Overkill on lame effort

Art

by RONALD MILLER

YOU may have noticed lately some new strains of that creeping art disease, curator's overkill.

Two examples: a sad little affair at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, and an exhibition at Melbourne University by Joseph Tierney, better known as art historian Bernard Smith.

In both cases, lame paintings are propped up with academic marketing, fulsome essays, documentation and colored catalogues.

Tierney abandoned painting 44 years ago and started again only last year, it seems. There's no reason, of course, why (with a distinguished career of a different sort behind him) he should not feel free to dabble again; but he should not expect to be much good at painting.

On this evidence, he's not. He tries to give his familiar social views a pictorial form by broadly outlining some photo-snaps of CND rallies, Moomba revels and ANZAC marches, and then coloring them in. The work is poorly conceived and made, blankly inexpressive, and makes only the most rudimentary social comment.

YET the catalogue notes solemnly that one of these timid hobby pictures of the Yarra Bank "almost paraphrases Seurat's *La Grande Jatte*".

At least Tierney does the best he can; but at the ACCA, Tony Clark actually intends his brown-slimed ovals and absurdly precious scraps of cooked-up classical landscape to look clumsy. Clark imagines it's part of the old Duchamp game, I suppose.

Here, too, he finds someone eager to document and discuss these piffling anti-art exercises and post-Modernist gestures, as if the whole thing were about real painting and meant to be taken seriously. The charitable view is that Clark's show is not just an indulgence but a send-up, an example of undergraduate dandyism.

I have found most of the shows at the ACCA dull, and so is this one. If you feel the same, go upstairs (above the Tierney show) at the university to refresh yourself with some healthier contemporary painting by Jan Murray, who has been painting in a Berlin studio for some time.

Unlike Clark's mock-ups, Mur-