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Art in Review

International Geographic

Artists Space
38 Greene Street, SoHo
Through tomorrow

Despite an excess of earnestness, the current constellation of shows at Artists Space is not only unusually good, it also holds together nicely, bound by the notion of space, whether social, architectural or perceptual. The main event is "International Geographic," an engaging installation that suggests collaboration between like-minded artists. In fact, Raquel Ormella of Sydney, Australia, and Kelly Poe, from Los Angeles, learned of each other's work only when Christian Rattemeyer, the Artist Space curator, organized this show.

In a hybrid of photojournalism and set-up photography, Ms. Poe takes striking color pictures of startled birds, caught in mist nets and traps at bird-tracking stations and seen against the vastness of the American West. Here her pictures serve as vivid exclamation points — little shrieks of the wild — for Ms. Ormella's "130 Davy Street," a meandering exegesis on a prominent ecological group in Hobart, Australia, whose visually oriented campaigns have helped save the Tasmanian wilderness from destruction. This second work unfolds over a dozen or so whiteboards covered with nonchalant photo-based drawings in bright colors that depict the group's offices (which are thick with whiteboards) and track its complex history.

An impressive program of short videos trolls the margins of building interiors, cities and, at times, the video image itself. Adrià Julià's longer video "La Villa Basque, Vernon, California" zeroes in on a Basque community, still cohesive after several generations, near downtown Los Angeles. There is also a program of short videos "on/in architecture" by an international roster of young artists.

In the project galleries, the young English artist Ryan Gander deviates from the general earnestness with two clever sound-video installations. In one a young girl is heard mulling over the possible interpretations of a recurring image of a car in a big snowy field. I don't think "Fargo" is mentioned, but she gently and inadvertently skewers the quest for money and meaning that fuels the art world. *ROBERTA SMITH*