



The Center for Art in Wood
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David Stephens: Auguries of Idolatry **Four Braille-based Installations in Wood**

February 7 – April 19, 2014
Opening: Friday, February 7, “First Friday”, 5 – 8 PM
Panel discussion, Saturday, February 15, 2 – 4 PM

CONTACT

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Images available upon request

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PHILADELPHIA – The Center for Art in Wood will host a solo exhibition consisting of four large installations by sculptor David Stephens, February 7 through April 19, 2014 with a reception on opening day from 5 to 8 PM and a panel discussion on Saturday, February 15 from 2 to 4 PM.

Auguries of Idolatry explores the enchantment and attraction of idolatry in both a historical and contemporary context. As David Stephens explains, “The word ‘auguries’ as used by the visionary British poet, painter, and printmaker William Blake means prophecy or divination. It has to do with the sorcery and enchantment of idolatry. Biblically, idolatry is bad because it takes you away from God,” His artwork addresses more than the superstitious and religious aspects of idolatry but familiar contemporary enchantments, including technology. “Today, our idols include cell phones and the computer,” he notes.

Stephens says, “Writing is symbols and many times I think that those symbols in and of themselves can become idols. A symbol doesn’t have to be something that you worship; it can be a tool. An idol, however, is a tool that is taken to a point where it becomes as significant as God.”

When he learned as an adult that he was becoming blind, Stephens studied and mastered Braille. However today, in



spite of his blindness, he prefers not to use it as a means of communication. His experience with Braille led him to think more deeply about the meanings of symbols and language. All Braille symbols are linked to letters and there are up to 90 contractions, like texting shorthand. In these installations he uses massively oversize Braille elements, hemispheres that are too large to be deciphered with the fingertips and can only to be read visually. This shift of perception from one sense to another and back again illuminates the power and mutability of symbols.

David Stephens' work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and focuses on spiritual and material concepts that are both topical and reflective of his life's experiences. The exhibition is composed of four large-scale multipart works entitled *Gesthemene Gate*, *Seduced by Royal Trappings*, *Cenotath TOBB*, and *Peeled Turf*.

A BRIEF NOTE ON BRAILLE

Braille symbols are linked to letters and composed in cells. Each cell contains two vertical columns of three single bump units—each unit is either a bump or no bump. Braille began as a failed system of code devised during the Napoleonic wars to enable the French army to communicate at night without disclosing their position to the enemy by lights or sounds. Louis Braille simplified the code for military use and his system was then recognized as a literacy tool for blind people. Texts in Braille are cumbersome, much larger than ordinary printed materials, and require more time than visual reading. Today many unsighted individuals choose to rely on digital technologies that give easy auditory access to documents and books and the ability to create written materials from spoken words.

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Image: *Cenotath TOBB* (2009-2012) mixed media. Photo by John Carlano