

# Creative couples: Can a husband-and-wife team work independently and make great art?

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Alex Asch, *First water at Weereewa 3*, Holden bonnet, recycled painted galvanised metal, form-ply, concrete and chalk residue, 46 x 44 cm. Photo: Beaver Galleries.

Art history is full of examples where a “great male genius” crushes the creative endeavours of his talented partner. Two artists in the same family is frequently a recipe for disaster and it is usually the woman who sacrifices her art practice for the sake of the marriage, or they drift apart. There is the famous case of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, who were incompatible together but were great artists separately.

Alex Asch and Mariana del Castillo are a husband-and-wife team based in Queanbeyan on the outskirts of Canberra.

Asch was born in Boston, on America’s east coast, in 1965; del Castillo in Ecuador, on South America’s west coast, a year later. They both emigrated to Australia in the 1980s and settled in the Canberra area. In this sense, they are both migrants from the Americas and, in their art practice, carry the imprint of their home cultures.

Also, they are both socially engaged artists involved in the big political, social and environmental issues of the day. Both artists also recycle scavenged materials, frequently transforming these materials through their art but allowing them to carry the scars of their earlier existence. They are artists who prefer to collaborate with the voices found in nature rather than totally dominating their materials. Despite their similarities in approach and philosophies, they are two very different artistic personalities and make art that is distinctive, powerful and memorable. It is impossible to confuse their work.



Alex Asch, *Primary front*, recycled painted metal, form-ply, concrete and enamel residue, 102 x 92 cm. Photo: Beaver Galleries.

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Asch, in his latest exhibition, continues his series of landscapes made out of recycled found scraps of metal, old road signs, form-ply, and concrete and enamel residue. The craftsmanship that he brings to his creations is outstanding, and on viewing the work, we are convinced that this is a landscape and only as we enter the pieces do we become aware of the components that bring with them their own histories and voices.

He recently observed about his art practice: “I have always been drawn to weathered materials, to the iconic form-ply that is used to erect the concrete structures of our cities, to galvanised steel used to construct our rural buildings, to the painted signs of our roadways abandoned in tips, reclamation yards and rural properties across the Southern Tablelands.”

His pieces, including *First water at Weereewa 3* and *Primary front*, are powerful and evocative works where we sense the thundering skies with theatrical cloud formations and the rushing waters.



Mariana del Castillo, *Edge of Awareness*, monoprint, repurposed linen, clay paint, sumi ink & wool, 85 x 124 cm.  
Photo: Beaver Galleries.

Mariana del Castillo takes her found materials and organically remakes them into a completely new entity, employing her unique symbolism.

In her *Edge of Awareness*, she incorporates found linen, clay paint, sumi ink and cotton to create a dominating monoprint featuring a giant knot suspended over a landscape. The knot, for her, is an expression of anxiety concerning the catastrophe facing our environment through climate change. It is an anxiety that the artist herself experiences as she questions her contribution to the disasters of fires and floods that are starting to dominate the land we inhabit.



Mariana del Castillo, *Previously unseeable (Winton series)*, carved cedar, monoprint on linen, clay paint, wool and cotton stitching, 44 x 17 x 20 cm. Photo: Beaver Galleries.

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Some of her other pieces, including *Previously unseeable (Winton series)*, have totemic heads carved out of cedar with a monoprint on linen forming a landscape face. The work is simultaneously a figure and a landscape. These are exceptionally powerful sculptural works that become imprinted on your psyche as you move around the exhibition. Whereas we have seen much of Asch's work related to the pieces in this exhibition, del Castillo's sculptural pieces are new and quite striking developments in her art.

She notes about her work in this exhibition: "My work seeks to translate the experience of being in the landscape. I hear and feel its rhythms and gestural energy and attempt to visually represent this robust and fragile environment."

**Alex Asch and Mariana del Castillo *Compression* and Thornton Walker *Pictures from an imaginary world* are on exhibition at [Beaver Galleries](#), 81 Denison Street, Deakin, from 5 to 21 September.**