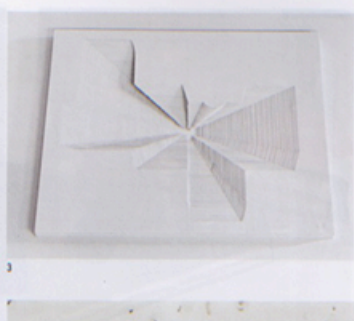


## The Hundredizer



1. Ken Nicol, *One hundred little paper boxes*, 2011, paper, 1.5 x 1.5 x 1.5". All images courtesy MKG127, Toronto.

2. Ken Nicol, *Sculpture made with one hundred beard hairs*, 2011, stainless steel, hair, 3 x 3 x 7.5".

3. Ken Nicol, *Nit one hundred little paper boxes*, 2011, paper, 17 x 14 x 12".

4. Ken Nicol, *One hundred bugs, one hundred bugs and one hundred bugs*, 2008, bugs on paper, 13 x 10.5".

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"It just seemed like a reasonable thing to do," says Toronto-based artist **Ken Nicol**, explaining his obsession with the number 100. "A few years ago I did a couple of things that were a thousand and I pressed a button a million times, but 100 kept on coming up. Then Pringles started to be sold in 100s and, of course, I count them, and as I'm counting, I'm playing with them and making patterns, and then something else comes up. I'm not entirely sure why I stick with 100 but it is a great tool because I have a goal and now I can stop."

He may have a stop-gap number, but ideas about what to make his number-centric pieces from seem limitless. Evidence of that range was recently on exhibition at MKG 127 in Toronto in "Hundreds of Things: Volume 1." The show included c-prints on dibond of different flavours of Pringles (regular, salt and vinegar, sour crème and barbecue), grids made from coffee cup lids, little bundles of matchsticks that he chewed while quitting smoking, 100 white hairs plucked from his beard and displayed like a diminutive still life, and various configurations of squished bugs. "There are three different arrangements, one in a little bottle and one arranged in a grid. The third one came about when I was working on a drawing one night and I squished a bug that came in to the studio—they're between a fruit fly and a mosquito but I call them Ken Bugs. I realized I had to put down a fresh piece of paper, turn off all the lights except the drafting light and sit there, and as they hit the paper I squished them." That section of the piece reads like a minimalist Cy Twombly drawing; the overall name of the work is *one hundred bugs, one hundred bugs, one hundred bugs*. "It's a madness but I don't think I'll be seeking help for it."

The artists Nicol talks about most often in connection with his work are minimalists, like Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt. LeWitt's cubes within hidden cubes

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is lurking somewhere behind *One hundred boxes*, a sculpture that offers very little to look at. What you see is a small box made of 70-pound white paper; what you don't see are the 99 other boxes that fit inside. (He also made a companion piece inside a wooden case that when opened shows the 100 boxes as an unfolded arrangement; it looks like a miniaturized series of terraces, or a delicate, topographic landscape.) There is nothing on the surface of the box that indicates what it is, or what it contains, but the piece is signed. "On the first cube," Nicol says with a hint of mischief. "I did that because I'm a smart ass."

Another wall piece, called *My name written a hundred times by people I've never met*, comprises his name cut out from boxes and packages that he kept around the studio. Nicol admits his attraction to things not normally considered material for art. "I'm the opposite of Damien Hirst; to make his skull he took platinum and diamonds, the two most valuable things on the planet, and made them into something valuable. But what if you were to take something not so valuable, like a bug, and make it into something. How valuable would that be? I just find that a more interesting angle. Besides, I work out of found materials, so I don't have a lot of choice." ■

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