



Peak

Expect to see things you have never seen before

Biennale executive director Marah Braye



Organic process: Artist Tanmaya Bingham  
Picture: Bob Barker



For this artist, portraits of couples go beyond the surface, writes

**Elizabeth Fortescue**

# The art of tolerance

IT MUST be quite confronting to be asked by Tanmaya Bingham if she can paint your portrait. It's not just the shape of your nose or the colour of your hair she's trying to capture. And it's not just you.

What Bingham wants is you and your partner. And before she starts the painting, she wants to come over and have a deep and meaningful conversation about your relationship.

"I'm really interested in sociological, genealogical and psychological patterns and trends," Bingham says.

"I'm interested in investigating human dynamics. It dawned on me that when we are in interaction with a friend or partner, we tend to project on to them what we want them to be, rather than seeing them for what they actually are. "That assumption, for me,

created what I considered [to be] people's own personal levels of tolerance for that other individual. So if you projected negative things on to that person, then automatically your level of tolerance might be lower."

What Bingham found among the five couples she interviewed was that they had a wide range of tolerance levels, depending on the particular situation.

"So one person has a high level of tolerance for that person's cooking. The other person has a really low level and sits over their partner and watches them cook," she said. Some people didn't like to use the word "tolerance" to describe the way they relate to their partner. If they had to be that tolerant, they said, the relationship wouldn't work.

"I was trying to go about it in a really scientific way at first,"

Bingham says. "Then I realised because it is a relationship, it's coming from an emotional body, not an intellectual body."

Bingham found the couples spontaneously came up with visual metaphors to describe their relationship. She then adapted those metaphors to her portraits. For example, one couple was depicted with a series of cogs between them.

"One of the couples mentioned their relationship was like a machine and that they're always putting parts into it, and they're really industrious about how they approach their dynamic," the artist says. "It was a learning process for me, and I'm sure for them too."

The couples Bingham used were her friends or acquaintances, aged from early 30s to mid 60s.

She had wanted to interview

same-sex couples as well as heterosexual couples, but was unable to find a couple that was willing to participate.

"I met with each couple and asked a series of questions which ended up being quite organic, and from that deduced how to create their own personal dynamic on a visual plane," she says.

**Tanmaya Bingham, Levels Of Tolerance; Brenda May Gallery, 2 Danks St, Waterloo; until June 6, 9318 1122**

**Also showing**  
**Matthys Gerber:** *Wild West*, Fairfield City Museum and Gallery, cnr Oxford St and The Horsley Drive, Smithfield; until July 4  
**Ben Cauchi:** *The Claim*, Darren Knight Gallery, 840 Elizabeth St, Waterloo; until June 5