

CHICAGO

Nate Young

MONIQUE MELOCHE GALLERY

Vestigial representations of the occult were harnessed in “Cleromancy,” Nate Young’s exhibition of six works from the past year that obliquely layered a range of personal and political histories, touching on subjects such as black jockeys, the Great Migration, divining, and family mythology. Densely distributing the works on three walls of the light-filled gallery, Young invoked a symmetrical, chapel-like display punctuated at the end wall with *Untitled*, a two-part piece. Composed of a single horse bone mounted on a walnut pedestal in front of an illusionistic graphic depiction of a similar equine bone, the work offered the coupling of object and image as a means to deliberate on the authority of the real and the magic of illusion. The drawing of the horse bone floats in a nondescript white ground, half obscured by a smoky cloud of smudged graphite. The verisimilitude of the rendering evokes the enchanted qualities of pictorial surrealism, while the physical remains emerging from the slender wooden pedestal bespeak the sacred qualities of a relic.

A triptych of wooden boxes (titled *Exhumed*, *Grave Goods*, and *Interment*, respectively), hanging side by side on the wall adjacent to *Untitled*, engaged the age-old philosophical debate between appearances and truth through a clever play on the physics of light reflection. Each box resembles a commemorative plaque and contains a block of serif type with textual information addressing the history of black American jockeys. A sentence from *Grave Goods* reads, THIRTEEN OF THE FIFTEEN RIDERS IN THE FIRST KENTUCKY DERBY WERE BLACK AND

Nate Young,
Interment, 2017,
gold leaf, walnut,
Plexiglas, horse bone,
spray paint, LED,
28½ × 16 × 6”.

FIFTEEN OF THE FIRST TWENTY EIGHT RUNNINGS WERE WON BY BLACK JOCKEYS, while *Interment* declares, BUT BY 1904 BLACK JOCKEYS WERE VIRTUALLY NON EXISTENT. The font is printed in glossy black and set against a flat-black ground, rendering the texts difficult to read. On each of the three works a title plate occupies the top niche of the box design, while a ghostly, holographic picture of a horse bone hovers in a narrow recess between the title and the narrative text. To produce this apparition, Young made use of an internal system involving a light and mirror, so that what we see is in fact the reflection of an illuminated bone—which appears to be levitating on the sheet of Plexiglas that forms the work’s surface—tucked deep within the wooden box.

Two large framed drawings, *Divining No. 1* and *Divining No. 2*, were installed directly across from the three magic boxes. Both drawings consist of handwritten text and diagrammatic notations set among graphite illustrations of hovering skeletal parts. The text fragments and sketches of

bone anatomy coalesce into narrative maps poetically imparting the history of Young’s great-grandfather. Arrows and lines connect the pictorial imagery to the numerous text blocks, whose delicately written sentences recount a narrative of displacement: **THOUGH THE PRIMARY MODE OF TRANSPORTATION WHICH CARRIED MANY FROM THE SOUTH TO THE NORTH DURING THE GREAT MIGRATION WAS THE TRAIN, MY GREAT GRAND-FATHER TRAVELED VIA HORSE AND MY GREAT GRANDFATHER SETTLED IN A TOWN OUTSIDE OF PHILADELPHIA AND CHANGED HIS NAME TO JACKSON IN ORDER TO HIDE.** Each drawing is a distinct constellation of image and symbol populating a foggy, graphite-stained middle area on a vertical expanse of paper. Words are inscribed on diaphanous scrimms of vellum that lend these works an otherworldly quality. The accurately rendered apertures and hollows delineated in the joint ends of the bone representations reinforce the connectedness of the drawing’s parts to a whole: Narrative snippets become biography, and disembodied femurs become horse.

There is another element of Young’s work that commands as much scrutiny as his beguiling concoction of image, symbol, and story: fine woodcraft. The joinery and the finish of the surfaces comprising his frames, pedestal, and magic boxes are exquisite. More than a professional framing conceit, Young’s expert woodworking skills are as enduring and alchemical as any sleight of hand. When commingled with African American histories, personal mythology, and an atmosphere of the occult, Young’s traditional technical skills solicit an engaging critical examination into empirical, spiritual, and philosophical systems of belief.

—Michelle Grabner

SAN FRANCISCO

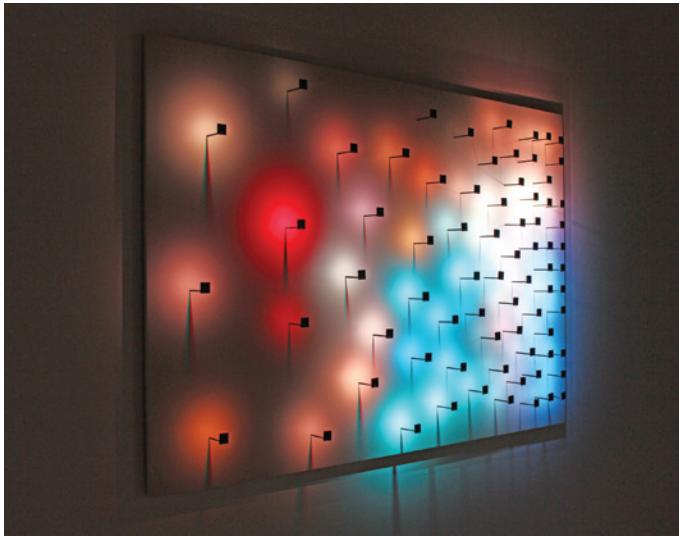
Jim Campbell

HOSFELT GALLERY

The phenomenology of perception goes electronic in Jim Campbell’s work. His signature homemade, high-tech fabrications include LED projectors, multiple-exposure photographs, diffusion screens, and moving images superimposed with treated Plexiglas. Titled “Far Away Up Close,” this exhibition featured fifteen works from the past year that presented viewers with either too much visual data or not enough, laying bare the work involved in seeing.

Installed at the show’s entrance was *Data Transformation 1*, a video rear-projected by more than a thousand LED lights onto a translucent Plexiglas screen. The video shows a stream of shadowy grisaille figures emerging from the right side of the screen in a steady march toward the left. About midway across, the figures start to break up—an effect of Campbell’s screen design, which increases the spacing between the individual LEDs from right to left. The growing gaps between the lights also augment the contrast between light and dark, with the LEDs taking on various brilliant hues before yielding to total darkness at the left edge of the screen. By removing one form of visual information (resolution) and adding another (color) at the same time, Campbell mesmerizes the viewer with a constantly shifting scene.

The subject of this first video would have remained elusive had it not been placed in context with other works exploring similar themes. In *Splitting the Crowd*, for instance, hundreds of one-inch black squares cantilevered a few inches out from the wall, each projecting tiny beams of colored light back onto the wall’s white surface. At the center of the installation these LED projectors were densely packed and emitted a constant stream of light, while at the edges the LEDs became increasingly sparse and flickered on and off. From up close, these material mechanisms dominated the viewer’s vision, but from



Jim Campbell,
Exploded Flat 2, 2017,
aluminum, LEDs,
custom electronics,
48 × 72 × 4½".
Photo: David Stroud.

twenty paces away, the central cluster of projections resolved into a coherent cinematic image: a current of walking figures moving toward the camera before literally splintering into glittering fragments of color at either side of the frame. While the footage was never in full focus, the viewer was just able to discern pink pussy hats being worn by many of the figures, revealing the work as incorporating a recording of one of the women's marches that erupted nationwide during the presidential inauguration this past January.

Fragments of embodied political ideals surfaced elsewhere: sometimes subtly, as in the flashes of hot pink that punctuated other LED works, including *Scattered 12x (Women's March on Washington)* and *Exploded Flat 1 and 2*; at other times explicitly, as in *Women's March on Washington 1 and 3*, light box-mounted photomontages of the titular demonstration. The photographic candor of the latter was almost garish in comparison to the LED compositions, as if the artist ultimately didn't trust the viewer to figure out what the subject matter was on her own.

Indeed, the human brain ably fills in gaps between sensations, images, and words. Campbell nodded to the fact that this is not just an Information Age skill with a series of photographs of ancient Roman and Byzantine mosaic portraits ("Mosaic Study") viewed through diffusion screens. Seen from the front, the faces appear in pleasant soft focus, belying the fact that they are made from numerous tesserae that were plainly visible when one peered behind the screen. Here, Campbell's reference to antique visual forms highlighted our intrinsic ability to create comprehensive knowledge from shards of sensory data.

A visual discourse on distributed perception, Campbell's show raised an urgent query posed by contemporary culture: How does technology—which increasingly fills our perceptual gaps with ever more high-resolution, on-demand data—impact the brain-body system? This question is especially pressing in the artist's adopted hometown of San Francisco, where a widespread belief that all emergent technologies are good threatens to eclipse a long-standing culture of intellectual diversity and grassroots organizing. Campbell himself is slated to install a work similar to *Splitting the Crowd* on the exterior of the still-under-construction Salesforce Tower—the San Francisco headquarters of a data-driven marketing company and one of the tallest buildings on the West Coast. Let's hope whatever Campbell produces for the structure will similarly serve as a reminder that the more closely we are hyperlinked to each other, the more drastically we may be cut off from our own lives.

—Elizabeth Mangini

LOS ANGELES

Pablo Rasgado

STEVE TURNER

Walls have been a recurring motif in the works of Mexico City-based artist Pablo Rasgado. In his ongoing "Extractions" series, 2006–, Rasgado produces found paintings by lifting off sections of splattered, graffitied, or scuffed walls in outdoor urban spaces using a centuries-old fresco restoration technique called *strappo*. Unlike other artists who have also taken surfaces found in the streets as subject matter—for example, Brassai, who made uncanny photographs of scratched drawings and pockmarked surfaces in the streets of midcentury Paris—Rasgado extracts physical segments of facades, preserving and presenting a range of indexical traces, from declarations of political protest to unintentional marks left by anonymous dwellers of his home city. In his more recent series "Unfolded Architecture," 2007–, Rasgado repurposes used slabs of drywall from venues where he has previously shown, transforming temporary walls discarded at the end of exhibitions into architectural sculptures and functional structures on which other works of art are hung.

In his recent show at Steve Turner, "This Too Shall Pass," Rasgado constructed a mazelike installation and selected a group of works by other artists to exhibit within it. Many of these artists hailed from Los Angeles, as well as from cities in Latin America (such as Zapopan, Mexico, and Mercedes, Argentina), in a nod to the Getty Foundation-sponsored, multiveneue Pacific Standard Time art program concurrently taking place. A number of the works on view in this exhibition-within-an-exhibition used nonprecious, often mundane materials in abstract forms that recalled processes of destruction and transformation. In Luciana Lamothe's *Untitled*, 2017, for instance, a grid of steel couplers and rusted pipes, slashed open at regular intervals, suggested both material obsolescence and the building of infrastructure. In Brian Rochefort's ceramic pieces—*Bull Head*, *Large Conch*, *Red Skull*, and *Skull Planter*, all 2017—ready-made terra-cotta objects were covered with grotesquely colorful layers of glaze, their original forms rendered



Pablo Rasgado, *This Too Shall Pass*, 2017,
copper, ¾ × ¾".