

MARY TEAGUE

The Commercial, Sydney

Visual artists, whose primary concern is normally matter not words, are often described as having a 'language'. This presumably refers to a set of conventions, grammatical structures, phrases, slangs, exceptions-to-the-rule and accents, which they cultivate and return to. This system rewards those best able to remain within the boundaries of interpretation; people can't understand you when you speak in tongues.

For her most recent solo show, 'Language of Art', at The Commercial, Sydney-based artist Mary Teague undertook to use art's own conventions, its pre-linguistic elements. The artist employs frames, stages, posters, plinths and hanging devices to constantly point to something else. The works are emptied out in order to distract from themselves; they refer to all the stuff that sits around the object, which she calls 'the collateral'.

The large-scale sculpture, *Another device* (2014), references an earlier work, *Device for looking forward* (2012), a sculptural collage which includes a photograph of a young blonde boy locked in a pillory and grinning. The more recent pillory-like device comprises a two-metre piece of plywood, painted and hung horizontally from a long, thick hemp rope threaded through two points and knotted where the wrists would be. A second rope is looped through two holes and left to slump onto a black-carpeted stage below. The stage takes up almost half the gallery space, intercepting the thoroughfare at about shin level and forcing people to choose whether to walk over or around. *Another device* is both something to be hung and a mechanism for hanging. A bunch of thick leather belts slump undone from the lowest point of the rope, as if waiting to be worn.

Multi-purpose, collaborative object-projects recur in Teague's work, and they often evoke the human body, whether through scale, figuration, titling or gesture. *Male and Female 1* and *Male and Female 2* (both 2014) are two phallic cylinders of Corflute covered in 24-carat gold that sit

within abstractly painted receptacles, reminiscent of candlestick holders. Teague describes these as being 'models' of sculptures; they are preparatory in terms of scale and seem to occupy the gallery like commas. One juts out abruptly, horizontal from the wall; the other is modestly placed on the stage, as if finding itself there by chance.

While the paint on the holder section of *Male and Female 1 & 2* is a denser version of the oil palette used in *Another device*, the same gold-plated (this time rose gold) Corflute reappears in the title piece *Language of Art* (2014). Here, three pieces of equal size rest on their edge to form a triangle. Installed beside *Sculpture* (2014), which itself comprises three framed photographs of different Marshall speakers hung from the floor up in a stack, largest to smallest, *Language of Art* initially suggests an enlarged pool or billiards rack. Yet, threes and triangles have more symbolic connotations, too. They recall any number of pyramid-systems, whose graphic role is to represent the proportional relationships between given products, personnel or consumer habits.

To further the point, *Language of Art* is positioned directly opposite the entrance to the gallery in alignment with the doorframe. The equilateral triangle indicates other notions of correspondence, too; the adjacent wall is covered floor to ceiling with a series of seven large giclée prints titled *Equivalence* (2013). The works are scans of photo album pages found in charity shops while Teague was in residency in Montréal in 2013. The cardboard frames are abstracted from their primary context and enlarged. They contain no images and frame only a simple white background, itself matching the gallery's walls.

Furthering these gestures toward the gallery space itself, Teague proposes that the wall of graphic posters covering both sides of the roller door of The Commercial should be taken as 'decorative', a way of enlivening a 'dead zone', rather than as a work. Yet, the prints in 'The Prairie' series (2013) are the only pieces in the show that actually use written language. This conscious separation of the decorative elements (language) and the artworks (outside language) is, despite Teague's best intentions at evasion, revelatory of her project at large. Incongruous and self-referential constituents come together to eventually contradict themselves. One of the slogans hits the nail on the head: 'Show me some discipline'.

