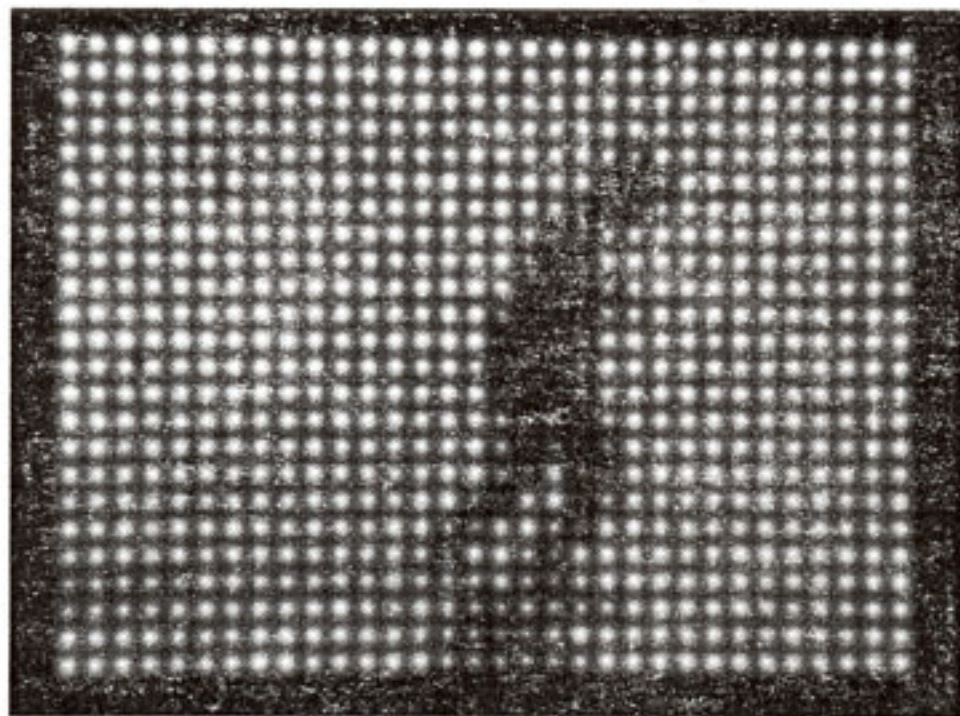


FINE
ARTS

Artist Jim Campbell's LED-based work from his "Motion and Rest Series" is part of the exhibition "After Image" at Wood Street Galleries.

ART REVIEW

Light art shines in 'After Image'

BY LESLIE HOFFMAN

Stepping into Erwin Redl's vast gallery filled with point-defining blips of chartreuse light is like stepping into "The Matrix." In fact, with fine lines of tiny LEDs strung in rows throughout the gallery, creating points, lines and planes, this comparison comes naturally, even before learning the piece's title: "Matrix II."

"Matrix II" invites human interaction with this techno world, and walking through the neat rows and columns delineated by the eerie, yet somehow peaceful lights, creates a sense of serenity and wonder. It's easy to imagine each dot representing stars in space, grains of sand on a beach, synapses in the brain or atoms in molecules, and this sense of awe applies to both the big and small. Someone caught in the web of this twinkling room feels both important yet inconsequential at the same time.

Like the other installations of "After Image," the Wood Street Galleries' current exhibition, Redl's artwork calls attention to some of the ways humans relate to the world around them by contrasting basic emotion and perception with the complex technology of LEDs, light emitting diodes.

"The show is titled 'After Image' because the nature of LEDs became very interesting to me after I learned that we retain the glow from an LED in our retina longer than that of any

other light," says Murray Horne, gallery director and "After Image" curator.

In addition to Redl's works, "After Image" features artists Leo Villareal and Jim Campbell, both of whom inflect what could be boring representations of technology — akin to a flashing bank sign or other advertisement — with a supremely aesthetically pleasing element.

But there's where the similarities end. Horne compares the work each artist does with the LEDs to that of three different artists with paintbrushes. "Each of the artists using LEDs are using them in very different ways," he says.

Villareal's installation, "Lightscape," for example, invites visitors to relax in a turquoise beanbag chair while taking in a dazzling light show on an immense screen. Though it's tempting to search for a pattern, a meaning, a message in this light show, the only meaning comes from what the individual brings to the piece. Whether or not Villareal intended a message, the installation can be enjoyed purely for its aesthetic value: Dancing patterns in alternating sets of different shades of magenta, teal, red, yellow and blue encourage viewers to sit and unwind. The gentle play of lights creates a similar effect to watching television, much like James Turrell's piece "Beanie," on display at the Mattress Factory.

"It's not so much the content of the

piece but the contemplation of the imagery," Horne says.

Campbell, whose work the Wood Street Galleries featured in "Time and Data" in 2001, and whose "168 Lightbulbs" has long marked the entrance to the gallery, is no stranger to Pittsburgh. His "Ambiguous Icons (Rest and Motion Series)" and "Wavelengths" use points of light to explore the relationship between information and meaning, especially when the information is compressed or muffled.

In each piece, it's obvious that something natural — a person walking through a landscape or the rolling sea — is being represented. Each is reduced to a highly simplified version. Though the artworks themselves are quite different, both of Campbell's pieces are similar to Redl's "Matrix II" because they invite contemplation of man's place in life. What blinking bank sign has ever done that?

"After Image" is not confined to the gallery. Redl's piece "FLOW" runs down the Liberty Avenue side of the building. At least 38,000 dotted lights form bars that slowly make their way up the side of the building. The artist, who drew much acclaim for his installation on the outside of the Whitney Museum during the last Whitney Biennial, has never done a commission as large as this one. It will remain up through March 2005 to coincide with

glimpse into our ever-growing technological future, but it also embodies pure joy and inspires the realization of a human experience that, many would argue, makes art art.

"After Image" remains at 601 Wood St. (at Liberty, 2nd and 3rd floors) through Oct. 25. The gallery is open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays. For information, call 412-471-5605.

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Horne predicts that art created from LEDs will become more prominent in the next few years as the lights decrease in price, and this prediction is exemplified by taking the artworks out of the gallery and placing them in the context of the street. We may see LED displays rather frequently on the exterior of buildings, but none so beautiful as those present within and without this gallery.

"After Image" satisfies on many levels. Not only does it explore a contemporary medium and provide a

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the run of the next Carnegie International. During the day, the piece is difficult to view, but at night, it's quite fantastic. A representation is also available online at www.para-media.net/pittsburgh.

"FLOW" is not the only public artwork in this exhibition. A few blocks away, Campbell's 8-minute-long "Sequencing Experiments" illuminates the Jumbotron at the Cultural District's Theater Square, on the hour.

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