

# ARTFORUM

## Spring Hurlbut

GEORGIA SCHERMAN PROJECTS

133 Tecumseth Street

November 11–December 13

Set in a darkened room, Spring Hurlbut's hypnotic video *Airborne* (all works 2008) begins with a woman wearing a mask—presumably for protection from toxic chemicals—gently removing the lid from a container. Its dusty contents waft through the air. One might first associate this dispersal of hazardous particles with a terrorist act, such as 9/11 or a letter laced with anthrax powder. However, after instigating this smoky event, the woman leaves the scene. Her absence suggests a laboratory space in which rates of evaporation or combustion are recorded by the camera's cold and objective gaze. This scientific quality is enhanced by an emphasis on repetition: The work is divided into segments that document the release of particles. The sections are preceded by a different first name appearing on a black screen—thus offering a personal, and hence unscientific, ambiguity only clarified by reading the exhibition press release: The airborne material is actually the remnants of cremated humans, including the artist's father, James.

It is best to realize the specifics of Hurlbut's project after viewing it, as the semantic richness may be cut short by a preoccupation with the transgressive activity of manipulating or dispersing the dead. This subject is further explored in a series of photographs, each of which portrays the incinerated remains of a person or a domestic animal. *Bridgit #1 (ruler)* depicts the measurement of bone fragments of deceased pets, while *Peewee #2* shows the weighing of a plastic bag—containing animal ashes—on an old-fashioned scale, a reference to archaeological culture, as well as to Last Judgment iconography and *memento mori* symbolism. Hurlbut's intriguing works strike the combined Zen and existential notes that all creatures—as with everything in the cosmos—are ultimately reducible to the same specks of dust.

— Dan Adler



Spring Hurlbut, *Airborne*, 2008, still from a color video, 19 minutes 40 seconds.