ALMINE RECH

Matthew Schreiber
Undertow

Nov 8 — Dec 14, 2024 | New York

Almine Rech is pleased to announce *Undertow*, Matthew Schreiber's first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from November 8 to December 14, 2024.

The exhibition features a laser installation created specifically for the dimensions of the gallery space and a new set of holograms from the artist's ongoing series *Orders of Light*. It is timed to coincide with a major presentation of Schreiber's holographic work at the Getty Center Los Angeles through November 24.

The future may have finally caught up with Matthew Schreiber.

For the past thirty years, Matthew Schreiber has been making art with lasers and holography—technologies that were described at the time of their invention as mediums of the future. Although the theory of holography was first proposed in 1947, it wasn't until 1962, with the development of laser technology, that holograms became a reality. Artistic experimentation quickly followed. Artists were drawn to holography for its spatial, volumetric, and sequential qualities—the display of three-dimensional images on a two-dimensional surface. Combining elements of photography, film, and early video, holography was even predicted to become the preferred medium of creative expression for its seeming combination of the two-dimensional aspects of painting with the three-dimensional experience of sculpture.

Alas, such predictions have not yet come to pass. While there was a brief period of holographic production by an intriguing range of artists in the late 1960s and 70s, including Bruce Nauman, Simone Forti, and Agnes Denes (and a lifelong commitment to the medium by a handful of the devoted including Margaret Benton, Harriet Casdin-Silver and Rudie Berkout), the technology and its promise was quickly co-opted in mass produced novelty items or embedded as a security measure in credit cards. Lasers, for their part, were once touted as "a new visual art" that "pushes out the frontiers of art and enlarges the possibilities of creation," before their increasing presence in rock concerts and planetarium light shows, then grocery store scanners and as mini-laser pointers relegated the medium to footnotes in art history as conceptual practices, video formats, then digital and now AI technologies took center stage.

While Schreiber came late to the game, historically speaking—and was among the last to study holography at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Royal College of Art in London before their holography labs closed—he has been an enduring believer. Fresh out of graduate school, as the master holographer of the C Project from 1994 to 1999, Schreiber convinced such artists as John Baldessari, Larry Bell, Louise Bourgeois, Chuck Close, Roy Lichtenstein, Dorothea Rockburne, Robert Ryman, and Ed Ruscha, among others, to go back to the future and try their hand with the medium. An extraordinary body of holographic work resulted because of his commitment to the technology. All the while, Schreiber used holography and lasers in the creation of his own art. As holography is dependent upon the laser, Schreiber's artistic practice has often concurrently considered the two technologies. His distinct approach to and ongoing experimentation with these mediums celebrates the utopian visions posited when technology offered the promise of brighter days, admittedly with a wink and a nod to the fringe elements it has also enabled.

Twenty-five years later, in a cultural landscape imbued with the virtual, Schreiber exhibits a new body of work at Almine Rech that again reveals the magic of the mediums. Four holograms from the artist's ongoing *Orders of Light* series present a mesmerizing range of forms and visual experiences conjured solely from the manipulation of light through the holographic process. Taking their names from the technical term that describes the separation of light into distinct beams, like the color gradient one sees in a rainbow, these holograms have no reference image. Rather, they are images of divided light itself, which celebrate the astonishing capabilities of the holographic medium. Each is an embodiment of the wonder of a technology that Schreiber himself admits he doesn't completely understand: "For over thirty years I have been trying to perfect a simple explanation of how holography works...but I can't. Just as I feel some mystery or magic in making the work, an explanation of the process remains elusive."

The centerpieces of the exhibition, the laser installation *Undertow*, also uses division as a guiding premise. Dividing the gallery in half dimensionally, Schreiber lines the walls at each end from top to bottom at a 45-degree angle with laser rails. The created shape appears elliptical. A light haze released into the room renders the form solid, as if constructed by an array of bright red strings or thin, glowing metal rods. It hovers—magical and fantastical—as the viewer moves through and around a form in which the seemingly solid gives way to the utterly permeable. Through this complex phenomenological experience, we find ourselves navigating a sculptural presence as well as the contradictory material properties of light, which are here rendered in every manifestation: visible and invisible, material and immaterial, enduring and ephemeral.

Schreiber's exhibition at Almine Rech is timed to overlap with the presentation of his work in *Sculpting with Light: Contemporary Artists and Holography* at The Getty Center, part of the broader initiative PST ART that includes more than 60 exhibitions hosted by organizations across Southern California considering past and present connections between art and science. While *Sculpting with Light* focuses on Schreiber's work and influence in the field of holography, his gallery presentation features his lasers and holograms in all their fantastical glory. As we depend to a greater extent upon virtual experiences to enthrall us and await the promise of AI to generate visual experiences inconceivable to the human mind, perhaps the moment of promise long offered by these modern pasts has finally arrived. Perhaps now we will pause long enough to understand that despite our proficiency in manipulating infinitely more sophisticated technological systems, we still can't quite get our heads around the fundamental principles of light fantastic.

— Jenny Moore, writer, curator, and Director of Tinworks Art