



**DISPLACED:** Clockwise from left, *Dragon fish*, *Ten fish*, *Cow fish* and *Specimen fish*. This exhibition confronts us with what we have done to the marine environment.

# Where once was beauty

The fact that Brenda Runnegar and Emma Kelly are mother and daughter might normally be irrelevant for an art exhibition, except in this instance they have combined to make quite a powerful joint artistic statement concerning marine ecology.

Brenda Runnegar is a veteran Canberra-based painter and photographer who presents a series of 37 oil paintings of fish, parts of fish and aspects of marine life in a manner which is very conscious of earlier still life painters and marine artists who over the centuries have documented the inhabitants of the world's oceans.

Runnegar's style of direct simplified images, which she has developed over a number of years, is particularly effective in this series of works where there is a crossover between direct scientific documentation and a naive childlike

## ART

**Brenda Runnegar and Emma Kelly:**  
**Displacement**

ANCA Gallery, 1 Rosevear Place, Dickson  
Until Sunday

Reviewer: **Sasha Grishin**

innocence in the depiction of what has been witnessed. She tells us that the imagery has been gathered from field trips to Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Heron Island and south-eastern Australia as well as ichthyological research in the deep sea.

I must confess that images of cut-up fish, fish heads, bits of sea sponge, jellyfish and other fragments are not particularly

aesthetically appealing, but when viewed as an assembly of images, more like an installation or a chorus of voices, there is a certain cumulative power as a collective statement concerning the destruction of life in the world's oceans.

Her exhibition operates in that intermediate zone between a gathering of scientific data and an imaginative evocation of an apocalyptic and slightly eschatological future. We are called upon to witness acts of destruction and desecration with expressions of agony caught on the faces of her subjects.

If protest may be implicit in the mother's work, in Emma Kelly's series of pencil drawings, predominantly dealing with the killing and dismemberment of a whale, the sense of protest becomes graphic and explicit. Kelly works more like a

cinematographer, where she documents as if in a series of film stills the murder of a whale by a Japanese whaling ship. She writes about this series of work. "This sequence of drawings represents the process of removing a whale from the ocean. Whales are beautiful in the water. They are flexible and light – drifting, turning and swimming in the deep water. But when killed and taken from their natural habitat they become heavy and broken – almost ugly."

Collectively, Brenda Runnegar and Emma Kelly combine in an effective protest exhibition concerning man's destruction of our marine environment. Once marine life has been extracted from the sea and transferred to land, this act of displacement converts that which is beautiful into that which is repulsive.