

## A classicist yearns for modernist ruins

Melbourne artist Tony Clark looks forward to the day when the last of Melbourne's modernist buildings falls down.

It will, he hopes, be replaced by something with a classical structure, which is easier on the eye and more pleasant to inhabit.

Clark is one of what he believes is a growing number of classicist crusaders.

They see the world as having been afflicted by a "blind belief in modernism" for far too long.

"And a blind belief in modernism has got art and architecture into trouble," says Clark, who is exhibiting his work at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art until 9 June.

Clark believes the emerging generation of artists and architects will change the face of Melbourne and, he hopes, its art.

The fact that the National Gallery of Victoria intends to buy one of his pieces is, he agrees, a good sign.

The gallery has chosen Clark's 'Two Landscape Paintings' and a print of the 'Roman and Imperial Fora'.

The Melbourne scene, Clark says, is part of a worldwide trend away from modernist architecture and art towards classically derived works.

"Modernist ideas made the places people lived and worked in much less pleasant than they needed to be," he says Clark.

The artist's interest in quoting historical precedents undoubtedly

has much to do with his childhood, much of which was spent roaming the ancient sites and ruins of Europe with his parents.

Greek and Roman temples are often used as subjects for his work, in which antique nobility contrasts with a seemingly makeshift, rough presentation on simple canvas boards.

This is Clark's "slightly clumsy, do-it-yourself form of St Kilda classicism".

He rejects any notion that he is a "spoiler" of traditions. "I do the paintings in good faith. I don't consider myself a spoiler of the traditions I work from. In fact I think the traditions of imagery I use are quite big enough to accommodate my versions of them. It can have a slightly sloppy end, if you like."

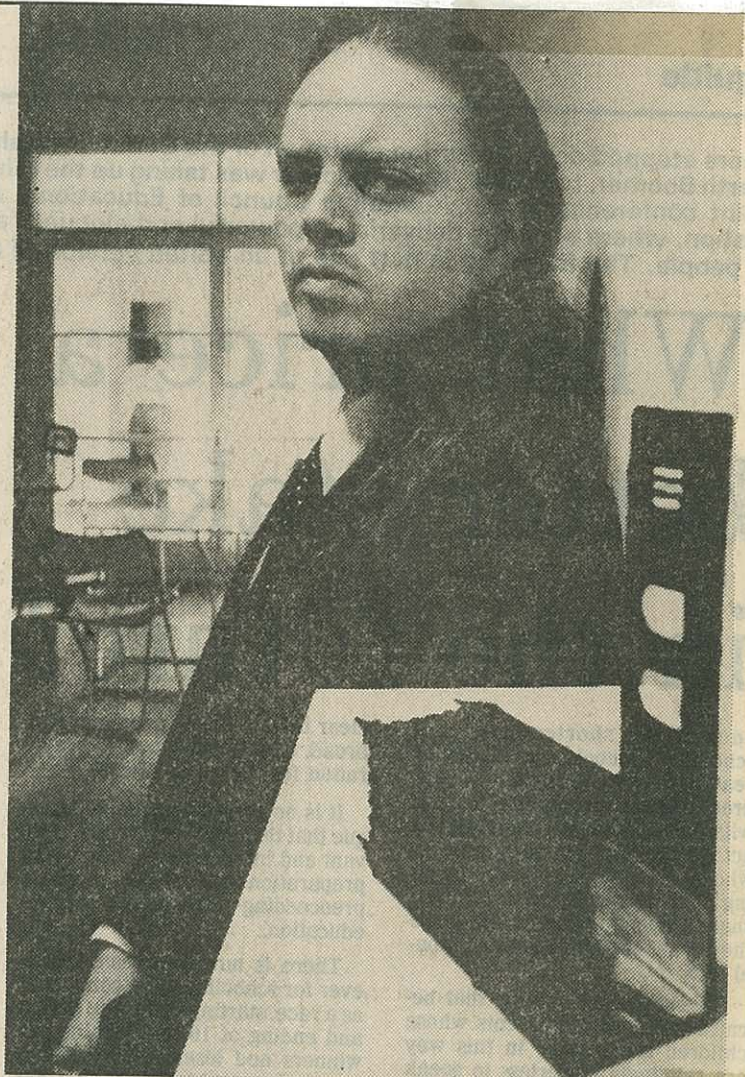
Clark sees classicism as particularly apt for Australia because this country has not had the chance to get bored with classical ideas.

"There is a freshness here which I think can be turned into something positive."

"But it involves bringing a stop to the sort of mindless developments using this debased, degraded, modernist language."

Clark says the point is not to dwell so much on the existence of buildings like Nauru House and The Rialto. Rather it is to make sure that others like them are prevented from being built.

Arts page tomorrow: 'The Age' art critic Gary Catalano reviews Tony Clark's exhibition.



Picture: SIMON CORDEN

Artist Tony Clark at his exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, The Domain.