

*Bird in Hand (red)*
Kevin Box & Robert J. Lang

# The Memory of Paper

Kevin Box has spent 25 years running toward the challenge of turning fragile paper into monumental works of metal.

**By Kris Ann Valdez**

American buffalo run into storms, not away from them.

It's the fastest way through bad weather, both a fact and a metaphor that resonates deeply with contemporary sculptor and metal caster Kevin Box, and one that resembles his own artistic grit and good sense.

Box is best known for developing metal sculptures, cast in bronze, aluminum and stainless steel, that emulate every crease, fold and wrinkle, even the very lightness, of paper. The works, often larger-than-life and white, appear to the eye as origami and folded paper.

"It's giving permanence to something that would otherwise be fleeting," says Box.

Today, Box Studio, which includes the artist, his team and renowned collaborators, has presented its work to millions worldwide, from fine art galleries to botanical gardens.

But once, Box was just another boy playing with paper.

"I grew up folding paper," he says, "mostly paper airplanes."

After high school, Box pursued graphic and fine art, drawn especially to printmaking and papermaking. But following college, he abandoned paper, deciding it was too fragile a medium. Wanting to pursue more "durable works of art," he turned to bronze casting.

In Atlanta and Austin, Box completed immersive studies and apprenticeships, yet became disenchanted with the dark bronze, green, black and brown hues of traditional metal sculpture.

Photo by UnderExposed Studios



Photo by Box Studio

Kevin Box



*Migrating Butterflies*
**Kevin Box & Michael G. LaFosse**

Photo by UnderExposed Studios

Through a mentor, Box discovered life casting and direct burnout and was struck with an epiphany: *I could make paper into the most archival version of itself by casting it in bronze.*

Box would spend the next seven years running toward the storm to find out if he could make paper permanent.

That pursuit required a move from vibrant Austin to the small town of Bastrop, Texas, where Box worked as a foundry production manager, earning a barely passable wage in exchange for all the "bronze he could pour" and two hours of daily studio time.

"I just never left the studio," Box says. "I traded all my social activities. I broke up with my girlfriend, I quit going to bars. I was like, this is my chance."

He was practically the cliché of the starving artist, even trading artwork with a local deli for sandwiches and eating his fair share of turkey soup and peanut butter and jelly.

Around 2001, he achieved some of his first successful small-scale castings and started selling his work at outdoor art fairs. Four years later came his "big break" at the Loveland Sculpture Show, followed by an invitation into the National Sculptors Guild and gallery representation.

But if grit got him this far, good sense told him he couldn't do it alone.

"Bands work together to make great music. It's not something you can do all by yourself," he says.

His longtime collaboration with renowned origami artist Robert J. Lang started with Box simply calling and asking if he'd like to partner.

"The fact that he answered the phone was pretty wild," Box says. "Nobody knew who I was or what I was doing."

When Lang eventually visited Box's Santa Fe studio, he asked the young artist what he had in mind.

Box told him, "I want to tell a story about light. And to show that origami is not just an Asian story, but an American story, a global story."

Their first project was a white buffalo. Following its success, they've spent nearly two decades in "playful collaboration."

It's not just the finished origami that Box pays homage to, however. He also loves the blank piece of paper and what he calls the "journey of decision-making" that transforms it, crease by crease, into something new.

When it's complete, Box is just as likely to unfold it, though, something the origami masters he works with didn't understand at first.

But paper has memory, he argues. Every choice is visible in its creases and wrinkles, imperfections included. The flattened paper, Box says, resembles a mandala, recording everything required to create the final form. To Box, it's a metaphor for a human life. We begin with a blank slate, make choice after choice and carry the imprint of each one with us.

"What does the architecture of the soul look like?" he asks.

That deeper meaning is there for those who want to find it. But Box is equally happy if someone encounters an enormous paper-like sculpture and simply feels "awe and inspiration."

Collaboration remains a defining principle of Box's work. Along with artists such as Lang, Box credits his wife and longtime studio partner, Jennifer, a former professional dancer

TOP: Photo by Bill Stangel. BOTTOM LEFT: Photo by UnderExposed Studios. BOTTOM RIGHT: Photo by Box Studio.



*White Bison*
Kevin Box & Robert J. Lang



*Ewe & Me + Dream's In Sheep's Clothing*
Kevin Box & Beth Johnson



*Rose Kusudama*
Kevin Box & Robert J. Lang

TOP: Photo by Bill Stengel. BOTTOM LEFT: Photo by UnderExposed Studios. BOTTOM RIGHT: Photo by Box Studio.



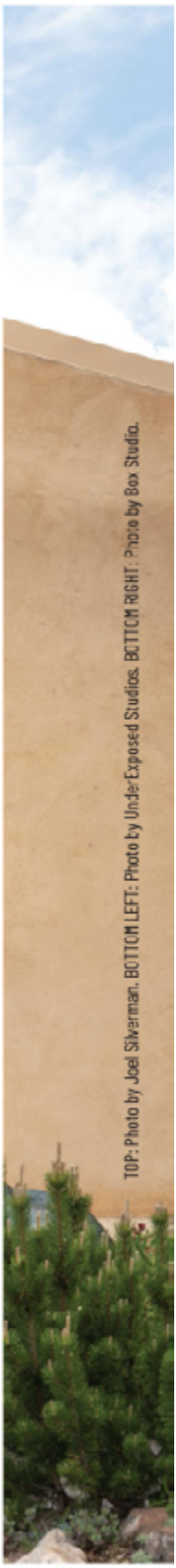
*Dear Family*
Kevin Box & Robert J. Lang



*Perennial Peace*
Kevin Box & Michael G. LaFosse



*Rock Paper Scissors*
Kevin Box



TOP: Photo by Joel Silverman. BOTTOM LEFT: Photo by UnderExposed Studios. BOTTOM RIGHT: Photo by Box Studio.



Photo by Box Studio

*Flying Folds*
Kevin Box & Robert J. Lang

with a background in arts administration, with helping build Box Studio and expand its vision.

Together, Kevin and Jennifer Box created *Origami in the Garden*, a traveling exhibition that takes the studio's monumental works into botanical gardens, opening the art to a broader audience.

"There's not a price tag in a botanical garden," Box says. "It's about truly telling a story and inspiring people."

Now, after 25 years of pushing paper and metal to their limits, Box Studio is on a new journey. This autumn, the studio joined Bonner David Galleries in Scottsdale. Located in the heart of the art district, the debut exhibition, *Garden Party*, pairs original works by Box Studio with those of renowned contemporary artist Hunt Slonem, and will be celebrated with a gallery opening in early December.

"We are honored to be represented by Bonner David Galleries, a force in the market for decades. Christi is a dream to work with, very professional and personable, and we know we are in the best hands," says Box, referring to owner of Bonner David Galleries, Christi Manuelito.

Visitors can also experience Box Studio's sculpture garden in Cerrillos, just south of Santa Fe, open seasonally spring through fall. During the annual Turquoise Trail Studio Tour on the last two weekends of September, the studio itself opens to the public.

For all Box's fascination with permanence, he knows nothing truly lasts forever. But an art history class in college made him realize that art can speak across generations, a possibility that has motivated him ever since.

The artist even dares to dream that one piece from his life's work will endure hundreds of years from now. And perhaps some future person might marvel at everything contained within its creases.

**Bonner David Galleries**
7040 E. Main St., Scottsdale, AZ 85251
bonnerdavid.com