

A man in a light-colored suit and tie is walking up a wooden staircase. The background consists of dense green foliage and trees. The word "jonesing" is printed in a yellow, typewriter-style font across the middle of the image.

jonesing





jonesing

Sean Albert
Francisco Amaya
Megan Bisbee
Shu-Mei Chan
Nathaniel Freeman
Bryan Hopkins
Brian Milbrand
John Opera

February 4–March 4, 2005

Jonesing

In an article in early 2003, William Safire fished around for etymological reasons behind the resurgence of the word "jonesing," which he had begun stumbling upon in various places in the popular press:

The root is a proper noun: for a reason I cannot fathom, Jones—a family name held in my estimation by nearly 18 million Americans—was applied in the early 1960's to heroin addiction. J.E. Lighter's *Historical Dictionary of American Slang* speculates about another possible origin: the male sex organ. In the 1970's, the noun—no longer capitalized—most often referred to withdrawal symptoms, and made the transition to verb: jonesing out. In 1984, I noted that jonesin' was extended to mean "doin' nothin'," as addicts often do, but it was not until this millennium that the participle made the leap into popular speech as a generalized "craving."¹

Safire was exploring the jagged path of slang solidly entering the common lexicon—to the point where a website called Galker Stalker had disparagingly referred to a fashion editor "zeta-jonesing on a McVeggie at the gaudy, fou-fou McDonald's on 42nd btw 8th & b'way." Zeta-jonesing because, apparently, the actress had put on a few pounds, so a subtle celebrity dig is collapsed with the word's more current, and benign, usage. The word's original reference to a junkie's feverish and fixated desire has been mainstreamed, though the intensity of that original definition remains in the background, giving the impression that the McVeggie in question was, in fact, scarfed.

It is the more recent, "generalized craving" around which the works in *Jonesing* orbit. A thematic adhesive, "jonesing" is easy to locate and read in the works of these eight artists, which gives a clue to how commonplace the concept is in contemporary art. It should be no surprise that such a notion is fairly ubiquitous in the works of various artists, though it is intriguing how many versions of jonesing can be identified. Filtered through eight distinct artistic practices, jonesing appears here as jittery, ambiguous, sad, elegant, humorous, even sentimental.

There is nothing jittery about the minimalist sculptures of Sean Albert which all share the single title *Light Versus Space*. Albert's sculptures are lean, concise works of wood and paint, shelf-like slabs no thicker than two inches, three of which jut out from the wall—horizontally and vertically—and one of which reclines upon the floor. In each, the facing edge slides into the work,

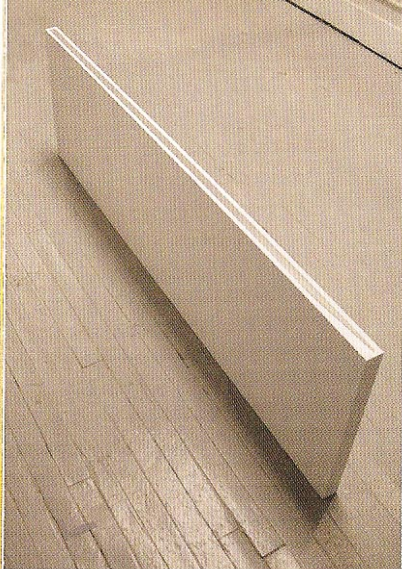
cover image: NATHANIEL FREEMAN, *The Tourist*, 2004, video still

inside cover: JOHN OPERA, *Valley*, 2004, video still

previous page: BRYAN HOPKINS *works in progress* (det.), 2004–2005, Grolleg porcelain, to 32" tall



SHU-MEI CHAN *Cut Box*, 2004, ceramic,
36 x 24 x 24 inches

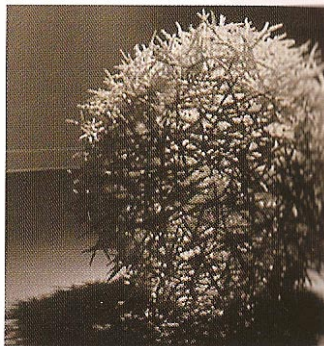


descending into the darkness of its own interior. Their whiteness describes a desire to disappear against the wall, which is additionally emphasized by the sloping of the one edge, as though they hope to fold in on themselves and vanish entirely. The fact that Albert's sculptures are physical objects that can never vanish only serves to fuel the urgency of their jonesing, pining for a dissolution that can never be realized.

Unlike Albert's work, the sculptures of Shu-Mei Chan are jonesing for form, for resolution, for an appropriate resting point, the spot at which uncertain elements can settle themselves into a recognizable thing. They are also metaphors about the slippage and form of identity—in Chan's case, Asian-American, but applicable to any hybridization of distinct elements into a new self. No two of Chan's sculptures are alike, as each is the culmination of

hundreds of physical pieces clumped into forms that can only be vaguely foretold. Hundreds hand-rolled porcelain "twigs"—combined in modular units no longer than twelve inches—are at the heart of each sculpture. Chan continually flirts with the appearance of instability—the works are not glued or adhered—such that every distinct piece literally becomes a "critical mass" defined not merely by its external shape but equally by the interior world created.

Bryan Hopkins' work is all contained within the field of functional porcelain. Vases, teapots, pouring vessels, mugs—they are never pretending to be anything other than what they are and yet they emanate a host of non-functional qualities. Hopkins avoids superfluous ornament, relying on an intuitive expression of the form. It is



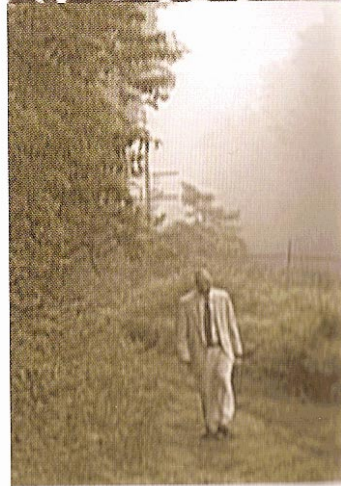
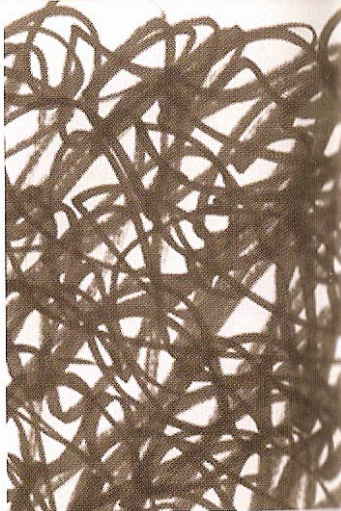
SEAN ALBERT, *Light Versus Space*, 2004
wood, paint, 16 x 18 x 1.5 inches • SHU-MEI CHAN
Ball, 2004, Ceramic, (30 inch diameter, 24 inch
diameter) • MEGAN BISBEE *Untitled (body study #1)*,
(det), 2003, mixed media on paper



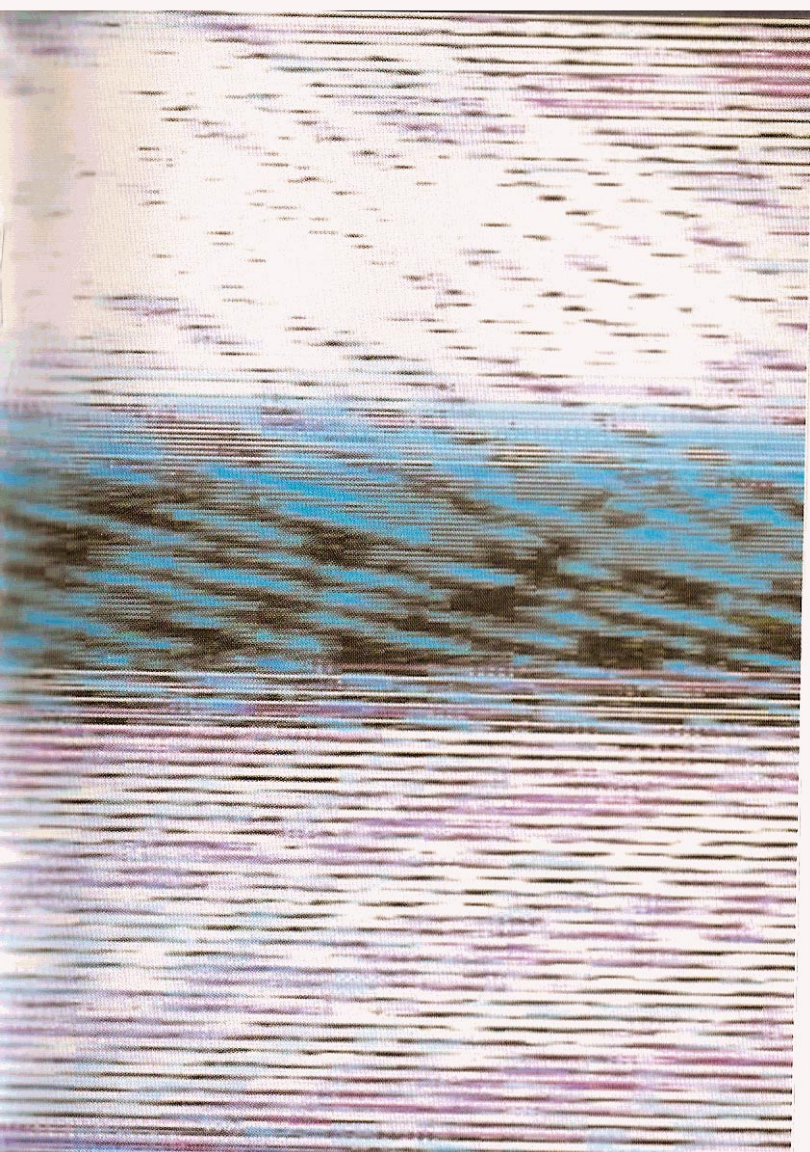
interesting that in forms reduced to the simplest versions of themselves, Hopkins' ornamental touches are also typically reductive—holes, apertures, punctures, perforations, and intentional cracks are the more commonly-trafficked textures in the work, as though these objects somehow need fissures through which to breathe. The newer vessels appearing in *Jonesing* extend all these qualities through their tall, figurative stances. Solid and certain, there remains a tenuous quality in their forms, as though they were adopting a languid posture and exhaling a palpable sigh.

Megan Bisbee's paintings convey themselves as simultaneously concrete and intangible. Mingling a rigorous drawn (or even doodled) quality with the expressive broadstrokes of painting, Bisbee has made intentional works that often appear incidental, as though the artist has only partially suggested a path of articulation and the painting has proceeded to complete itself. It is a generous gesture exemplifying full faith in the medium at hand. And it brings the work into a position that wholeheartedly ignores any so-called "problems" or issues with the genre, choosing instead to define a space of optimism and possibility. In this way, Bisbee accepts, relishes, and emphasizes the visual promiscuous pleasure percolating throughout her work.

Parallel to his painting practice, Francisco Amaya explores the revelation and obfuscation of meaning through "translated photographs." Found photographic images are revamped into large-scale grid works



FRANCISCO AMAYA, *Pentagon Papers* (det), 2004, marker on paper, 8 x 22 feet
NATHANIEL FREEMAN, *The Tourist*, 2004, video
BRIAN MALORAND, *Feedback Oscillations*, 2004/2005, video installation





SEAN ALBERT, *Light Versus Space*, 2004
wood, paint, 2 x 15 x 24 inches



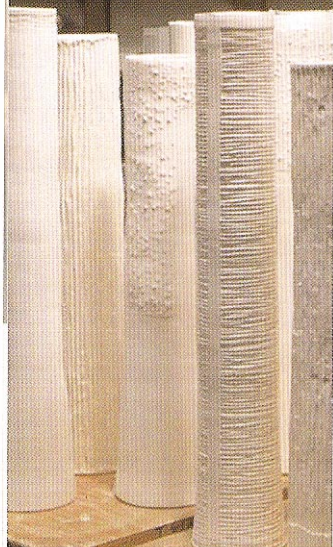
that both retain the original image and abstract it, breaking it down to forms and patterns. As with the aerial image of the Pentagon, Amaya selects images whose narrative content or (in the case of the Pentagon) subject matter is inherently ambiguous, which is then accentuated by his methodology. The resulting work evokes a jonesing for

clarification, even if clarification cannot be achieved. Amaya is willfully wading in the ambiguity of his images, collapsing issues of consumerism, politics, and media into a somewhat recognizable—yet probably unknowable—entity.

John Opera's short video *Valley* toys unabashedly with sentiment as an active mechanism within jonesing. As the artist's voice plaintively (very plaintively) sings an acapella version of "Down in the Valley," we watch a silhouetted face serve as a darkened landscape against a blue sky. A bird flits by. Clouds tumble in from the left of the frame. After a while, the face/landscape shifts ever so slightly, the gentle seismic movement of a deeper emotion. We have no indication of the object of jonesing in Opera's piece, but there is no question that a deep longing is unfolding. A visually eloquent mélange of simple optical layering, Opera's vocal soundtrack—its potential hokiness undercut by the forward/backward tug of sound—pushes the quiet serenity of his imagery into a realm where the unbearable sadness of being is unmistakable. Treading along the edge of sentimentality, *Valley* avoids the terrain of schmalz through a tenuous, edgy combination of image of sound.

In Nathaniel Freeman's ambling narrative video *The Tourist*, the artist plays the title character, your standard Everyman in warm pursuit of an unspecified something. He seems to be seeking shelter, which he never finds and never adequately constructs. If he is seeking companionship, he never finds it. If he is seeking purpose and meaning, that pursuit remains unresolved by the end of the piece. Freeman's *Tourist* is a wayward pilgrim jonesing for something and we are witnesses to his lack of progress. He moves, he passes through locations, but Freeman's clever use of time-lapse photography articulates the restless soul within. Freeman's *Tourist* is never quite in sync with the world (either moving faster or slower than his environment) and we are left with the sensation that he is traipsing through some ambiguous netherworld.

Brian Milbrand's *Feedback Oscillations* appear to be the most rabid works in the exhibition, the most frenetic, the most chaotic. In truth, the chaos is intentionally generated and at least partially controllable and what look at



times to be spontaneous visual ruptures will just as quickly slide into lean, elegant abstractions. Milbrand is merging the organic shapes of video feedback with the striped patterns created using voltage oscillations. The simpler, linear shapes of the oscillations are complicated by the non-linear feedback, the combination further textured by audio created by cycling the visuals through a series of cameras and a sequencer. In some cases, the audio reverses the process and is itself converted into a visual oscillation. Not unlike the paintings of Megan Bisbee, Milbrand's "paintings" seek an expression between the formless and the concrete. It is not an either/or proposition. Milbrand's work pursues that space—call it the point break—between order and chaos.

Ambiguity lies at the heart of all jonesing. No matter if the jonesing is pointed toward a particular object, person, drug, or idea, the generalized craving remains ineffable and often inarticulate. It is what it is, a feverish impulse, a desire that's undeniable, a hunger that must be fed—none of which implies a resolvable condition. Feed the jonesing and, soon enough, there's more jonesing. There may be no verifiable end, just the unrelenting tremble of desire.

Mad jonesing in the service of art.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

1. William Safire, *On Language: Jonesing*, The New York Times Magazine, May 11, 2003

BRYAN HOPKINS, *works in progress (det.)*, 2004–2005,
Grolleg porcelain, to 32' tall
MEGAN BISBEE, *Untitled (Body study #3) (det)*, 2003,
mixed media on paper



Sean Albert received his BFA from Massachusetts College of Art in 1994 and is a current MFA candidate (2005) at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. His most recent solo exhibition "pattern(s) (un)randomized", was mounted in August of 2004 at the William Traver Gallery in Seattle, WA. He was recently awarded a six-week residency at North Lands Creative Glass in Scotland. Sean's work is included in various collections throughout the United States and Europe, including the Michael and Anne Kay collection and the Microsoft Art Collection in Bellevue, WA. www.travergallery.com and seanalbert2001@hotmail.com

Francisco Amaya was born in Wheeling, West Virginia on July 30, 1972. His father came to the U.S. from Chile in 1969. His mother is from Georgia, having met his father while serving in the Peace Corps in Chile. Francisco traveled a lot when he was young, visiting mysterious places such as Easter Island, Machu Picchu, the Nazca Lines, and Berlin when it was still divided. He studied art and architecture at the University of Michigan, printmaking at West Virginia University, and painting at the University at Buffalo. He currently lives and works in Buffalo: making art, playing music, and teaching art classes at Villa Maria College. frnamaya@hotmail.com

Megan Bisbee will be receiving her Bachelor of Fine Art from the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University in May 2005 where she studied under Kevin Wotod and Mary Lum. Recently Megan's work was accepted for publishing in the upcoming northeastern edition of "New American Paintings".

Born in Hong Kong in 1973 to deserters of the Cultural Revolution, **Shu-Mei Chan** grew up in Jersey. After graduating from Wesleyan University in 1996, she moved to Brooklyn, NY and took her first ceramics class with Yeti Metrani at the Educational Alliance Art School. In 2001, she set up a studio in Helena, Montana. Her ceramic and concrete sculptures have been exhibited in NYC, CT and MT. Most recently, her work was shown at Viridian Artists Gallery in Chelsea. She currently lives and works in Alfred, NY with her ceramic artist husband, Daniel Evans. In her spare time, she likes to swim and make miso soup. shu_chanevans@yahoo.com.

Nathaniel Freeman received his BFA from the University of Montana in 1998, and is currently an MFA candidate at Alfred University in New York. He has shown work both nationally and internationally; upcoming exhibitions include a solo show at Lemmons Contemporary in New York City, and participation in the International Digital Art Awards touring exhibition in Australia. Nathaniel currently lives and works in Alfred, where he appreciates the rural landscape of his art-making environment, but bemoans the lack of a good movie theatre and Mexican food. He can be reached at nathanielfreeman@gmail.com.

Bryan Hopkins was born in Philadelphia. He began college as a math major and took ceramics as an art elective. Since earning a MFA in Ceramics from the State University of New York at New Paltz, he has travelled across the US and to Japan. His work has been exhibited both regionally and nationally, and he has received grants from local and state arts councils. Hopkins' career goal is to make a great pot. He currently teaches at Niagara County Community College and lives and maintains a studio in Buffalo, NY. barny@localnet.com

Brian Milbrand is a graduate from the Media Study program at the University at Buffalo. Brian is a founding member of two local arts collectives, The Real Dream Cabaret, a performance collective based in the back of Rust Belt Books, and the now defunct Kamikaze, a media and visual arts collective formerly on Elicott St. Milbrand has performed or screened nationally at Artists Television Access, PS122, Scribe Video Center, Burchfield-Penney Arts Center, Video Mundi and the Athens Film Festival. Brian currently teaches at Medaille College and is the Technical Director at Squeaky Wheel.

John Opera is an artist who was born in Buffalo and currently lives in Chicago. He has exhibited at various galleries and museums including Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center, Buffalo Arts Studio, Carnegie Arts Center, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and CIPA Gallery.





FRANCISCO AMAYA, *Pentagon Papers*, 2004 marker on paper, 8 x 22 feet

The curator would like to thank the participating artists for their energy and enthusiasm; Harold Kopp and the EMI Building for providing a temporary gallery space, UB Department of Media Studies, and a posse of hardworking interns (Amy Purifoy, Keri Logel, Maya McCormack, Amanda McKnight) for helping make this exhibition possible.

State of the Arts



NYSCA

*"...and I don't know where the sunbeams end
and the starlights begin, it's all a mystery..."*

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