



Braille in “The Nature of Inquiry”

Ron Dicker

The Blind Can See Art

To be blind and yet see art is the gift that only sculpture gives.

As I worked on “The Nature of Inquiry” and felt it in my hands, it pleased me to think that art, usually a visual affair off-limits to those who can’t see, may be made visible to them, simply by the artist’s choice of medium.

The Blind Can See Reason

Sweet irony: though I used an eye as the metaphor for insight, eyesight is exactly what you don’t need to see the insights explored by this sculpture. The person who is blind sees reason or ethics by intuition, just like anyone else. (See essay “The Nature of Inquiry”).

Intuition As Equalizer

That fact makes intuitive knowledge an equalizer. You can reason without vision, you can be ethical without eyesight. You can think like Pascal, you can love like Mother Theresa. You need intelligence, you need virtue, you need insight. You don’t need eyesight.

It’s Easy: Symbols Symbolizing Symbols of Symbols

This sculpture explores epistemology — the philosophy of knowledge itself, or, the study of how you know you know. So I wanted it to feature our cognitive tour-de-force: literacy. It’s a system of symbols (writing) of symbols (speech) of symbols (ideas) of real things. (See essay “The Everyday Miracle of Being Us”).

Because of the written word, Pythagoras can educate me. Socrates can persuade me. Augustine can reach me. Leonardo can teach me. By using it, I can speak to generations unborn. The knowledge of billions of people accumulated over thousands of years is our nursery, thanks to literacy.

Why Braille?

In the sculpture I used braille instead of text to emphasize the idea of sculpture as art for the blind. And Braille intrigues me as yet another layer of abstraction — a fourth level of symbols on top of literacy’s three. It’s also less intrusive than type; it fits in well. This is art first of all, then philosophy. And in good art, aesthetics must surpass ideas, even good ones.

Why Say Anything at All?

A considerate artist treads the razor’s edge between being cryptic and being dogmatic about his work. By the sculpture’s title and the braille clues, “reason” and “intuition” (the eye doubles for i), I hope to give viewers enough to go on, yet not spoil their discovering.

Ambiguity in art makes room for the viewer to participate, to fill in the blanks. It’s how art, unlike a white paper, enables dialog. That’s when the synapses start to arc, when the sparks sizzle.

That said, the artist should do the courtesy, for anyone curious, of somewhere stating what the art means to him. But it’s silly to presume to tell the viewer what the art means to the viewer.

You have to send your artwork out to see what it will do, what the world will make of it. Now it’s your turn to see in it what you will.