

Alex Asch



Alex Asch, *Nice Conversations Over Lunch*, 2004. Mixed media, 81 x 50 x 8cm. COURTESY: THE ARTIST.

Alex Asch arrived in Australia in 1987 at the age of 22. He had spent his childhood in Cambridge Massachusetts, in the old part of town on the edge of Harvard campus. It was a neighbourhood of two and three storey houses. As he recalls: "Many of them were old wooden weather boards and shingled Victorians. There were wild rumours and stories about older and more reclusive residents ... At night we would sneak around and dare each other to peak through old windows."

Despite having spent almost two decades in Australia, Asch brings a distinctly American sensibility to his art. To enter one of his exhibitions is like being a witness to a conversation between **Joseph Cornell** and **Edward Kienholz** with **Rosalie Gascoigne** standing somewhere in the background. Cornell's boxes and collages are some of the most beguiling and entrancing intimate creations of 20th century art, while Kienholz championed a form of grotesque funk art to make powerful ethical statements. One was the quintessential introverted East Coast artist exploring a new spiritual order, the other was the rather brash West Coast artist for whom art was the conscience of society.

Asch draws on both of these traditions to create wonderfully poignant sculptures. Each piece is a symbolic tableau or an assembled installation which has been exquisitely crafted from weathered materials which bear traces of their former existence. The pieces have a piercing dry wit, but more often than not evoke a sense of profound pathos as they touch on issues as varied as militarism of the new world order, prisoner abuse in Iraq, violence against women and the US presidential elections.

Asch's installations echo the tall weatherboard buildings of his childhood in Cambridge, but here constructed from weathered wooden panelling from houses from the old suburbs of Canberra, with lead capped roofs and supplemented with strange plumbing parts converting them into expressive mutants or functionless machinery designed for social engineering. They are works which demand an interaction with the viewer with doors that open and handles which turn. We are invited to explore and to engage with the sculptures.

Alex Asch is an unusual sculptor whose work does not fit into an established mould or a defined postmodernist orientation. His art is quirky, yet tough; humorous, yet serious; brilliantly crafted, yet naïve and understated in its use of stylistic conventions. While only 40, he is already an original and distinctive voice in Australian sculpture.

- Sasha Grishin

Born: 1965

Price range: \$400-\$1,600

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