

## Jim Campbell: New Work

JIM CAMPBELL  
MAY 07 - JUN 19  
HOSFELT GALLERY

by Matt Stromberg

In the current post-everything contemporary art world, too-often characterized by visual and theoretical exhaustion, few works still have the power to inspire wonder. When they do, it comes more from an *overwhelming sense of bravura* than from an honest reverence for visual enlightenment. Not so in Jim Campbell's current body of work at the Hosfelt Gallery. Using simple technologies, Campbell recaptures both a sense of wonder and a joy in the act of observing that we seldom find in art today.

Campbell is not simply an artist who uses technology, but rather a trained engineer who straddles the worlds of art and technology; his work reflects this duality. After studying engineering and math at MIT, Campbell began making interactive video installations in the mid-1980s and has been working with LED lights for over ten years. In "New Work," he displays grids of such lights that have been programmed to fluctuate in brightness in order to replay video-based content. With these works, Campbell is interested in finding the minimum amount of visual information required to create something recognizable. Stand too close to his works and you see an abstract grid of blinking lights. Step back, and suddenly a familiar image snaps into focus. These works highlight the human mind's ability and need to, in this case literally, connect the dots to create meaning. From the crudest technology comes revelation.

In this current body of work, Campbell displays four variations of his signature LED grids. The first is a rectangle of lights onto which he has mounted a panel of frosted plexiglass. The plexiglass diffuses the light, coalescing the pixels into recognizable forms. This is the case with *Market Street Pause* (2010), which captures a bustling San Francisco street scene in panoramic format, mimicking a film projection. Every so often the movement freezes, highlighting the role of motion in our recognition. Frozen, the image becomes abstract, and the underlying technology becomes apparent. When static, it forces us to focus on the apparatus that makes this illusion possible.

A variation of this format involves replacing the frosted plexiglass with a photographic transparency of a still image from the same source material as the video.



*Fundamental Interval (Commuters)*, 2010; Courtesy of the Artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco.



*Fundamental Interval (Waves)*, 2010; Courtesy of the Artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco.

In *Fundamental Interval (Commuters)* (2010), Campbell juxtaposes a transparency of commuters walking in Grand Central Station with a video-based LED reproduction shot in exactly the same location. Every so often, the two sync up for a split second. Otherwise, the moving images exist as ghostly traces behind the static color image. This juxtaposition calls into question the verisimilitude of different types of representation. Which is more accurate, the immobile color image, or the moving image? The latter more accurately captures human movement, yet by way of impersonal, blinking lights. *Fundamental Interval (Waves)* (2010) portrays the movement of ocean waves behind a transparency of the same scene. Despite possessing a certain Zen-like beauty, this work is not as compelling as other pieces in the exhibition. The natural ebb and flow of water is just not as impressive as the complexity of moving crowds when rendered in binary code.

Campbell further varies this structure in *Taxi Ride to Sarah's Studio* (2010), in which strings of LED lights are hung along a wall, facing inward. Instead of perceiving the light directly from the LEDs, we see its diffuse reflection off the wall. As the strings progress from left to right, the space between them increases and the number of lights decreases. This mimics our perception of the scene, which was shot from the window of a cab travelling from Manhattan to Brooklyn. As the car heads from right to left, the images stream by from left to right, becoming less perceptible as they are absorbed by our peripheral vision.

An example of the last and perhaps most impressive variation of Campbell's formula is *Exploded View (Birds)* (2010). With this work, Campbell extends his grids into three dimensions. Strings of LEDs hang from the ceiling at various intervals. When viewed from a certain angle, their flickering on and off gives the impression of birds taking flight and landing. Move to a different side of the grid and this scene collapses as the flickering lights revert to binary code. It is a testament to the power of this piece that it is a precursor to two large-scale works, one of which is scheduled to hang in the atrium of SFMOMA next year.

By offering a minimum of visual information, Campbell gives us a sparse and elegant exploration of the lengths the human mind will go to in an attempt to create order from chaos. When viewing his works, one is reminded of the wonder that early viewers of cinema must have felt when stunning reproductions of the everyday world grew out of the simple combination of metal, glass, and light.

"JIM CAMPBELL: NEW WORK" IS ON VIEW AT **HOSFELT GALLERY** IN SAN FRANCISCO THROUGH JUNE 19, 2010.