

“Facsimile” 2003

Moscone West Expansion Project – Exterior Artwork

Artist: Diller + Scofidio, Project Leader: Matthew Johnson

A Project of the San Francisco Arts Commission

The project was born from a paradox: the opportunity to make a public art work for the new Moscone Convention Center expansion in San Francisco--a building that was neither open to the public nor had any sizeable public space on its footprint. By default, the inevitable site left for the art work became the outer surface of the building.

A 15' high x 25' wide LED video screen is suspended from a traveling armature in front of the glass facade of the new glass building. The 100' high structure moves very slowly along the outer contour of the building, guided on tracks at the parapet and soffit. A live video camera back-to-back with the monitor points into the crowded pre-function space on the second level and transmits live feed to the monitor facing the street. An enhanced view of the off-limits space and the activity of its inhabitants is broadcast to passersby as it scans 220 feet of facade between Howard and 4th Streets. One round trip takes 45 minutes.

While the live imagery naturally correspond with the speed and direction of the scanning motion, the system switches randomly to pre-recorded fictional programs that were designed to simulate the speed of the armature, the facade structure, and the depth of space beyond. The pre-recorded programs include semi-fictions featuring performers composited onto a computer simulation of the pre-function space and focusing on insignificant details turned ominous, as well as choreographed window washers and night janitors during the natural course of day and night routines. Occasionally, this virtual transparency reveals impostor occupants inhabiting impostor spaces such as an office building or a hotel. With each change of identity of the building, a hyper-banal scene draws viewers into becoming voyeurs of ambiguous spatial narratives.

The rear of the sign (facing the 2nd floor, pre-function lobby) will host 4 equally spaced alpha-numeric displays. Conceived by the collaborative team of Ben Rubin and Mark Hansen, four bands of dynamically streaming LEDs broadcast real time data feeds culled from thousands of on-line news sources. These streams are assembled through the extraction and restructuring of online content to create a “retelling” of the news. The text displays have been custom designed to send text across at the exact speed of the sign in order to create the illusion of text floating in mid-air. Whereas the front of the sign critiques the assumed transparency of modern glass buildings and the veracity of live images, the text displays, viewed from the inside looking out into the city, will be used as filters channeling the ubiquitous but otherwise invisible streams of information circulating beyond the building and further beyond the city.

“Facsimile” and “Tree” by Shum, Shu, Gordon, LLC were commissioned by the San Francisco Arts Commission for the Moscone West Expansion Project in accordance with the city’s art enrichment ordinance, which provides for a funding allocation for public art equivalent to two percent of the construction budget of new or renovated civic structures.