

Margaret Benyon, MBE (1940 - 2016)



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Born in Birmingham, England, on 29 April 1940

Studied painting at *Slade School of Art* in London from where she graduated in 1962

Studied at the *Royal College of Art* in London and received in 1994 her **PhD** for research and activities in art holography.

In her thesis: *How is Holography Art?*

“she argued that every fine-art holographer theorized, in effect, about the practice and the product, in common with the beginning of art movements through the twentieth century.”

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In 1967 Benyon read about holography when she was using graphic *interference patterns* (such as *moiré patterns*, a graphic idea employed in op art) to modulate the picture plane so that it no longer looked flat, and provided the illusion of depth.

In 1968 when holography was available only to scientists Margaret Benyon began to learn about holography and started to make holograms.

Actually she was the first artist in UK to make holograms herself. Most other artists at that time hired holographers to record their holograms. Her aim was to take holography out of the science lab, and to enlarge the boundaries of what was traditionally seen as fine art.

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It all started when Benyon won a Fellowship at the *University of Nottingham* in 1968, where she got access to a holography lab at the Production Engineering Department in the university. There she produced her first very small transmission holograms.

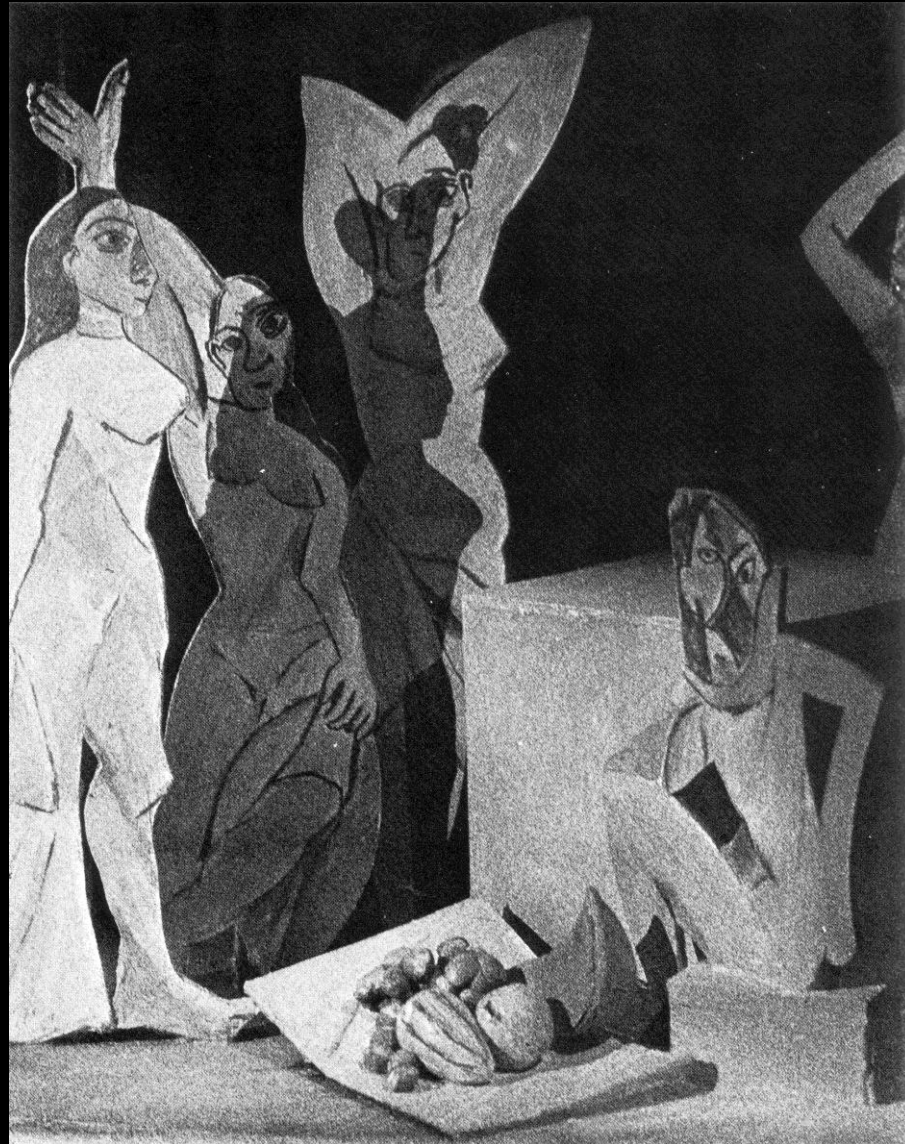
Next year, in 1969, she was able to use Peter Spicer's lab at the *British Aircraft Corporation* in Bristol. In that lab she made the holograms for her first exhibition at the *Nottingham University Art Gallery* which took place in the spring of 1969. This show was the first UK exhibition of art holograms.

Since her holograms were transmission holograms which needed lasers to display them and, since she could only get access to very few lasers, she **arranged her holograms on turntables**. They were turned manually by the visitors or by them pressing a button to rotate each hologram into the path of the expanded laser beam for viewing.

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An example of
one of her first
holograms:

Picasso 1969



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One year later, in 1970, she had another exhibition at the *Lisson Gallery* in London, which generated a great deal of publicity.

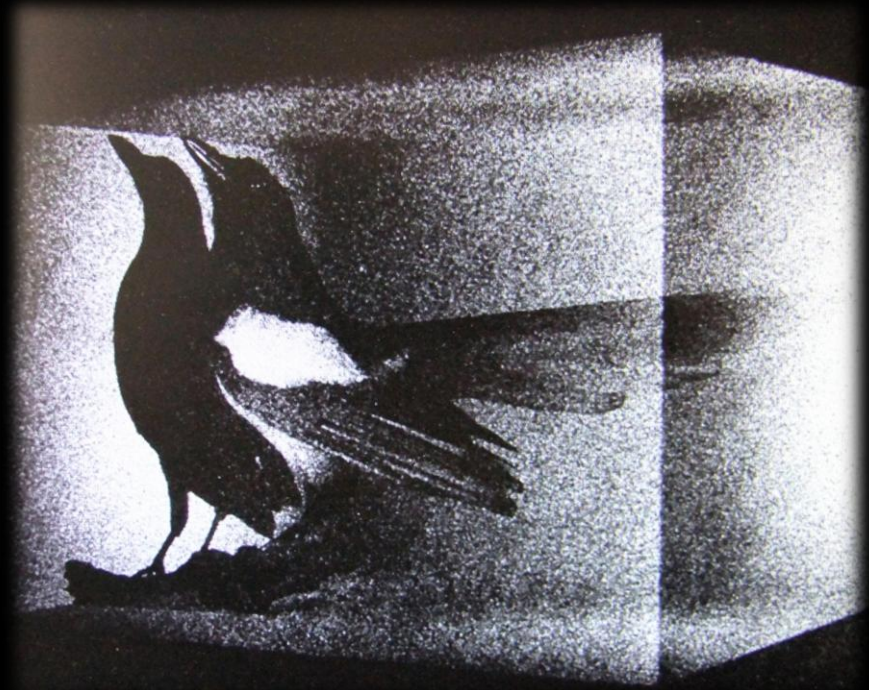
The laboratory of Tony Ennos at the *National Physical Laboratory* (NPL) in Teddington was another lab Benyon got access to. At NPL Jim Burch and Ennos were both working on *holographic interferometry applications*. There she learned about holographic interference patterns, something she would later use for her art holograms.

After her first exhibition of holograms, Benyon was able to borrow John Butter's lab at *Loughborough University* during the university vacation, to make 20 by 25 cm holograms.

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After her three years at Nottingham, Benyon gained a *Leverhulme Senior Art Fellowship* at the *University of Strathclyde* in the Architecture Department. As an initially isolated and pioneering British artist experimenting with holography, it took some time before she created more artistic holograms.


For example, her hologram *Bird in a Box* (1973) was her first holographic art piece having an emotional and personal undercurrent which was about her feelings as a scapegoated female artist in the architecture department, a boxed-in “bird.”



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In 1980: Twelve years making art holograms!

Exhibition at MOH in New York



Phases

A twelve year retrospective exhibition of Margaret Benyon's work in holography.

October 16, 1980 through January 11, 1981

You are invited to the opening of Phases on Thursday, October 16, 1980 at 6:30 p.m., in the south gallery, main floor.

Museum of Holography
11 Mercer Street, New York, New York 10013 USA



She was an **Artist in Residence** at the *Museum of Holography* in New York in 1981.

In 1983 she set up her own **holography studio** in Dorset, England. The 1987 *Shearwater Award* helped her to improve and extend her lab.

In the period between 1981 and 1993 she used the human body as the sole subject matter for her work, combining holography with techniques such as underpainting.

Jig-Saw

Margaret Benyon
1978

6 pieces 3-1/4" x 3-3/4" mounted on wood blocks
Reflection holograms
Australian National University, Canberra, Australia
Collection of the artist

Copyright 1980 by the Museum of Holography, 11 Mercer Street, NY, NY, 10013

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By the late 1970s she moved to Australia with her husband and family. There she worked in the Physics Department at the *Australian National University* in Canberra on a fellowship. From 1979, at the nearby *Royal Military College* in Duntroon, she was able to get access to an argon-ion laser.

She subsequently returned to Britain and collaborated with *John Webster*, a physicist at the *Central Electricity Generating Board*, to make pulsed laser holographic art holograms from 1981.

Webster had developed a **pulsed ruby laser for holographically inspecting nuclear fuel rods**. Together with him she made pulsed holograms, some of them with interferences patterns.

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Counting the Beat (1981) John Webster and Margaret Benyon in the hologram emphasize the polarity of opposites, one head nods "yes", the other shakes "no".

Interference fringes were produced by one nodding the head "yes" and the other shaking "no". Such movement on different axes produces different fringe patterns, the nodding giving vertical lines and the shaking horizontals.

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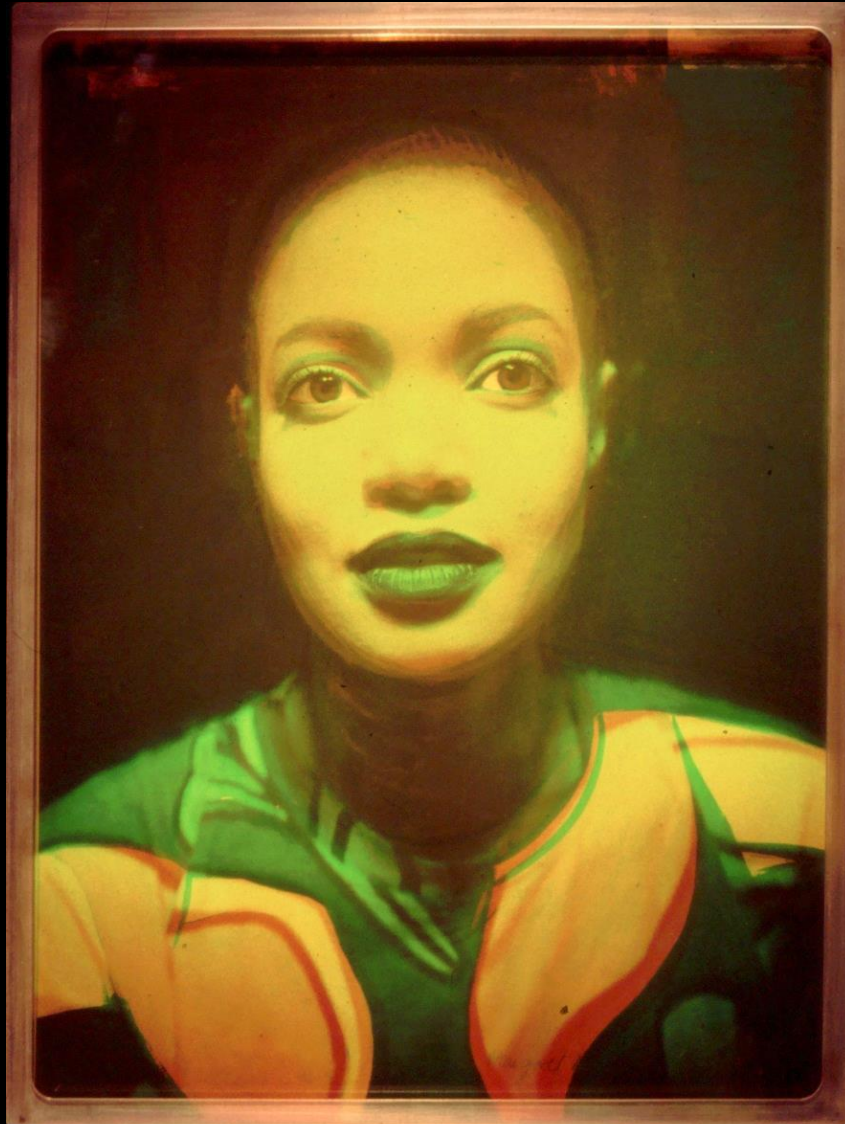


Her best known art hologram is probably *Tigirl* (1985)

The pulsed master plates were recorded in Paris in *Anne-Marie Christakis' holography lab*.

There she recorded the pulsed masters for the holograms in the *Female Cosmetic Series*.

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By combining a hologram and a gouache under-painting, carefully registered with the hologram, she created several holograms such as

Painted Margot (1986)

The painting can be seen on its own when the hologram lighting is switched off.

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In 1996 she got the *Lifetime Achievement Award* at the Art in Holography International Symposium in UK.

In the millennium year she was awarded an **MBE** by HM the Queen in the New Year Honours List 2000 for services to art.



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Margaret Benyon returned to Australia in 2005. She continued to practice as an artist, while teaching at the *College of Fine Arts at the University* of New South Wales in Sydney.

Her work has been seen in a large number of exhibitions, in countries as far apart as the USA, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Australia, France, Germany, Japan, and China.

Her works are in a number of public collections, including the *Australian National Gallery* and the *Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, and in an undocumented number of private collections world-wide