

Credo quia Absurdum

The Art of Rob Neilson

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The son of a Detroit steel worker, Rob Neilson creates sculpture that combines industrial materials, meticulous craft and caustic cultural satire.

Large sculptural busts of Teddy Roosevelt, Joseph Stalin and Napoleon echo classical marble statuary along with the media-rich gleaning from Pop Art tradition. Gestures evoking computer glitches or other technological erasures multiply and distort these faces into dynamic anamorphisms.

Neilson's titles and imagery display a punky cynicism towards the heads of state he represents. With tongue planted firmly in cheek, the works portray an iconoclastic repudiation.

The portraits are created from MDF, a far from noble material composed of pressed sawdust, commonly used as a cheap alternative for wood boards in cabinets and furniture. Layers of the material are cut and stacked, evolving into a likeness through their accumulation. The works are coated with white milk paint, another pedestrian material, here utilized as a pun on the agrarian traditions of Wisconsin, Neilson's adopted home.

The title of this series, "Credo quia Absurdum," translates to read, "I believe because it is absurd." The ironies in Neilson's statuary seem to parallel those in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias." In a broken, barren city, the long dead king of kings boasts from an inscription on his ruined statue,

Look on my works, ye mighty, and Despair!

Now imagine Shelley's poem read by a sweaty, acerbic stand-up comedian in a dark club downtown. Neilson's mixture of grit, humor, candor and poetry reside there.