

CRISTIN TIERNEY

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# PETER CAMPUS: 'Calling for Shantih'

By KEN JOHNSON DEC. 9, 2010

*Cristin Tierney*

*546 West 29th Street*

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Viewers prone to seasickness might experience slight wooziness while perusing this exhibition of new works by the pioneering video artist Peter Campus. Discomfort will be offset, however, by beauty.

Shown on flat screens, each presents a highly pixelated, vividly colorful image of a piece of coastal Long Island, including land, industrial buildings, water, boats and the ambient sounds of the sea, wind and birds. At a glance the images appear static, but you quickly notice that they are moving slightly as if shot from the deck of a floating raft. In fact each roughly 24-minute loop was shot on land by Mr. Campus, holding the camera. The motion comes from his breathing.

The key word in his title, “shantih,” is Sanskrit for tranquillity. In “The Waste Land” T. S. Eliot translated it as “The Peace which passeth understanding.” The effect of Mr. Campus’s videos is indeed soothingly meditative and incipiently transcendental.

There is a more Western sort of philosophical interest as well. By digital means Mr. Campus abstracted his imagery, simplifying it into flattened, generally rectangular planes that slightly shift and flicker as you study them.

They call to mind painters like Cézanne and the early Mondrian. In that sense they are richly paradoxical. Painters of empirical perception project humanly conceived order onto reality. The camera, a machine, only registers light. Yet because of the shifting planes and the motion of the whole picture it is as if we are seeing through the myopic eyes of someone looking out the rectangular cabin window of a gently rocking boat.