

**robert pulie, mary teague,
john spiteri**

Gallery 19, Sydney

Between the Hong Lee Chinese food store, with its rows of canned foods that most Westerners avoid, and a swankily refurbished Capitol Theatre, two adventurous artist-entrepreneurs have established Gallery 19. Although Sydney's Chinatown area is no stranger to small art spaces hidden away from the gaudy glitz of Asian commerce, it has so far not seem anything like Gallery 19. For a start, Gallery 19 is not an artist-run space; it is a commercial exercise (not that it is yet making money) run and operated by Michael Hutak and Sean O'Brien.

From the street, Gallery 19 'calls' to the passer-by. A former cafe, its large open windows and impressive front room allow for a full kerb-side perusal, at all hours, of the delights within. Artists who pay for a show at Gallery 19 get a professional although understandably limited package of services: stylish invitations and publicity fliers; access to the Gallery's contacts; and the chance to hang in a quite beautiful exhibition space that is bright, airy, open and centrally located.

A recent show at Gallery 19, one of the first at the space, consisted of work by three well-known Sydney artists: Robert Pulie, John Spiteri and Mary Teague. Teague's elegantly dangerous work, *Hazchem* (the symbol used on signs to warn of the presence of 'hazardous chemicals') was one of the real highlights of the show, along with Spiteri's video piece *Siesta*, which had me pining for Roadrunner cartoons. This is not to say Pulie's work was without merit. A new sculptural piece made from cotton and wadding, stretched out along the wall and floor, demanded the viewer's attention. Seeming simple at first, the work revealed a stitched human figure on the surface of the cotton. Intricate and engaging, this work was far more impressive than Pulie's other sculptural piece with its excessively long title *The smile shared by the Toothpaste company executives standing to receive the substance of my pitch for their next ad campaign* and rather short visual joke.

Spiteri's painting, titled *Treasure Hunt*, was playful and enjoyable, recalling the work of contemporary Asian artists like Vietnamese painter Truong Tan. For my money (although I'm not sure it was worth its price tag), Teague's *Hazchem* was the most impressive work in the show. Made of vinyl, PVC and enamel, the work takes the idea of



Mary Teague, *Hazchem*, 1998. Vinyl, PVC and enamel.

a dirty, dangerous word; adds calligraphy and a silhouette in the shape of a butterfly to produce a highly polished object which shifts in context and meaning. Teague obviously likes these sorts of visual/verbal tricks as she uses them in her other two works in the show, though not with the same impact or complexity. In *Under New Management*, for instance, the mundane is again put into a softer, more ambiguous focus. In another untitled work, fifteen metres of bright red carpet, leading from the door to the back wall, asks to be walked over and along, cleverly distracting and engaging the viewer.

peter fray

**beauty 2000
di ball, bianca beetson, mikala
dwyer, jeff gibson, eve klein,
susan gray, richard grayson,
john meade**

curator: david broker

Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane

An interrogation of beauty in these postmodern times might be one of those ventures readily placed in the 'too hard' basket. On the part of Beauty 2000's curator, David Broker, it is certainly courage and conviction that seems to have driven him to excavate for this poisoned chalice. As cultural phenomenon, beauty has captivated us for centuries, perhaps becoming increasingly befuddling with the aesthetic and political fractures of our times. However, what emerges from this exhibition is not only an awareness of the ontological complexity of beauty but also a sense that certain epistemological obsessions with it verge on folly. As many of the works in Beauty 2000 seem to indicate, beauty is like fear. It makes good prey, and perhaps perversely, we derive some degree of pleasure in the taunting.

In Beauty 2000, Broker presented works by eight artists which address 'beauty in our times'. This exhibition was timed—with an apparent use-by date—indicating that ideas about and performances of beauty are in a constant state of flux, representing momentary aesthetic aspirations and respirations. The borders between the territories of popular culture and art are constantly contested and the critical distance upon which the 'aesthetic disposition' relies is under rapid fire. Subsequently, like beauty itself, this art is elusive. It does not elucidate what constitutes beauty nor does it represent beauty. Rather it prompts us to reconsider some rather invidious claims and assumptions about beauty, particularly in relation to the binary tyrannies of Western thought.

Among the contestations are constructions of identity predicated on more specific articulations of and encounters with beauty as constructed through popular culture. Desire is interlaced with such conceptions and becomings of beauty, promises of romance and sex. Richard Grayson's *Why Must I Be A Teenager In Love* and *Still Love* evokes nostalgic and sentimental memories of youth-