

Systems of Absurdity, Memory and No-Thing-Ness: An Essay on My Artwork

My artwork has always emerged from an engagement with systems: systems of order, value, memory, belief, and the notion of self. Yet these systems rarely appear as stable or rational structures. Instead, I place them under pressure, allowing them to repeat themselves, contradict themselves, or expose the absurdity hidden within their own logic. Across sculpture, installation, performance, digital imaging, 3D modeling, bronze casting, and virtual exhibition, my work continually asks: what remains when meaning is stripped away, randomized, displaced, or emptied?

The answer has changed over time. In my earliest work, nothingness appeared through existential absurdity, the futile task, the pointless gesture, the machine condemned to repeat itself. More recently, influenced by Zen meditation and an interest in sacred space, absence has become less a symbol of futility than an opening. Between these two poles, the absurd void and the generative void, my practice has developed.

One of the earliest works to establish this trajectory was *The Square That Rotates*, created while I was working on my M.F.A. Influenced by the Theatre of the Absurd, particularly Ionesco and Beckett, I constructed a square piece of aluminum with a spirit level attached to one side that rotates once each hour. A level is designed to measure balance, yet here movement guarantees perpetual imbalance. The work performs a function while defeating it. Something happens, time passes, but nothing progresses—a condition I came to think of as the “development of non-development.”

Sisyphus extended this idea through a motor that winds a spring until it snaps and then begins again. *30 Balls Moved 30 Times* transferred the system from machine to artist: each day I clocked in, arbitrarily moved thirty balls around the gallery, and clocked out. Labor occurred, but nothing was accomplished. In *Take-A-Number*, the viewer entered the system. A ticket dispenser enclosed in plexiglass remained unreachable while stanchions organized visitors into a line leading nowhere. These works turn familiar structures of work, efficiency, and expectation into rituals emptied of purpose.

Popular culture often enters these systems. *Competition Stripes*, inspired by the oscillating scanner light on KITT from *Knight Rider*, transforms automotive spectacle into a vertical light sculpture that simultaneously recalls and undercuts the seriousness of Minimalism. *Safe Sex*, created during the AIDS epidemic, used truck mud flaps bearing chrome male and female silhouettes. Animated by hidden hoses, the figures flailed wildly but could never touch. Desire became mechanical, comic, threatening, and frustrated.

Questions of value and ownership form another recurring thread. In the digital slot machine *Untitled*, ownership is determined by chance: land nine consecutive zeros and you win the artwork. If it is ever resold, the transfer must occur through the same

mechanism. Its value might therefore be twenty-five cents or twenty-five thousand dollars. *Voyager*, a black plexiglass square containing a digital counter, records how long the work has been publicly displayed. Ironically, after being sent to a gallery in Milan decades ago, it disappeared. A work designed to measure visibility became invisible.

That loss contributed to *Plagarius*, an installation of missing-person posters and silhouettes representing artworks withheld following a gallery dispute. It also informed *Wrecks, Accidents, & Collisions*, a series of fictional exhibition postcards in which I digitally inserted my work into art-world advertisements and historical exhibitions. If I lacked access to the gallery or to history, I could appropriate both. These fabricated documents later came to resonate with Alison Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory": memories acquired through images and cultural artifacts rather than direct experience.

Memory in my work is similarly unstable. *The Book: An Exhibition*, inspired by Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, consists of a hollowed book containing oversized playing cards reproducing earlier artworks, many of which have disappeared, been destroyed, or been stolen. It functions as archive, exhibition, game, and memorial. Family objects and inherited histories also enter this territory. My grandmother's Zuni frog pot, her stories of New Mexico, and the photographs and narratives passed down through generations have encouraged me to think of memory as something continually assembled, revised, and restitched.

Digital technology expanded this inquiry. *monaLisa.jpg (C++)* replaces the image of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa* with the computer code that allows a digital image to exist. *What's In A Name* gathers online photographs of other people named Kirk Miller, turning identity into an algorithmic accident. My *Sunrises / Sunsets* series similarly examines technological mediation. Photographs originally taken during walks as attempts to record moments of beauty eventually became archives of metadata—dates, files, formats, and printing information. The sublime sky becomes data.

The body provides another system through which identity is constructed. Asthma, cancer, surgery, hearing loss, stroke, and recovery have shaped both my life and my work. The inhaler, a lifelong tool of survival, has become a recurring self-portrait. In *He Did The Best He Could With What He Had*, it becomes a bronze funerary urn topped with my own head, intended eventually to contain my ashes. *Empty Head*, a hollow bronze head accompanied by a detached mask, takes portraiture in another direction. Instead of accumulating features to define identity, it removes them. The self becomes shell, role, absence.

This movement toward subtraction led increasingly to no-thing-ness. The torus became an important form: a three-dimensional zero, a loop constructed around an absence. *Fur Torus* turns this mathematical primitive into something tactile and absurd. *Half*, a glass suspended conceptually between half-full and half-empty, rejects binary interpretation and instead emphasizes a condition of becoming.

Zen meditation transformed my understanding of such emptiness. In *Light & Air*, a bare corner becomes sacred not through religious architecture or imagery but simply through attention and presence. *SacredTextSacredSpace* extends this idea by cutting away words from sacred texts, leaving openings through which light passes. Erasure does not eliminate meaning; it creates another way of encountering it. The void becomes active.

The *SPACER* works similarly occupy intervals between artworks, inspired by ideas associated with Debussy, Miles Davis, and John Cage about the importance of silence, pauses, and what is not played. These works ask viewers to attend not only to objects but to the spaces separating them.

Recent works such as *War of the Roses* extend this inquiry into simulation. A living red rose and a flawless white 3D-printed rose sit beneath separate glass domes. One is alive but temporary; the other permanent but lifeless. The work asks whether technological permanence can substitute for mortality, change, scent, and experience.

Across my practice, certain questions persist: What is value? What is ownership? What is identity? How does memory become art, and art become memory? What happens when systems continue functioning after meaning collapses?

My work does not resolve these contradictions. It inhabits them. The early works expose systems as absurd; the later works suggest that absurdity is not necessarily the final condition. Nothingness can represent futility, but it can also become possibility—the silence between notes, the empty corner filled with light, the hollow head, the missing artwork, the opening left by an erased word.

Somewhere between motion and stasis, comedy and tragedy, absence and presence, meaning appears, disappears, and begins again.