

afterimage online

THE JOURNAL OF MEDIA ARTS AND CULTURAL CRITICISM

Exhibition Review Jim Campbell: Rhythms of Perception



Shadow for Heisenberg (1993-1994) by Jim Campbell

Jim Campbell: Rhythms of Perception

Museum of the Moving Image
New York City
March 21–June 15, 2014

Subscribe

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

- Marion Faller, November 5, 1941–January 15, 2014
- Herman Wallace Dies a Free Man After 41 Years in Solitary Confinement
- Canadian Filmmaker John Greyson and Doctor Tarek Loubani Freed from Egyptian Prison
- VSW Veteran Carrie Mae Weems Awarded MacArthur Prize
- In Memoriam: Allan Sekula, 1951-2013
- News Archive

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ADVERTISEMENTS

KONTINENT
AWARDS
2014

FROM THE ISSUE

“Contemplative” and “reflective” are fitting identifiers in describing the engaging exhibition *Jim Campbell: Rhythms of Perception* at the Museum of the Moving Image, organized by guest curator Steve Dietz. Featuring over twenty media projects, including electronic installations and low-resolution video works that span almost thirty years of production, this was San Francisco-based Campbell’s first museum show in New York City. From a quick glance at the exhibition, one could have discounted it as mere formal artistic explorations of technology and light. However, Campbell’s work offers much more.

Projected on the wall behind Campbell’s most recent piece in the show, *Self-Portrait in Positive Light* (2014), a three-dimensional carved resin screen displaying soft abstracted monochromatic imagery, was *Letter to a Suicide* (1985), a candid and emotionally charged film essay made in response to the suicide of the artist’s brother that is the earliest work in the show. At one point in the film, Campbell is seen speaking through a television in a domestic urban setting as he reflects upon a series of conversations he had with his brother and states, “It’s funny, all the arguments we used to have about E.S.P. and telepathy, and now here I am sending you a communication across an even larger gap.” This quotation can be seen as a metaphor for the impetus for other work featured in the show—ghostlike and fragmented communications that create beautiful and thought-provoking works allowing for open-ended interpretations.

Last Day in the Beginning of March (2003) revisited the event that resulted in the making of *Letter to a Suicide*. In this poetic installation, beams of light were cast onto the floor, and illuminated text labels representing fictionalized shards of memories were evenly distributed on the four walls of the installation, including such text fragments as “Back and Forth (walking)” and “Medication Levels.” From a distance, the installation appeared peaceful as sounds of pouring rain filled the dimly lit room, but as the viewer wandered through the space assembling the written clues, a closer examination revealed feelings of melancholy and despair.

In the 1990s, Campbell worked with the notion of electronically mediated participatory artwork. *Digital Watch* (1991) is comprised of a large rear-projection video monitor and two video cameras—one pointed at the viewers and the other at a pocket watch. Viewers played an unsettling role in this interactive, digital composite projection installation, as they became objects of two time spaces, one of which is slightly offset by five seconds from the other. A magnified pocket watch dominated the screen, acknowledging the passage of time and our inability to control it, time and memory becoming fragmented in a purgatory-like state between past and present.

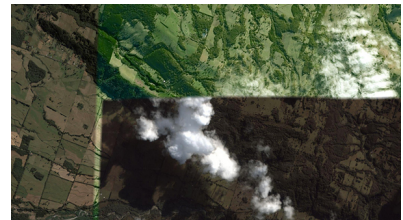
Throughout the exhibition, the content was personal in nature, from home movies and family photographs to spiritual icons—evoking more questions than answers in such works as *Portrait of My Father* (1994–95) and *Photo of My Mother* (1996). The interactive sculptural work *Shadow for Heisenberg* (1993–94) consists of a found sculpture of Buddha sitting on a



PORTFOLIO

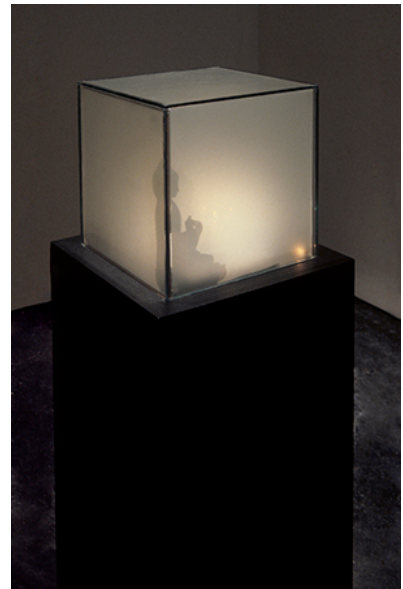
Half Forgotten, by Rachael Deeley

ONLINE EXCLUSIVES



PORTFOLIO

Seam-Ripper, by Aaron MacLachlan



EXHIBITION REVIEW

Jim Campbell: Rhythms of Perception, by Seth Thompson



EXHIBITION REVIEW

piece of paper with text, situated within a glass cube structure; as the viewer approaches, a mist-like barrier thickens within the structure, obscuring the Buddha and the text, until only the cast of Buddha's shadow against the glass is discernable—evoking the fundamental limits to knowledge famously described by German physicist Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle.

While *Motion and Rest #5 (White)* (2002) and *Home Movies 1040* (2008) were both comprised of wall-mounted grids of LED lights displaying low-resolution moving images discernable only from a distance, *Exploded View Commuters* (2011) is a three-dimensional time-based light sculpture consisting of 1,152 hanging LED lights that initially appear as a random array of blinking lights. As the viewer moves away from the work, however, the flickering lights implode into a seemingly flattened low-resolution moving image. The subject matter is of people walking and going about their day. Viewers are not privy to the purpose or reason of each individual's journey; these are merely ghostlike images, recognizable yet indistinct.

Not only did this exhibition provide inspiration for those for whom coding and electronics are increasingly important tools for exploration and expression, but it clearly contributes to the lineage of new media works that are introspective while also engaging larger questions of shared experience. Between *Letter to a Suicide* and *Self-Portrait in Positive Light* is a repertoire of contemplative and reflective works that provoke startling questions about the nature of perception and representation. From a distance there may appear to be clarity but, as in life, we can become entangled and lost in the details, whose proximity may at times obscure the construction of meaning and understanding.

seth thompson is a media artist, writer, and associate professor in the department of art and design at the American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. His website is www.seththompson.info

◀ Portfolio

Half Forgotten, by Rachael Deeley

Ragnar Kjartansson: Me, My Mother, My Father, and I, by Paul Thomas Rubery

INKLIGHT

Inkligh is a meeting place for words and images. We invite photographers to submit their work and writers to respond creatively. [MORE...](#)

ARTICLE SEARCH

Looking for something? Search our vast article archive by title, author, issue, or keyword. [MORE...](#)

PORTFOLIO ARCHIVE

Each issue, Afterimage invites visual artists to create a portfolio of their work. Presented here is a growing archive of these artists' portfolios. [MORE...](#)

NOTICES

Browse hundreds of media art events, grants, fellowships, and opportunities. [MORE...](#)

BACK ISSUES

Over forty years of Afterimage back issues and individual articles are available for purchase!



PREVIOUS ISSUE

Vol. 41, no. 6



State of the Arts



NYSCA

Afterimage online is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts.

