

Annual Americans for the Arts Conference

June 2002



“Building Memory” by Jim Campbell.

The city of Tempe’s public art project, *Building Memory* by Jim Campbell is located at the Westside Multi-Generational Center and was showcased at the 2002 Americans for the Arts Conference in Nashville, Tenn. New York writer Nancy Princenthal selected the artwork for inclusion in Year in Review 2002, a session that highlighted innovative and exciting public art projects.

Building Memory is an interactive public art project that links together the Westside Multi-Generational Center lobby, gymnasium, senior activity space and game room and creates a live video collage with images specific to the building and its grounds. Background imagery originally incorporated a series of still photographs made by project assistant Anna Vida during the construction of the building. New background imagery of the completed building and grounds is created by young people who attend the center.

Real-time moving images received from 10 cameras placed inside and outside the facility by Campbell and project assistant Matthew Biederman are superimposed over the background images of rebar, pipes and concrete.

“It’s about the past, present and future of the building and people’s relationship to it,” Campbell said. “...and a way to merge the architectural elements of the building with the people who use it.”

To achieve this, images are created, stored in a computer and output using custom electronics designed by the artist. As the title of the artwork suggests, memory is built by the images that make up the project. The images also become the memory of the building. By adding future background photographs made by the young people who attend the center, the piece reflects the artist’s intent to evolve over time.

Campbell was born in Chicago in 1956 and lives in San Francisco. He received two Bachelor of Science degrees (Mathematics and Engineering) from MIT in 1978. His work has been shown internationally and throughout North America in institutions such as the Whitney Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Carpenter Center, Harvard University, The International Center for Photography in New York and the Intercommunication Center in Tokyo. In 1992, he created one of the first permanent public interactive video artworks in the United States at what was formerly America West Arena in Phoenix. He received a Rockefeller Grant in Multimedia, a Langlois Foundation Grant and a Eureka Fellowship Award. As an engineer, he holds more than a dozen patents in the field of video image processing.