

Artist Statement  
Bloodlines - Ansen Seale

In the past, most of my work has been photo-based. Though this new work is not photography, it has its roots past work. Like photography, it is “reality-based”, only not with physical objects, but more abstract concepts.

In our modern world of “millions” and “billions”, the visceral meaning and understanding of these numbers is often lost. My desire is to bring these kinds of numbers into the physical world, to produce actual visual representations of very abstract, yet completely real concepts that point to the infinite. What does pi look like? What does a million digits look like? Is there any pattern to prime numbers? I want to make numbers real and tangible in a way that a normal human brain can start to understand.

We have developed three main institutions to help us bring meaning to the mysteries of life; science, religion and art. Eight thousand years ago in West Texas, shamans painted images of themselves and mythical animals on high cave walls with blood. The authors of these paintings are largely a mystery to us. We know something of their lifestyle and the sociological reasons they began painting, but the meaning conveyed by the figures painted there largely eludes us. The early shamans of west Texas combined all 3 disciplines of art, science and religion in their pursuit of the unknown, a holistic approach to meaning and mystery. Each shaman was an artist, scientist and religious leader, all at once.

One tool they didn't possess is our system of numbers and calculation. Numbers give us the ability to peer into the abyss of infinity. I believe that numbers have, not only power, but personalities.

To see 100,000 digits of pi all at once brings the worlds of science, religion and art together in one place for a conversation. Like the Torah worn on a headband or the Lord's Prayer inscribed on the head of a pin, I placed all this information within a single glance to stress the idea that this is more than just raw information; this special number is an entity, a real force in the universe.

For example, only 39 decimal places of pi are needed to calculate the circumference of the known universe to the accuracy of one proton. At 100,000 digits, real meaning (in any human) sense falls apart and only the existence or the uniqueness of the number is left.

The use of my own blood in these pieces echoes the shaman's use of blood as paint. My purpose was not to overly sensationalized the work, but to use blood as a kind of personal anchor—a way to bring the message back down to a physical level and re-connect the world of numbers with our bodies, the frame of reference for all our primal understanding of our surroundings.