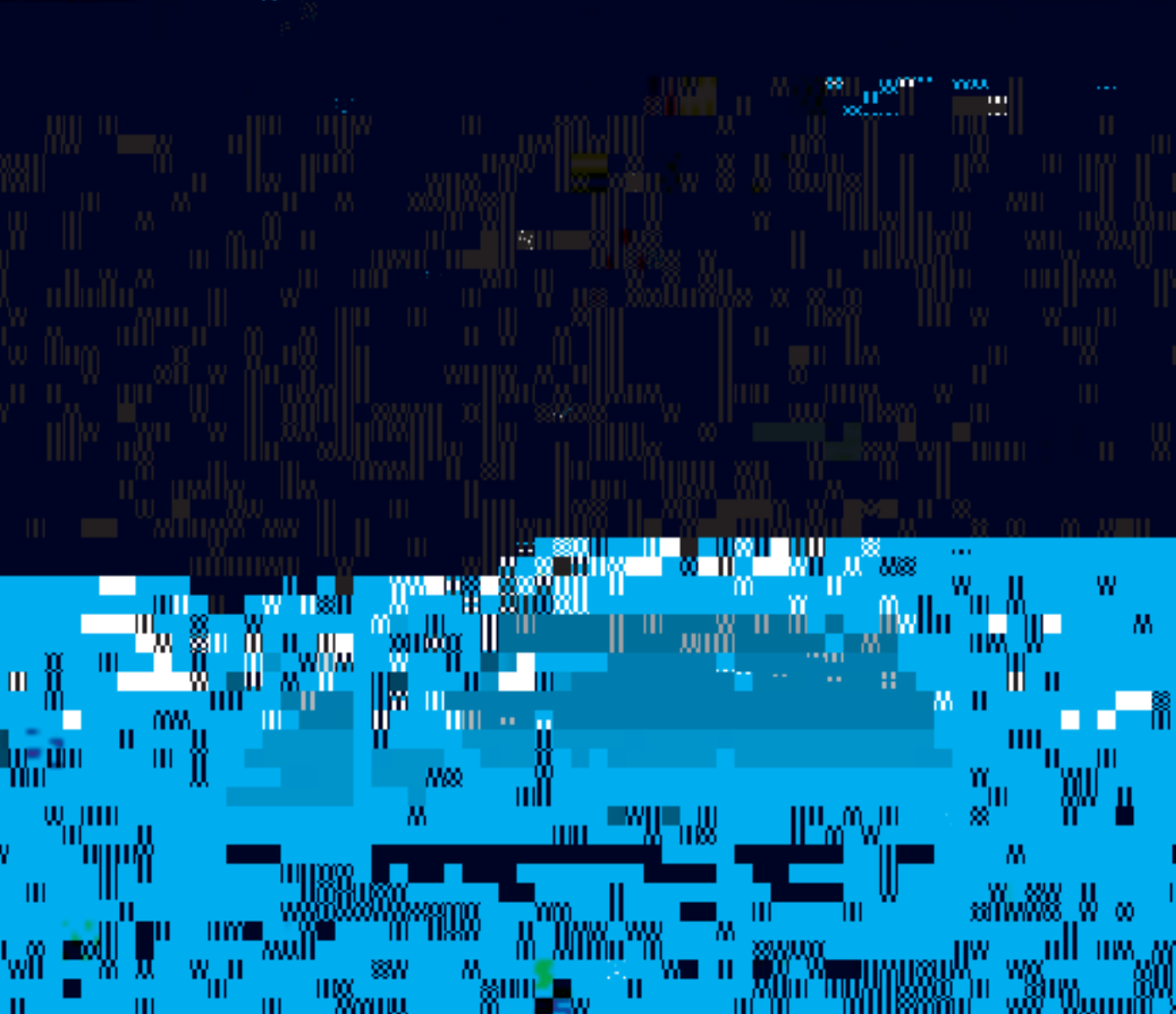


33



“Engineering is about solving problems, and art is about creating them.”

—Jim Campbell¹

Two night-lights glow and dim. Red LEDs (light-emitting diodes) flicker on and off, illuminating a figure running, falling, then getting up and running and falling, again and again. Phantom, ghost-like figures and birds momentarily coalesce before dissipating in front of a building, and fluttering shapes suddenly become the recognizable form of a bird in a cage. These and other transient, elusive, yet compelling electronic mnemonics by the San Francisco-based artist Jim Campbell defy easy categorization.²

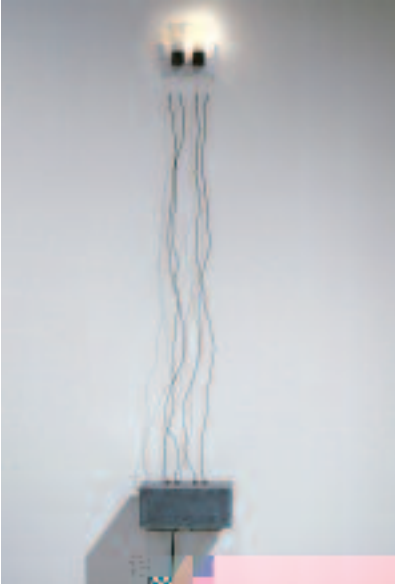
An artist who “employs technology in the service of profound humanism,”³ Campbell’s custom electronics (“custom” as in he makes

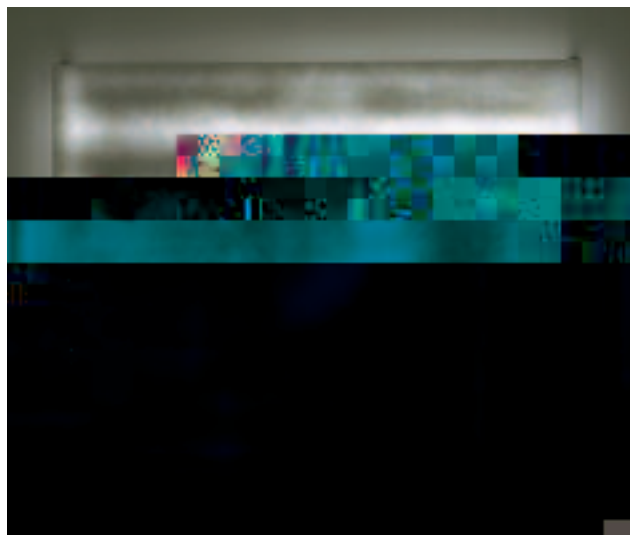
the chips and writes the algorithms) are a neutral ground where two types of signal processing converge—the technological and the human—with neither privileged over the other. Combined, their resonance comes from the artist’s creation of a strangely empathetic space where we add our own meaning and personal history. As the LED panels and mixed-media works run through their programmed loops, they become a meme, transmitting ideas about both culture and the process, power and, indeed, frailty of human and digital memory.

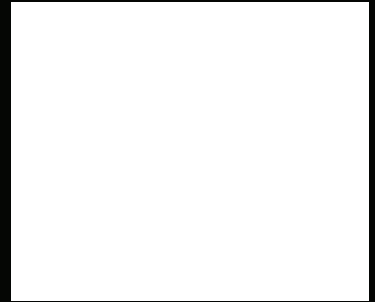
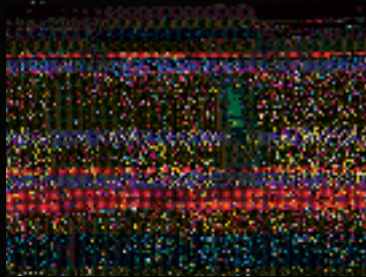
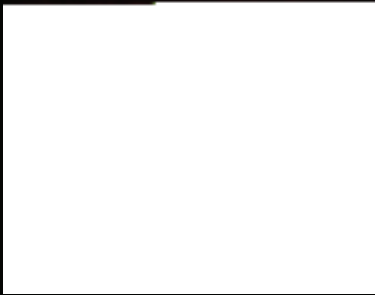
Campbell’s chosen medium of consumer-grade electrical components, low-resolution LED panels, and black box computing seem like familiar objects and concepts in our digitally evolving era even though we may not understand exactly how they work. Through his selective use of low-fidelity technology, Campbell posits a subtle contrast between the LEDs highly pixelated digitized output—as in the ubiquitous electronic banner panel or the work of artist Jenny Holzer—and the analog or continuous world of image, text, numbers, and sound. Essentially he explores the question of how to take something that is essentially a “slave” with predictable outcomes—the computer—and create ambiguity. Powered up, these *Memory Works* and *Ambiguous Icons* unfold over time with a uniquely humane ebb and flow.

So how ebb and fl









Ambiguous Icon #5 (running, falling).



About the Artist

Jim Campbell was born in Chicago and lives and works in San Francisco. He received a B.S. in both Mathematics and Engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) in 1978. His work was the subject of a one-person traveling exhibition organized in 2005 by SITE Santa Fe in collaboration with the MATRIX Program of the University of California, Berkeley Art (TJ -4.36137 -1.28572 TD (Boulder)74, CO)24, 2005; Ey)17 (beam, Center for)37 Art, Science and Technology

3. Ambiguous Icon #5
(running, falling), 2000
custom electronics, 768 LEDs
22 x 29 x 3 inches
Courtesy of the artist, San Francisco,
and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco
and New York
Made with financial assistance from
The Daniel Langlois Foundation for
Art, Science and Technology
4. Church on 5th Avenue, 2001
custom electronics, 768 LEDs,
treated Plexiglas
22 x 29 x 6 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist, San Francisco,
and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco
and New York
Made with financial assistance from
The Daniel Langlois Foundation for
Art, Science and Technology
5. Library, 2003
custom electronics, 768 LEDs,
photogravure, treated Plexiglas
24 x 30 x 3 inches
Published by Graphicstudio, Tampa
Courtesy of the artist, San Francisco,
and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco
and New York
6. Hong Kong Bird Market, 2005
custom electronics, 768 LEDs,
rice paper, treated Plexiglas
21 1/2 x 29 x 3 inches
Courtesy of the artist, San Francisco,
and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco
and New York

Dimensions h x w x d

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I thank the artist for sharing his unique vision about the intersection of life, art, and technology. I first saw Jim Campbell's work at the 2002 Whitney Biennial and find it no less compelling today. I also thank Todd Hosfelt, Hosfelt Gallery, for making this exhibition possible at The College of Wooster Art Museum. To Jim Campbell's administrative assistant, Karen Gallagher, a warm thank you for her gentle guidance throughout this project.

At Wooster, the museum staff, Joyce Fuell, Museum Administrative Coordinator, and Doug McGlumphy, Museum Preparator, once again handled the many details of the concurrent Jim Campbell and Hiraki Sawa exhibitions with their usual skill and aplomb.

Kitty McManus Zurko
Director/Curator
The College of Wooster
Art Museum

JIM CAMPBELL

August 29 - October 22, 2006

Burton D. Morgan Gallery

The College of Wooster Art Museum
Ebert Art Center

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