

MAY 27TH THROUGH JUNE 24TH, 1979 THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY, 1145 WEST GEORGIA STREET,



Lindberg, Ted. "Jerry Pethick: The Eskimo/Krieghoff Proximity Device: A Cultural Osmosis."  
Exhibition poster essay. Vancouver, BC: Vancouver Art Gallery, 1979.

Organized by The Vancouver Art Gallery and financially assisted by The Canada Council and by the British Columbia Government through the British Columbia Cultural Fund and the British Columbia Lottery Fund.

## Introduction

Increasingly, we are equipped to comprehend the universe in terms of fields of energy. On cursory examination, the world is filled with tangible objects and organisms, but the exponential growth of knowledge penetrates most of these entities: matter, when scrutinized, dematerializes in waves and/or particles of sheer energy. Even our consciousness, a process of information recording, storage and retrieval which gives us our notions of reality and self-hood, is based on culturally mutual but distinctly unique energy fields. The most apparent and visible kind of energy is pure light. It is more and more likely that *all* is light.

In December, 1976, Jerry Pethick published *Bias Arrays: Un Procès Sans Cesse*, 1 an essay so dense and recondite in interdisciplinary concepts and correlations involving light, consciousness, optical physiology, quantum physics, concomitant cross-fertilization and the psychology of perception as they related to art and culture that few readers could stay with or grasp its fullest implications.

The essay was the outgrowth of years of preoccupation with illusory systems (notably holography,) new materials, pure spectral colour, spatial relationships, physics, phenomenology and structuralism, which led Pethick through the intricacies of art's mimetic and plausibly mythic forms to another level of remarkable vision — a kind of conceptual alchemy.

This exhibition, in its entirety described as *The Eskimo/Krieghoff Proximity Device: A Cultural Osmosis*, is a demonstration of the multiplicity of ideas first expressed in the *Bias Arrays* compendium. Initially, it is an ode to a mythic Canada in that Pethick applies his theories to the memory of indigenous North American peoples, especially the Inuit, the cosmonauts of the north in their dimensionless/ yin yang/ original isolation; and to Cornelius Krieghoff, selected to personify the relentless 19th century European proliferation of this continent which was simultaneously liberring and destructive.

*The Eskimo/Krieghoff Proximity Device* is not, however, a social polemic as much as a profoundly esthetic one. In the most understated and simplistic form of interpretation, it is a theoretical, holographic model generated by the confluence of two cultures, if it can be said that, in broad terms, specific cultures emit definable, collective energy patterns.

As holography is the creation of readable interference patterns made manifest by generating, splitting and reintegrating coherent light (a scientific premise that has also been demonstrated with acoustic and thermal energy sources), Pethick reasons that such interference patterns can be described metaphorically and poetically through the agency of light: its reflection and diffraction, interacting with transparency and opacity; all melding in an infinity of possible precognitive and ideational sensations. What is more, in a majority of the exhibited works, he is able to define sculptural space through these concepts in a two-dimensional, planar mode without resorting to traditional illusory devices.

Pethick's empathy and fascination clearly lie with the formerly intact Eskimo culture, which he sees as

information as the European, which carried, even in the 19th century, such an overload of cumulative scientific verification of 'reality' based on Newtonian physics that it had begun to seriously limit its options to perceive with an 'open mind'. Euclidean geometry, Renaissance perspective, optics (and the resulting camera lucida and photography), mathematics, improved horology, all manner of sciences — tended to define the universe by filling up its immensity with mythic and curiously-distorted information. This assuredness and certitude continued right up to the introduction of energy physics (quantum or wave mechanics) by Planck-through-Einstein.

"The cosmic universe that particle theory helps to unravel, would seem to have been very much a part of Eastern man's philosophy, religion and beliefs. Einstein, Bohr and Schrödinger were particularly aware that the cosmic concept of matter and energy has existed in its gradual evolutionary form in the East for at least 2,000 years. With the early work in relatively, the realisation that the observer or observing device could theoretically no longer be excluded from the experiment created a need for more complete and, at first, intuitive hypothesis of all matter, space and time that classical physics was unable to provide."<sup>2</sup>

European culture, especially of the 19th century, could be said to have distanced itself further and further from the universe by inventing an increasingly vast semiotic system that alienated itself from a pre-linguistic harmony — such as the precariously-adapted Eskimo culture, which nonetheless viewed nature directly with a minimum of mediators.

Next to light in the process of imaging, spatial orientation is perhaps the most important sense, and in this respect the Eskimo culture displayed uncanny abilities, not only in its matchless sculpture, but of navigation in a constantly shifting world, and such engineering feats as the construction of spirally-assembled vaulted domes (igloos) from components unerringly calculated and shaped with nothing but bone snow-knives and intuition.

The metaphoric artifacts displayed in this exhibition are instruments of cosmological simplicity or instruments of irreversible change which have created permanent distancing from nature.

The tripod (and its monocular progeny, the surveyor's transit level, the easel and the camera) virtually destroyed on contact alternative systems of measuring and defining. They represented rigid unifying structures of an overwhelming cultural bias.

Pethick's *Marker*, of etched glass standing in a quartered granite stone, becomes a poignant reminder of the encroachments of Western man, and a ghostly marker for indigenous consciousness.

It is significant that with the 20th century, both science and art effected a liberating breakaway from the constrictions of tradition and in such a dramatic way that one could almost believe in the simultaneity of creative bursts that could transcend all boundaries. As modern man has become more alienated in his industrial and post-industrial malaise (because of that very real separation from nature), the need for adequate new myths to satisfy cosmological longings has been found in the arts and to some large extent in the soaring outer limits of energy-and-astro-physics.

Krieghoff died much too early to become a beneficiary of any artistic break-through, although the New World provided him with dynamics, space, colour and a certain

technologically minimal but rich (virtually paranormal) in intuitive powers that are only vestigial in modern Western man as he now desperately grasps for ecological stability and fundamental cosmic centering.

It is immaterial to Pethick that the characters and properties in *The Eskimo/Krieghoff Proximity Device* are plucked out of historical and geographic context, since the past, any time other than the living present, quickly takes on a two-dimensional characteristic with imprecise definitions of depth.

Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872), a Dutch-born and German-trained genre painter of Quebec habitant life and customs (which sometimes included aboriginals), never travelled to the Arctic, (nor has Pethick, though he has studied and read its mythos exhaustively). Peter Pitseolak (1902-1973), portrayed or symbolized in a number of the pieces, is singled out because he was the first Eskimo photographer, ironically using a principle recording device of Western "civilizing" technology to record the mutating, fading last moments of his own culture.

*The operative element throughout this exercise is light:* as it pits consciousness (one form of light energy) against 'reality' (an ontological concept sustained by various mutual agreements). The *E/K Proximity Device* commemorates all of science and art in its search for a reality as nebulous as the concept of infinity itself.

To locate this experiment at the moment of impact of these particular two cultures may seem a bizarre choice, (Eskimos having been relegated to so few, however powerful, semiotic clichés on a global scale,) in an atmosphere so alien to most of mankind. In another sense, precisely this alienness permits crystallized deconstructions of symbols, systems and values.

It is safe to speculate that "pre-conquest" Eskimo consciousness was every bit as full of some manifestation of

provided him with dynamics, space, colour and a certain exhilaration which he might not have experienced had he stayed in his homeland. As a trained observer, he must have been at least slightly aware of the effect of the confluence of cultures in this setting.

By an extraordinary set of circumstances, (time, space, genetics, ratiocination, temperament and intuition,) Jerry Pethick has permitted himself to stand sufficiently apart (epitomizing McLuhan's 'Artist As Distant Early Warning System') to be able to grasp this enormous panorama and hold it, fleetingly, luminously, iridescently, amorphously, undulatingly, seductively up for our inspection. He has boldly and brilliantly entertained a series of concepts which are easily Duchampian in their scale and execution, and where a book-length commentary might have been fully in order, I apologize for the brevity of this statement.

Ted Lindberg, Associate Curator.

1 *Vanguard*, December, 1976 - January, 1977, The Vancouver Art Gallery. 2 *ibid*

## Catalogue

1) *Iceberg Mirage*, 1976, 96.5 x 96.5 cm. Etched mirror and diffraction grating\*, glass, aluminum and silicon sealant. Collection Gloria Onley.

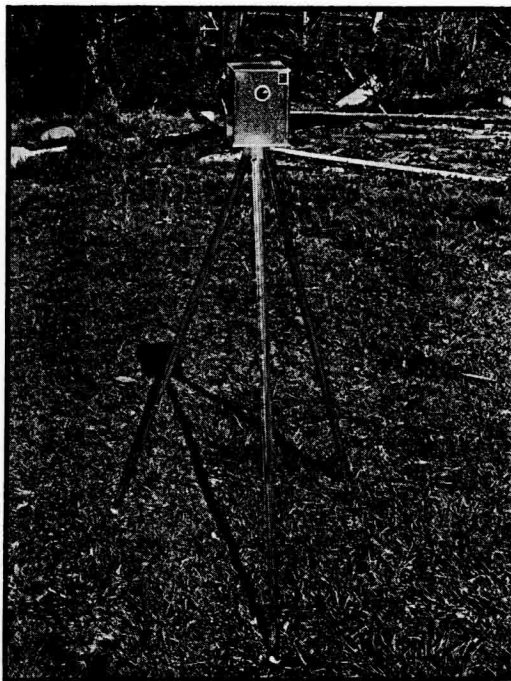
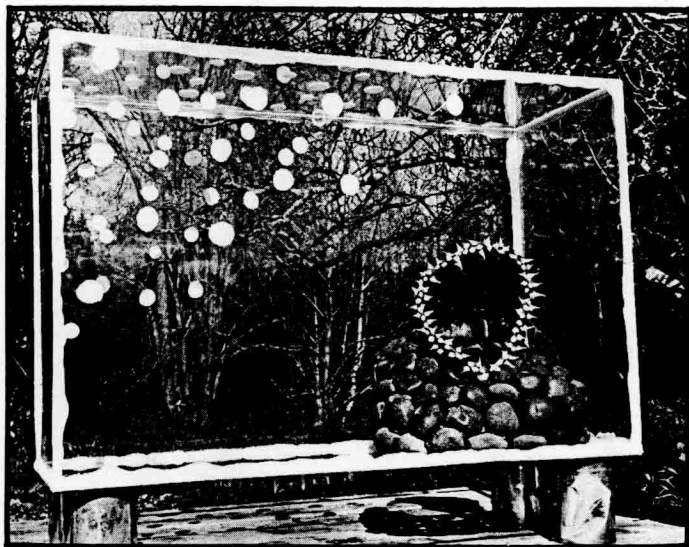
2) *Sleigh Interference*, 1976, 63.5 x 90.3 x 218.6 cm. Etched mirror, stones, glass, silicon sealant, aluminum. Collection of the artist.

3) *Snow Tire Track*, 1976, 33 x 86.3 cm. Etched mirror, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

4) *Tundra Down There*, 1976-77, 50.8 x 68 x 113 cm. Glass, fresnel lens sheet, mirror, diffraction grating, silicon

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Spatial :

*Parka and Snow Screen*, 1978-79, 66 x 43.2 x 25.4 cm



*Krieghoff Painting Chief Tanagha*





sealant and Carnation Milk cans. Collection of the artist.

5) **Eskimoesque**, 1977, 81.3 x 71.1 cm. Etched mirror, diffraction grating, glass, paper, fresnel lenses, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

6) **Eskimo Watching First Skater**, 1977-78, 66 x 66 cm. Etched mirror and diffraction grating, paper, ink, glass and silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

7) **Krieghoff Painting Chief Tanaghte**, 1977-79, 160 x 160 cm. Etched mirror and diffraction grating, glass, silicon sealant, enamelled steel. Collection of the artist.

8) **Igloo Inversion**, 1978, 45.7 x 45.7 cm. Glass, etched mirror and diffraction grating, silicon sealant. Collection Peter Junger.

9) **K Facing South**, 1978, 45.7 x 45.7 cm. Glass, etched mirror and diffraction grating, silicon sealant. Collection Peter Junger.

10) **Pitseolak Portrait**, 1978, 48.2 x 48.2 cm. Etched mirror and diffraction grating, glass, aluminum, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

11) **Woven Realms**, 1978, 91.5 x 61 cm. Etched mirror and diffraction grating, glass, aluminum, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

12) **Snow Knife Floating In Memory**, 1978-79, 304.8 x 53.3 x 5 cm. Fresnel lens sheet, etched diffraction grating, aluminum, and silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

13) **Snow Glasses**, 1978-79, 228.6 x 16.5 cm. Glass etched diffraction grating, aluminum, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

14) **Krieghoff Easel (Signed)**, 1978-79, 142.2 x 78.7 x 78.7 cm. Etched mirror and diffraction grating, glass, aluminum, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

15) **Krieghoff Book**, 1978-79, 45.7 x 45.7 x 5 cm. Etched glass, mirror and diffraction grating, silicon sealant, coloured diffraction grating. Collection of the artist.

16) **Marker**, 1976-79, 66 x 25.3 x 25.3 cm. Etched mirror, silicon sealant, granite. Collection of the artist.

17) **Parka and Snow Screen**, 1978-79, 66 x 43.2 x 25.4 cm. Glass, stones, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

18) **Ghost Camera**, 1978-79, 132 x 88.9 x 88.9 cm. Clear and frosted glass, etched mirror, diffraction grating, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

19) **Arctic Light**, 1979, 71.1 x 58.4 cm. Glass, etched diffraction grating, enamelled steel, stones, lenticular screen, and silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

20) **Cornelius and Ernest Approach Toronto Across Frozen Lake Ontario**, 1979, 86.4 x 114.4 cm. Etched mirror, etched and coloured diffraction grating, enamelled steel, glass, silicon sealant. Collection of the artist.

\* Diffraction grating is a man-made ornamental material capable of iridescent qualities similar to fish scales, butterfly wings or abalone shell, created by printing continuous spiral grooves on a metallized plastic film in successive convolutions of which are equidistant and approximately 7/100,000 of an inch apart. Light striking this material is modified by the lines or grooves in such a way that waves of a particular frequency, or colour, are reinforced and become visible as that colour, and change through the breadth of the spectrum available through that particular light, depending on angle of vision.

## Biography

Started work in Holography

Canada Council Bursary, 1968-69

Works in Great Britain and other European collections

**Electronic and optical technologies Coherent light**

Moved to the U.S. to further explore holographic space, Michigan and New York, 1968-70

Holography consultant and designer for Sonovision Inc., a laser modulator research and development company  
Integrations — Fly's Eye Lens System

Canada Council Bursary, 1969-70

Exhibited Editions Gallery, Ann Arbor, 1969

Drawing Show, 20/20 Gallery, London, Ontario, 1971

**Manufactured optical materials**

First exhibition of holograms, Cranbrook Academy of Arts, Bloomfield Hills, Detroit, 1969

Statement on holography, Light Edition, artscanada, December 1968

"N Dimensional Space", Finch College Museum, New York, 1970

**Sand based stability systems 1970 Laser optics**

Reece Palley Gallery, SoHo, New York, 1970

New York State Endowment of the Arts, New York State

Museum Tour, 1970-71

Newsweek, June 1970

Teaching sculpture, San Francisco

Art Institute, 1970-71

**Spectral light Dimensional imagery**

Holography book, Belltower Books, Toronto, 1970

Lecture, Bennington College, New York, 1970

**Holographic loop**

"Going away at home" 13 holograms on film

Moved to California, 1970

San Francisco and Northern California

Co-founder-teacher, School of Holography 1971

Lectures:

California Institute of Art;

University of California, Berkeley

Extension Course;

Cheltenham College of Art, England, 1972

"Space Arrays", Nova 1 Gallery, Berkeley

**Ambient light Spatial orientation of observer**

Exploratorium Exhibition, Palace of Arts and Science  
San Francisco

Lighthouse, University of British Columbia and Burnaby Art  
Gallery, 1973

Look-Out Fad Gallery, England, 1975

Museum of Holography, New York, Opening, 1975

Look-Out Exhibition to Canada House, London, 1975

Light Recordings, 3M Colour 1972

3M Colour Machine Book,

Transparent House, Point Arena, California, 1973-75

Research of 3D systems for William Burroughs film, "The  
Ticket That Exploded"

Spaceman Edition of 100 Holograms, 1972

Wolverhampton Fine Arts Gallery, England, 1975

**View point**

Fresnel optics

Optical tapestries

Fly's eye lens system

Serial imagery

Composite images

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**Interference**, 1976, 63.5 x 90.3 x 218.6 cm.  
stones, glass, silicon sealant, aluminum.  
ie artist.

**Fire Track**, 1976, 33 x 86.3 cm. Etched mirror,  
. Collection of the artist.

**Down There**, 1976-77, 50.8 x 68 x 113 cm.  
lens sheet, mirror, diffraction grating, silicon

Ontario, 1956-57

**Light and darkness.** The behaviour of light during blasting

Travelled to Great Britain, 1957

Attended art colleges:

Chelsea College of Art, National Diploma of Design, 1960

Chelsea Diploma of Design, 1960.

Worked and travelled, 1960-61

Royal College of Art, Sculpture Department, 1961-64

Associate of the Royal College of Art

**Manipulation of colours, materials**

**Excitement of ideas Plasticity**

Worked and exhibited in London, 1960-68

Commonwealth Artists Annual at Whitechapel Gallery

London, 1965

John Moores Liverpool Annual, 1965

"Six Canadians", South London Gallery, 1965

Vowe Land Piece, Commission, Suffolk, Eng. 1965

Fulham Palais Exhibition, London, 1967

British Council Purchase Award, 1968

**Art support system Inherent colour of thermo-plastics**

**Light transmission Reflection**

**Dimensional illusion**

"Poetics of space"

**Non physical solids**

**Spatial aberration**

B.C. Building Sculpture Dr W

Competition (aborted at model stage through fall of government)

Unpacking Ceremony 1976

**De-focussed vision light properties**

West Vancouver, Private show

Bias Arrays

Lecture Series, University of Victoria, 1977

Started work on the Eskimo/Krieghoff

**Prismatic colours, Interference patterns, Diffraction of light**

Proximity Device 1977, Lecture

Lecture, Fanshaw College, London, Ontario 1977, Bias

Arrays

**Physics and Semiotics, Sensation phenomena, Cultural**

**osmosis, History of light control**

Commissioned Essay for *Vanguard* 1977

Optics of Insight, an essay for the Holography Book

3D Imaging Conference, San Diego 1977,

H.P. Show, Co-Op Radio, Vancouver

Eskimo Prince Suite of Prints with Bill Little

**Eskimo consciousness and technologies Research on**

**Krieghoff and Pitseolak**

Pumps Gallery 1978

Notes *B.C. Monthly* 1978

Eskimo/Krieghoff Proximity Device, Vancouver Art Gallery,

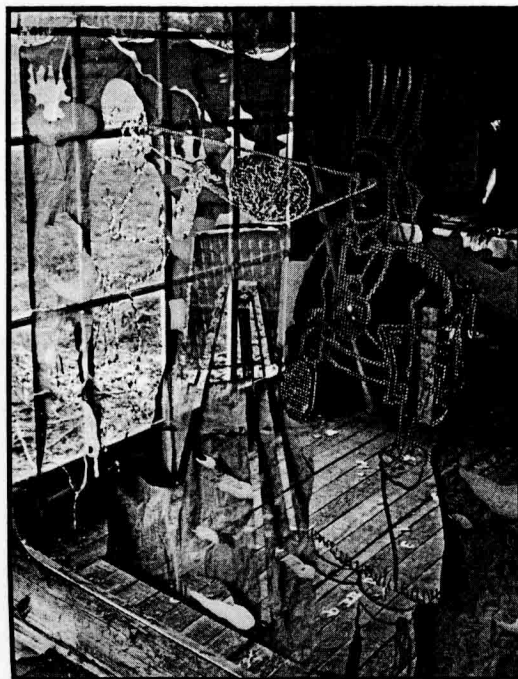
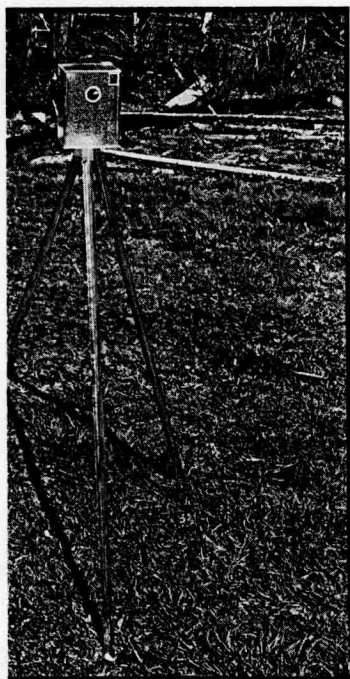
Spring 1979

1978-79, 132 x 88.9 cm

*Krieghoff Painting Chief Tanaghte*, 1977-79, 160 x 160 cm

*Snow Knife, Floating in Memory*, 1978-79, 304.8 x 53.3 x 5 cm

*Woven Realms*, 1978, 91.5 x 61 cm



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