

arts | wednesday

The mystery of what we see

Below: Jim Campbell's "Market Street Pause" is at Howard Yezerksi Gallery.



Electronic works

Jim Campbell went to MIT, not art school, and he studied math and engineering. His electronic works at Howard Yezerksi Gallery simplify and abstract the motion of people walking, the passersby in Grand Central Station and on Market Street in San Francisco. Campbell distills video he has taken of these pedestrians and filters the barest bits of information through software that makes lights go on and off.

"Exploded View (Commuters)" utilizes more than 1,100 LEDs, spherical white bulbs the size of sourballs, suspended at various heights on wire from a steel frame, creating a rectangular, three-dimensional, polka-dotted field of light. Campbell has programmed the lights to shine or dim; in concert, they depict the shadowy figures of hurrying people.

It's magical. When I first saw the piece from several feet away in the darkened gallery, I took it to be a monitor on the far wall with a grainy video. Up close, it's like a swarm of fireflies.

"Market Street Pause" sets a grid of LEDs behind a diffusion screen, blinking to convey cars and buses and pedestrians passing. Occasionally the blinking stops, and a single image freezes on the screen.

That's when you realize how little information you're working with: A bus becomes a grid of grays and whites, totally abstract. The motion is what makes it readable. The works are streamlined and smart, but it's that flip-flop Campbell incites between the most mundane representation and startling abstraction that makes them art.

MICHAEL MAZUR: Black Paintings

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery, 10 Newbury St., through June 7. 617-262-4490, www.barbarakrakowgallery.com

JIM CAMPBELL: Recent Work

At: Howard Yezerksi Gallery, 460 Harrison Ave., through June 11. 617-262-0550, www.howardyezerkigallery.com

TOMMY SIMPSON: Totally Tommy

At: Gallery NAGA, 67 Newbury St., through May 28. 617-267-9060, www.gallerynaga.com