

*There is some level of purity in the process, consisting of my hands, the material and the self. It's an experience that consumes me, and I gravitate toward it.—Miles Neidinger*

Miles Neidinger's sculptures are informed by his personal and professional relationship with electrical conduits, construction, and the systems that physically and metaphorically exist behind that which is visible. By using the most quotidian materials, including metal tubing, wire, and electrical junction boxes, Neidinger theorizes how materials are sometimes ranked. Is there still an institutional hidebound preference for traditional sculptural material, such as bronze, over ordinary metal, dirt, cloth, wood, fingernail clippings, etc.? Contemporary artists suggest that they are all equivalents. By mining the landscape of construction material that he works with daily and with which he has a complicated relationship, Miles Neidinger intertwines labor, social psychology, art, and industry.

Neidinger constructs his sculptures from widely available galvanized steel tubing and hardware by bending the tubing into knots and shapes that seem tightly wound, or loose and open. Sometimes the metal is left in its natural state and sometimes it's powder coated different colors as a means of disguising the ordinary metal. Some sculptures, like the purple—a color Neidinger associates with status — *Coupling, Dissect, Converge, Divorce*, resemble a severely compromised circuitry grid that is in Neidinger's words, "a non-functioning infrastructure." While metal tubing's resistance to corrosion makes it a preferred conduit for liquids, gases, and electrical wire, it can also be an "industrial chic" material used in interior design, which confers a valuable status on otherwise ordinary plumbing or electrical material. Neidinger mines this status reversal and builds toward an aesthetic end that is more than the sum of its construction parts. He uses "insipid images and materials that are collectively charged with social signifiers and class identity." He continues, "This work is a sinister response to a cultural drive to categorically rank material, organize our surroundings, and infuse our machines and structures with a hierarchical system of order. Although this work insists on formal purity, it never remains solely dependent upon the materials and imagery employed."

Working full-time as an electrician and dealing with this material daily, Neidinger uses it in the sculptures subversively, challenging boundaries between high and low. The material becomes new and other. Neidinger can then feel himself expand and become more than the job and its demands of conformity. The artist and his work resist the power structure implicit in the daily grind. Instead of the material and work controlling him, Neidinger controls it and writes its story.

If predictability is the goal of an electrical system, then Neidinger's sculptures represent the unpredictability of free-flowing ideas. While he does sometimes make preparatory drawings, the sculptures evolve organically in the creative process, often going in different directions than originally planned.

The taut, knotted sculptures may also suggest our nervous system circuitry and how chaotic those strands of neurons can be. What happens when something goes wrong, or sparks? The system may fail. In *Echo, Scatter, Swell* the conduit is connected by junction boxes, whose original purpose, like that of the metal tubing, has been disrupted. Junction boxes function as a safety barrier, housing electrical connections. Similarly, nerve and electrical impulses are carried by neurons and passed to other neurons via junctions known as synapses.

Neidinger's ability to generate emotion from galvanized metal tubing speaks to his acute sensitivity to the fragility in all systems. The tightly knotted *Billow* communicates tense energy, whereas other sculptures are more open and outward reaching.

Neidinger mines visible and invisible systems, suggesting that our interior selves are not so far removed from the systems that undergird the physical spaces we inhabit. Neurology, social psychology, construction, and labor are intertwined in these sculptures. Neidinger's material choice becomes a vehicle of transformation, subversion, and introspection.

- Dana Self, independent arts writer, Prairie Village, KS