

Dark House

curated by **Studio 27: Jessica Allee and Wago Kreider**
Sunday, November 30, 2008 – Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

Tonight's program presents shifting perspectives on the privacy of domestic space, and its relation to the transience and decay of modern urban architecture. In these works, discreet moments from the past, capturing the city's excitement and vitality, are momentarily recovered and irrevocably lost. Memories of intimate, everyday routines are rendered in solitude while the flickering facades of buildings reverberate in a dust-enshrouded and dilapidated present.

Office Suite

Robert Todd, USA, 16mm film, 2007, 14 mins

Binnenverblijven (Enclosures)

Arianne Olthaar, Netherlands, Betacam SP, 2008, 4 mins

Domestic Safari

Anders Weberg & Robert Willim, Finland, DV, 2007, 11 mins

Detroit Park

Julie Murray, USA, DV, 2005, 8 mins

Cityscapes

Michaela Frill & Martin Siewert, Betacam SP, Austria, 2007, 16 mins

House

Ben Rivers, UK, 16mm film, 2007, 6 mins

Seven After Eleven

Christina McPhee, USA, HD (downsampled to DV), 2008, 7 mins

Drive Thru

Gretchen Skogerson, USA, HD (downsampled to DV), 2006, 20 mins

Everyday space is rendered strange and otherworldly in a couple of works in ***Dark House***. For ***Office Suite***, Robert Todd has photographed the interiors and surroundings of a typical work environment with a camera technique that renders details abstract, and difficult to identify. The pulsating fluorescent lights and the ever-present sonic vibrations generated by corporate air conditioning systems infuse the work with the ambience and daily rhythms of the filmmaker's workspace. Ben Rivers' ***House***, on the other hand, explores the entropy and decay that has overtaken an abandoned domestic space. Rays of light scan across sections of dilapidated walls and staircases, broken windows and peeling wallpaper, remnants that provide a mute testament to what was once a living home. A sepulchral resting place for deteriorating memories, this house has been reoccupied by the history of horror cinema.

Two other films investigate the uncanny permutations of domestic space, in both the human sphere, and, unexpectedly, the world of primate captivity. Arianne Olthaar's ***Binnenverblijven (Enclosures)*** is a disturbing meditation on the "bathroom

architecture” that was once popular in European zoos. These barren, tile-covered interiors for housing gorillas suggest spaces for torture and execution, rather than a site for living beings. The use of grainy motion picture film stock in documenting these spaces of captivity creates a distancing effect, a surveillance-like gaze that intrudes into the primates’ lives, a gaze that ultimately situates them in a shopping-window display. As the title of Weberg and Willim’s *Domestic Safari* suggests, the most common and familiar interior, one’s home, can become exotic and very strange when looked at closely. Here, a roving camera caresses tabletops and other domestic objects. Extreme close-ups of interior surfaces overlap with one another to create a complex space of ambiguous depth and scale. The foreign reverberations that echo on the soundtrack further alienate any familiar traces that make up these homes.

In *Cityscapes*, Michaela Grill and Martin Siewert capture the ephemeral, fleeting nature of Vienna’s past architecture. Working with archival film material housed at the Austrian Film Museum, they have created a dream-like journey through the metropolis. Their digital fragmentation and optical dissection of this archival imagery pushes the limits of legibility, approaching abstraction at times, as architectural traces of the metropolis disintegrate into discrete black and white dot patterns. This visual traversal and recording of a historic public space via vehicular transport is also adopted as a shooting strategy in Christina McPhee’s *Seven After Eleven*. A constantly mobile camera encircles the World Trade Center site, allowing us brief glimpses of ground zero through tiny gaps and fissures in the surrounding protective barrier. This zone, where picture taking is officially forbidden, is likely controlled to negate the trauma and loss associated with it. Multiple perspectives merge and overlap to create a cubist-like montage of lower Manhattan where the vacant and the occupied become entwined.

Julie Murray’s *Detroit Park* explores the interior of the Michigan Theater, an elaborately decorated movie palace, built in downtown Detroit in the 1920s, and converted into a parking lot in the 1970s. Fortunately, the floors and ramps of the parking structure were installed with minimum disruption to the existing interior architectural detail. While documenting its present state, Murray’s video creates a speculative connection to the imagined ghosts of its past. *Drive Thru*, by Gretchen Skogerson, also examines the effects of automobile culture on the built environment. This video, shot immediately following a hurricane that passed through Western Florida, traces the ubiquitous florescent light tube as it appears on dozens of roadside signs blown apart by recent winds. In this J.G. Ballard-like landscape, signs lose their intended meanings, while the emptiness of their underlying structures are put on blinding display.