

# Exploring the Interconnection of Body and Mind at UC Irvine's Beall Center

BY DAVE BARTON

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George Khut, *Cardiomorphologies* (2007): heart rate-controlled video projection, Max-MSP and Java-based visualization systems, chair, and projector

*Courtesy of the artist*

**Anyone doubting the disconnect between mind and body need only watch an interview with one of the millions of people on the Affordable Care Act who voted against their best interests by blissfully electing someone who made public statements about repealing their health care.** It doesn't even matter how that cluelessness happens—a lack of critical reading and thinking or religious organizations encouraging distance between our filthy bodies and our more spiritual minds—but the resulting break with reality pits us against our best instincts and separates us from one another. It also bleeds over, infecting other segments of our lives, putting us in a place where healing one part of the body often means ignoring another. The result is a body (politic or corporeal) blackened with illness, the healthy part becoming infected by the unhealthy part, again and again, even immediately after treatment.

While not as overtly political as my example, "Embodied Encounters," a contemplative exhibition co-curated by David Familian and Simon Penny at UC Irvine's Beall Center, encourages viewers to slow down and heal the schism. I don't think it's reading too much into this subtle, often poetic exhibit focused on art and science to say we can take its message of body-and-mind unity a step further, that all of us are part of a larger, united community. All we must do is realize it.

There are two ways Familian and Penny go about this: First, they ask us to slow down and be aware of our own bodies. George Khut's *Cardiomorphologies* has a couch placed low to the ground, facing a ceiling-to-wall screen. After attaching a nearby oximeter to my left finger, a white circle on the screen throbs with my heartbeat. The calming shades of blue, dark or pale, pulse and billow in on one another, swallowing themselves in a long tunnel that reminds one of near-death experiences. It suggests, in its Buddhist way, that dying to one's old patterns of behavior, even if it's just slowing down your breathing, can make a difference in your body. Likewise designed to be more meditative, the black screen in Alex May's *Shadows of Light* doesn't react right away. Wave your hands, and it will remain a blank edifice. Stand there, and like a daguerreotype plate, your outline slowly appears from the darkness, the algorithmic design resembles a spray-painted image. If other people are present, you all stand together, immovable, focused; the resulting impression onscreen of multiple lives layered on top of, over and next to one another, all in different colors, can be mesmerizing.

That subtle shift to installations requiring more than just one person to fully activate them is the second way that Familian and Penny bring us together. You probably won't see the cameras pointed down at you in Sha Xin Wei, Julian Stein and Todd Ingalls' striking *Time Lenses*; the equipment captures, plays, and then replays your movements from different angles on five blank, white screens. As with May's piece, it takes some time, but when the ghostly black-and-white images drift across the screens, the effect is breathtaking. Like blurred surveillance images, minus the Big Brother menace, they're perfect symbols for our imperfect memory; the black-and-white pictures—there momentarily, then disappearing—are as lovely in their fractured way as can be.

The idea behind Miriam Simun's *Adoro* (Latin for *honor*) is an intriguing one, combining smell, taste and performance to re-create the short-lived bloom of a plant designated as an endangered species. With the artist absent on the day I was there, the abandoned pieces of equipment and bottles of liquid work remarkably well as a metaphor for things we're likely to lose. As just a reminder of the ephemeral qualities of an installation we'll never fully experience, it also works better than it should.



Rhona Byrne's *Huddlewear*

If it is difficult or awkward for you to make eye contact or small talk with people you don't know, Rhona Byrne's hand-made series of hats and hoodies, *Huddlewear*, may be your own personal hell. The very friendly docent walked me through a couple of pieces. My generally non-interactive personality melted when she had me put on the first piece, two baseball caps joined by a large stiff bill, created with just enough room between us that it didn't feel as if we were violating each other's space. The forced eye contact of Byrne's silly and smart art piece—aided by the young woman's warmth and personality—had us both giggling. As we tried on a second piece, this time with two hoods and shoulder/torso capes, we talked as we laughed, aware of the awkwardness of ourselves and each other. Problem-solving to synch our bodies, since we were facing each other and couldn't look behind us, we had each other's backs. A good thing—and a hopeful gesture of solidarity underscoring both the moment at the gallery *and* this period in history.

*"Embodied Encounters" at Beall Center for Art + Technology, Claire Trevor School of the Arts, 712 Arts Plaza, Irvine, (949) 824-6206; beallcenter.uci.edu. Open Tues.-Sat., noon-6 p.m. Through Jan. 21. Free.*