

On the outside looking in

Alex Asch: *Facade*

Beaver Galleries, 81 Denison Street, Deakin. Closes September 4, Tues-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat-Sun 9am-5pm.

Reviewer: **Sasha Grishin**

Alex Asch is an American-born, Canberra-based artist whose beautifully crafted constructions present new ways of examining our environment.

In his practice he is drawn to materials that reflect the passage of time and bear traces of the changing environment. Many of his earlier works were in the form of exquisitely made miniature houses or churches on wheels.

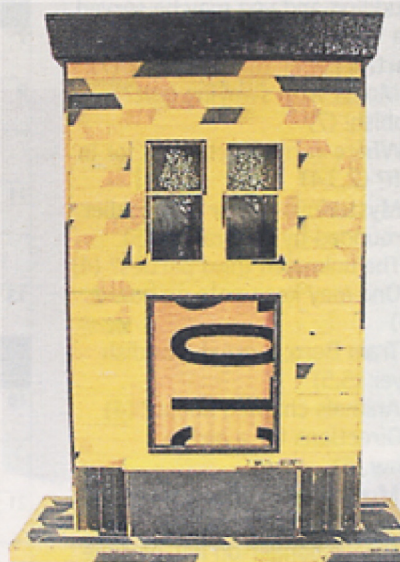
His new exhibitions deals with facades where the interiors are collaged with the exterior landscape; birds, fishes and suited men who lie behind coloured glass. The windows and doors act as the eyes and the mouths of his buildings.

I have followed Alex Asch's work for about two decades and have become accustomed to his dry humour, and gift for understatement. What in his earlier art was whimsical and anchored in nostalgic memories, now is becoming more socially proactive with an implied critique of our society, commercialisation and things to which we turn a blind eye.

The exhibition consists of more than a dozen immaculately realised installations where we are presented with little snapshots of ourselves and society. It is a somewhat gloomy portrait.

The show-stopper is the large installation *76 J.C.s continue the big charade*, where 76 found statuettes of Jesus Christ mounted on various vehicles and all spray-painted in black enamel approach us like an army of alien invaders.

If I was to choose a favourite from this exhibition, it would be



Till further notice, by Alex Asch.

Till further notice, where a constructed facade made of "reclaimed retro reflective timber" has a prominent "closed" sign in the lower storey and two suited figures peering out of the top windows with their heads composed of shredded US currency. As an installation, it taps into so many associations, from Rosalie Gascoigne to Fiona Hall, yet maintains its own and independent voice. The piece is like a mausoleum to an extinguished hope.

In a facade such as *The immigrants*, under the sign "Please Proceed", heads are crammed into a sea-blue house boat. All of his constructions, his social facades, become little meditations on our society.

Engaging, humorous and increasingly confronting, Asch is now emerging as one of the serious artists critics of contemporary Australia and of its broader context.

This is a very strong exhibition by a local artist who is receiving national attention.