

# RED FORCE FIELDS

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Woody Vasulka  
Jim Campbell  
Leo Villareal  
Ben Weiner

David Richard Contemporary

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# RED Force Fields

David Eichholtz

**RED (Force Fields)** features five artists who address an essence of light and space in a perceptual way responding to very contemporary situations. While the technology is quite new and utilizes the most up-to-date communication devices, the end result of each work in this exhibition is a translation in a viewer's own perceptual field. This should not seem too surprising as this is reminiscent of artists in the 1960s and 70s who explored the most modern extensions of light and physical space where investigating industrial, synthetic materials and commercial media tropes entered into the studio or public as factory. Thus, artists challenged not only the definition of art materials, but the location of art production and the role of the artist extending beyond the gallery into the social. Similarly, today's artists explore the potential with the latest technologies—electronic, digital and fiber optic—in settings that more resemble an MIT electronics lab or a public urban environment. Like earlier light and space artists, participation of the viewer also becomes a defining component of the artwork, often required to activate or complete a process in the work. Each of the artists discuss their work in terms of affecting a *field*—and investigate the viewer's participation as an agent, extending the work beyond the boundaries of the image.

**David Richard Contemporary** has been interested in re-telling iterative histories surrounding time-based media and painting that let a viewer effectively come to a new work, and consider its historical context as full of new concepts, interactive and strangely unfamiliar. This exhibition is a quick trajectory in the mediated image that suggests a strong future direction for ideas about painting.

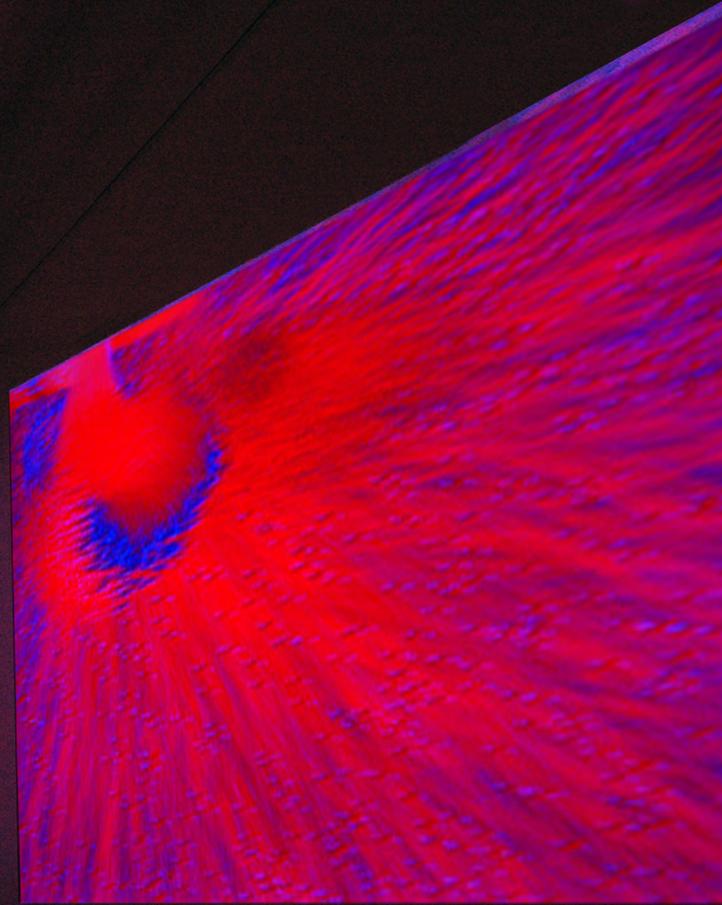
**Marcia Lyons' RED Force Fields (2011)** is a two part interactive installation activated by live data and viewer movement. Bubbling up as large pulsating red blots, the projection field is triggered by remote earthly events and bodies in motion that might alter the work—without knowing it—through the use of cameras and sensors. Exploring a dual networked affect—'interacting force fields'—streaming seismic sites are wirelessly translated into massive 'magmatic' color field projections on adjacent walls of the gallery space. The artwork is activated by live events (feeding in by the hour, day, week) as the viewer moves, the piece is moved, while both the work and viewer un-earth an empathic with a pulse. This anthropomorphic nature is enhanced by an audible hearthrobbing surge synched to the live data and bleeding red trails as viewers 'bump' into 'sore spots'. *RED Force Fields* ultimately allows the visitor to comprehend the environment in a more ephemeral and sensual manner, breaking free of the limitations of 'logic' and 'reality'. Marcia Lyons elaborates, "I'm interested in how these limits disappear and how the performance body takes over."



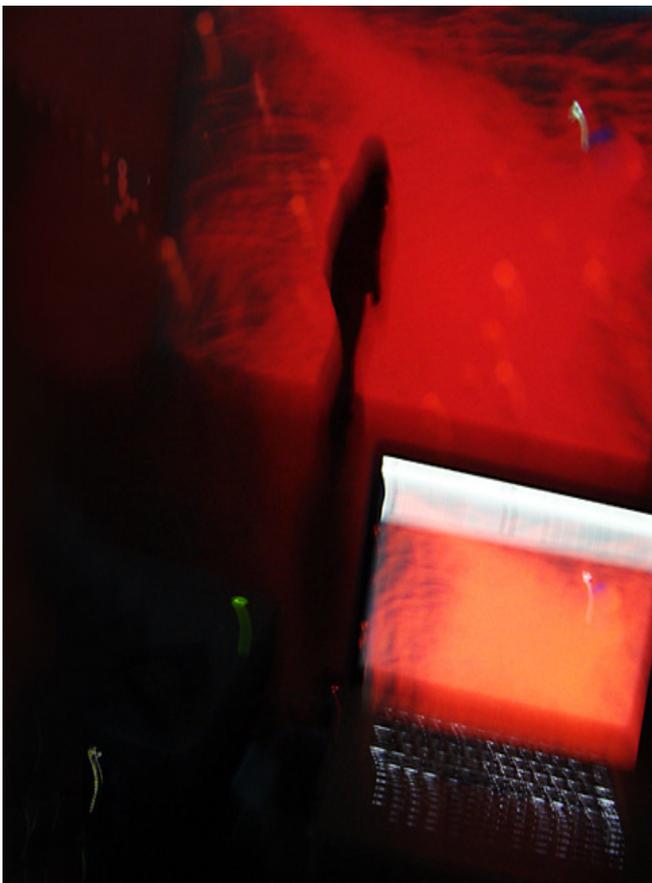
Marcia Lyons, *RED Force Fields, No. 1*, 2011, installation view, live feed Interactive data installation, seismic activity, sound

## ON STREAM BETWEEN AIR AND GROUND

Marcia Lyons



Marcia Lyons, *RED Force Fields, No.1- No.2*, interactive live data, sound, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2011



*All that radio is-  
Is making available to your ears-  
What was already in the air –*

*And available to your ears but you couldn't hear it.  
In other words, making audible something that you are  
already in –*

*You are bathed in radio waves, TV broadcasts, probably  
telepathic messages –  
From other minds deep in thought. (Cage, 1963)*

*... the "world" is thought as "fire", which means as pure  
emergence as "light" which from the outset intimately pen-  
etrates, like lightning or flame, every being without encom-  
passing it... (Haar, 1996)*

Marcia Lyons, Studio Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2011

On the occasion of this exhibition, 145,000 square acres of the earth is burning near Los Alamos, New Mexico, dangerously close to the secret nuclear lab that contains the bulk of plutonium (300,000 barrels) for the U.S. military (Washington Blog, 2011). Media coverage doesn't convey the local experience on the ground—the sensation of heat, loss of control, fear of a nuclear 'event' and the incessant smoke and light that is altering the air and water for all the surrounding cities. Imperceptible shifts in the earth compared with an extreme earthly event create a tendency in us to tune out the subtle and subliminal live frequencies penetrating all around us.

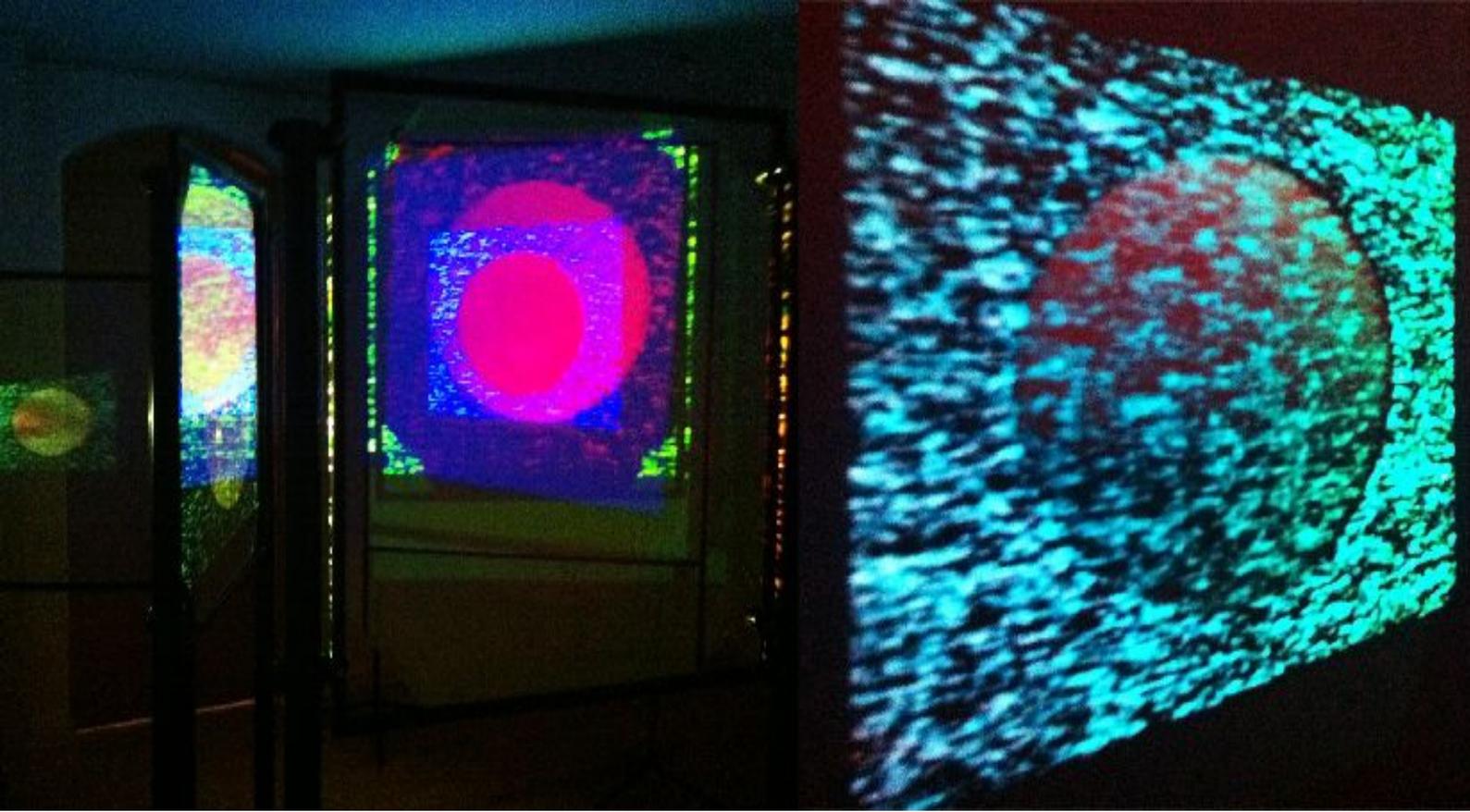
Live networks, like geometry, describe an area that doesn't exist in real space, but only in an idea of perfect (virtual) space. Just as rapidly moving molecules describe an invisible electric field that is real and yet, is the smallest representation of a chemical reaction. Like an odor that is unknowingly inhaled and becomes part of your own system involuntarily; live networking is infectious and viral, yet it is invisible and often imperceptible until you are affected. The second nature of interactive media is fictive, able to create mixed realities, the viewing of which poses complex questions about how we think, how we feel and behave. When the event dimension migrates to another energetic zone through a transmission of effects its 'nature' changes, such as live data of seismic activity and earthquakes into a telepathic message in sound and light.

This intuitive direction between the system, the live site and the moving viewer, echoes back to influences of Robert Smithson's intuitive account of locating a site/non-site; how [Smithson] arrives at a source in-the-field of particular earth work. Walking through an expanded field, unconsciously select[ing] the site, just by how the energy hits [his] psyche, he recounts, 'when I'm scanning it; a low-level scanning, is almost unconscious' (Smithson, 1979).

An exhibition 'space' is a framing mechanism but ultimately each space is similar, and less relevant than the 'movement-event' that occurs. The space is the literal field and the viewer the 'transceiver' where each modulation becomes a kind of force within a more subtle field dimension. In furnishing the imagery of a 'site', '[tele]-videography does not itself require any 'space' except for its supporting camera and projector, themselves integrated - or dissolved, as it were - into other equipment having nothing to do with 'artistic' telematic or cinematic representation. Just as one is not bothered by the dials and lights on a car dashboard or by the lighting in a shop window, so one is not really troubled by the 'broadcasting' or 'diffusion' area of a video projection. That area is solely what is lit up, and not the 'theatre' or site of a cinema performance screened at some distant location.

As viewer's approach the entryway at David Richard Contemporary in Santa Fe, New Mexico, *the RED* appears like fire on 'stand-by'. Analogous to drifting from station to station, *RED Force Fields, No. 1-No. 2 (2011)*, as an interactive field, acts as a liminal threshold. The elements vary in strength, tone and pitch. The system's conditions are re-conditioned as the viewer's move through the space and new seismic events stream in. Intermingling site specific events (local and remote) a momentary inbetween from a source 'out there' into a mutating live-cast (embodied) 'in here'...create a viewer interval...a transition.

The third field of *RED Force Fields, locasts* (MEL, MIT, 2009) to passers-by via cell phones. Locasting as you pass-by "does not designate a perception by means of bodily eyes," (Haar, 1993) instead it extends the interactive 'event' and 'field' range outside the gallery limits to the street. The absence of control of an audiovisual experience, in that it can be internalized and externalized, and 'bleed' over between subject to object and object to subject (Massumi, 2002), interpenetrating bodily limits, hinting back to sound and the events of Fluxus – and 'sounds immediacy to impinge on a listener's perceptual field' (LaBelle, 2006), making what is invisible seen.



Woody Vasulka, *Noisefields*, 1974, 2011, installation view, de-interlacting electronic signals, video noise, dichroic glass mirrors, screens

**Woody Vasulka's** *Noise Fields*, (1974, 2011) is a re-created analog to digital installation in the gallery's project space. Like flickering visual codes, Vasulka's very formal process deconstructs beams of de-interlacing electronic signals that are transmitted and reflected through a series of framed dichroic glass mirrors positioned in the space to capture these fleeting pulses onto screens and the gallery walls. *Noise Fields*, 2011 causes an interior perceptual and physical reaction in the viewer reminiscent of psychedelic light effects in the '70s. A 'stroboscopic' pulsation trespasses the viewer's senses, leaving a series of charged mind expanding 'after-image' aesthetic disruptions. The viewer's internal 'digestion' of digital data transports the installation event beyond the eyes into an echo of vibrations in the body.



In an interview with the artist in his studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the discussion segued to wireless signals that are penetrating our spaces. Some people feel the toning of these contemporary interferences as a subtle audible hum, others as an encroaching or pervasive physical reaction.

Vasulka explains: "In video we have this gift, an ideological supremacy over film—60 interlacing frames/sec... we were able to change the pulse so to speak in a very rich way so that perceptually there was a third color created inside a pattern. The latest iteration of the work... through the computer again modifies and migrates the evolution of the process, the phenomena is encoded... the digital version... the figure/ground shows you NO/OFF image then shows you YES/ON image... with an apparent motion shift... an hypnotic affect..."

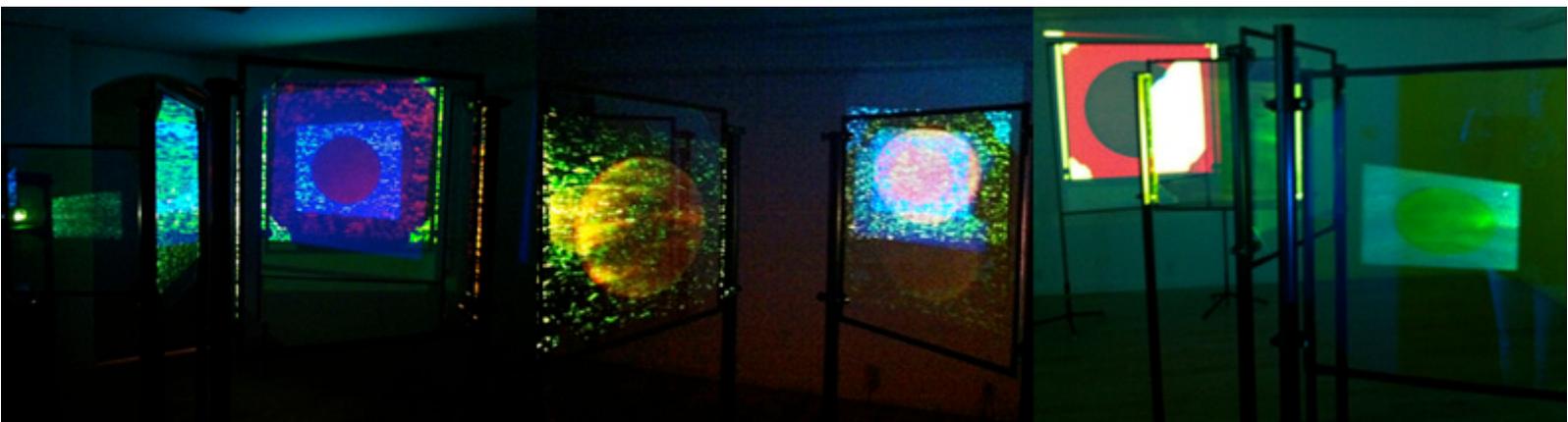
Woody Vasulka, Studio Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2011

## Woody Vasulka's *NOISEFIELDS*: A User's Guide

On first encountering Woody Vasulka's *NOISEFIELDS* the recommended modus operandi for fully absorbing this video installation is a fleeting catch and release strategy. Dip into the electronic sensation; then, step out. Repeat, until your curiosity is satisfied. Play with the line between being oriented and disoriented, artfully avoiding vertigo or nausea. During immersion - if you happen to be standing - make sure you are firmly grounded if and there is a wall or something supportive at hand. Or, take a seat. Simply put, the experience is an electronically induced synaesthesia that crosses visual sensation with auditory sensation. It can make you dizzy. With this assertive video installation Vasulka elegantly, efficiently and emphatically amplifies the simultaneous process of seeing through your ears and hearing through your eyes, hence the name.

As with all human interactions, multiple exposures to *NOISEFIELDS*' pulsing fields of color and brash, fuzzy sounds will build your discernment and may even open your body of perception to a relatively unexplored visual world of aesthetic beauty. But, be forewarned, you have been brain-washed your whole life by a paradigm that entrains and quite literally frames and delineates your perceptions into a narrow band of predictable, even tyrannical ways of seeing the world. Since one-point focal perception was "invented" in the renaissance it has dominated the way we see - as if through a lens with a frame around it. Of course, from time immemorial hunters and craftsman naturally close one eye to focus their gaze, but for Western civilized cultures focused perspective became the norm. Absurdly, our minds and bodies accept these limitations in perceiving time and space, which narrative cinema and television continue and reinforce.

*NOISEFIELDS* is not only a different order of experience from the entire historical canon of western art, it is a different order of experience from life as our systems have become accustomed to see and hear it. Modernist painters defected from the rank and file developing color fields, grids, and abstractions on their canvasses. As pioneers in the field of video art Woody Vasulka and his wife Steina began a life-long love affair with phenomena specific to the electronic matrix in creating art. From their first forays into video they entered an art-making arena that they perceived as having no precedents. They are structuralists, formalists, and philosophers at play in the field of manipulating electronic signals. Through their methodical investigations into the components of electronic media they stripped away, exposed and constructed sensate experiences from fundamental, invisible properties inherent to the media. In making "sense" of their explorations, they have built the syntax of a new aesthetic language - both in process and vocabulary - that is multi-dimensional, unframed, omni-directional and interconnected.



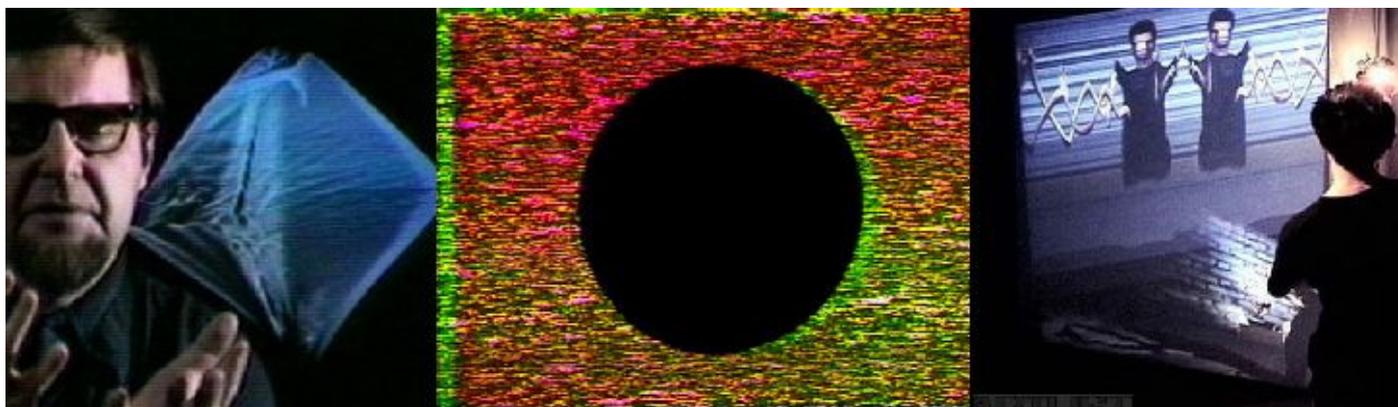
Woody Vasulka, *Noisefields*, 1974, 2011, installation view, video sequence

To really see an electronic field and to be enveloped by an immersive installation it is necessary to stop your eyes from grabbing and focusing. Simply soften your gaze and peripheralize your vision so that your eyes have the potential to touch and be touched from a 180-degree kinesphere. This installation at David Richard Contemporary is the third digital iteration of Vasulka's 1974 *NOISEFIELDS*, an analog display of detecting electronic video signals.

Since there is no difference to the machine between audio or visual electronic signals, a Video Sequencer was used to switch between two video sources. The simple circular form and a Colorizer were used for variation and to make visible the division of interrelated pulsations. This audio-visual modulation was the original "content," i.e., - making things previously unseen and unheard - "video noise" visible.

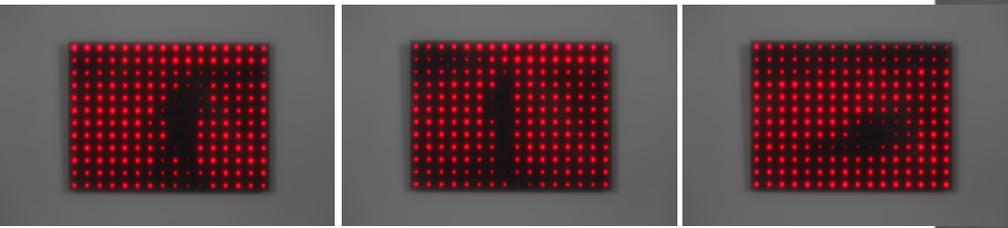
In his shift to making a digital version of *NOISEFIELDS* Vasulka uses the original recorded stream of simple analog pulsations - switching between the inner circular field and the outer field - and builds an installation that amplifies and emphasizes the fluidity of electronic noise and fields. He introduces more visual options that are fundamental to the medium of video. In contrast to film, the screen is not just a display surface but can be the place of creation, a place where making and displaying converge. In this case, Vasulka splits beams projected from the original recording with mirrors that use different refractive coatings. Vasulka's video, then, offers formerly unexplored fluidity and transformations, *NOISEFIELDS* you have never seen/heard or heard/seen, depending on the hierarchy of your senses.

MaLin Wilson-Powell  
Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2011

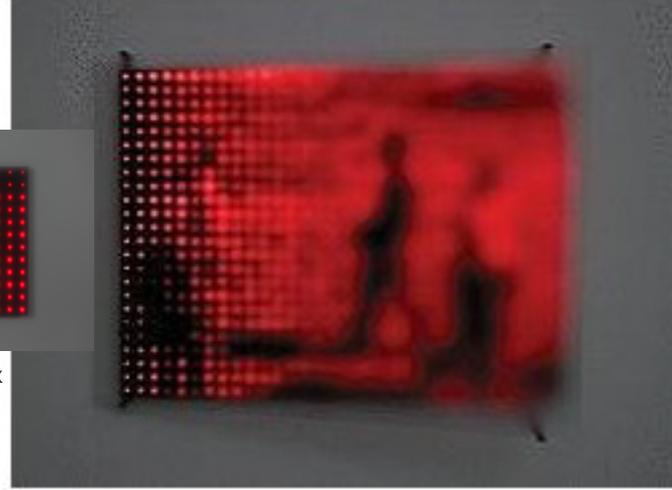


Wood and Steina Vasulka, *Noisefields* (still), 1974

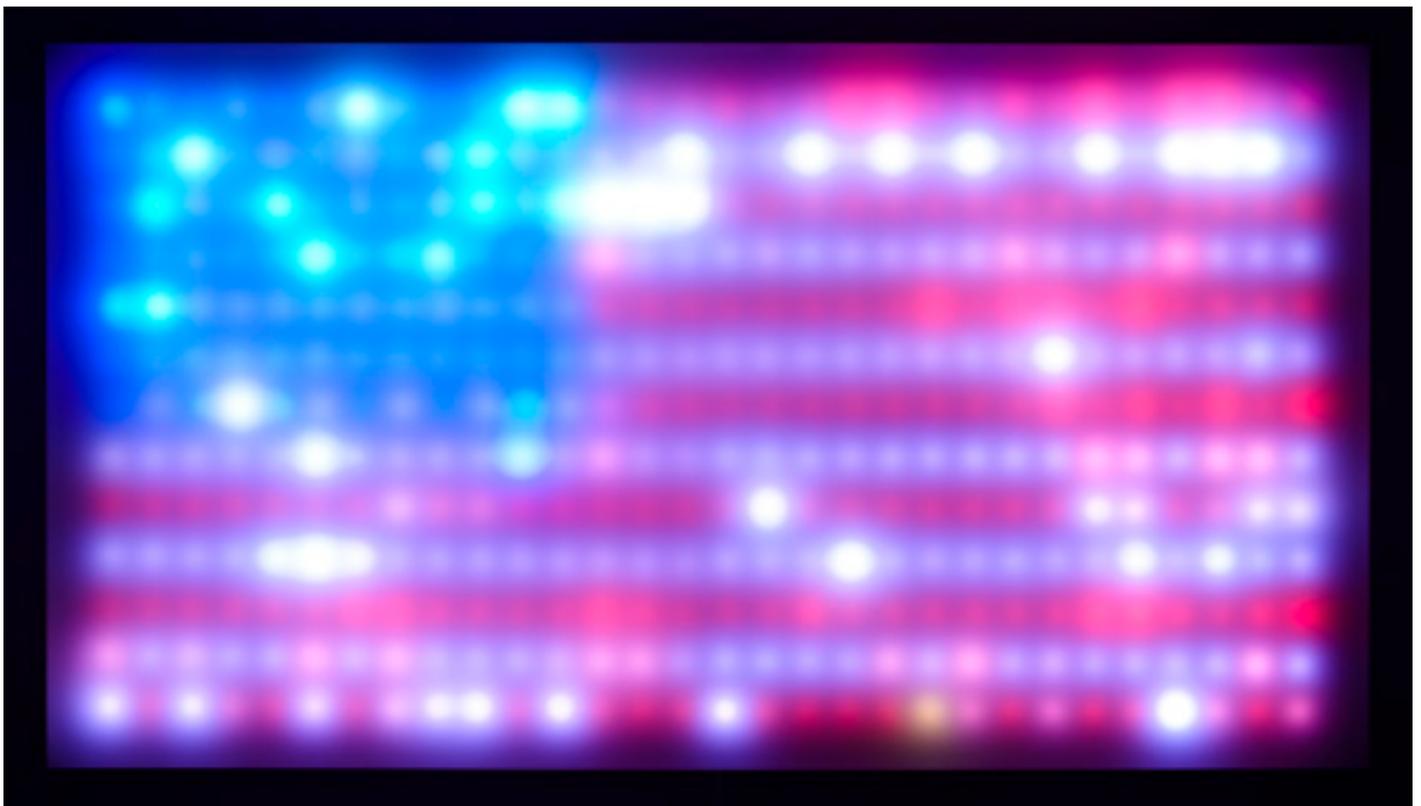
Born in Brno, Czech Republic, Woody Vasulka studied film in Prague. He made several documentaries before relocating to the United States in 1965 with his wife Steina. He then worked as editor on a number of film projects, and experimented with electronic sound and strobe light. In 1969, dissatisfied with film, he started using video. With Steina, he worked to explore the nature of electronic image and sound, and directed several documentaries on the New York City avant-garde, and more specifically the theatre, dance and music produced at that time. In 1974, the Vasulkas moved to Buffalo where they taught at the Center for Media Studies at the State University of New York (SUNY). Working independently during that period, Woody became interested in the way the Rutt/Etra Scan Processor could modulate a video signal; in 1976, he and Jeffrey Schier created the Digital Image Articulator. In 1980, he left his teaching post and continued research into what he called "a new epistemological space." (Perron, 2000)



Jim Campbell, *Ambiguous Icon #1 (Running Falling)*, 2000, led panel, video loop, perspex

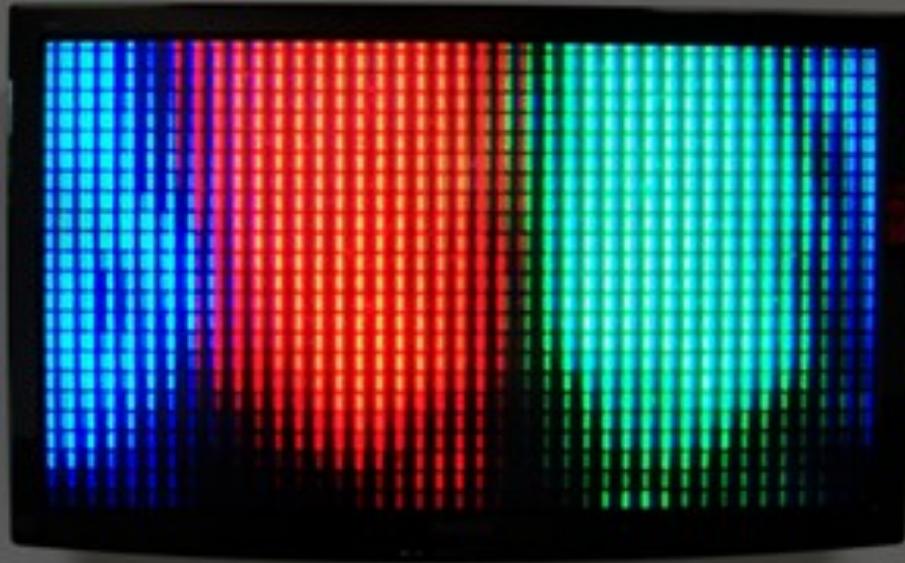


The LED work by **Jim Campbell**, *Ambiguous Icon #1 (Running Falling)*, 2000, is the seminal work of the series that became the cornerstone of his ongoing investigation into light as material. Campbell explores the boundary of vision by working consistently with viewpoint and low resolution. Treated perspex is set at a 6 foot distance from the display of red LED lamps, continuously looping a visual blur of a man running and falling. The piece is more evocative than descriptive with little meaning provided for by the artist. There is a futile sensation, almost a surveillance quality in the conceptual nature of his work. Campbell is exploring the relationship of viewers with mediated space on the one hand and on the other, a looping subjective rhythm.



Leo Villareal, *Flag*, 2011, programmed led panel, perspex

*Flag*, 2011, by **Leo Villareal**, an enclosed LED wall-mounted work cycles through randomly dissolving mediaverse of imagery based on the American flag, transitioning into an infinitely enigmatic, complex array of monochromes and activated abstract pattern recognition. Brightly flashing and evocative of fire works, Times Square and all things that glitter, fleeting vapors, political tensions and social cues—which ones depend upon how the viewer wants to decode it. And, like Jasper Johns' *American Flag (1954-5)* becomes a fraught ambiguous thing, at once object and history, public icon and secret message. It captures in its ghostly depths intricate mysteries every simple facade conceals.

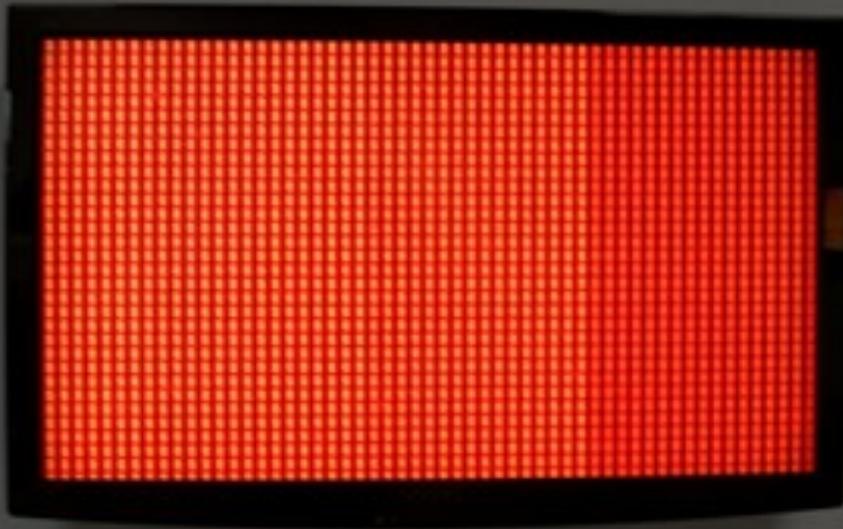


Ben Weiner, *C18H21NO*, 2010, video on loop (still), displayed on 26.5 x 40.5 x 4.5 inch screen

The video works of **Ben Weiner** evoke slow moving transitions as he addresses conceptual issues using photographic and digital techniques delivered in a painterly format framed by wall-mounted flat screens. His video, *C18H21NO*, is a montage of hundreds of photographic stills shot from the artist's computer screen taken at close range to achieve hyper-pixelated views of videos of natural processes—a forest fire, in this case. Through the high resolution macro photos of his computer screen, he relates the illusionism of the computer to classical geometric painting, focusing on the technique of chiaroscuro and strong contrast of lights and darks produced by the fire flames. Conceptually, he comments as to how a man-made medium breaks down the internal nature of its visual elements, just as paint signifies an image structure on canvas.

### **Seeing RED, Are we really seeing what we're seeing?**

Following the exhibition, *RED (Force Fields)*, the fires in New Mexico are still burning. The danger zones expanding and contracting as the wind is shifting. Attracting a different audience to the gallery, the event may have been a catalyst—lit a fire—for a more intuitive social awareness to media on air and experience on the ground. Each of the five artists investigate their work as an extended or an activated *field*. And from a different angle, open up different permutations, a *force*, as potential or metaphor for the movement of a work questions; is the subject located in the work that forms the content or in the viewer's body as a sub-system moving in the space around the work. Each concept starts to deviate under light—(LED bulbs, projection light, deconstructed light, half-light, highlights, cinematic auras), the work's illuminations—accessible as a kind of route into watching a painterly manner.



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