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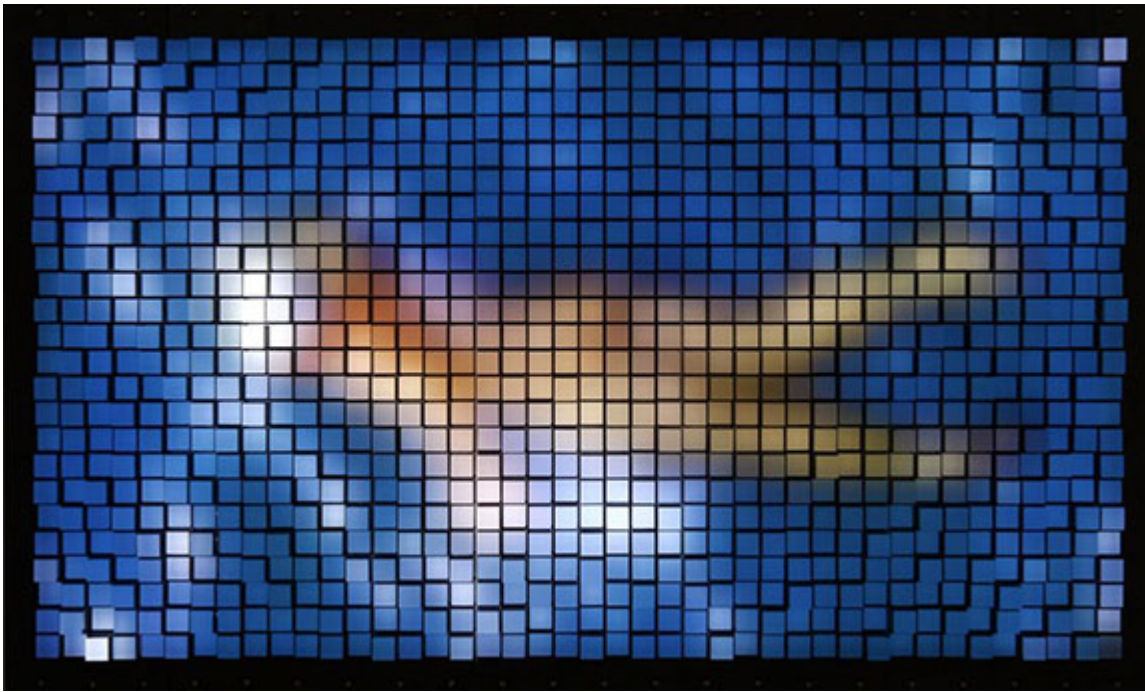
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Jim Campbell @ Hosfelt

Posted on 06 January 2020.

by **George Philip LeBourdais**



Vertical Repixelated, 2019, custom electronics, LEDs, frosted acrylic, 42 3/4 x 71 1/2 x 6"

Do you have enough pixels in your life? The new iPhone's big screen bathes you in 458 of them per inch. Phase One's flagship digital camera back now provides a hard drive-crashing 151 megapixels of resolution, should you need that much. Life online is also sharpening into ever higher states of definition.

Closer to Nothing, a show of LED light works by Jim Campbell, pushes in the opposite direction, working as a tonic for pixel overload. Distilling films and photographs to their blurred, diaphanous essences, the artist argues that, when it comes to resolution, less can be more.

A prime example and one of the more mesmerizing works in the show is *Vertical Repixelated*, which reduces footage of a swimmer filmed from above to 1,008 points of light. Each flickers behind a frosted acrylic cube, creating a wave of illuminated blocks that together resemble a bank of basalt columns brimming with light, or a Venetian sunset programmed for the Atari

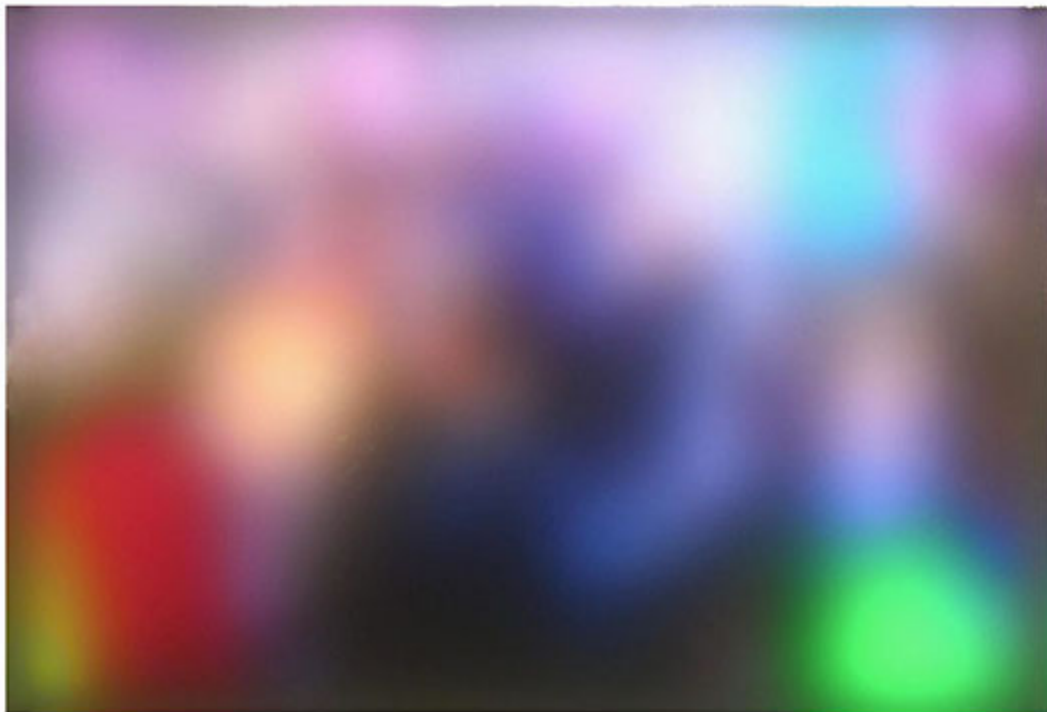


Temple at Yunnan (variation), 2019, custom electronics,
768 LEDs, treated plexiglas, 23 x 29 7/8 x 3"

2600. Campbell's work can invite such hot wirings of art history and modern tech. *Day for Night*, his 2018 installation atop of Salesforce tower, might be thought of as a translation of the Roman mosaics that Campbell admires into the idiom of the technological sublime.

For an artist whose work soars so high, it's ironic that his primary maneuver is bringing resolution low. After studying mathematics and engineering at MIT, he worked on video image processing in Silicon Valley for more than two decades, racking up numerous patents along the way. Of his transition from electrical engineer to electronic sculptor in the 1990s, he said: "My day job was high definition TV, and my artwork went the other way." It tests the threshold at which the human sensory apparatus can create coherence from fragments. How does our experience of an image change if it is reduced from 2 million pixels to 500? Or, more philosophically, at what point does an image cease to exist?

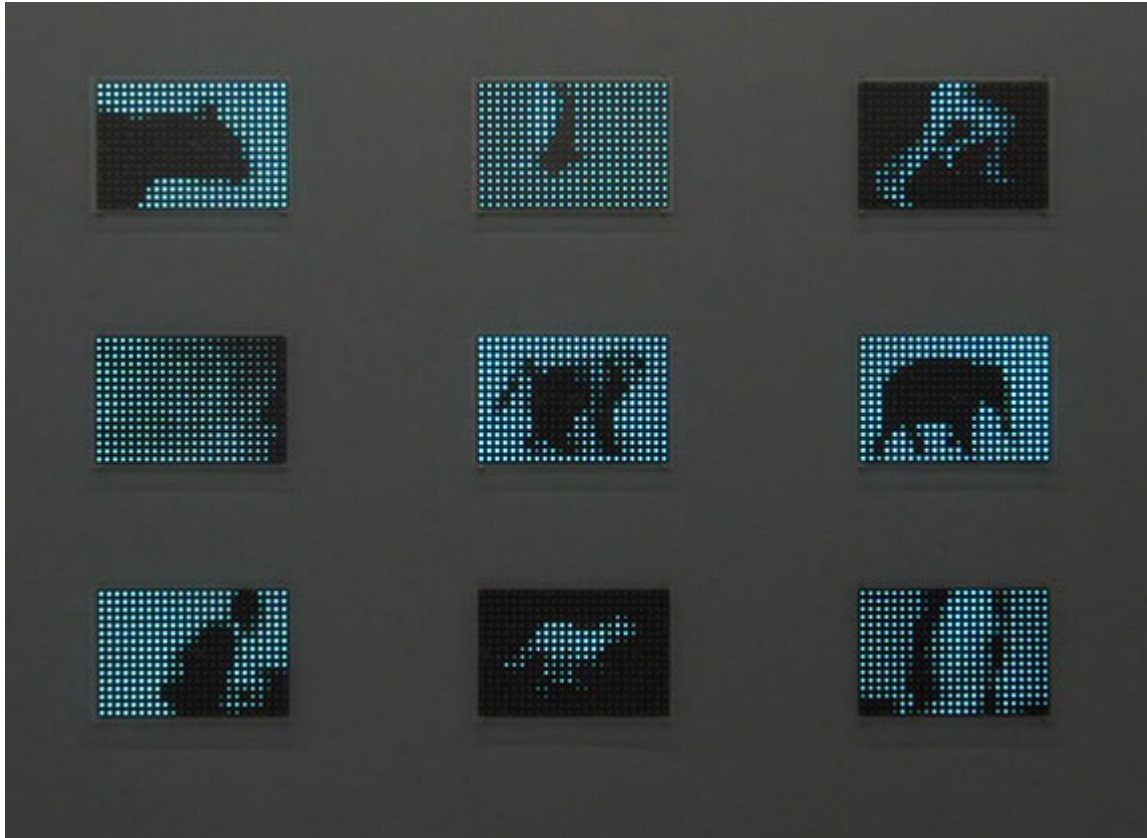
Campbell's experiments in low-resolution video help answer these lofty ontological questions. He and his assistants craft each piece to display specific light sequences; they are backlit electronic sculptures, not screen-based works. In *Vertical Repixelated* and *Topographic Wave II*, two pieces that feature swimmers, the undulating, luminous topographies become visible only at oblique angles. Given the washy, fluid quality of the diffused light emanating from them, it's not surprising that more than half the works depict some aspect of water, including *Against the Tide*, which shows the nebulous splashes of a swimmer projected backward by tiny elevated projectors. There's a certain satisfaction in recognizing the motions, even as they skip and dash into the realm of abstraction. The small circles of light behind treated plexiglass in the panoramic beach scene, *Southern California*, behave similarly. It greets you at the entrance to the gallery.



Edition 27 (Women's March), 2018, custom electronics, 384 LEDs, treated plexiglas, 15 1/2 x 22 3/4 x 2 7/8 inches

Other works in the show are timely and innovative. In one depicting the 2017 Women's March, individual figures blur into a parade of solidarity tinted by the unmistakable pink glow of pussyhats. Various colors of prayer flags flutter in *Temple at Yunnan (variation)*, a 2019 piece that features a unique zoom capability that toggles the view between close-ups of bright colors lashing the surface and airier shots of a string of textiles seeming to lick blue sky. The code produces an apt visual analog to the Buddhist principle of impermanence, which holds that all events, mental or material, exist in a constant cycle of emergence and dissolution. While all the works in the show date from the last two years, the glowing orange rectangle, *Reconstructed Memory (variation)*, recalls Campbell's *Reconstruction series*, developed from 2002 to 2009, in which moving shadows wax and wane behind a hazy block of cast resin.

A final suite of works flashes even further back in time, to the eminence grise of moving-image technology: Eadweard Muybridge. In *Rhythm Studies (studies)*, Campbell encodes the sequences of pictures from Muybridge's groundbreaking animal locomotion series, turning them into looped black-and-white animations. The set of nine panels includes the obligatory galloping horse, which Muybridge famously captured with all four hooves off the ground at the behest



Rhythm Studies (studies), 2019, custom electronics, LEDs, plexiglas, 72 x 112 x 1/2 inches

of his employer, the industrialist Leland Stanford. But the other figures in motion— cat, elephant, human, birds —are equally fascinating in their Lite-Brite-like dot illuminations, which show closely cropped views of moving joints being both articulated and abstracted.

Given that Muybridge began his experiments on a horse farm that became Stanford University, it's worth noting that another exhibition of Campbell's work is on view at that campus at the [Anderson Collection](#), wherein Campbell's video pieces are set in dialog with paintings, the goal being to show how artists, over time, have explored liminality.

Suffice to say Muybridge is a fitting bookend to this collection of works. While Campbell's practice of data deficiency is the polar opposite of the "automatic electro-photographic" method Muybridge developed in the 19th century, both artists share a common trait: each breaks apart and reconstructs visual phenomena to show us things that previously couldn't be sensed or seen.

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Jim Campbell: "Closer to Nothing" @ [Hosfelt Gallery](#) through January 25, 2020. Campbell will [discuss his work with Jason Linetzky](#), director of the Anderson Collection, at the gallery on January 9 at 5 pm.

About the author:

George Philip LeBourdais is a historian of American art and photography. His exhibitions and writing have earned awards from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Clark Art Institute, and the U.S. Fulbright Commission, among other institutions. A Mainer by birth, he holds a Ph.D. in art history from Stanford and lives in San Francisco.



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