

THE BLIND ALPHABET PROJECT INTRODUCED:

Continuance of the project as:

BLIND ALPHABET F – 2015

BLIND ALPHABET G – 2016

BLIND ALPHABET H – 2016

BLIND ALPHABET I, J, K, L – 2018 ongoing into 2019

The most divisive symbol in the absurd South African social theatre of the past has been *the skin*. 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.

The *BLIND ALPHABET 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.

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 viable discourse. It sets up the sense of touch in favour of sight by enabling, if not ennobling, the state of blindness and by disabling the sense of sight.

The *BLIND ALPHABET* project is a three-dimensional dictionary of morphology with the 'entries' being sculptural interpretations of obscure words hidden inside wire baskets. The sculptures are hidden from clear view, gallery rules preventing the sighted visitor from opening them. Each basket, representing a 'page' in the dictionary, is fitted with a lid explaining the dictionary entry in Braille. In an inversion of power relations, the work creates a dependency on the touching and reading skills of blind guides. 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 placed conveniently close together. 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.

To the sighted, a Blind Alphabet installation looks like a cemetery, with black steel boxes 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 need only view one object at a time.

On the lid of each steel box the concept interpreted in sculptural form inside is defined in an essay in Braille, whereby the blind *enlighten* the bewildered sighted. By their powers of perception, the blind dictate the most abstruse texts through their fingertips.

Their *nescience* turns into prescience by which *they* help even the visual expert to 'see'.

I research the formulation of the paragraph written in Braille on the lid of each box containing a sculptural interpretation of particular word extensively, so that the information might be noteworthy to those who are visually literate, but who might not know such an obscure word. In Braille the entry is stated as definiendum, for example: hamiform (2016):

'hook-shaped', followed by its definition or meaning and etymology: in Latin *hamus* is 'hook'. This is followed by an elaboration on common usage of the word. Also stated is the type of wood or woods I used to make the sculpture inside the wire basket and the date of its creation. Rows upon rows of closed boxes allude to the pages in a closed book.

The first chapters of the Blind Alphabet Project started in 1995 with the letters A, B and C. The work has been exhibited extensively, often in its individual completed chapters, each devoted to a particular letter of the alphabet. Ongoing production now stands at the letter H, with sculptural production of the letters I, J, K and L in production. I like to engage with language systems which stonewall, or subvert the institution of the traditional gallery to empower disenfranchised social groups. The Blind Alphabet continues to engage with who is empowered to see and learn and who is not.