

METROARTS & CULTURE

ACCA, Big Brother is giving you \$300,000

By MICHAEL SHMITH

IN A windfall for Melbourne art, the NSW-based Balnaves Foundation is to contribute \$300,000 over the next three years to the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art's annual emerging-artists' program, NEW. This is the first time the foundation has invested in a Melbourne metropolitan arts organisation — although it is also a major donor to the McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery, at Langwarrin.

The foundation, which invests more than \$2 million a

year in medicine and the arts, was established in 2006 by businessman and philanthropist Neil Balnaves, the founder of Southern Star, the television production and programming giant whose output has included *Police Rescue*, *Blue Heelers* and *Big Brother*.

Yesterday's windfall was the equivalent for ACCA management and board of the chance for house improvements to enable more future tenants.

"This will enable us to have more commissions, more artists and maybe some outdoor work,"

said ACCA's chairwoman, Naomi Milgrom. "It is the beginning of a fantastic relationship." Ms Milgrom met Neil Balnaves at the Venice Biennale, where she talked to him about emerging talents and ACCA's NEW scheme. "He got very excited and said, 'I'd love to support it.'"

True to his word, the foundation has come through. Its donation will also strengthen the centre's already vibrant relationship with its near neighbour, the Victorian College of the Arts, as well as enable a greater bond with similar institutions over-

seas. "An important point is our international component," Ms Milgrom said. "This gives us the opportunity to enable young artists to see for themselves the quality of international art." She hopes the donation will encourage other philanthropists to support NEW.

Neil Balnaves set up the foundation with his wife and their three grown children after he retired as Southern Star's executive chairman in 2005; he remains a consultant and is a director of Southern Cross Broadcasting, which was bought

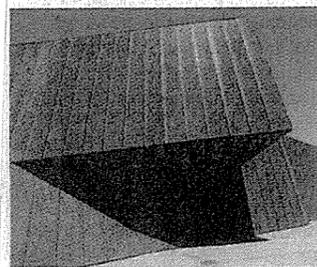
by Fairfax Media, owners of *The Age*, in 2007.

"The foundation has three areas: medicine, art and the emerging future generation," Mr Balnaves said yesterday. "The beauty of ACCA is that it doesn't collect, but just exhibits.

"Our donation will help with things it wants to achieve, and will also enable it to market the centre properly. Given its size, it has been a difficult space to get to work. ACCA has a great infrastructure, and there are great people working there. Now it needs to be seen. To be more visible."

Does this southerly expansion of the Balnaves Foundation's interests mean there will be more investment in Melbourne institutions? "I doubt it will be the last," Mr Balnaves said. "It all depends on the criteria. We will always listen to a good case." As with Naomi Milgrom, Neil Balnaves hopes his donation will attract others, large and small. "We're not Myer or Pratt, but a small family foundation," he said, somewhat modestly. "Size doesn't matter; it's the culture of giving and doing what you can do."

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NEW FUNDS FOR NEW

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