

First show does not live up to the occasion

RECENTLY, we saw the opening of the new Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. The small cottage in Dallas Brooks Drive, newly polished and painted, was filled to overflowing with crowds keen to support this important new venture.

The occasion was also appropriately marked by the launching of a new anthology 'Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980' put together by 'Art and Text' editor Paul Taylor, it makes a significant contribution towards documenting some of the aesthetic debates which characterised the ideological and conceptual concerns of the seventies and provides a crucial backdrop to our own.

But despite the excitement and high hopes, it was difficult not to feel a certain disappointment at the centre's opening exhibition. This comprised three disparate and unrelated shows by painter Robert Jacks, British sculptor Bill Woodrow and architect Peter Cook, which together did not live up to the significance of the occasion.

Part of the difficulty would have been in planning ahead a more substantial exhibition when the opening date for the centre was uncertain. But it would have been a thrilling start to the centre's life to have seen an exhibition which,

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whether international or Australian, really cut the ice of contemporary art.

As it is, Jacks's series of minimalist canvas boards, 'Marine Totem/Painting' installation, whilst never having been shown before, have a significance which relates primarily to the contexts of Jacks's own art. Peter Cook's 'Tower Projects' illustrate some of the more visionary and imaginative bases for architecture but hardly, at this time, make an exhibition with the appropriate panache.

Bill Woodrow is more interesting and more in keeping with the calibre of the centre because he is one sculptor who recently made his mark in Britain by using ordinary or "found" objects, the refuse of a consumer society, in a manner which distinguishes itself from 'Pop'.

In Woodrow's art, one object strangely gives birth to another achieving an odd juxtaposition of object and image which sometimes, as in ('Car Door', 'Gun', 'Suitcase') is suggestive of some oblique narrative.

Despite these criticisms, the

centre has already made a lively contribution in bringing Keith Haring in person, and Phillip Guston's paintings to Australia. Its 'Three Rooms/Three Artists' was an imaginative use of the building prior to renovation. Hopes are still high for the future, and its opening clearly a very exciting event.

(Centre for Contemporary Art, Dallas Brooks Drive; South Yarra. Ends 7 October). Gallery open 10.30 am to 5 pm weekdays, 2-5 pm weekends.



John Buckley, director of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, and some of the work of Bill Woodrow: one object strangely gives birth to another.