

CRISTIN TIERNEY



ARTSEEN

peter campus: pause

by Pac Pobric

CRISTIN TIERNEY GALLERY | JANUARY 11 – FEBRUARY 17, 2018



Peter Campus, *at rest*, 2016, videograph sequence
4:55 minutes, edition 1 of 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy the artist and Cristin Tierney.

Few artists understand the potential of the moving image as well as Peter Campus does. For fifty years, he has been training his eye on film and video, concentrating on how small breaks can make for big differences that bend our perspectives. In the 1970s, he began designing closed-circuit feedback loops in installations like *Interface* (1972), where viewers encounter strange, refracted images of themselves reflected through mirrors. It was an attempt to show how disconnected we can be from ourselves, and how new media could detach us even further.

Interface is a subtly disruptive work, and it's far from the style of Campus's latest videos, three of which he showed at the Cristin Tierney Gallery earlier this year. The new videos, all shot on the coasts of Long Island, Massachusetts, and the Atlantic coast

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of France, set a calming, harbor mood. In *ebb and flow* (2017), a two-channel video installation put in a corner, seagulls flock above a wharf, and boats gently float by a dock. Later, a pair of fishermen prepare their boat for the day and two ships quietly motor past one another in opposite directions across each screen. On another dock, two women laugh and pull the dock lines of a ship that's almost completely out of view.

These themes aren't dissimilar from those of his 2014 show at the gallery, which also included shots of boats and sandy beaches. But the previous group of videos were manipulated to look highly pixelated, as if they had been painted upon by a Fauvist painter. The newer works are stripped down; all we see is what came through Campus's camera lens on the day he took his shot, which lends the work a documentary feel. There's no story in *ebb and flow*, just seven minutes of short, wedded vignettes separated by clarifying moments of complete darkness.



Peter Campus, *at rest*, 2016, videograph sequence
4:55 minutes, edition 1 of 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy the artist and Cristin Tierney.

The most compelling moments of the video are when Campus pairs similar shots taken just a few feet from one another, like the moment when he shows two expansive views of deep ocean blue from a road leading to a rocky sand beach. The images appear to match, but the guardrail in one shot looks barely askew, and it's difficult to spot and reconcile the contrast. It takes a moment to see this for what it is, which is a playful and deliberate decision to emphasize difference amid similarity. The experience should be confusing, but Campus has a way of muting dissonance even when it's obviously present, and *ebb and flow* instills a gentle, dazed lull.

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Peter Campus, *ebb and flow*, 2017, videograph sequence, 7:00 minutes
edition 1 of 3 + 1 AP. Courtesy the artist and Cristin Tierney.

A long career like Campus's—he'll have a career retrospective at the Bronx Museum in 2019 that travels from the Jeu de Paume in Paris—gives him rich experience. But immersion is also his liability. The show's other large-scale work, a single screen video titled *at rest* (2016), was made on the waterways of Pornic in northwestern France. Each shot begins in full color, and at one point we see a happy young boy climbing a ladder out of a deep, sandy ditch. He gets to the top, all smiles, and then suddenly and painfully the color drains from the picture until the boy and the background radiate in blinding, sallow, black and white. The color comes back in the next shot, and there's no indication that the boy's happiness is gone, so it seems to be just one of Campus's formal games. Importantly, the work was shot in 4K, and it's imaginable that Campus, with his expert eye, sees something of note here. But whatever it is, it's too ugly to be visible to the rest of us, and his strongest points don't emerge when he's focusing on a single shot. He is best when he's mixing and matching clips, displacing a mood, putting it back into focus, and orchestrating subtle disorientations, where the end result is an atmosphere, not an idea.