(art)n Laboratory, a collaborative art group and media lab that has been based in Chicago since its inception in 1983, is comprised of its director and founder, artist Ellen Sandor, and a dedicated core group of visual and computer artists. The laboratory possesses a vital and extensive portfolio thanks to the talent and sophistication of its members and the accomplished artists, scientists, and mathematicians with whom it has collaborated. These collaborations have spawned a body of artwork that is invaluable both for its pioneering aesthetic and the historical importance of the scientific concerns and discoveries first portrayed by (art)n and research teams working together.

The (art)n work presented at SIGGRAPH 2000 is entitled Townhouse Revisited, 1999. This PHS Cologram and interactive audio sculpture addresses issues of the body, public space, and touch in the architecture of virtual reality. The work was created in response to such questions as: If hard matter and gravity offer no impediment in virtual reality, what then will meeting, working, and playing spaces look like there? How might form, substance, and light evolve as we navigate through virtual structures? Would the body’s passage behind a monitor’s glass raise any layered echoes of sound? How would sound behave in a virtual space with no true surfaces to bounce off of — only image planes? Would sound bouncing off image planes be affected spatially by the digital code that makes up the structure of the image?

TJ McLeish and (art)n collaborated with Skyboy Productions on the interactive sound for Townhouse Revisited. The sculpture is surrounded with ambient and interactive sounds that viewers engage in when they step on the floor mats surrounding the piece. The interactive composition by McLeish and (art)n literally and metaphorically describe sounds of the future in home environments. (art)n and Skyboy previously collaborated on interactive sound for PHS Cologram sculptures that are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago and Santa Barbara Museum of Art.
The (art)n Laboratory is unusual among artist's groups in that it holds landmark patents in 20th century visual technology. In 1989, after six years of research and development, the group patented what is called the PHS Cologram (pronounced skol-o-gram), the very first virtual photographic hard copy process. "PHS Cologram" is a word coined by the group in 1983. It contains the acronym PHS for photography, holography, sculpture, and computer imaging. In practice, it includes a process of digitally combining color images with computer-generated models and outputting these composites as 3D image hardcopies.

In inventing and patenting the first 3D digital output technology, the (art)n group has been able to push the conceptual and aesthetic boundaries of its own unique medium. The PHS Cologram is arresting in its unconventionality. In an exhibition space, the back-lit and fully dimensional images extend from darkly framed image planes toward the viewer. The images are lush, detailed, and visceral in effect.

Selected works from (art)n's portfolio have been shown in international museums, galleries and symposia and are in the permanent collections of, for example, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., the Museum of Jewish Heritage, NYC, Museum Victoria, Australia, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, and Musée Carnavalet, Paris. Group and solo shows include The New Museum of Contemporary Art, NYC, The George Eastman International House of Photography, The Wexner Center for the Arts, The Art Institute of Chicago, Computer Museum Boston, Musée d’Art Contemporain de Montréal, Galerie Darthea Speyer, Paris, Maya Polsky Gallery, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Feature Gallery, Art Chicago Navy Pier, Triennale di Milano, Art Futura, and SIGGRAPH.

Townhouse Criteria

The functional program is left to the discretion of the entrant. The solution must include the front, back, sides, top, and bottom of a conceptual 20'-0" wide x 40'-0" high x 80'-0" deep building volume.

Site:
A typical Chicago infill parcel 20'-0" frontage x 125'-0" depth, fronting on a street, with an alley in the rear. A 15'-0" front yard and 30'-0" rear yard.

A symposium, open to the public and featuring members of the "Chicago Seven," and the jury was held to discuss the winning solutions and illuminate the issues raised by the competition.

130+ entries were submitted.
31 were selected for the exhibition.
Thomas J. McLeish is one of seven asked to build a model of their submission.
This submission is abstract; to attempt to build a traditional model of this would limit the potential for realizing what digital media has to offer. This unique PHS Cologram installation captures the atmosphere inherent in the submission, and gives it the needed depth to really perceive the form and its illumination.

The first installation of Townhouse Revisited was a work-in-progress for the final sculpture, which includes multiple PHS Colograms on Duratrans film and interactive sound. The townhouse visuals were designed by TJ McLeish in Microstation. Working in collaboration with the (art)n group to realize an immersive environment, the first PHS Colograms were output on an HP 2500cpr printer with 3M transparency materials for pre-visualization and early documentation of the project.

Thomas McLeish spends his life pursuing the assimilation of art, architecture, and technology to enrich our understanding of the human environment. He has consequently collaborated with (art)n on a series of provocative installations 1999-2000. The turn of the Millenium was spent in Malta as a guest of the government assisting with the construction and installation of John David Mooney’s series of light sculptures for their Millenium celebration. He spent 1995-2000 as an architect and visualization specialist under the tutelage of Helmut Jahn at the Chicago based architectural firm of Murphy/Jahn. There he played a key role in assembling and creating presentations for award winning architecture, ranging from airports in Cologne and Bangkok, to a private museum in Buenos Aires. His work there has been published in the New York Times, Digital Architecture, and several books on the work of Murphy/Jahn.

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front view