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BY SAVANNAH GUZ

In Wood Street's *Text Memory*, technology pulses with emotion.



Except for certain advanced robotics, technology seems incapable of expressing desire. The complicated and sultry landscape of emotion -- part of what makes us human -- is essentially absent from circuits and gadgetry. However, with *Text Memory*, curated by Murray Horne at Wood Street Galleries, artists Jim Campbell and Mark Scheeff show us that, while technology can't reciprocate feeling, it can certainly evoke it.

With "Last Day in the Beginning of March 2003-2008," MIT-trained electrical engineer Campbell creates a "rhythmic narrative" from fictionalized memories of the last day of his brother's life. The installation's walls are sheathed on all sides by black plastic scrim, and lined with metal-framed boxes that contain gently glowing word-images like "Eyelids," "Car (radio)" and "Windshield Wipers." Spotlights hang near each box, some brightening, others dimming -- suggesting the way these memories gradually grow ambiguous over time. While walking this circuit of recollections, visitors hear an endless soundtrack of rain, transporting us to that day and, eventually, inside the artist's mind. And while we voyeuristically inspect his memories, we are shielded from the potentially anguishing cascade of events outside.

Indicating but not categorically defining, Campbell remains elliptical about the cause of his brother's death. These idiosyncratically packaged memories ask something universally human and extremely moving. What can we hold on to after the tangible is gone? And by what methods does our mind tag and retrieve the traumatic?

Campbell also creates surprisingly intimate portraits of his parents. In "My Heartbeat, 12 a.m. to 8 a.m. January 12th" (1996), a black-and-white photo of Campbell's aging father is shielded by several layers of electrified "privacy" glass that grows hazy, then clear, to the recorded beat of Campbell's heart. In "My Breath, January 1996, 1 hour," a scallop-edged photo of his mother is rhythmically hidden, as if the artist himself were exhaling on the glass. The works evoke wistfulness by demonstrating how Campbell's existence perpetuates (and eclipses) his parents:

As long as his heart beats and he breaths, they will be remembered; when he dies, their memories will be obscured.

Stanford-educated mechanical engineer Mark Scheeff's "Want (continuous) 2003-2008," also expresses poignant human emotion through technological means. A wide room is littered with receipt-sized paper containing information from three online databases. Sheets contain prayers, personal ads and patient requests for organ donations. Every 20 seconds another sheet is emitted from three ceiling-mounted printers. The sheets descend like ticker-tape and accumulate in piles on the floor, emphasizing that human desire is unremitting. Each of the three kinds of requests reveals exquisite human vulnerability. Some land face-down, never to be read; others bear the shoeprints of passersby.

In Campbell and Scheeff's use of electronics to convey human experience, they come closer than ever to presenting technology as an emotive medium. With their work, technology shakes off its clinical austerity and initiates an emotionally infused conversation. Still, the works require human intelligence and emotional resonance to complete their circuits.

Text Memory continues through June 21. Wood Street Galleries, 601 Wood St., Downtown. 412-471-5605 or www.woodstreetgalleries.org