

# Agnes Thurnauer

L *Matrices* brushed aluminium

Agnes Thurnauer's *Matrices* is an extensible series of works consisting of individual sculptures based on the moulds used to create sets of alphabetical letters in three-dimensional form. The number of component works being exhibited varies from one installation to another, but like the difference between language and speech (*langue* and *parole*), each selection of letterforms makes a comment on the workings of the system as a whole. In Thurnauer's practice as a painter, written language is often incorporated into the picture plane, but even when it is not, the frequent allusiveness of subject matter and style and the foregrounding of generic conventions make it clear that the work is situated within the language of art history and that it engages with the methods of *reading* a painting that this entails. Thurnauer is fascinated by the ways art reads the social and cultural reality in which it is produced, and her constant insistence is on making the viewer aware of the complicated mixture of liberties and restrictions that the available languages of art allow us to use.

Her most recent series of paintings focuses on the migration crisis whose most graphic scenes of tension are set on the borders between states, cultures and

language conventions. Her work can be thought of as having been always situated on the borders between different states of being, of gender, of mentality, of sensibility, and of expressive medium; and her own work issues from the necessity to translate and re-translate the idioms of one state into another. But as the recent paintings make clear, it is the very ground of being that is taken from under the feet of those who migrate from one state to another. Language acquisition is formative of every aspect of the self, which means that second-language acquisition is a means of building a new and somewhat different self; this has positive consequences as well as elements of melancholy.

The *Matrices* remind us of a child's set of wooden or plastic letters, different shapes that can be arranged in ways that are aesthetically pleasing as well as semantically correct. They are both literal and symbolic building blocks of a way of interpreting and representing the world that involves creative play and pleasure at the same time as they teach us the rules and limitations of social being. They remind us that art and language are positive resources during a historical crisis in our willingness to imagine ourselves in the place of the other.