

# Raquel Ormella

Work 2

Poster Reduction / essay by Blair French



## Poster Reduction

Blair French, curator *Who's Afraid of the Avant Garde? The Performance Space*, Sydney (2005)

Raquel Ormella's *Poster Reduction* continued the artist's ongoing investigation of the intersections of artistic practice and the workings and representations of social activism.

More specifically Ormella extended her recent work utilizing whiteboards – functionary trappings of any and all bureaucracies from the corporate to the collective – as representational architecture for imagery based on Wilderness Society campaigns that subtly highlighted the structures of language and dialogue underpinning the workings and rhetoric of environmental campaigns. In Ormella's work activist politics abuts the more overtly self-reflexive formal sphere of contemporary art, revealing fissures in the drawing on the histories of each.

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This work featured two coloured texta-pen drawings on separate sections of an electronic print-out whiteboard. One replicated a photograph taken by the artist of the inside of an office in the Wilderness Society Campaign Centre in Hobart. At the centre was a whiteboard with various slogans listed – the workings of a brainstorming session attempting to come up with the most effective sticker in a public campaign in support of the “Gunns 20”, 17 individuals and three organizations—the Wilderness Society, The Greens and the Huon Valley Environment Centre—being sued by Gunns. Gunns, a privately owned company making massive profits from selling old growth forest as woodchips to Japan claims that the activist campaign defamed the company resulting in a loss of profits.

The other drawing replicated a photograph taken of a massive *Eucalyptus regnan* within the Styx Valley Forest in Tasmania by artist Catherine Rogers. This pairing of images yoked together the very different spaces of environmental activism, whilst crucially each suggested something of the way in which complex environments and issues tend to be reduced to singular, memorable, almost iconic representations for the purposes of social and political efficacy. On one hand, a campaign dealing in a myriad of economic, social

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and institutional complexities hanging on the effectiveness or otherwise of a bumper-sticker. On the other, the arresting form of a single majestic tree, only visible in such a form thanks to the clearing of bush already around it, assuming the function of public icon of the natural environment subsuming reference to the necessity, even to its own survival, of a wider, more complex, less overtly photogenic eco-system.

By its very character, to a greater or lesser extent, representation of all forms tends to flense away details, to reduce, synthesize and focus material for rhetorical purpose. Ormella overtly worked with this by also presenting the compressed monotone print-outs of her whiteboard drawings. Here fine details, colours and tonal ranges were reduced to basic black and white contrasts (by analogy to the simplistic statements of what passes as much contemporary public discourse), leaving highlighted and isolated just a few slogans and the rudimentary form of a single tree.