Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

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The Building Project

The Building Project treats us to secrets. Using an endoscopic camera (a miniature recording device used in medicine), New York-based Shannon Kennedy collected video footage of chemical by-products and organic growths accumulating in the inner spaces of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts' Galleries and Forum Building—within air ducts, in drainage systems, around heating vents and behind walls. It makes sense that Kennedy uses an endoscopic camera, a device normally associated with the investigation of the human body, since Kennedy's work offers the experience of architecture as if it were an organism that lives, breathes, grows and decays. The tour of the Center's pipes, vents and walls resembles a Jules Verne-like adventure into a body. We are surrounded by piles and globs of matter that could easily be mistaken for the lining of lungs, muscle tissue and glands. Having conveyed the idea that architecture has biological qualities, our relationship with the building changes. We begin to question the hard distinctions between biological entities and constructions of matter. Other implications suggest that the building and its human inhabitants participate in a cycle of exchange and fusion. As our skin and hair particles gather in the hidden places of the building, the building's own particulants imbed themselves into our pores, lungs, extremities and eyes.

Kennedy's work is beautiful and disquieting. We are seduced and soothed by its atmospheric and ambient qualities. It also offers evidence of horrors beyond our imagination. Kennedy is a surveillance agent confirming our suspicions about the unknown. The artifice of safety that the pleasant white gallery walls represent is stripped away to expose pollutions and contaminants occuring every day and at this very moment around us. We watch the work and now know the obscure reality of our occupancy.

René de Guzman
Visual Arts Curator