

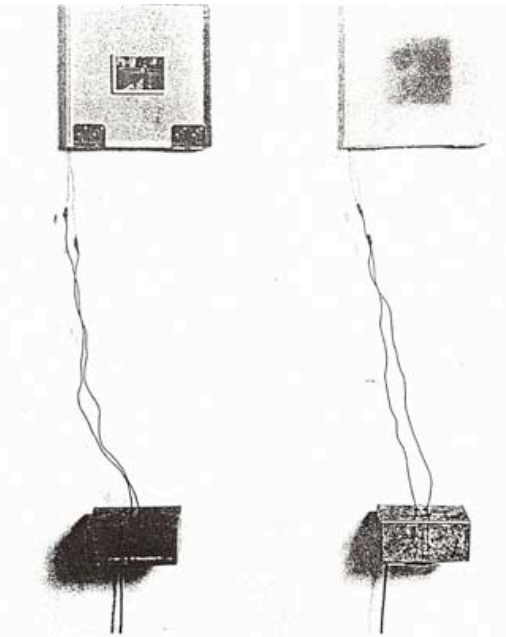
**Pittsburgh**  
**Jim Campbell**

Wood Street Galleries

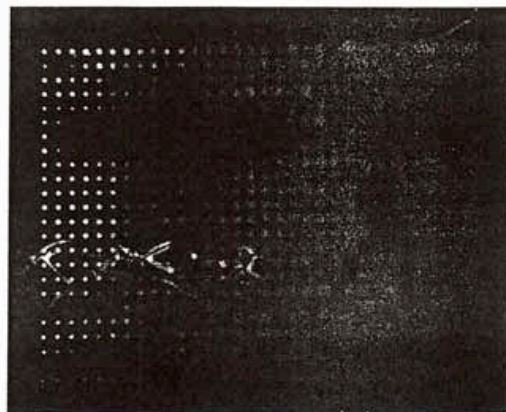
This survey of electronically based art by Jim Campbell is a standout in the now not-so-new genre characterized by dimly lit spaces punctuated by sometimes noisy illuminations. Such darkened rooms often feel as placeless as cyberspace, but in Campbell's exhibition the meticulousness of detail in material, image, and form grounded the viewer in time and place, even as the artworks referenced the larger spheres of information systems and shared public space.

"Time & Data" featured 24 pieces, including a public art commission that will remain in place for a year. The accompanying 68-page color catalogue does a laudable job of representing time-based, highly experiential works. The exhibition included LED-based works, electronic sculptures incorporating found objects, room-sized installations, and lightbox pieces that collapsed time-based data into single images. The exhibition was beautifully designed and installed and interwove aspects of the public and the private, with the result that our self-absorption was encroached upon—not assailed by—images and information flickering in their frames, seeking our attention. It felt something like walking down a city street at dusk or moving through a technologically connected workplace. In other words, it was similar to the way we live now, though transcendent and uplifting, too. In all cases, time appeared paramount to meaning and the interpretation of data seemed subject to context, which is to say, not inherently factual and oppressive.

In the works shown here, Campbell regularly achieves a resonant



Left: Jim Campbell, installation view of *Photo of My Mother*, 1996; and *Portrait of My Father*, 1994–95. Custom electronics, glass, photographs, and LCD material, each 1 x 4 x 1 ft. Below: Jim Campbell, *Church on 5th Avenue* (detail), 2001—Custom electronics, 768 LEDs, and treated Plexiglas, 28 x 22 in.



balance between personal memory and collective spectacle. In *Motion Study #1* (2001), red LEDs glow through treated Plexiglas, revealing a ghostly silhouette lurching along. After a short while, one realizes that it's an image of a person walking on crutches, but deciphering the image doesn't defuse it—it remains an apparition, as clear and as elusive as a dream. *Ambiguous Icon #2 (fight)* (2000) uses a mere 88 color LEDs and a piece of frosted Plexiglas suspended in front to suggest enough for us to follow the action, with our knowledge and memory filling in some of the details of a

boxing match. It's an intriguing field of changing colored light, like a television program glimpsed through curtains. *Church on 5th Avenue* (2001) is visually hypnotic and conceptually stunning. The red LEDs sketch out a small patch of sidewalk and street rendered as a rough image, bringing to mind a very low-resolution surveillance camera. The mutating scenario fluidly shifts with the movement of passersby and our own shifting ability to interpret, recognize, or resolve what we see. *Church on 5th Avenue* is subtle yet profound, gently prompting us to question information and

perceptions without rashly rejecting their usefulness or necessity.

The exhibition included a wide range of data and information, including sound, video projection, and clocks. In *I Have Never Read the Bible* (1995), a battered antique dictionary emits the sound of the Bible being read one letter at a time, presenting the point at which the text is broken down into units so small that it fails to convey meaning, or at least the meaning usually associated with it. The gap between text (data, information, representation) and meaning (inherent content as distorted by desire, memory, and other subjective factors) is readily graspable and feels like the viewer's insight because the artist makes the point indirectly. In *Portrait of My Mother* (1996), which shifts in and out of focus with an electronically controlled cycle based on the artist's breathing, and *Portrait of My Father* (1994–95), which flickers in time to Campbell's recorded heartbeat, the recorded images and the strongly suggested memories and feelings are pinned to the present through the exquisitely crafted physical presence of the artwork. Campbell has a BS in electrical engineering and mathematics from MIT a couple of decades ago, which may account in part for his attention to materials and form, for which he has an incredible aesthetic sensibility not typically found in today's electrical engineers.

Campbell's work often evokes elemental human responses, privileging the human over the abstractly technological. He sees technology in all its complexity

yet with clarity, as something that is created for a reason, that sometimes takes on a life of its own, and that increasingly occupies our consciousness, in the process becoming an ever greater locus of meaning and of memory.

—*Robert Raczka*