

# History of the 3D Center of Art and Photography

## by Shab Levy

### The Beginnings: 1994 to 2003

The 3D Center began as a vision of a handful of members of Cascade Stereoscopic Club and became a reality. In early 1994, a small group of passionate photographers with a love of 3D, met to discuss founding a club in the Portland metropolitan area for those who had an interest in 3D photography and equipment. Like most hobbyist groups, Cascade Stereoscopic Club struggled from its first tentative meeting to find low cost or free meeting space, the equipment necessary to project images, and the skills to organize club activities. One thing CSC never had to struggle with was enthusiasm. The small dedicated group grew gradually over the years into a unit of committed and loyal members who were willing to squeeze time from other commitments to keep CSC alive and vital. From its inception CSC was groundbreaking in its goals and aspirations. The club published two books, initiated the first internet PSA exhibition, and hosted the 2004 National Stereoscopic Convention in Portland for 3D lovers all over the United States.

The 21st century wasn't even a year old before some members of CSC started voicing thoughts that would take the group far beyond its previous projects. While the dream developed slowly, it became increasingly important to a handful of CSC members and eventually became an agenda item for the Board of Directors. In late 2001, the Board announced the intention to create a national 3D museum and learning center in Portland. It would be a museum/gallery to house 3D equipment and imagery; a public place to teach classes, do workshops, have exhibitions, and a place to preserve the images and equipment of the past.

The concept was part of CSC's second "Five Year Plan" and the hope was that such a facility could be located and opened as early as 2004 or at least by 2007. Despite some concerns that the ambitious project could saddle members with higher dues and increasing commitments of time, the plan continued to evolve. CSC had never had an annual budget much bigger than \$1500. It was clear that an angel was needed if CSC was going to be able to lease commercial space for this project. Diane Rulien, the CSC Chair, called Mark Gehlar, a long time CSC supporter, and asked if she could drop by his house to visit. Mark lived in Salem, forty miles from Portland, so he must have known that the visit was more than casual.

On a sunny afternoon, armed with Map Quest driving instructions to Mark's home, a proposed five year budget, a business plan for a 3D Center and hope, Diane arrived at Mark's door. The conversation was pleasant with Mark clearly amused by the zeal of CSC and its ambassador. He asked many questions and said he would like to think about it. Mark's resulting donation combined with the existing resources of the club, allowed the Board to finally vote in favor of leasing a storefront and embarking on a great adventure.

It was essential that the facility have a name and the Board knew that an Assumed Business Name would need to be filed with the State of Oregon. Suggestions came from as far away as Stan White in Ontario, Canada who emailed suggestions of: SEE 3D, WE SEE 3D, GALLERIE 3D, GALLERIE SEE 3D or any of the permutations of the words herein. Breaking the tension at a Board meeting set to discuss the facility's name, Board member Jerry Weigel said with a twinkle in his eye, "How about calling it Oregon Museum of Stereoscopic Imagery? We could call it OMSI for short!" (OMSI is the acronym used by the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry in Portland.) Ultimately the discussion of name came down to several very important principles. The Board wanted the name to convey that this was not simply a facility for old stuff. It was important to emphasize that the Center would house more than just photographic stereoscopic images. While honoring the history of 3D, the Board wanted to focus on a future for stereoscopy in the computer age. They wanted the Center to be dynamic and fluid.

### The Center had a Home: 2003 to 2007

The balance between historical and contemporary will be an ongoing challenge for the Center, but it is a challenge CSC has embraced. The Center is not a mortuary for old stereocards, but rather a link between the rich history of 3D and its development and the ongoing vital use of 3D imagery by professionals and hobbyists. The facility was envisioned to be a place to learn how to create 3D images, view past images and devices, and see cutting edge 3D art.



On November 21, 2003, an 1130 sq ft storefront was leased for one year. The lease included four more years of options on the space in the event CSC chose to stay. A concerted nationwide fundraising effort began and is still ongoing. Within weeks, donations exceeding the amount of a year's rent had come in and frequent work parties replaced old wall board, installed new lighting, painted, and refurbished a sink and counter. By the Center's February 2004 opening, a silver screen had been installed and a tall projection table constructed. A black curtain was hung so that half of the space could be darkened for slide shows while the exhibit area with its newly installed display cases, interactive exhibits, gallery spaces, library corner, store and front desk could all remain in full light.



The announcement had gone out to the stereo community worldwide. Postings on various Yahoo groups including Photo3D and the ISU group resulted in a spreading excitement. Emails began to come in from all over. "Congratulations on the 3D Center (as we would call it). I only wish I was resident in Portland - I'd be one of your volunteers (staffing the joint)," wrote Alan Mahon from Dublin, Ireland. Jan Burandt, editor for Stereoscopy was eager to run a story with pictures in the ISU magazine. John Dennis began sharpening his pencil to do the same for NSA's Stereo World. From sunny Los Angeles Ray Zone wrote, "I'm really excited about the new CSC public 3D Center. I would like to work with you on an ongoing basis to curate exhibits, locate 3D artists and innovate new ways of exhibiting stereographic images in a gallery space. And, of course, to line up stereo slide shows to augment the wall (and space) art in the gallery. I have lots of ideas and lots of contacts." Practical advice came from Ron Labbe in Massachusetts, "Kids love 3D, but kids also love to see how far something can go before it breaks! Hopefully any exhibits will be kid proof. Lenses need constant monitoring for fingerprints, drool, etc."

The Center's first gallery exhibit featured 13 large framed stereo pairs by David Lee and five of the special mirror viewers he designed for them. David was so enthusiastic that he drove overnight from his home in the Bay area to Portland with the framed images and his viewer, said hello to everyone at the Center, then pulled out his level and started mounting them. After the images were hung, he joined several CSC members for breakfast and chatted about his photography, life in general and the 3D Center before heading back to California.

The gallery exhibits were intended to display original 3D art for sale with a changing array of contemporary artists every four to six weeks. The 3D Center of Art and Photography (or "3DC" or "3D Center") was the only gallery/museum in the United States dedicated solely to contemporary and antique 3D art. Located at 1928 NW Lovejoy between Portland's trendy Nob Hill and Pearl districts, the 3D Center began by being open every Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 1 - 5 pm, as well as in the evening on the first Thursday of each month (a tradition among Portland's art galleries.) For more than a year it was staffed entirely by volunteers.

Thanks to the financial support received from stereographers all over the United States, the Center hired its first part time employee in 2005. Annie Dubinsky started working at the Center in September 2005 and rapidly became a great proponent of everything 3D. When she wasn't busy doing press releases, preparing the layout for postcards announcing upcoming exhibitions, training other volunteer staff, and greeting visitors, she was reading articles in past issues of Stereo World to learn more about 3D. Her enthusiasm and hard work allowed the Center to move beyond day to day survival. In 2006, the Center received three grants from local organizations thanks to Annie's work in preparing the applications. In summer 2007, Annie found another job and began graduate school. She has continued to be an asset to the Center as a volunteer and enthusiast.

After six years of unparalleled dedication to the creation and development of the 3D Center of Art and Photography (3DC), Diane Rulien stepped down from her role as founding Director, a volunteer post she filled from the establishment of the Center until summer 2007.

Without Diane's devotion and enthusiasm, the 3DC would never have been realized, let alone become a nationally known and recently internationally recognized institution. From humble beginnings as a focus for local enthusiasts, the Center mailing list and membership base tripled under Diane's leadership. The Center became the premier public exhibition space for the stereoscopic arts, old and new. Thanks to her dedication we have enjoyed nearly two dozen hung and projected exhibits every year, along with other memorabilia on view at the Center and a revamped and exciting Center News. The 3D community has much to thank Diane for.

Diane will continue to serve as Chair of the 3DC Board until 2009.

After a national search for a new director, in August 2007, we welcomed our new 3D Center Director, Paul Brenner, to his first day at the 3D Center. Paul has a background in art gallery administration, non-profit arts program development, grant writing, marketing, public relations and community outreach going back nearly 20 years. He had recently moved to Portland from Chicago where he worked for several art galleries all faced with the same challenges of public outreach and fund raising that we have at the 3D Center. We were fortunate to have Paul join us. When you are near the 3D Center, stop in and introduce yourself to Paul and join us in welcoming him to the Center.

And so the work continues and the Board of the 3D Center looks to the future. The five-year goal is to outgrow the present location and to purchase a permanent building with more space for exhibits, workshops, and classes. As of December 2006, the Center has exhibited the work of more than 40 contemporary stereo artists, including national and international talent. The Center's permanent collection of images, equipment and books continues to grow and the featured exhibitions have represented every format of current 3D imagery. Center classes and workshops, taught by dedicated volunteers, have brought in over 100 students to the field of stereoscopy. And over 4,500 visitors have experienced the Center.

Annual funding comes from a combination of over 140 Friends of the Center memberships nationwide, individual donations from worldwide 3D enthusiasts, small grants from public and private foundations, entry fees and gift sales. The membership in Friends of the Center has more than doubled in the two years memberships have been offered. The Board and staff continue to search out additional funding through grants and business support.

2007 saw the debut of a new website designed and donated by Terry Wilson, one of the Center's Friends from the East Coast. Even if you can't visit the Center in Portland, you can now keep up to date with exhibitions, classes and special events with your own log-in on the site. The Center's quarterly newsletter, Center News, has matured into an eight-page, full-color magazine that includes 3D Center information and also specialty articles on 3D imagery and interviews with contemporary stereo artists. PBS came to the Center to film a segment of History Detectives, which aired on Monday June 25, 9:00 pm PST on Public Broadcasting Stations all over the United States.

The Center also held the first ever Friends of the Center meeting during the NSA/ISU Convention in Boise. In addition the Center had a trade fair table to inform stereo enthusiasts about the Center's work. This tradition continued at the NSA Convention in Grand Rapids.

Our vision is that the past, present and future of three-dimensional imagery will have a home at the 3D Center.