

## Jim Campbell/MATRIX 208

### Memory Array

September 21 – November 16, 2003

**University of California  
Berkeley Art Museum**

**MATRIX**

**Jim Campbell/MATRIX 208**

If you knew that today was the last day of your life, what would you do? This question has been posed in a multitude of contexts—from pop psychology to existentialist discussion to late-night slumber parties—and highlights issues of mortality, leaving a legacy, and the responsibility to memory. Such issues are central to much of Jim Campbell's sculpture and installation work. In his work Campbell indirectly asks, "What is our obligation to remember?"

In a provocative new book entitled *The Ethics of Memory*, author Avishai Margalit questions the nature of the obligation to remember people and events from the past as well as whether remembering and forgetting are proper subjects of moral praise or blame. If the crucial question is "Are there things that we ought to remember?" then equally important is its parallel, "Are there things that we ought to forget?"<sup>1</sup>

In 1994, without any autobiographical intentions, Campbell began a series of sculptures that he subsequently titled *Memory Works*. Upon repeated showing of these pieces he acknowledges being confronted with their essentially autobiographical nature, noting that even those memories that represent a more universal experience were chosen for significant personal reasons.<sup>2</sup>

*Memory Array*, Campbell's MATRIX exhibition, includes *Portrait of My Father* (1994–95) and *Photo of My Mother* (1996) as well as a new installation commissioned by BAM, *Last Day in the Beginning of March*, that fictionally chronicles the events on the final day in the life of the artist's brother. In *Portrait of My Father*, a photograph of the artist's father fades in and out of clarity, based on an EKG reading of Jim's own heartbeat while he slept from 12:30 to 8:30 a.m. on January 3, 1995. A comparable phenomenon occurs in *Photo of My Mother*, the image's clarity fluctuating according to the rate of the artist's breath as electronically recorded for one hour. These works simultaneously reference the artist's family and reflect himself. Campbell understands that others' memories ultimately replace the person remembered. Here the viewer knows the artist's parents only through his filtered presentation.

Originally trained in mathematics and engineering, Campbell employs technology in the service of a profound humanism. His early works explore simple analogies between the shared traits of human and computer memory, including the characteristic of hiddenness and certain processes of representation. Campbell cites as one inspiration for his *Memory Works* Robert Morris's *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961), a crude wooden box with a concealed tape recorder that emits sounds of sawing and hammering recorded during its three and a half hour construction. Here Morris, like Campbell, is creating a static and technological memory, one that is verifiable and unchanged over time. Human memory is of course more fallible. We seek to retain continuity by using the same words or ideas over and over again to describe the person or event—"our memories become set pieces in the retelling"<sup>3</sup>—but even so, with each recall, we understand that the memory has been slightly altered. Time and experience play their parts in changing

Cover: *Last Day in the Beginning of March* (computer simulation), 2003; Light bulbs, custom electronics; dimensions variable; courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA

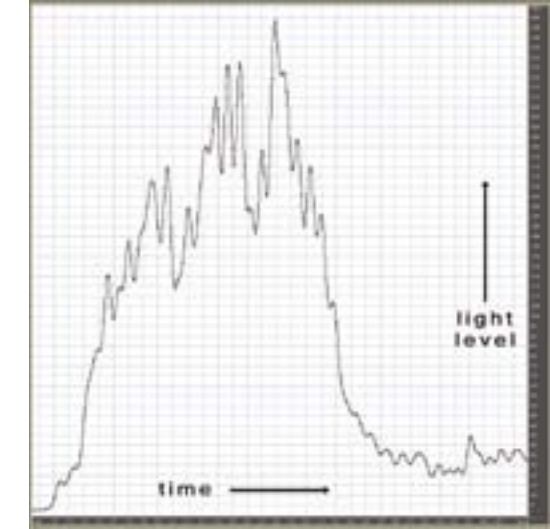


what we know. In both technological and human memory, value is determined based on quantification. How much can be retained and at what speed can it be accessed?

Psychological and scientific relationships to time and movement are another key exploration in Campbell's work. Of particular interest is the quantifiable time between when an image is seen/experienced (by the eyes) and when it is known/interpreted (by the brain). Memory is in itself another way of looking at time. *Last Day in the Beginning of March* is an electronic installation that incorporates digitally encoded memories and the element of time as represented by pools of light. The work consists of thirty light bulbs suspended from the ceiling shining onto the floor below. Arranged seemingly randomly and controlled by computer memory, the bulbs fade in and out of brightness to communicate fictionalized human memories. Viewers are immersed in fluctuating rhythms of light that represent a diverse range of possible memories, from smoking a cigarette to hearing voices.

In this work all representational visual content has been removed and every memory is denoted by the same form—that of a light bulb. The meaning derives not from individual rhythms but rather from the overall relationship of events. The installation furthers a question posed by Campbell's last major series, *Motion and Rest Studies*: what meaning does a viewer extract from small amounts of information? When standing under the circle of light thrown from any of the bulbs, the viewer casts a shadow, which is expected. The unexpected thing happens when the bulb extinguishes and an afterimage of the shadow appears. This persistence of vision phenomenon profoundly mirrors the intangible effect of memory, the fleeting and obscure sense that something or someone is familiar, recalled from the past. *Last Day in the Beginning of March* affects the body as well as the mind. Essentially an abstract, nonlinear work, the series of patterns it comprises can evoke both specific and generalized memories for the viewer—not those of Campbell

*Last Day in the Beginning of March* (computer simulation), 2003; Light bulbs, custom electronics; dimensions variable; courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA



or his brother but highly personalized ones. The artist is aware of the physical phenomena by which forgotten experiences can be remembered when one is functioning in a comparable state, such as behavior performed while inebriated or pain associated with a physical condition like pregnancy. *Last Day in the Beginning of March* dynamically maps a key aspect of human identity: how experiences of joy, pain, suffering, enlightenment, and compassion are indelibly coded into the brain.

The text that accompanies each circle of light is located on an aluminum box hanging on the gallery wall. Subtle and descriptive only of a generalized activity—rain, walking up six flights of stairs, swallowing medications—it facilitates the connection of the rhythm to what it represents. The installation title similarly connects all of the events to their occurrence on a single day. Many of the rhythms are the result of graphs—representing the brightness of light through time—hand-drawn by the artist and scanned into the computer. Like listening to music, the experience in the space is that of rhythm over time. The sounds for the installation—rain falling on a roof, louder at the front of the gallery and quieter in the back—repeat the patterns of the lights: continuous yet constantly fluctuating.

All of the events chronicled, while inspired by a real day and a real person, are invented. The artist states that they are fictional, yet the viewer recognizes and believes them, as they are so mundane: the car radio playing, the telephone ringing, or a windshield wiper swishing back and forth. Technology, usually identified as objective and uncompromised, is employed here to represent a fabrication. Yet what effect does the memories' truth or falsehood have? The influence of physicist Werner Heisenberg and his famous Uncertainty Principle—stating that the examination or measurement of any object invariably affects it—often appears in Campbell's art. In *Last Day in the Beginning of March* Campbell proposes the uncertainty of knowledge along with memory, time, and existence. If we do not know when our

*Last Day in the Beginning of March*, process graph of match lighting



last day will be, equally impossible to know is when that day will be for those that we love. How then does one balance that knowledge of the impossibility of knowing with the necessity of daily being?

Like James Turrell, another artist who works with phenomena of light and space in the service of revelation, Campbell explores human perception and mutability as they relate to both technological advances and humanistic concerns. He uses electronic images to produce inscrutable, mythic, dream-like—and often highly poetic—sensations of illusion intended to question not only what we know and how we know it, but also what we feel and subsequently do.<sup>4</sup> As critic Pamela Feinsilber observed, “the deepest meaning in Campbell’s art may arise when we add the workings of our own minds and hearts, our own memories and emotions, to his.”<sup>5</sup> Technologically savvy yet in no way clinical, Campbell himself is never far from the exploratory process. His willingness to insert extremely personal memories and experiences into his work serves as a brave guidepost for the process of self-discovery and potential healing that a viewer may find in his art.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson  
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

<sup>1</sup> Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 7, 17.  
<sup>2</sup> Jim Campbell, e-mail to the author, August 7, 2003.  
<sup>3</sup> Robert Gottlieb, “Bringing Up Biographer,” *The New York Times Book Review*, August 17, 2003, 13.  
<sup>4</sup> Bartomeu Mari and Chia Chi Jason Wang, “Jim Campbell,” *2002 Taipei Biennale: Great Theater of the World* (Taiwan: Taipei Fine Art Museum, 2002), 82.  
<sup>5</sup> Pamela Feinsilber, “Only Connect: Jim Campbell’s Electronic Art Plugs Into the Human Heart,” *SAN francisco*, March 2002, 95.

Patricia Maloney, MATRIX Curatorial Assistant, contributed the idea of the fallibility of human memory to this essay.

*Portrait of My Father*, 1994–95; Custom electronics, glass, photograph, LCD material; 72 x 15 x 6 in.; collection of San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA

Jim Campbell was born in Chicago in 1956. He earned two Bachelor of Science degrees in electrical engineering and mathematics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1978. He lives and works in San Francisco, California.

#### **Selected Solo Exhibitions**

- 2002  
 “Data and Time,” Nagoya City Art Museum, Nagoya City, Japan  
 “Motion and Rest,” University Art Museum, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ  
 2001  
 “Time and Data,” Wood Street Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA  
 “Contemporary Configurations II,” Museum of Art and History, Santa Cruz, CA  
 “Time, Memory and Meditation,” Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA  
 2000  
 Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA  
 1999  
 “Transforming Time,” University Art Museum, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ  
 1998  
 “Reactive Works,” San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA  
 1997  
 “Digital Watch,” Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO  
 “Reactive Works,” Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA

#### **Selected Group Exhibitions**

- 2003  
 “House of the Tomorrow,” Experimenta, Melbourne, Australia  
 “The Disembodied Spirit,” Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, ME; The Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City, MO  
 “Bytes and Pieces,” San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, CA  
 2002  
 Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY  
 Taipei Biennial, Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taipei, Taiwan  
 Busan Biennial, Busan Metropolitan Art Museum, Busan, South Korea  
 “Future Cinema,” ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany  
 2001  
 “Bitstreams,” Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY  
 “Highlights Festival,” Montreal, Quebec, Canada

*Photo of My Mother*, 1996; Custom electronics, glass, photograph, LCD material; 72 x 15 x 6 in.; collection of San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA

- 2000  
 “Ars Electronica,” Linz, Austria  
 “Scanners,” California College of Arts and Crafts, Oakland, CA  
 “Illuminations,” Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill, NC  
 “Timekeepers,” San Francisco Cameraworks, San Francisco, CA  
 1999  
 “New Voices New Visions,” University Art Gallery, UC San Diego, San Diego, CA  
 “Digital Hybrids,” McDonough Museum, Youngstown, OH  
 “The Photographic Image,” National Museum, Kwachon, Korea  
 “The Body,” Salina Art Center, Salina, KS  
 1998  
 “Body Mecanique,” Wexner Art Center, Columbus, OH  
 “Art & Technology,” Duke University Museum, Durham, NC  
 1997  
 “Serious Games,” Barbican Gallery, London, England  
 “Interaction 97,” Gifu, Japan  
 “Meditations in Time,” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA  
 “451 Degrees,” San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery, San Francisco, CA  
 1996  
 “SECA Awards Exhibition,” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA  
 “Creative Time—Art in the Anchorage,” Brooklyn, NY

#### **Selected Bibliography-**

- Baker, Kenneth. “Modern Art Redefined.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 1998, *Datebook* 1.  
 Bonetti, David. “Computer Artist Campbell Finds Visual Poetry in Motion.” *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 16, 2002, D1.  
 Cutajar, Mario. “Jim Campbell at Art Center.” *LA Weekly*, June 13, 1997, 43.  
 Feinsilber, Pamela. “Only Connect: Jim Campbell’s Electronic Art Plugs Into the Human Heart,” *SAN francisco*, March 2002, 95.  
 Fischer, Jack. “Technocrat Has an Artist’s Soul, Exhibits in S.F. and New York.” *San Jose Mercury News*, March 24, 2002, 5E.  
 Helfand, Glen. “Jim Campbell: Hosfelt Gallery.” *Artforum*, Summer 2002, 180–181.  
 Kurtz, Glenn. “Jim Campbell: Hosfelt Gallery.” *Tema Celeste*, May–June 2002, 95.  
 Maclay, Catherine. “The Art of the Elusive.” *San Jose Mercury News*, June 28, 1998, 1G.  
 Raczka, Robert. “Jim Campbell: Wood Street Galleries.” *Sculpture*, May 2002, 74–75.  
 Renov, Michael. “Documentary Disavowals, or The Digital, Documentary and Postmodernity.” *Polygraph*, 2001, 93–111.  
 Rogers, Sarah. “Body Mecanique.” *Body Mecanique*, [Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1998].  
 Sakane, Ituso. “An Invitation to Interactive Art.” *Interaction 97 Catalogue*, March 1997.

*Motion and Rest #2* [detail], 2002; custom electronics, 768 LEDs; 22 x 28 in.; courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA

- Seid, Steve. “Sense and Sensation in the Electronic Sculptures of Jim Campbell.” *Time, Memory and Meditation* (Richmond: Anderson Gallery, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, 2001).  
 Sturken, Marita. “Electronic Time: The Memory Machines of Jim Campbell.” *Afterimage*, November–December 1997, 8–10.  
 —. “The Space of Electronic Time.” *Space Site Intervention* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2000).  
 Willis, Holly. “5th Avenue Cutaway Series.” *LA Weekly*, June 21–27, 2002, 88.  
 —. “Jim Campbell at the Art Center College of Design.” *Art Week*, July 1997, 26.  
 Wilson, William. “Jim Campbell’s Poetic Engineering of Choices.” *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 1997, F6.

#### **Work in MATRIX**

- Last Day in the Beginning of March*, 2003  
 Light bulbs, custom electronics  
 Dimensions variable  
 Courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA

- Photo of My Mother*, 1996  
 Custom electronics, glass, photograph, LCD material  
 72 x 15 x 6 in.  
 Collection of San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA

- Portrait of My Father*, 1994–95  
 Custom electronics, glass, photograph, LCD material  
 72 x 15 x 6 in.  
 Collection of San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA

The MATRIX Program at the UC Berkeley Art Museum is made possible by the generous endowment gift of Phyllis C. Wattis.

Additional donors to the MATRIX Program include the UAM Council MATRIX Endowment, Ann M. Hatch, Eric McDougall, Glenn and April Bucksbaum, and Christopher Vroom and Illya Szilak.

Special support for **Jim Campbell/MATRIX 208 Memory Array** is provided by the Fleishhacker Foundation, Nancy and Joachim Bechtle, Maryellen and Frank Herringer, and Charles and Naomi Kremer. Additional support has been provided by Roselyne C. Swig.

© 2003 The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved.

*Church on 5th Avenue* [detail], 2001; custom electronics, 768 LEDs, treated Plexiglas; 22 x 28 in.; courtesy of the artist and Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, CA