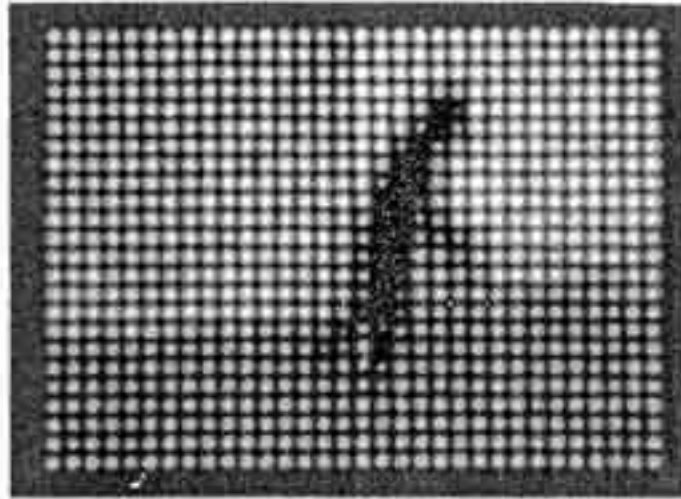


ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2002 \$8.00

I N T E R N A T I O N A L



See Campbell, *Motion & Rest* 5, 2002.
Text not LED's and not in all screens. 22" x 25" x 1"

SAN FRANCISCO

JIM CAMPBELL

HOSFELT GALLERY

Jim Campbell was included in two recent Whitney Museum extravaganzas: the digitized "BitStreams" and the spiritualized 2002 Biennial. While these high-profile outings reflect a certain curator's interest in his work, in combination they also demonstrate how Campbell's electronic projects have overcome the stigma of his technological tools to elegantly address universal contemporary themes, namely, the now unavoidable intersection of subjective experience and machine. His exhibition at Hosfelt included a group of light-box works and two series of

gridded LED displays, by now Campbell's signature format, that serve his continuing exploration of how digital tools translate empirical information relating to the passage of time and the quantification of memory.

The main gallery featured "Motion & Rest," a 2002 series of six wall-mounted works displaying looped footage of the shadowy forms of androgynous walking figures. These grids of tiny red lights on black panels function like a television screen whose dot matrix has been enlarged so that the image is recognizable only from a distance. Campbell has peeled away every extraneous bit of information, including sound, to reveal a monochromatic visual essence. Still, it takes a moment to notice that the figures proceed at peculiar paces: one slowly and rhythmically, the next quickly and lurchingly. The film, in fact, shows variously disabled people walking with limps, spastic gaits, and the pained stride of the seriously arthritic, their off-kilter movements punctuated by moments of repose. With its formal presentation of identical screens showing single figures with particular physical characteristics, the series has a scientific, Muybridge-like air. But Campbell is not interested in performing a movement study. As in much of his work, the artist is concerned with the ways in which we experience the mercurial aspects of life that seemingly can be held onto only in our minds. Seen through his effectively electrified images, infirmity takes on a strange poetic cadence.

While these silent projects lent the darkened gallery a meditative, churchlike ambience, two pieces displayed in an

adjacent room explicitly referenced a religious site. Here, in tiny white lights instead of red, Campbell presented slowed footage of figures walking into and past the doorway of a lower Manhattan cathedral, filmed the week of September 11. *Church on 5th Avenue*, 2002, is fitted with a half-transparent, half-translucent Plexiglas overlay tilted out from one side at a slight angle; figures moving from left to right pass out of focus as if dissolving into midair. Occasionally someone walks directly toward the camera and obliterates the scene with the darkness of his silhouette; the illusion of unchecked advance seems to shatter the picture plane. The 9/11 context lends the piece a metaphysical edge. (In the "Art on the Plaza" series of public projects presented by Creative Time, Campbell installed a large-scale outdoor version of this work not far from Ground Zero, where the ghostly images had an even more poignant effect.)

Similar works using red lights were included in the Whitney Biennial, but the white light offers greater tonal range and more complex luminosity. For the most recent piece here, *Reconstruction #1*, 2002, Campbell applied a two-and-a-half-inch layer of resin directly over the LED, lending the image a magnified, somewhat painterly presence. The lights become softly flickering circles that blur into one another, nudging the image back toward its original form. Yet there's a heightened sense of abstract beauty at play, suggesting that Campbell is moving in a visually sophisticated direction at a clip as idiosyncratic and determined as those of his ambling figures.

—Glen Helfand