

# Bringing art to attention

Amidst the freshness and greenery of Melbourne's Botanical Gardens a modest, white brick house plays host to a feast of creativity.

Driving along Dallas Brooks Drive, one could easily mistake the revamped Victorian style building now known as The Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, as being a residence.

Only a small, neatly lettered sign hanging from the front gate gives the clue to passers by.

Yet despite its modest visual profile, the first public gallery in Australia to be devoted solely to exhibiting contemporary art is ever increasing in both popularity and public awareness.

Opened less than six months ago, the centre is already receiving wide acclaim for its program, encompassing both national and international works.

Inside, a \$60,000 remodelling job funded by the State Government and the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council has provided exhibiting space accommodating 20 artists' works.

Centre director, John Buckley, described the venture as "just a small beginning".

"The government thought this was a good place to start the Contemporary Art centre, but

**By**  
**Jo Harrington**

the notion has never been held that this is all," he explained.

"The long term plan is for an institution that will take the pressure of contemporary art off the National Gallery of Victoria an institution that will include a bookshop, resource and information material, a coffee shop, lecture theatre and will house a permanent collection of contemporary art.

## Need

"For so long there has been a need for such a facility.

"Until now, Australia was the only civilised country in the western world that did not have a museum of contemporary art. No organisation in this country had ever attempted to show contemporary art exclusively."

Mr Buckley has been with the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art since it opened last September.

His job was to redesign the interior of the old Victorian residence and

to establish the gallery as it is now.

His credentials, starting as an artist, working for seven years at the Vancouver Art Gallery in Canada, and as the director of the Institute for Modern Art, Brisbane, among other appointments, make him more than able.

Sitting back talking, dressed in jeans, a checked shirt, tie and corduroy jacket, it is obvious the man knows his art.

With determination and direction he explained that the centre's program "attempts to encompass what is current in the visual arts," including works by international artists whenever possible, a feature he considers important for a public gallery.

To date, Mr Buckley believes the exhibitions staged at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art have been highly successful.

The gallery's ninth and current exhibition *Visual Tension*, is a unique collaboration between the centre and the arts magazine *Tension*.

Under the title *Visual Tension*, the magazine features the black and white works of 20 artists, including Imants Tillers, Peter Booth, John Lethbridge, Peter Tyndal, Howard Arkley and Vivienne Shark Lewitt —



● Australian Centre for Contemporary Art director John Buckley

all of the works are on display at the contemporary art centre.

Mr Buckley said the special edition of *Tension* magazine was an attempt to produce an exhibition that could be held in the hand — a means of taking contemporary art to an audience far greater than a gallery could ever attract.

Broadening the public's exposure to contemporary art is a role

which he sees as vital for the centre.

For far too long, he said, contemporary works "have not rated a prominent place in people's minds," and have been subject to "a clichéd image."

Through what Mr Buckley calls an "outreach" program, he hopes the centre can "redress" the problem of the public's view of modern art.