



No. 1

TOM BURR | BODY/BUILDING

Marcel Breuer's Pirelli Building is a cavernous, decaying monument to brutalist architecture. It sits upon the Long Island Sound, now sandwiched between the Interstate 95/Interstate 91 interchange and the New Haven IKEA, with whom it shares a parking lot. In fact, IKEA owns the building, and somewhat surprisingly they've elected to do nothing with it, other than turn its façade into a giant, garish, billboard. And so the impressive building has remained vacant and abandoned, until the conceptual artist Tom Burr moved in earlier this year.

It was Bortolami Gallery who initiated the installation. The gallery had earlier launched a daring new program, *Artist/City*, where artists can elect to show works outside of New York and outside the traditional constructs (and architectures) of contemporary art. Burr's project exemplifies this approach. The two approached IKEA and struck a mutually

beneficial deal. The first floor was cleaned up and renovated at the gallery's expense in exchange for a short-term rental, and then Mr. Burr went to work.

I can tell you, having lived in New Haven off-and-on for more than six years, that many people fantasize about exploring this incredible structure. The fact that Burr's sophisticated and nuanced intervention is now mapped atop that space only increases the appeal. Burr hails from the New Haven, and his ties to the building are both deep and personal. Inside we see that local familiarity on display, where we find any number of references and literal quotations to the city's complex (and fraught) cultural history—these range from the Black Panthers to Josef and Anni Albers to Jim Morrison.

A great moment in the show is the banner that stretches across the windows that span the entire footprint's length. At eye level, they split our vision in a disorienting way, while also screening us from the bustling, consumerist nightmare that is making a trip to IKEA. Who wants to see parking-lot relationship meltdowns, Burr seems to suggest, when dwelling in such an awesome space? Personally, I think it would have only added to the show: this Swedish manufacturer, who makes furniture that no one really wants but everyone still buys, now plays a major role in the New Haven community, where the light industry that once propelled the region has vanished. Nevertheless, to be inside this building is a once-in-a-lifetime treat. To see Burr's complex and winding project within it is another. Call Bortolami to make an appointment and go check it out. It's just a train-ride away.