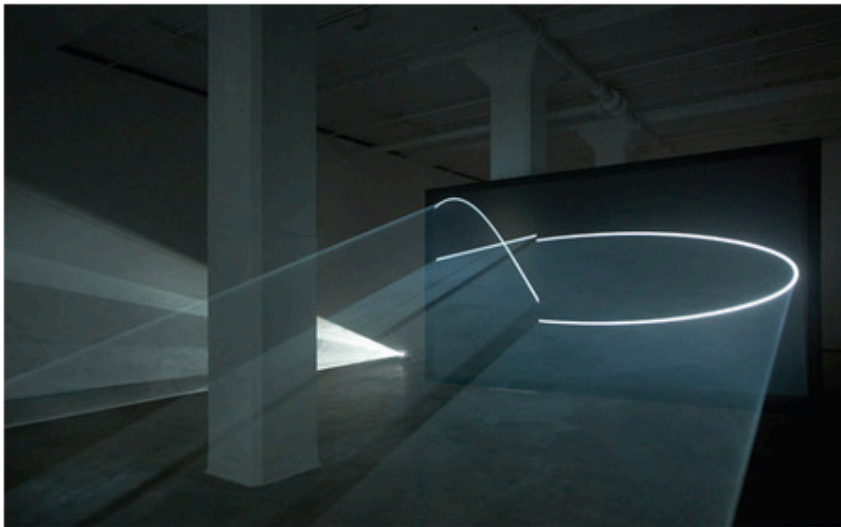Rose, Julian. "Anthony McCall, Sean Kelly," *Artforum*, May 2013.

ARTFORUM

Anthony McCall
SEAN KELLY GALLERY

Anthony McCall, *Face to Face*, 2013, two projectors, two haze machines, two double-sided projection screens, dimensions variable.

Appropriately enough, given the beautiful paradox of "solid light" with which he refers to them, Anthony McCall's projections are often described as simultaneously embodying film, sculpture, and drawing. But McCall's recent show "Face to Face," which combined a physical intervention into the gallery space with his latest solid-light piece, suggested another medium—architecture—as equally fundamental to his practice.

The exhibition's titular 2013 work, installed in the gallery's main space, is the first that McCall has projected onto freestanding screens, rather than directly onto a gallery wall or floor. (The show also included a restaging of one of McCall's early films, *Circulation Figures*, 1972, on view downstairs.) His placement of these screens inside the gallery was in itself a kind of architectural process, as they functioned like partition walls, loosely structuring visitors' circulation through the space. But the screens were also arranged in a way that emphasized a deeper, underlying connection to architecture.*Face to Face* consisted of two projectors facing each other across the room, each casting an animated line drawing onto a screen adjacent to the one opposite, with the projected light forming two of McCall's signature ethereal volumes in the hazy atmosphere of the darkened room. The screens were translucent, allowing the drawings to be seen from both sides, *and* so for the first time in one of McCall's works, a visitor could view the two-dimensional geometric figure (what he refers to as a work's "footprint") independently of the sculptural presence created by its projection. Yet because each projector faced the other, looking at the "back" of one screen also entailed looking at the "front" of another. Each projection was thus offered in two forms simultaneously: as a body in space, the three-dimensional curtain of light traveling toward the front of one screen, and as the isolated two-dimensional footprint visible through the back of another. This didactic arrangement emphasized the separation between two states of the work's

existence, a condition also central to architecture, in which buildings are first conceived as representations before being built as physical objects.

This separation was further underscored by the complexity of the footprints themselves, which juxtaposed an ellipse with an overlapping line and wave, each separately animated but also in a continuous cycle of transfer from one screen to the other through a cinematic device known as a "wipe," in which the image on one screen gradually replaces the image on the other (and vice versa) through a slow horizontal scroll. The cumulative result, for the viewer, of all this motion was a sometimes intense difficulty in following both the transformation of the figures themselves and the connection between the two screens, let alone understanding the relationship between the dancing lines and the slowly metamorphosing volumes of light.

When faced with such a perceptual conundrum, it can be tempting to surrender, to become lost in the extraordinary sensuality of McCall's projections. But in thematizing the opposition between his two-dimensional footprints and the three-dimensional volumes they create (thereby making explicit a condition latent in all his solid-light works), McCall does not frustrate comprehension so much as he reveals the source of his work's unique power. The difference between footprint and volume, after all, is not irreconcilable—both are versions of the same geometric figure. This reminds us that a projection is as much a relationship as a thing in itself. This associative status is often forgotten in film, in which emphasis is typically on the moving image rather than on the projection per se. But it is foregrounded in architecture, in which various techniques of projection are in fact what enable three-dimensional forms first to be conceived and manipulated in two-dimensional space and then to be translated from these representations into built structures. McCall recognizes and exploits this generative power of projection, but also extends it in a way unprecedented by any existing architecture. Architectural projection remains pure process, articulating space but not in itself a spatial condition. By materializing his projected light, McCall allows us to experience projection as both process and thing—a simultaneity more profound than any merging of mediums—as we occupy a normally invisible zone of translation and witness the mediation through which space becomes both visible and inhabitable. The pleasure of his work thus lies not so much in getting lost in an atmospheric indeterminacy as in being present at the precise moment when space comes into being.

—*Julian Rose*