

margo sawyer

Finesilver Gallery

San Antonio

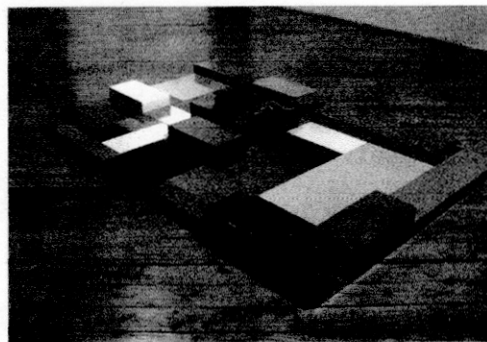
A sure cure for chromophobia, Margo Sawyer's steel boxes revel in pure color. These machine-tooled squares and rectangles, dressed in glossy, powder-coat finishes of purple, green, and orange, were installed across a fifty-foot wall in the gallery's sunny upper space. The abstract composition suggested an aerial view of a thriving metropolis, a fitting effect for this public commission destined for the Austin Convention Center. Entitled *Fragment of Index for Contemplation*, this new work fit in neatly the Texas-based artist's longtime practice of building dynamic topographies from discretely simple parts.

The tension between the opposing elements was palpable. A third of the way down the wall, a dense cluster of boxes held a cumulative charge that overwhelmed the perception of individual volumes, shapes, or hues. As the objects fanned out across the wall (in singles, pairs, and triads), awkward transitions exposed the heavier, fixed qualities of each isolated component. But ever versatile, the boxes easily recaptured their heady collective energy in a tightly grouped rectangular composition on the floor. The

variations in color and height bounced the eye over and around the work. Sawyer made this already delightful experience more sophisticated with the occasional black, white, and shimmering zinc-plated box, carefully positioned like punctuation marks.

Her previous installations of wooden blocks and pachinko balls were also floor-bound and reflected the artist's travels in India and Japan. In these, viewers could find teeming cities and temple gardens reduced to bird's-eye abstractions. The scale and intricacy of the arrangements similarly generated two registers of response, a sensual intimacy with customized materials as well as a formally austere, albeit elegant, distance. Reduction is the key to all of her systematically plotted works. In *Fragment* one sensed the minimalist process that led to this color free-for-all in the artist's choice of materials and the right-angle installation of the boxes. Such decisions are the difference between a Josef Albers and an Ellsworth Kelly, a Carl Andre and a Donald Judd. By tailoring her vocabulary, Sawyer discovers expressiveness within similar confines.

John Ewing



Margo Sawyer *Fragment of Index for Contemplation*, 2002, powder coated and yellow zinc plated steel, dimensions variable.

jim campbell

Hosfelt Gallery

San Francisco

Jim Campbell's *Ambiguous Icons #5 (Running/Falling)* (2000) was one of the standouts in the Whitney Museum's *BitStreams* exhibition last year. Originally shown at Hosfelt Gallery, the piece rendered a video of a figure running, stumbling, and falling on a grid of LED lights. The transfer reduced the figure to a dynamic shadow, seen against a field of glowing red.

Running/Falling may have questioned the viability of human activity in a digitized world, but it drew its strength from the tension between an abstract surface and the just recognizable image this surface implies, literally bringing questions of representation to light. Hovering between surface and content, Campbell's LED works explore how media constitute meaning. Campbell's most recent work, on view at Hosfelt, furthered this exploration. In the series "Motion and Rest" (2002), a central figure appeared in a matrix of 768 evenly spaced red LED lights. The content of these six pieces was an image of a handicapped person walking with a distinctive gait. The emotional force of this human silhouette emerged once viewers

deciphered the image, but as in *Running/Falling*, the representation was an effect of the system. The piece's depth was found on its moving surface, between the blinking lights. It was here that the viewer engaged the complex, enigmatic ways that an image is rendered intelligible.

The intense highlight of the show, *Church on 5th Avenue* (2002), began with another panel of LED lights—this time white rather than red—through which the artist displayed a looping video of people entering and exiting a New York church. Instead of leaving the surface bare, however, Campbell covered it with two sheets of frosted plexiglas, set at an angle to the lights. The material compounded content and surface while simultaneously differentiating the degrees of their relation. Distinct pixels visible on the left gradually coalesced to a misty glow on the right. The figures, walking between two realms, seemed subject to a continual process of analogue-digital conversion. The people, as well as the LED lights, were passing through modes of abstraction.

Glenn Kurtz

Jim Campbell *Church on 5th Avenue*, 2002, custom electronics, 768 white LEDs, treated plexiglas, 55.9 x 73.7 x 8.9 cm.

