



## In your dreams

### *Kansas artist's mysterious 'toy store' pops up in downtown Riverside*

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Another world: Tucked behind Burlington Realty and visible from passing Metra trains, Randy Regier's "NuPenny" transports the curious to a dream-like world of sci-fi toys. (DAVID PIERINI/Staff Photographer)



By **Bob Uphues**  
Editor

A tiny, pop-up toy store appeared in Riverside about a month ago, just in time for the Holiday Stroll and the beginning of the Christmas shopping season.

No one's bought any toys from the place. And even though it's been there since late November, lit up at night like a jewel box from the 1950s past in your dreams, few people have actually seen it.

Actually, that's part of the plan — on closer inspection, the "store" is an installation by Kansas artist Randy Regier.

Titled "Nu Penny's Last Stand" — there's a sign on the front of the structure reading "Nu Penny," but you can't translate it without using teletype code — the piece is at once fascinating and frustrating, familiar yet inscrutable.

Just the way Regier intended it.

First off, you can't see it from the street. It's located directly behind Burlington Realty at 21 E. Burlington St. in Riverside. You have to walk around the back of Riverside Bank next door to get to it.

You can see it from the train, but there's no way to tell what it is from that vantage point. It simply looks like something out of a black-and-white 1950s science-fiction film depicting a child's nightmare.

Inside a steel and glass case topped with a sleek "N" and a red beacon are items that look like toys, but ones you might not actually want to play with. There's a station wagon with a snow plow fixed to its front, a rocket sled with a star-like object ripping through its passenger compartment, a rocket ship powered by a boat propeller, a robot operating a wheelbarrow and a type of police car/hot rod. There are also three old-fashioned candy jars on a shelf — containing black, silver and white balls.

According to Regier, each item has a component or material that is representative of a song lyric, poem or work of literature (the rocket sled is a reference to the Ray Bradbury short story "Kaleidoscope"). Some are literal, some aren't.

"I've had vivid dreams since I was a child," said Regier, a former auto body painter who decided to enroll in art school in his mid-30s during the late 1990s, and earned his MFA in 2007 from the Maine College of Art.

"I've been fascinated for years how vividly real dream states can be, and I wondered whether I could attempt to make an art work — what would it be like to pump out someone else's dreamscape?"

Initially installed in vacant storefronts in both Maine and Kansas, the installation was whittled down to a handful of pieces after a collector purchased several of the items. At that time, Regier fabricated a standalone "shop" whose door is always locked, whose intercom speaker can never be answered, whose front coin slot is inoperable, and whose toys can only be explained by translating the teletype code labels on them.

Regier says he completely understands when people tell him the work is simply frustrating.

"I agree with all that," said Regier, who added he doesn't know how he himself feels about the piece.

"As often happens, once you're done with the piece, it doesn't mean you're comfortable with that, but dream states aren't comfortable," he said.

So how did an artist who grew up in Oregon and lives in Kansas find a spot for Nu Penny in Riverside?

It turns out that Troy Klyber, a Riverside resident who is an art collector and employee at the Art Institute of Chicago, met Regier at a 2010 exhibition of Tony Fitzpatrick's work in 2010 and commissioned a piece from him.

Nu Penny had been in storage since 2011 and likely would have remained there, but Klyber and others, including Jeff Baker and Judy Jisa of Burlington Realty, pooled resources to transport Regier and the work to Riverside. Regier set up Nu Penny around Thanksgiving. He hopes the piece will stay up through January, maybe even beyond that.

"I'd like to have it there for months if they let it," said Regier. "We haven't had that conversation yet."

But take a look at it while you can, because one day — just like those other installations from the past — it'll simply vanish.

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