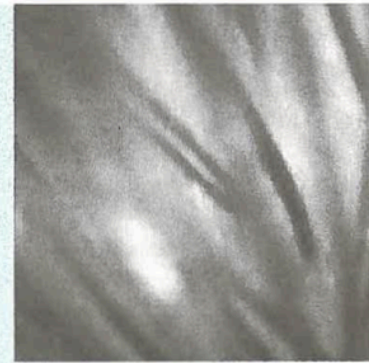
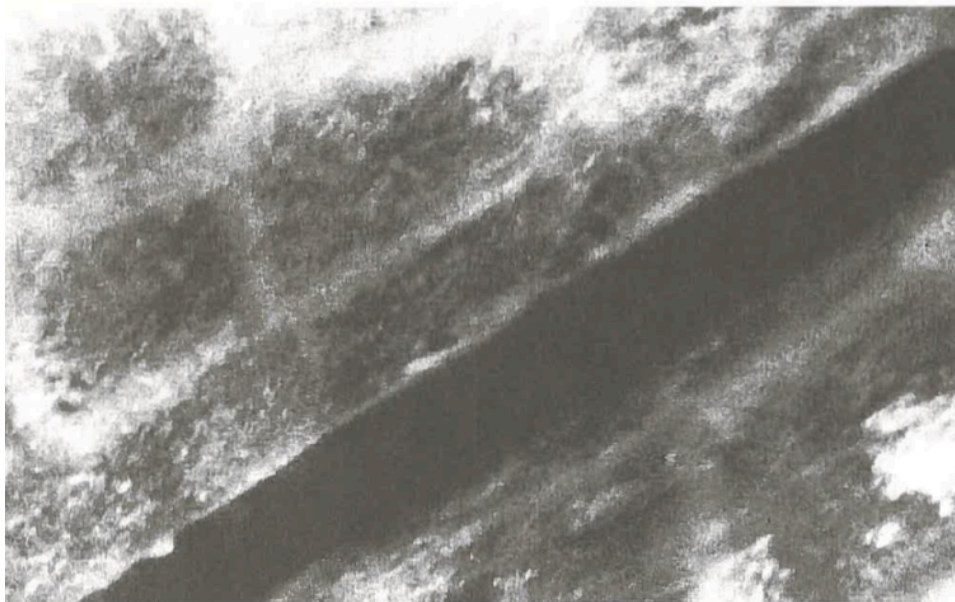


# BUILDING PROJECT

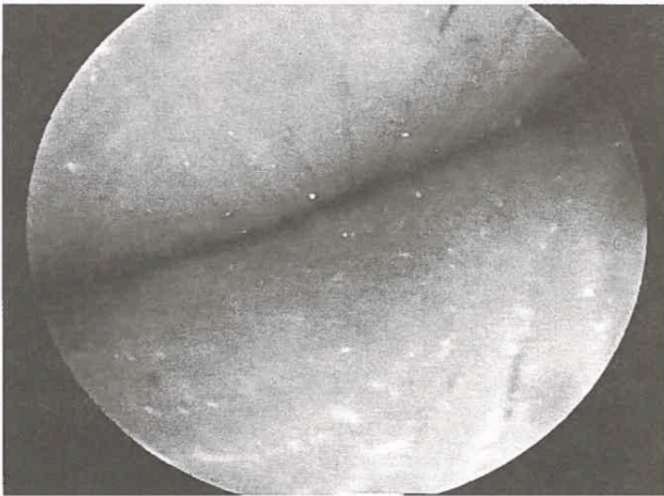
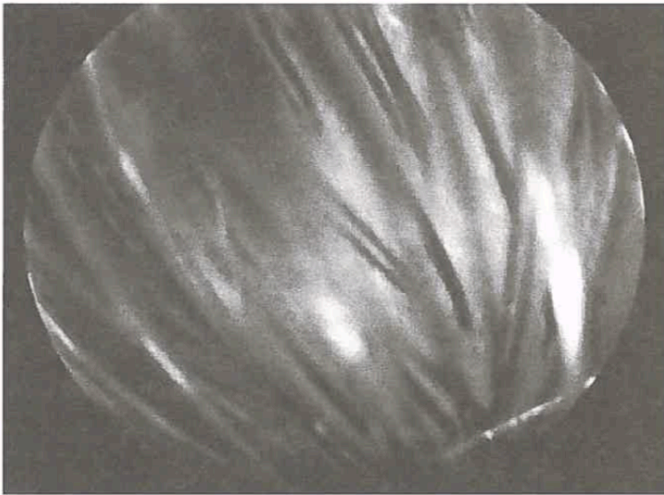
We tend to think of buildings as passive spaces. We build them. We decorate them. Perhaps we remodel, add to, or demolish them. They serve as static backdrops to the constant motions and occasional dramas of our active lives. Or so we think.

Shannon Kennedy aims to change that: "I want to find a way to get people to think differently about architectural spaces and to challenge notions of what a building is." For her current project, she takes an endoscope—a miniscule camera normally used to film the inside of the human body—and uses it to explore the unseen nooks, crannies, shafts, and cracks of whatever building she's exhibiting in. Pipes. Air ducts. The spaces inside walls, under floors, and above ceilings. What's obscured, walled up, or painted over, Kennedy reveals.

*[continued]*



SHANNON KENNEDY



*Building Project*, 1999, video stills, endoscopic views of building interiors

In her video installations, we follow the camera into spaces overgrown with weird orbs and barbed filaments, which we recognize on an intellectual level as dust particles, mold, and asbestos fibers—but on a visceral level, it seems more like a probe into the interior of a living body. These ordinarily unseen views are surprising—to everyone but the artist. For almost a decade, she's lived with environmental illness, which means she's hypersensitive to chemicals, molds, and other things lurking in the hidden spaces in buildings. "My experience of buildings totally changed. I could no longer just go in and think about the design, or whether I liked the couch or the paint color or whatever. I started to perceive the building as something that acted upon me."

It was, in large part, Kennedy's illness that led her to her current medium. Having originally worked as a photographer, she became unable to handle darkroom chemicals. So she turned to video, in which she's since developed and refined a preoccupation with the body and its environment. In a recent series, Kennedy filmed people on the New York City subway: "I would just sort of set my camera up, and catch people walking around or looking at the camera or looking at each other. I was interested in exploring the psychological space between people interacting in this really confined space."

Her ongoing project, *Building Project*, studies building interiors once again and invites viewers to contemplate figures in space—only this time, the figures are the viewers themselves, and the space is all around them. "If I'm doing it in a museum or in a building that's supposed to be this very pristine space, it's a critique of the power that it has on our viewing psyche. I'm saying that that type of perfect, gleaming white box setting is a fantasy."

The results, however, are far from video verité. After spending several days shooting footage and recording ambient sound, Kennedy retreats to her editing room, where she shapes the raw footage into an approximately 10-minute piece. "I try to make it interesting as an aesthetic experience," she explains. "It's edited in such a way that it's not just a document of the inside of the building. With this and the sound processing, it becomes a kind of science fiction view of the museum."

Science fiction is precisely what it feels like. Watching (and listening to) one of Kennedy's large video projections can be a distinctly uncanny experience. Peeling paint and asbestos, creeping mold, years' worth of accumulated dust—behind the gallery's chaste white walls is a structure that heaves, shifts, and emits like a living organism. In *Building Project*, the boundaries erode between what's seen and unseen, static and alive, real and imagined. "I'm using tools and techniques that are developed for objectivity, but I'm taking the objectivity out of them," the artist says. What she reveals are not only unseen physical spaces, but untold layers of assumptions and associations accumulated within our own psyches. ▮