

The Kitchen Center for Video and Music

PETER CAMPUS, The Kitchen; LEE KRASNER, Pace Gallery; CARLOTTA CORPRON, Marcuse Pfeifer Gallery:

PETER CAMPUS's show at The Kitchen consists of four color videotapes, *Four Sided Tape*, *East Ended Tape*, *Third Tape* and *Six Fragments*, and two closed-circuit low-light video installations, *Lus* and *Num*.

For the past 15 years Campus has been involved with film, television and video communication. And in 1960 he received a Bachelor of Science degree in experimental psychology (he studied perception). Going backward, then, we trace his major interests: the mind's workings; the perceptual mechanisms instigated in the mind by light; narration (television) created out of and for the mind, accompanying and integral with the symbolism of visual forms; the effects educed from the mind's reception of verbal and visual content: the tools being light, sound, form, story; the effects being emotional, psychologically introspective and, to a lesser degree, formally esthetic.

In 1970 Campus made his first videotape. The medium is conducive to a greater simultaneity than film and allows, through closed circuit video, the spectator's instantaneous creation of his or her own image. Thus the viewer's mind acts upon itself, and the psychological impact of video becomes the impact of self-reflection.

Campus succeeds in his ambition. In the two installations, *Lus* and *Num*, viewers confront themselves. In *Lus*, constricted by the lens's focal diameter, one stands in the confines not only of the optical possibility to reproduce one's own image, but within the boundaries of the ego's stamina. For standing there in the infra-red light, the camera reports the image of one's face grossly magnified within a vertical rectangular format nearly four feet tall. The face is harshly lit, playing in and out of shadow, emphasizing the most prominent angularity of physiognomy, ranging in tone from light gray to black. Yet most striking is the image's inversion: the face is upside down. Should the face move closer than the fixed focal length permits, all becomes a subtlety of abstract shape in flux—the face, the strongest representation of the self, the ego, is dissolved.

In *Num*, the confrontation with the self

is altered by low-angle lighting of the type used in horror films. The face becomes segmented into an area of largely inarticulated blackness and one of blanched grayness. But in the inversion of the image, the greater detail of hair, eyebrows, eyes and nose take on the effect of a textureless mask, and the image's upper half presents a mass of homogeneous skin, hardly arrested at any point by the slight protuberance of lips, the cleavage of chin, the bland tubularity of neck.

The notion of the depersonalized self is portrayed with tantamount poignancy in the four videotapes. There is a lushness of color and a greater definition through sharp focus in this episodic series of images. In *Lus* and *Num*, the spectator is forced to demonstrate a psychological despondency: The imposed limitation of focus, the depthless frontality of the wall upon which the face is projected, imply the unalterable frailty of humanity: the mind encompassed by the perishable body. In the videotapes, the story of our weakness is narrated.

Each of the videotapes exhibits what might be called short "skits" in which the human body is distorted, decomposed; obliterated. In *Four Sided Tape*, one watches a headless body being torn apart by a hand from behind. Due to the sound of ripping paper, the immediate impression is that of a poster being destroyed. But in the process of destruction the body's hands begin to move slightly. Though we quickly realize that it is a video projection on a screen, the effect is macabre. In *East Ended Tape*, Campus solemnly wraps his head with a roll of Saran Wrap, effacing his image in the harsh, dramatic sound of unraveling plastic and staggered breathing. In *Six Fragments*, a simplistic spoken narrative relates the conquest of a city by means of germ warfare. The narrator has been chosen to carry the disease.

Campus concerns himself with esthetic formalism in the frontal, figurative character demanded in the execution of *Lus* and *Num*. Yet there is little doubt that his broader interest is in communication as "the greater work." He utilizes its several sensory and intellectual aspects. In the evocation of the narrative mode, Campus pays homage to the whole history of humankind: its savagery, its curiosity of self, its frailty, its desire to transmit the memory of itself in

generation. The advance of science has not altered this impulse. Campus has said: "I fabricate instruments to reveal relationships." By combining

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Steven Madoff