

Sara Barker

MARY MARY, GLASGOW, UK

While Sara Barker's work is theoretically complex, its formal construction and appearance is deceptively simple. Her sculptures are ciphers, of sorts, for an elaborate and personal narrative comprising mostly late-Victorian and Modernist fiction, poetry and biography. The title of her second solo exhibition at Mary Mary, 'Images', nodded to Imagism (the early-20th-century movement closely associated with H.D. and Ezra Pound), while also referring more directly to the way in which her work frames the gallery space. The six fragile structures shown here (all works 2010) stand just above head height, each construction consisting of both ridged and bowing lengths of aluminum, all painted with gouache in varying pastel tones. Each balances precariously on either the floor or on the glass tops of immaculately produced tables.

In the first gallery, Folly, the largest work here, dominated the space, its latticed construction of uprights, horizontals and diagonals resembling a freestanding set of hackneyed stretchers awaiting canvases, or a room divider missing its panelled surface. But Folly's frame isn't strong enough to support either — what we are presented with is a window consisting of various apertures from which to view the gallery and the surrounding works. In denying the form a flat surface or mass, the work frames the location it inhabits; in doing so it encompasses the structure's negative space, using it as a material to fill the void that has been purposefully created. The title, Folly, points towards its architectural definition: a decorative construction, sometimes purposely unfinished to resemble a ruin, built as a talking point or place for contemplation. Again, in the work that stands opposite Folly, Barker implies meaning through her titling, personifying the sculpture with the name Ottoline — in this case an allusion to the English aristocrat Lady Ottoline Morrell, whose friendships with writers including D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley resulted in her indirect characterization in a number of novels (including *Women in Love*, 1920, and *Point Counter Point*, 1928).

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The three tabletop works that stood in the gallery's second space have similarly allusive titles: obvious suggestions of architectural functionality are evoked in the case of *Awning* and *Fenestre* (an archaic spelling of the French for 'window'); *Le Lac* (The Lake) takes a 1911 painting with the same title, by French cubist Henri Le Fauconnier, as its starting point. From his painting, in which a tree-lined lake reflects the surrounding landscape, Barker has drawn influences that have informed the muted tonal range used when painting the sculpture, having applied pale greys, blues and yellows, as well as her choice of glass as a reflective surface for the table. As *Fenestre* and *Awning* are also both presented on glass tables, and are painted with the same palate of colours it is clear that Le Fauconnier's landscape holds a certain significance to the viewing of the works on show. In reflections, like those in the painting, Barker identifies 'images' that refract from their origin to create staccatoed circumstances which, through shifting perspectives, describe their originators in ways that they themselves never could.

Steven Cairns