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BLIND ALPHABET C (COCULLIFEROUS TO CYMBIFORM)

The most divisive symbol in the absurd South African social theatre of the past has been the *skin*. In scientific terms it is the largest organ of the human body, which somehow also made it our most visible drape, a ludicrous costume of social standing. It was a dead give-away to whom we were and what we were entitled to. No-one ever missed the skin of *the other*. By it, one was allowed to get, to go or to be; or, not to get, not to go, or not to be.

Our prejudicial obsession with each other's skin-colour enforced the coldest, furthest possible distance. Under *apartheid* we were like sacred art objects in a well guarded museum, *far apart*, only to be seen, never to be touched. Fortunately, to be truly blind, is also to be colour-blind.

In his *BLIND ALPHABET PROJECT*, I use the liberated pellicel, with its own unique ability to be sentient from head to toe, as a bridging tool to help mend the social chasms of the past. The project re-establishes the integrity of touch as a socially viable catalyst for interactive discourse. It sets up touch, in favour of sight by enabling, if not ennobling the state of blindness, and by disabling the sense of sight.

The *BLIND ALPHABET ABC* ... is a three-dimensional dictionary, of 338 finished sculptural units, with more work in progress. This Sao Paulo Biennale shows only the 77 units entitled *BLIND ALPHABET C (COCULLIFEROUS TO CYMBIFORM)*.

In an inversion of power relations, the work creates a dependency on the touching and reading skills of blind guides. Without blind people

in attendance, the *Blind Alphabet* remains lost, - an exercise in aesthetic futility.

The sculptures are hidden from clear view by being placed in boxes, where gallery rules prevent them from being opened by the sighted. When blind people visit art galleries they are usually guided to find sculptures, and to see that they don't damage anything. The units of the *Blind Alphabet* are so conveniently close together that the blind are not *lost*. Each piece is of a manageable size and height, near at hand, so that it can be picked up and fondled close to the body, over a basket, where it won't fall to the ground. *BLIND ALPHABET ABC* has been extensively exhibited, and even though the blind have actively indulged in it, they have yet to cause any damage.

To the sighted, the 338 sculptures look like a cemetery, repeated in endless rows. It is intended to disorientate us. The blind, of course, do not know that the work makes us feel lost because they only have to view one object at a time.

Each work is labelled in a complex Braille essay whereby the blind *enlighten* the bewildered sighted. By their special magic they dictate the most abstruse texts through their fingertips. Their *nescience* turns into *prescience* by which *they* help even the visual expert to 'see'.

492 words

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