

CLAYTON CAMPBELL – THE POWER OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

December 2014 Written by Jody Zellen 0 Comments

Clayton Campbell has been making digital photographs since the mid 1990s. Campbell's works take their cues from popular culture while offering social commentary.

He has been influenced by particular art works and artists such as James Rosenquist's "F-111", the pictorial design of medieval manuscripts, photogravure artist Peter Milton, Fantastic Realist artist Ernst Fuchs, and photographers Jeff Wall and Miwa Yanagi. Campbell's works are labor intensive and are the result of a multi part process that involves photography and digital image processing. Rather than offer his works as tangible printed commodities, Campbell has devised a way to show them on flat screen monitors in continual rotation so that their luminosity is kept intact from conception through production to display; and is one of the first photographers to offer his works in this manner.



The Consuming Terror of Terror
color photograph, 33 x 58in., 2014

Campbell is a thoughtful artist who at times wears different hats within the arts community and draws from these myriad resources to create his work. The work is an often humorous, never didactic, commentary that stems from acute observation of the absurd contradictions within modern culture. He uses and abuses digital effects creating controlled mistakes that appear like software glitches, although a perfectionist, the works have a casual imprecision and Campbell's laissez faire attitude toward the mechanics of their fabrication gives them a certain appeal.

Campbell tends to work on many series simultaneously. Among the latest are series entitled: Wild Kingdom, Artists Amongst Us, I Found Jesus in my Food, Interloping, Tableaux Vivants and Fractures. What differentiates these series is less the methodology than the subject matter within the images. I Found Jesus in My Food is a tongue and cheek satire on faith and the religiously obsessed. Campbell invites a friend or colleague out to lunch and during the meal snaps a few photographs of his companion holding up some aspect of their food. Their portrait is later composited with other images that relate to food, eating, religion, or the specifics of the personality being depicted. Campbell's compositing is intuitive and he draws from a vast archive of images to create each composition. I Found Jesus in My Food is the only series in which an appropriated image appears. Campbell inserts a found black and white illustration of the face of Jesus into each montage; be it sushi, tortilla chips or red wine.

In Wild Kingdom he montages images of people unaware of the camera who are experiencing a personal moment, taking pictures or texting and talking on their cell phones over images from museum dioramas depicting animals in the (artificial) natural landscape. Sometimes the juxtaposition is telling while other times it is absurd. Do You Ever Feel This Way? imposes a photograph of a girl resting her head against her arm as if taking a nap onto an image where two bears are relaxing atop jagged rocks in a receding landscape. In the distance is an image of a person holding an umbrella running away. These disparate elements coalesce in Campbell's imagination as the thought, "do you ever feel this way" bounces from girl to bear and back.

Interloping is a series of images in which Campbell explores the "sensation of not belonging where you seem to belong. Feeling the need to leave before it is discovered that you are not whom you seem to be..." In these pictures he begins by photographing exquisitely decorated neo-classical period rooms from the Thorne Miniature Collection at the Art Institute of Chicago. Isolated individuals are montaged into these spaces. His creative titles

comment on the effects of, or the reasons for the interloper's presence. In many respects this series is the most straightforward of Campbell's composites as the background image remains intact and is not modified or manipulated.

If Interloping is the least "Photoshopped," Fractures relies most heavily on digital manipulation. Here, Campbell jiggers the jpg codex to create glitches in the way the image is displayed. The resulting images have a stutter that Campbell uses as a point of departure for doubling, mirroring and distorting the elements he layers on top of the backgrounds. In this series he takes a tongue in cheek look at cultural psychodramas allowing his wit rather than his social and political consciousness to dictate the tenor of each image.



Gobsmacked
color photograph, 33 x 58in., 2014

It is evident that Campbell enjoys making these images and is able to create meaning through juxtaposition of the elements he has photographed over the years. The thought process becomes one that intertwines memory with commentary, as the images are as personal as they are universal.

The universal has also been a subject Campbell has investigated, specifically in the aftermath of 9-11. In 2003 he embarked on a project where he photographed his pre-teen son with a piece of paper onto which was printed a word he learned since 9-11, as well as words that took on new meaning because of the attack. The cumulative impact of the words becomes a powerful statement about the language of terrorism and its affects on our consciousness. This project was later expanded to include participants from different communities and countries. In these other incarnations of the project, each participant was photographed with a hand-written word in their native language. These images have been presented as large grids in gallery spaces as well as banners in public sites.



Empire
color photograph, 33 x 58in., 2014

When asked about his goals as an artist Campbell, replied that his aim was to educate as well as elicit smiles from his viewers. He is less interested in making overtly political work than in the power of suggestion. Because he is confident that his archives contain relevant subject matter, new meaning can be created through any juxtaposition of the various elements. Campbell believes in the power of the unconscious and lets this faith guide his aesthetic choices. Thus far he has hit the mark.

Clayton Campbell has worked in the arts for more than 30 years and has exhibited all over the world. Since 2004 his, "Words We Have Learned Since 9-

11" series has been in museums, galleries and art centers including the Maison Europeenne de la Photographie, Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; University of Nevada Las Vegas; Higher Bridges Art Center, Enniskillen, Northern Ireland; WYSPA Institute of Art, Gdansk, and Wroclaw, Poland; Aaran Gallery, Tehran, Iran; Museum of Mobile, Alabama; Community Media Center, Kurdistan; Unit 24 Gallery, London, UK; Nam Jun Paik Art Center, South Korea; Three Shadows Photography Art Center, Beijing, China; the International Center of Contemporary Art, Bucharest, Romania; the Wonder Institute, Santa Fe; Scope New York and Scope Basel, and the University of Capetown, South Africa. Campbell's currently represented by Coagula Curatorial in Los Angeles, CA.