

Finding a life in sculpture

Alex Asch likes nothing better than to discover weathered, worn materials and turn them into pieces of art

Canberra-based Alex Asch is a very formidable artist whose work has not as yet received the national recognition that it so richly deserves.

For those unfamiliar with his art, you can think of it as a kind of hybrid cross between Canberra's Rosalie Gascoigne and New York's Joseph Cornell.

In his practice he adores materials which betray the experience of time, like weathered pieces of wood, old glass, peeling paintwork and discarded objects that have spent seasons exposed to the elements.

He recently noted, "When seeking the materials for my art practice I have always been drawn to the weathered and worn; the man-made placed into Nature's hands covered with her patina of muted rust; the echoes of sweaty prints and urine stains; the marks of tools that have in turn marked the hands and bodies of the men and women who have used them.

"I am particularly fond of old painted boards that have been ripped from their resting places and thrown in piles like amputated limbs, their rusty nails twisted and hardened arteries. In my workshop – all gathered – these entities pass through a process of reincarnation – constructed again into the form of the house." From these materials Asch creates small installations or illuminated tableaux, frequently in the form of immaculately crafted miniature buildings. These become a microcosm of the universe containing all of its joys and tribulations.

Some of them in form are reminiscent of the tall weatherboard buildings of his childhood in his native New England in America, others have a



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Alex Asch: *Murus constructions*

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more generic, almost fairytale quality.

To some extent they are interactive works with doors that open and handles which turn, interiors which are inhabited.

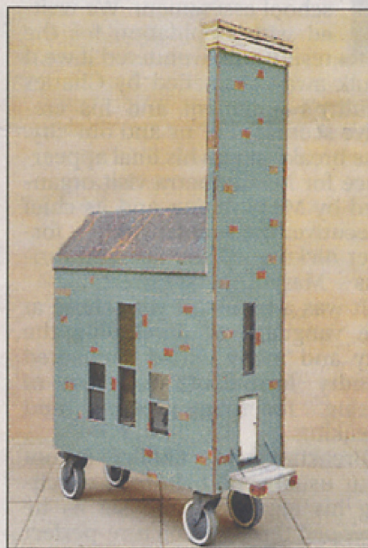
We are invited to enter and explore these little dwellings and to bear witness to the strange rituals which they contain.

They are quirky and exquisitely crafted, and betray a refined sensibility.

Pieces such as *The spotted roller*, *Another beautiful day at the factory*, *Death of formalism* and *Winter at Cornell's* are some of the highlights of the show.

Yet they photograph poorly, precisely because a photograph cannot capture the interactive component, the narrative within. The major piece in the exhibition, a museum quality work, is *In the holy roller*, an evangelical church on wheels, as ridiculous in its outer form as it is in the doctrines which we can spy inside through the coloured glass.

This is a very strong show by a significant artist. The only prediction which I can confidently make is that Alex Asch's work will never again be exhibited at such ridiculously low prices.



This is a strong show by an important artist who deserves to be better known. Alex Asch's *Murus constructions* features *spotted roller*.

