animals which diffract the light, like seaside shop signs.

Some of the pieces in this show were made by the artists separately, before they began working together in 1983. Cheap items of underwear or footwear often furnish the subjects of Susan Gamble's holograms. Her **Cultured Vest** is just that – a string vest in front of a rainbow of optically created colours, the form of the

Second Look, Michael Wenyon, 1982
203 × 254 mm hologram





Expander, 1984

300 × 800 mm double plate hologram

vest adding its own inherent psychedelic moiré effects.

Michael Wenyon's holograms tend to be simple in visual conception – too simple, you might say at first. But his tellingly named **Second Look** demonstrates how this simplicity masks cunningly devised arrangements which could not be so effectively achieved, if at all, in any other medium. At first we may see only red luminosities in a boxed space – a minimal and 'pure' abstract composition. But as we move to one side we catch sight of a pair of spectacles hidden down the left-hand side of the 'box'. What are they doing there? Are they the real subject of the piece, or an intruder? And why are we now spending so much time looking *at* an item which is usually looked *through*?

Wenyon & Gamble's recent cooperative **Miniatures** are framed in white plastic set-squares, suggestive of the scientific end of holographic research. Otherwise, however, they are redolent of Victorian daguerrotypes with their ornate presentation cases. They remind us that Wenyon & Gamble's operation has much in common with that of the first photographers. Like their nineteenth-century counterparts, the two modern artists have to make their own equipment, striving in a slow and painstaking manner to capture the likenesses of static objects.

While energised with the exploratory spirit that infuses the first few British artists to be working in this medium,

Wenyon & Gamble refuse to be in awe of the technology behind holography. But as artists they do not merely reiterate what might be shown just as well in paint.

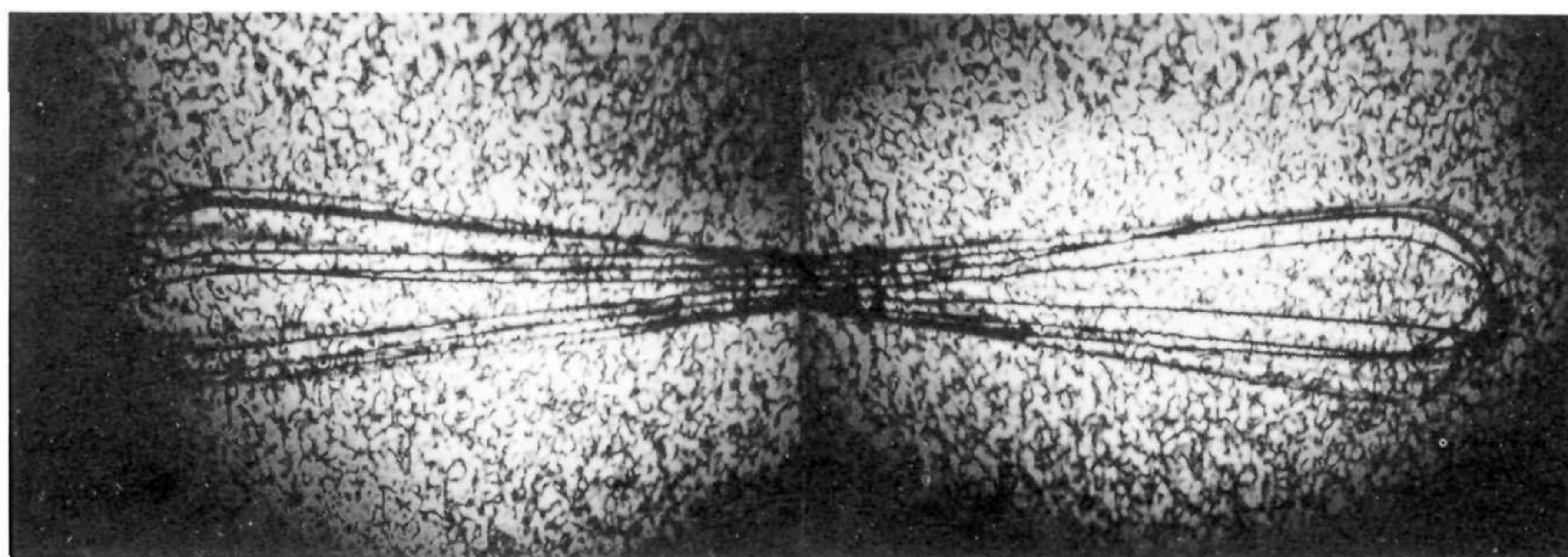
Substitute 'holography' for 'painting' in this quote from the artist Jean Dubuffet: 'Many people approach painting convinced of finding a transcription of that which the painter sees. Some painters may, in fact, aim to reproduce what they see, but if so the activity is difficult to explain. If they do see, they are satisfied; why then go to all that trouble? To make others see? Very kind of them, indeed.'

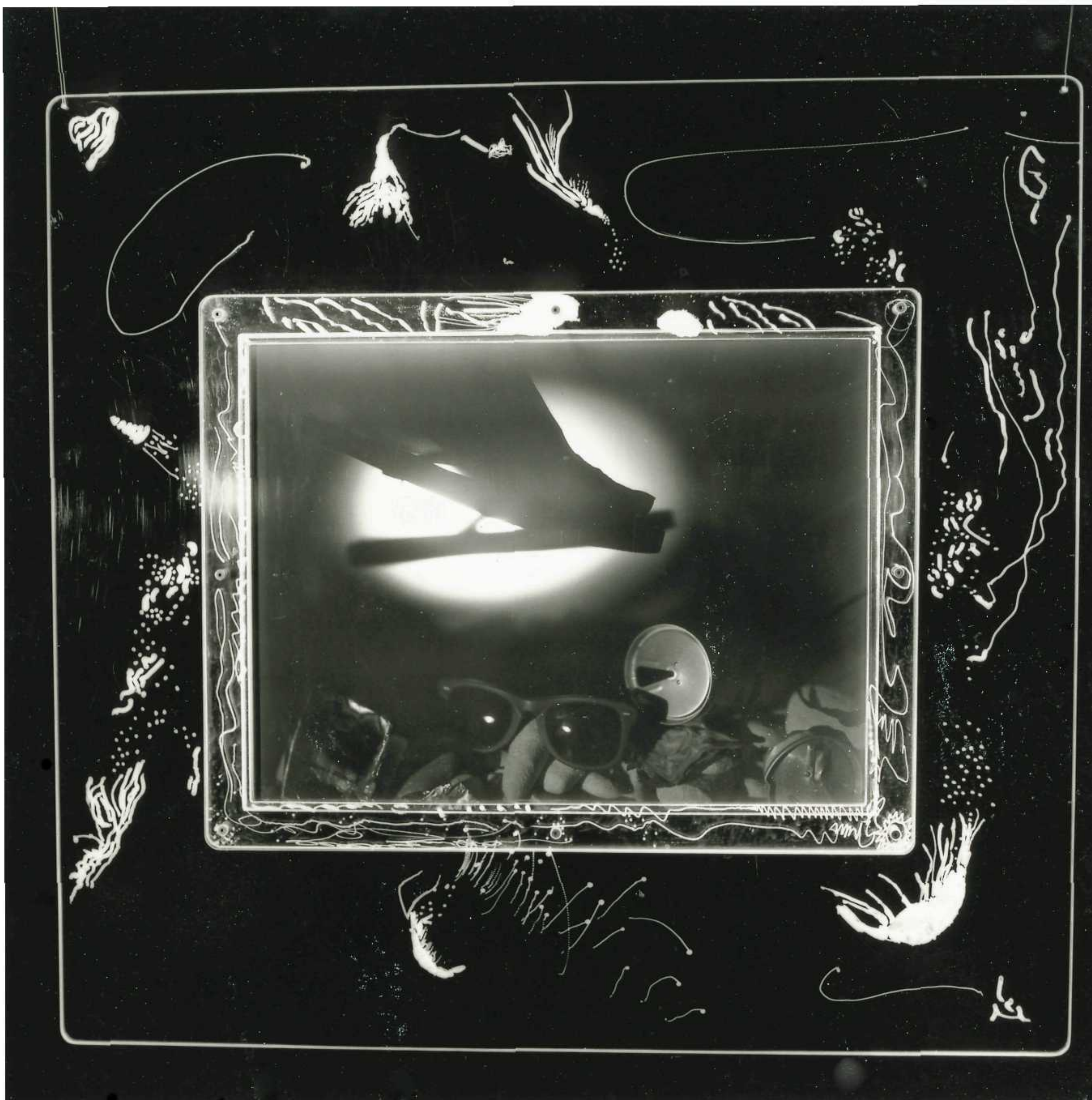
Wenyon & Gamble are not trying to be kind. They do a lot more than just make us see; in so doing, they make us look a lot harder.

David Briers August 1984

Propeller, 1984

300 × 800 mm double plate hologram





Our Beach, 1983

300 × 400 mm hologram in 600 × 600 mm engraved perspex frame

Wenyon & Gamble

Susan Gamble was born in 1957 in Edmonton, Middlesex, England. She received a BA Honours Degree in Fine Art from Goldsmiths' College, University of London, in 1979. Michael Wenyon was born in 1955 in Dayton, Ohio, USA, but moved to England as a child. He obtained an MSc degree in Applied Optics from Imperial College, London in 1978; his thesis title was 'White-light transmission holography'.

In 1980, Michael Wenyon designed and built the first studio for creative holography in Europe, at Goldsmiths' College. The project, called Goldsmiths' Holography Workshop, offered teaching and workshop rental to artists wanting to make holograms. It was funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation. More than twenty artists took

practical courses during the project's two years of operation, taught by Susan Gamble as well as by Michael Wenyon. Wenyon & Gamble began to make work together and formed a partnership in 1983. They now rent the workshop premises as their own studio; they are currently researching the feasibility of teaching holography to undergraduate Fine Art students in a two-year programme for Goldsmiths' College.

Four British artists received bursaries from the Arts Council of Great Britain to make holograms with Wenyon & Gamble during the Goldsmiths' project in 1982. Those holograms were included in the first British touring exhibition of holography, 'The Holography Show' which opened at the Orchard Gallery, Derry in October 1982. The exhibition was organised by

Susan Gamble; Michael Wenyon designed the travelling light rig. The show toured to the Ulster Museum, Belfast; Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff; Wolverhampton Art Gallery; Spectro Workshops, Newcastle; Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery; Aberystwyth Arts Centre; and the Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead (December 1983).

Michael Wenyon made a seven-week study tour of the United States in 1982 on a Winston Churchill travelling fellowship. He visited the studios and laboratories of artists and scientists in Boston, New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. He also attended the First International Symposium on Display Holography, Lake Forest College, Illinois, July 1982.

In 1982, Wenyon & Gamble organised six one-day seminars on 'Holography in Advertising and Display'.

In 1983 the artists taught a special practical course on behalf of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to four Portuguese artists; Susan Gamble was also invited to visit the artists' studios in Lisbon.

Wenyon & Gamble were commissioned by Royal Doulton Tableware Ltd in 1983 to make seven multi-colour holograms, 500 by 600 millimetres. The images all used holographic 'magic' (optical effects, etc) to illustrate classical magic tricks with the company's china figures and tableware.

Exhibitions (group shows)

'Spotlights and Glass Plates', Goldsmiths' Holography Workshop, 1981

'The Holography Show', touring exhibition, 1982-83, opening venue: the Orchard Gallery, Derry, plus seven other British galleries (see notes)

'Contemporary Art Holography', Museum of Holography, New York, 1982

'Light Vistas, Light Visions', St Mary's College, South Bend, Indiana, 1983

Interference Gallery, Toronto, 1983

Modern Gallery, Kilkenny Castle, Ireland, 1983

'Holography Redefined', Museum of Holography, New York, 1984

'Licht Blicke', Frankfurt Film Museum, 1984

Articles and Publications

'Understanding Holography', Michael Wenyon, David & Charles Ltd, 1978, (introductory textbook)

'Holography is an Art Form, Not a Gimmick', Michael Wenyon, *Design*, November 1979

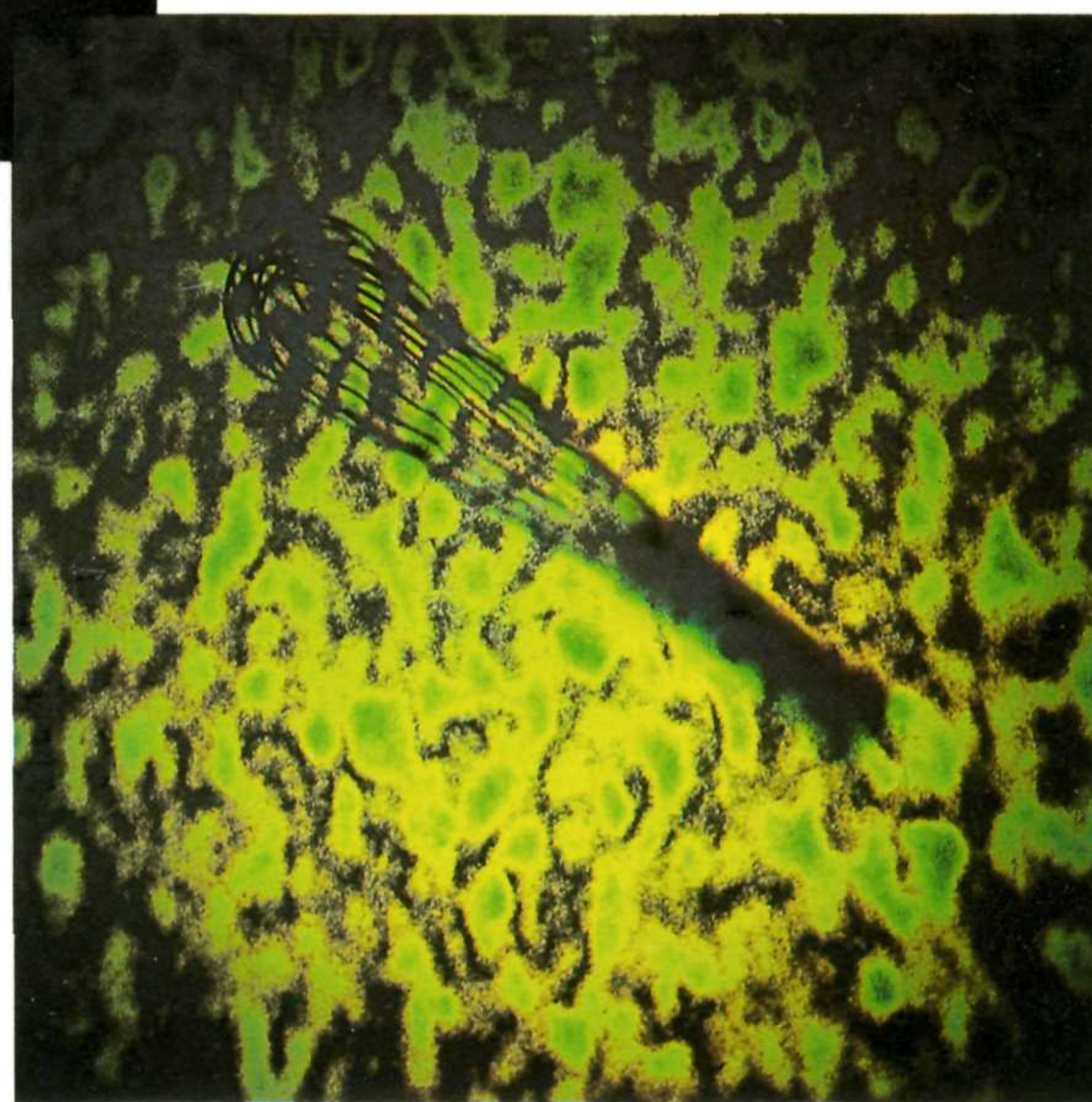
'Holographic Art at Goldsmiths' Workshop', Susan Gamble, *holosphere*, December 1981

'Holography, Images of Illusion', Michael Wenyon, *Graphics World*, July/August 1983



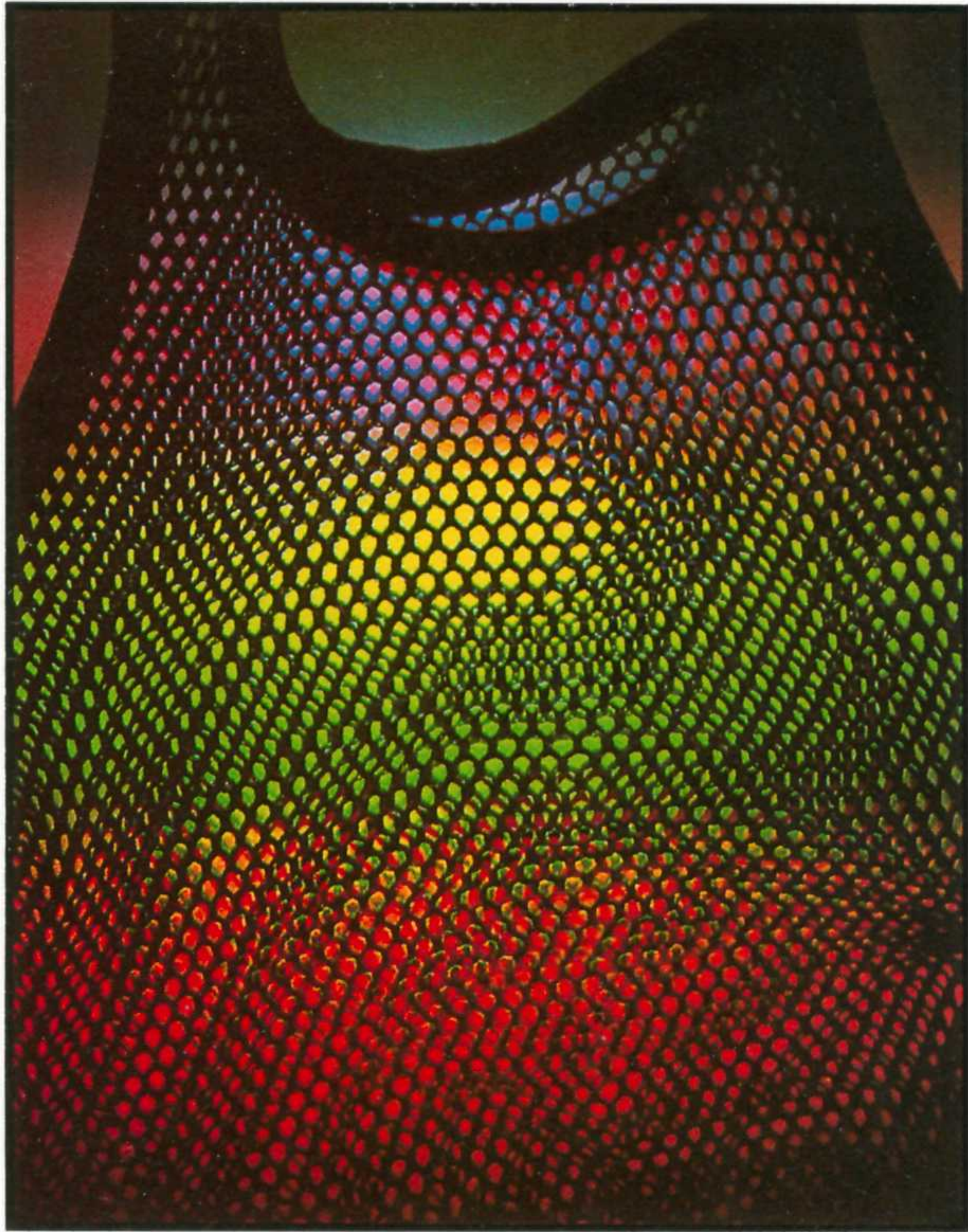
The Chemical Change: A Pan 1984
300 × 400 mm hologram in opal perspex frame

front cover
The Chemical Change: An Egg, 1984
300 × 400 mm hologram in opal perspex frame



The Chemical Change: A Whisk, 1984
300 × 400 mm hologram in opal perspex frame

Wenyon & Gamble, New Holograms is a touring exhibition;
it opened at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery & Museum, Swansea in August, 1984.



The Cultured Vest, 1983
Susan Gamble



Painting Glass, 1982
Susan Gamble



The Logos, 1984
Wenyon & Gamble



Coal Seam, 1984
Wenyon & Gamble

Wenyon & Gamble

New Holograms

List of Work

- 1 **Holographic Spectacles**,
Michael Wenyon, 1981
203 × 254mm, edition of 20
 - 2 **Second Look**,
Michael Wenyon, 1982
203 × 254mm, edition of 9
 - 3 **Display Spot**,
Michael Wenyon, 1983
300 × 400mm
 - 4 **Contact Print**,
Susan Gamble, 1981
203 × 254mm
 - 5 **Painting Glass**,
Susan Gamble, 1982
102 × 127mm
 - 6 **Backwards Girls/
Forwards Girls**,
Susan Gamble, 1982
102 × 127mm
 - 7 **Cultured Vest**,
Susan Gamble, 1983
400 × 300mm, edition of 3
 - 8 **Our Beach**, 1983
300 × 400mm hologram
in 600 × 600mm engraved
perspex frame
 - 9 **The Logos**, 1984
500 × 600mm
 - 10 **The Chemical Change: A
Whisk, An Egg, A Pan**, 1984
triptych of 300 × 400mm
holograms
 - 11 **Falling Pan**, 1984
500 × 400mm with two
pieces 500 × 100mm
 - 12 **Propeller**, 1984
300 × 800mm
 - 13 **Expander**, 1984
300 × 800mm
 - 14 **Scan**, 1984
300 × 800mm
 - 15 **The Habitat**, 1984
300 × 800mm
 - 16 **Coal Seam**, 1984
300 × 800mm
 - 17 **Water Stretch**, 1984
300 × 800mm
 - 18 **Calculating Space**, 1984
two 200 × 200mm holograms
in 450 × 450mm set-square
 - 19 **Dust in the Eyes**, 1984
triptych of 300 × 400mm
holograms
 - 20 **Nursery Rhyme**, 1984
500 × 600mm
 - 21 **Hide and Seek**, 1984
500 × 600mm
 - 22 **Balancing Trick**, 1984
600 × 500mm
 - 23 **Saw Through Plate**, 1984
600 × 500mm
- Numbers 20-23 for
Royal Doulton (UK) Ltd*