

# Words make worlds

By Dr Marion Piper

It's hard to imagine a day without language. A day without communicating with each other. A day without watching someone's lips dance as they regale you with tales of their life.

In 2020, we lost touch with the physicality of language – we lost touch, period. But that didn't stop the collective imagination going into overdrive, taking fragments of the world to piece together a narrative that made sense. Because let's face it, it just didn't make sense.

## These pieces

No one fits the pieces together better than an artist. When I take in Boris Cipusev's precise and measured drawings, I'm reminded of just how powerful imagination truly is.

Plucking snippets of everyday life out of thin air and distilling whole ideas down into just a few words – these are the moments we forget, or ignore, or simply can't take in because the flow of information is too constant and too loud.

These pieces open up tiny portals to the past where we, if only for a second, have the ability to time travel. To leapfrog over ourselves and land someplace else, anywhere else, but here.

Cipusev takes us to the *Concert hall*, to *Paint the flat* and *build an ark*. We're given permission to transport our minds beyond the 'now' and pass through these colourful letters into a world of our own dreaming.

But the dreaming can only last so long. Why? The body demands to be felt.

## Increase

Negotiating the illusion of Mark Smith's soft sculpture is *all* feeling and *all* perspective – you can't just take it at face value. That's because on a cellular level, the human body stores experience as a record of the fact that yes, "I am here". This intrinsic knowledge can be difficult to access but that doesn't mean it's not there.

When we stand before something small, we often feel larger than life itself. But – this is where things get interesting – when we confront something much bigger than us, we can be humbled, awe-struck or find a sense of wonder. And when we wonder, we enter the world of innocence, of thoughts like "*how is this possible?*" or "*I've never seen anything like it.*"

Smith's work is a gentle reminder that everything we know and experience is mediated through the body. Whether that's viewing an artwork, hugging someone we love or simply taking a moment to notice the rise of fall of our breath.

Justin angry bad cathy  
sad bad money 4 week  
sad

When the world puts its 'serious face' on, life can get heavy. But when I see the world through Cathy Staughton's eyes, I don't feel like I have to get so wound up. Through her trademark wit and bold, personal mark-making, Staughton gives us permission to profile what's important.

As we changed and adapted to lockdown orders, sporting masks and face shields to stay safe, we had to refine how we communicated. Without the luxury of a smile, we had to embody our emotions even more, turning a simple acknowledgment of someone walking past us into a game of charades.

Our new 'uniform' of PPE became a metaphor for everything we should've said before but never got the chance to. Relationships evolved, disintegrated and emerged anew as a result of months and months behind a mask. Staughton captures the dance of COVID-19 so beautifully – it's ridiculous, intimate, frustrating and just plain weird.

## Where the art is

Perhaps a lesson we can learn from last year is this: art isn't art because it's curated into a gallery. Art is more than the resulting work on the wall – it's a perspective and a process to define a certain way of being that doesn't accept the world at first blush. It celebrates the worlds we create when the world we know no longer exists.