

CRISTIN TIERNEY

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“The Surrogate Eye: Peter Campus’s new videos”

by Hearne Pardee

Peter Campus: Calling for Shantih at Cristin Tierney

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546 West 29th Street, between 10th and 11th avenues

New York City, (212) 594-0550



Peter Campus, *Docking at Shinnecock Bay*, 2010. Digital video, 24 minute loop. Courtesy of Cristin Tierney. Photo by Justin Francavilla

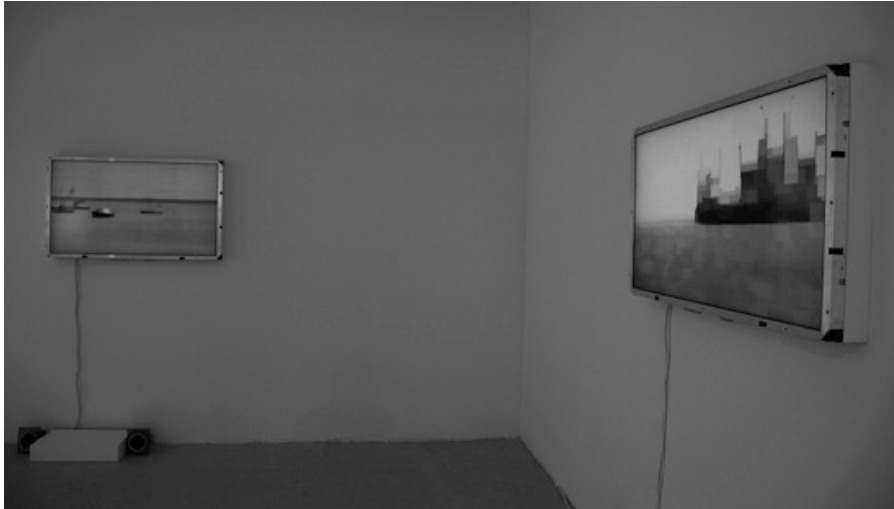
Early photographers with artistic ambitions sometimes blurred their images in order to imitate the effects of painting. Alfred Stieglitz, however, established the modern practice of art photography when he chose instead to develop the camera’s capacity for high definition of texture and detail. In his hands, technology, pushed beyond mere copying, revealed new aspects of familiar things and, he believed, allowed the unconscious to express itself. While Peter Campus’s new videos move in the direction of painting, they also extend this modernist endeavor to heighten perception and psychologically engage the viewer.

The seven works in “Calling for Shantih” seem deliberately pixilated – slowed down and broken up into shifting, rectangular blocks that look like overlapping brushstrokes. Campus’s stationary camera focuses in extended shots on single, everyday subjects; internally layered and blended, their effect is one of dense, saturated color and meditative calm. But the images are hardly static; they draw us in and dislodge us from our conventional visual moorings.

Displayed on stripped-down flat screen TVs, these videos focus on utilitarian scenes near the artist’s home on Long Island – boats at rest or docking, a power station, a barn – accompanied by ambient

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sounds. The subjects recall Seurat's pointillist paintings of the working port of Honfleur. But just as Seurat applied scientific logic to decompose his images and then rebuilt them piece by piece, Campus uses the digital toolbox to dissect and orchestrate the input from his camera. Each video is repeatedly edited in multiple layers, which are abstracted into mosaics of color, into seemingly improvisatory grids of rectangles. When recombined, the grids overlap unevenly, and the rectangles become translucent scrims, which gradually change in hue, allowing different colors to emerge and then to blend back into their surroundings. There's a primitive fascination to these living images, which seem to breathe, and to respond to the normal movements of our eyes.



installation view of the exhibition under review, Peter Campus, *Calling for Shantih*, 2010. Courtesy of Cristin Tierney. Photo by Justin Francavilla

The layered rectangular units also recall the primordial modernist rectangles that Mondrian applied to his early studies of sand dunes and ocean. They contribute an expressive inflection to architectural subjects such as “Cable Station at Orient Point”, where they seem to extend the outstretched arms of the building and enhance its monumentality. In “Fishing Boats at Shinnecock Bay” they resemble piled up cargo containers. This weighty architecture seems to resist the flow of time, but change is ongoing – shadows deepen, boats dock, and water flows. In “Dusk at Shinnecock Bay” time makes itself visible in more than one way – most obviously in the flow of the tide across the frame, yet more subtly in the slow-changing colors around the buildings on the distant shore – movement through space accompanies change over time. The modulating pixels suggest the stream of Heraclitus, into which Campus dips at will via digital editing.

The video camera enables the videographer to step outside of his one-on-one relation to his subject; in an early statement, Campus called it a “surrogate eye” and coined the term “durational perception” for the way the arrangement of camera and monitor objectifies the visual process. His works of the 1970s explored this concept in a literal way, disrupting the conventional relationship between camera and subject, as in installations where viewers confronted their images distorted or upside down. Now, Campus finds this sort of hyper-perception in the editing process, which frees him to slow down and re-orchestrate a period of observation. If there's an implication of higher consciousness in all this (*Shantih*, I was told, is the name of his cat), there's also something poignant in Campus's slowing of time and his intimate articulation of its relentless flow.