

How to Discipline a Tree

Lonely but forbidding, *How to Discipline a Tree* incorporates many of the motifs and indeed many of the ideals that Derek Kreckler sets up for himself within his programme of performance and installation work. Primarily a performance artist, Kreckler creates installations which tend to interact with the audience to the extent that the common term for the viewer in the gallery situation - the beholder - hardly applies; the visitor to the gallery coming across *How to Discipline a Tree* finds herself incorporated into the work. Sit down on the stool: apart from being surrounded, the feeling of repression comes from the deadening of the everyday sounds we take for granted: those quotidian essences which, as common background noise remind us (inexorably): WE ARE ALIVE. Deprivation of the senses such as come from Kreckler's installation; the feeling of being blinkered, and of being aurally muffled reflect as personal and temporally corporeal concerns the expanded social, political concerns inherent in the piece via its conception, its materials, its title, and its delicacy. The installation is, in fact, rotting as you watch it, not at such speed that you can see it happening, but it is rotting, indeed faster than most of you reading this are. Kreckler's installation, whilst having a solid background within the work of the historic and neo avant-garde's has also (and perhaps surprisingly given the status of painting over the last twenty years) a painterly quality, inherited from Malevich and Mondrian but carried on most spectacularly over more recent years by artists such as Carl Andre and Richard Serra. These artists share a primeval desire for building blocks - a kind of meccano aesthetics that has been given manhood via the theorisation of archetypal grid formations, it is undoubtedly one of the most important macho elements in modern art. And yet, although this formal device can be an inescapable crevasse for some, for others these building blocks are like letters - the foundation stones upon which a language, a social fabric and a social concern are built. The bricks in *How to Discipline a Tree* are paper bricks made from the newspapers brought into an average Sydney household in one month. Indeed a close inspection will reveal the odd unpulped word shining out with unforetold meaning like a Dada poem. These words are the detritus of what is already a byproduct of everyday waste. And this everyday waste - the newspaper - has taken on a meaning altogether other from its earliest incarnations when it was a force of change rather than conservatism. From being the major means of intelligent communication, it is now a symbol of hopeless ecological damage via the massive

daily deforestation needed to produce the daily useless gossip and reactionary propaganda that we take into our homes every morning and digest with our breakfasts. The trees used for newsprint have been living far longer than you or I and the punishment inflicted upon them for this supramortal longevity is murder far more agonising and humiliating than any punishment humans have inflicted upon themselves. The trees are chopped or pulled down and left cut but still living, to dry out. Their notion of eternity is to be sawn up into woodchips and mashed into pulp, pressed into paper and then have garbage printed onto them to be read by people that have never - not even once - thought one thought they have not been told to think. People like yourselves, whose idea of independent thinking is a pat on the back from your superiors. Waste is an integral aspect of our lives. It could be said that the amount of junk mail we receive is an indication of our importance in the community. The maladjusted trees we find in our letterboxes as we come home from work are a source of solace from an anonymous sender to us -the anonymous receiver. How to Discipline a Tree gives us a similar solace. Like a good whisky it blocks out those troubling aspects of the world upon first sip. It gives you quietude to think and reflect. And forget. Silence to forget about the virtual violence that is essential - as essential as the daily newspaper - to our day to day lives.

Billy Crawford, November 11 1990 (Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane catalogue)

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