

COMPASSIONATE STORY

ZIP ZIP MY BRAIN HARTS WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANGELA BUCKLAND (HSRC PRESS, 2006), 104 PAGES, SOFTCOVER, ISBN 0-7969-2159-8

Art changes meaning according to context. Curators, for example, construct narratives by placing works in relation to each other, thereby enabling different conversations. By contrast, catalogues function on many distinct levels, not only recording exhibitions but also sometimes becoming the exhibition. The book *Zip Zip My Brain Harts*, which takes its title from the wordplay of a disabled child, is not a catalogue of an exhibition; it is also not an art book, nor is it a social science book – it is all three.

The premise for this book arose out of an ongoing project by Durban-based photographer Angela Buckland, whose personal experiences with her disabled son Nikki have informed the trajectory of this project, one that is principally concerned with imaging disability. Organised into several sections, the book reproduces Buckland's

early experiments where she double-exposed images of baby Nikki onto X-ray images documenting his particular skeletal features.

Alongside work from this *Dysmorphic Series*, the book also illustrates the *Stickytape Juice* series, still photographs of personal items of children's clothing, each altered by a parent in order to conceal their child's disability. *Shadow Catching* shows Nikki playing with his shadow. Also included is *Where's Nikki?*, a series of photographs exploring the experience of seven South African families, each of them parenting a disabled child. The work captures the many complex emotions and relationships brought to the fore by such a reality, and records how family dynamics shift.

When this series was first shown in Durban, the overwhelming scale (4 x 2.7m each) of the photographs created a sense of involvement with the viewer that this small book is unable to reproduce. The book does however bring another dimension to their appreciation, the power of Buckland's photos paired with that of the written word. The book includes an informative and sensitive text by psychologists Kathleen McDougall and Leslie Swartz, another by anthropologist Amelia van der Merwe. These texts highlight both functional issues relevant to parenting disabled children, as well as the ethical issues surrounding photographing disability.

The book, which benefits from designer Garth Walker's general layout strategy and imaginative and idiosyncratic use of fonts, does not attempt to illustrate disability as a social pathology. Located at the juncture between the humanities and sciences, it tells a compassionate story, intelligently using image as striking counterpoint rather than mere illustration.

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