



JESSE SMALL KANSAS CITY

vaginal. More abstract, the triptych *Your Brain On Reading*, 2004, is like a surreal brain scan. Ganglia, neurons, and gray matter collide madly, caroming off one another and back again. Is the imagined reader absorbed in a philosophical treatise or a Harlequin romance? It's impossible to tell, making *Your Brain On Reading* equally engaging and inscrutable.

White applied watercolors, sumi ink, and graphite to some of her smaller pieces. This adds depth and texture, as well as a gentle, blurred quality. Her twofold process—withdrawing and adding—underscores the push-pull dialectic that is at the heart of the series. Nowhere is this more evident than in *Cloak*, 2006, which resembles two scarves suspended in mid-air—a frozen study in contrasts. Scratchy, rough, and vaguely menacing, the cloak closest to us sinks and slowly disappears into the lower right-hand corner. Visible both underneath and behind its sharp-edged twin, the second cloak is soft and caressing. This pyrograph is a fitting metaphor for the constant struggle between opposites and the ongoing effort to achieve balance. As such, *Cloak* represents White's own experimental Yin and Yang as well as the dual nature of her medium.

The duality of Susan White's pyrographic process makes for a provocative and compelling viewing experience, from crackly hay to petal-soft shadows. As she pushes her experiment with this burning technique, her works will undoubtedly venture into more intellectually challenging territories.

—Kim Carpenter

Jesse Small's exhibition *Newtypes* [BOKA Powell; June 1–30, 2007] proves that many contemporary artists are also producers. Developed after a yearlong studio-residency in China, his steel, plastic, and porcelain sculptures are rooted in the aesthetics of street graffiti, Art Nouveau, and industrial design.

Newtypes is Small's first exhibition in Kansas City—his home base between travels—in over three years. While in China, Small's sculptures began to shift dramatically. Sourcing images in nature and technology, his work combines unflinching references to Art Nouveau ornamentation with visual influences from early videogames and graffiti. Embracing modern processes, Small begun drafting new sculptural concepts in AutoCAD while working with Chinese manufacturers to produce plastic sculptures.

Installed throughout the minimal/industrial space of BOKA Powell's architectural and design studio, the works, representing five simultaneously developed series, fit quite naturally.

The first three series consist of multiple small-scale icons clustered in various patterns throughout the space. These include *Ghosts*, 2006, *Talk-Bubbles*, 2005-2006, and *Cloud Transformers*, 2006-2007. Resembling characters from Pac-Man, *Ghosts* are white glazed porcelain cast forms whose passive appearance contradicts the panic-mode they trigger in the players they pursue. Presented on pastry trays during the exhibition's opening, these gaming icons went under disguise as frosted hors d'oeuvres. Elsewhere, red and white plastic *Cloud Transformers* were displayed in various stages of metamorphosis, from a boxy cumulus-styled cloud shape to a standing figurine with movable arms and legs. Often included as supporting character/partners to other sculptures, the palm-sized white plastic *Talk-Bubbles* appeared in a few *Cloud Transformers'* hands as improvised conversation facilitators. By referencing video games, cartoons, toys, and comic books, Small discovered a means to communicate simultaneously to con-

porary Asian and American audiences across language and cultural barriers.

The cloud icon reappears in *Into the Copious*, 2007, a folding screen made of layers of untreated sheet steel, as cutouts of stylized rain clouds interspersed with organic forms recalling spray-painted lines. Small regularly returns to the folding screen format to compose what may best be described as sculptural drawings.

Supercuts, 2007, and *Shark's Mouth*, 2007, two magnificent chandeliers created by way of vector software and an industrial plasma cutter, are installed overhead. These ornate red and black-coated steel sculptures hover like enigmatic deep-sea creatures whose sinuous silhouetted tentacles are interspersed with geometric rings. Droplets suspended off the ends of the three tiers of appendages invoke the liquid pigment used by street graffiti artists and contemporary painters such as Hung Liu. These sculptures also evidence the influence of contemporary industrial design—notably the work of Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec and Buro Vormkrijgers.

Ultimately, *Newtypes* demonstrates that, straddling the borders between art, design, and architecture, Small's work can go in a number of promising directions. How will the art world support this visual artist who works in multiples? That is the real question.

—Amelia Ishmael

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Susan White, detail of *Field*, 2007, pyrograph, 50 x 50 inches [courtesy of the artist]; Jesse Small, *Into the Copious*, 2007, steel, 80 x 120 x 20 inches [courtesy of the artist]



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