

Sowing seeds for rebellion

Gary Cook meets artists
Ackroyd & Harvey

It is a rare talent to take the ordinary and not just make it extraordinary, but also imbue it with a powerful message. That is a trademark of multi-disciplinary artists Ackroyd & Harvey, whose special alchemy is to breathe thought-provoking beauty into the everyday. There is, after all, nothing particularly unusual about designing a jacket, unless it is made from verdant, living grass and worn at London Fashion Week as an indictment of the uber-wasteful clothing industry.

The pair seem equally able to conjure up the surreal and unexpected in other areas of their lives. While holding the barricades at the recent London Extinction Rebellion (XR) protests, Heather Ackroyd got into conversation with a tall policeman. Surprised by his apparent sympathy with their cause, she commented to him, "It sounds like you understand our aims." Stooping down, the PC whispered, "That's because when I'm off duty I'm a druid."



Ash to Ash (work in progress) © Ackroyd & Harvey
Photograph by Madeleine Hodge



Ackroyd & Harvey in their studio © Johnny Millar
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A significant portion of the actively alternative world Heather Ackroyd and Dan Harvey inhabit is being taken up with XR at the moment. They spent 11 days and nights camping at Marble Arch during the high-profile demonstration in April this year. But their involvement is really just a natural extension of what they have been energetically expressing in their creative lives for the past 40 years. Their back catalogue of installations and artworks has always focused on the environment and its destruction. They are enthused now that many more of the public have joined the movement: "In a dark place, the protests are a gleaming light."

As well as producing multi-disciplinary works that intersect art, activism, architecture, biology, ecology and history, Ackroyd & Harvey are among the founders of the Culture Declares Emergency movement. Allied to XR, it is a group of like-minded artists and practitioners in culture making a public statement of their support for action in the face of the planetary crisis.

Challenging the status quo through artistic expression is where Ackroyd & Harvey's strength has always been. For example, their striking installation *Ash to Ash* at White Horse Wood, Maidstone, Kent was commissioned by The Ash Project as part of a campaign to highlight the sad predicament facing one of our most populous trees. Scientists predict that as many as 98% of Britain's 150 million ash trees will be struck