

## Reading skins:

Proposal for a Braille learning facility in Old Town Alexandria

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A design thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Architecture

Approved:

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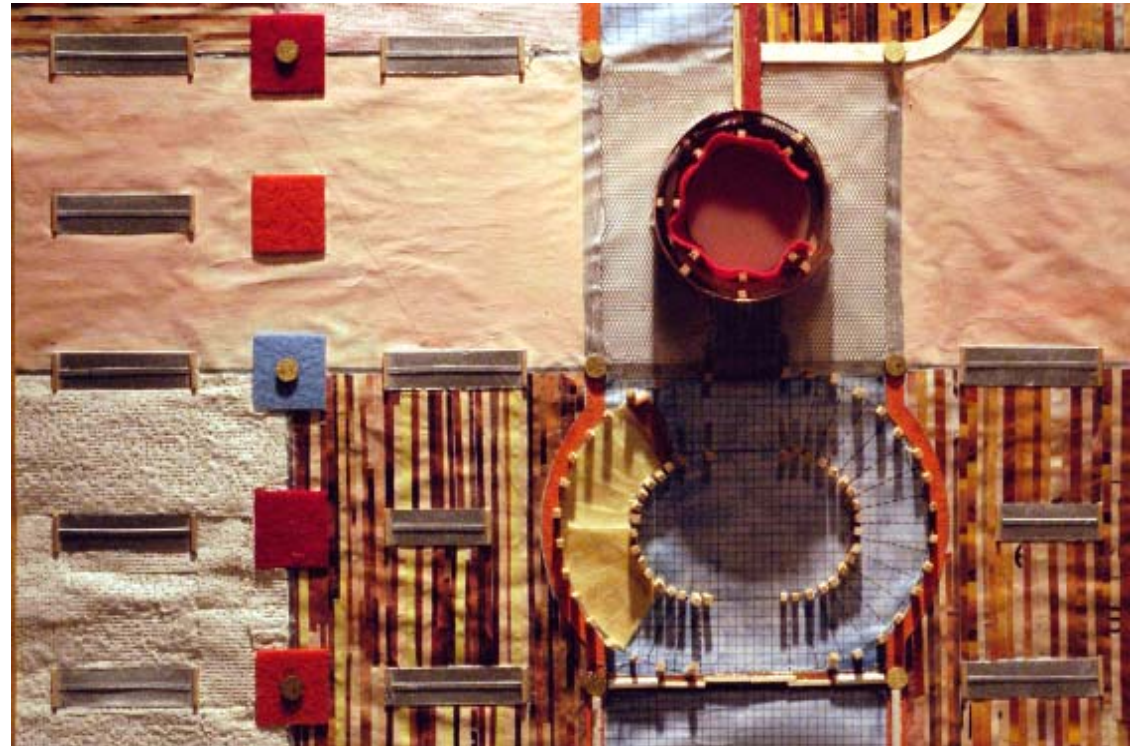
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### **Abstract**

The resonance of a knock on a door uncovers its density.

The smell of a wall describes its materiality.

The texture of a floor may invite us to sit or lay down.

The smoothness of a handrail comforts our ascent.

Human skin is a powerful material that enables us to perceive and understand our surroundings. Skin is highly expressive; based on its color, texture, wear and plasticity we can read it, gathering information concerning culture, ethnic background, age, abuse, health and the tasks it performs on specific body parts. Skin itself reads as it is readable. Our skin can gather data through tactile perception and read our spatial surroundings. Architecture is an expressive act and the only discipline that stimulates all of our senses. An architect designs spaces that foresee and celebrate the bodily interaction of the inhabitant.

The architecture of the 21st century seems to be geared toward a more optic experience, an influence of the digital world and its wide-spread effect. The architectural body of modern construction is made up of skins that convey no intentions of interaction between human skin, delivering a concoction of low quality materials that time and again are layered the same way and only aim to be cost efficient. The result is a bland, empty and “flat” experience. In a culture dominated by visual stimulation, can the design of architectural skins aid in the reading and understanding through touch of an architectural body’s spatial sequence?