

VENETIAN IMAGES

Melbourne's newest gallery gets a facelift.

THE NEW \$250,000 gallery at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Dallas Brooks Drive, Melbourne, opened on February 4. But the walls will have to be repainted after the inaugural exhibition by one of Australia's leading internationally known young artists, Imants Tillers: *Paintings for Venice*, which opens on March 15.

Not, it is hoped, because of excessive behaviour at the inaugural party held in the gallery last night. As one of 145 donors who each contributed \$1,000 to the new extension, the Melbourne journalist, political commentator and bon vivant, Barry Everingham, was rewarded with the opportunity of holding his 55th birthday party there. Expelled from the Canberra Press gallery during the Whitlam years for being caught in the leader's rooms after hours (it was a set up, says Everingham), he is the one whose celebrations are most likely to set the teeth of gallery director Richard Perram on edge.

Other donors, including Dame Elisabeth Murdoch, Bob Ansett and the Smorgon family, promise less lively entertainments should they choose to exercise their donor rights.

No, the reason for the paint job is that Tillers' paintings consist of many small panels assembled in numbered order and attached to the walls with Velcro.

This is not because of one of those "isms" that make up contemporary art

labels, but because of practicality. Sydney-born and based, Tillers lives and works on a cliff face at Sirius Cove, opposite the noise from Taronga Zoo and above the site of Arthur Streeton's 1890s artists' camp. It is simply much easier to store stacked panels in the house and to carry them up the steep cliff than to wrestle with large, stretched canvasses.

Trained as an architect (he won the University of Sydney Medal in 1973), Tillers is drawn to working repetitiously and on grids. *Paintings for Venice* — chosen by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council as the sole visual works to represent Australia at the 42nd Venice Biennale in 1986 — developed out of early work much influenced by Marcel Duchamp. There was, for example, a series of little metal stands mounted with Hans Heysen paintings in baked enamel and superimposed with references to a Duchamp work.

There is as much to ponder in the six huge *Paintings for Venice*, valued at about \$20,000 each. *I Am The Door*, for example, is eight metres long and three metres wide. It borrows, among other elements, the image of Paganini on his death bed from a contemporary painting by Sigmar Polke, in turn a borrowed image. The title is a quote from the Bible, the name of a series of paintings by John Walker and a reference to a painting by the New Zealander, Colin McCahon. *Mount Analogue* is elaborated from a Von Guerdar painting. *The Hyperborean and the Speluncar* has images from works by de Chirico, Lord Leighton and Colin McCahon. The question Tillers seems to be asking in his work is: where does originality start and finish?

Gallery director Richard Perram believes that most images are borrowed: "They are borrowed and added to with contemporary and historical references," he says. "Tillers uses the

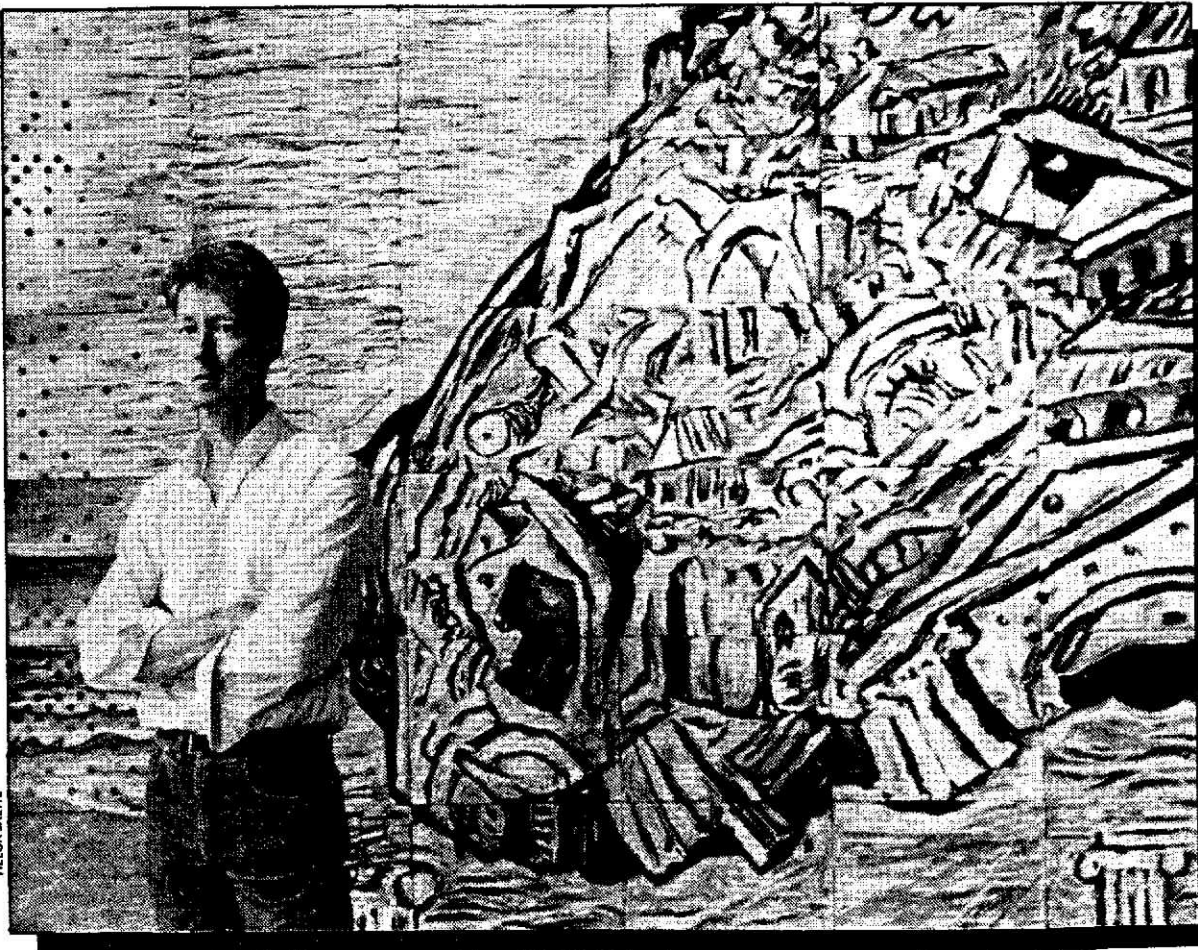
idea of taking something second-hand and making it first-hand and more interesting. It is a comment on Australia's received culture that we constantly see things here second-hand through magazines and catalogues."

Books and magazines are Tillers' sources. Having selected images, Tillers draws a fine grid over the torn-out reproductions so that each section can be enlarged by copying it on to one of his 25-centimetre by 38-centimetre panels — although Tillers' choice of images does not necessarily mean that he subscribes to the original meaning. Perram believes his work is a perfect choice to open the new gallery because it is the ACCA's role to present both contemporary Australian and overseas work. Tillers is an international Australian painter who has often exhibited abroad.

Born in 1950 of Latvian parents, Tillers has been influenced by the new German expressionism. Like many Latvian intellectuals of his parents' generation, he seems drawn to the German culture and language. *Heart of the Wood*, for example, lists the names of various German folk heroes, with Tillers' own name paramount among them, the letters intertwined with figures from Latvian mythology.

The ACCA, in its extended form, reflects a harmony of old and new which Tillers' art complements. The ACCA opened in 1984 in a Victorian brick cottage surrounded by a rose garden and the parkland fronting Melbourne's Botanic Gardens.

Later, the Melbourne City Council offered the cottage to the Victorian Ministry for the Arts and it became a non-commercial contemporary art space. It was always intended to expand the centre and this was achieved with a \$100,000 grant from the Victorian Government, the aforementioned donor funds, \$50,000 worth of materials from Melbourne builders



Richard Perram, director of the Centre for Contemporary Art at Dallas Brooks Drive, Melbourne, in the centre's new \$250,000 gallery.

and \$20,000 from the Helen Shutt Trust.

Leading Melbourne architect Daryl Jackson designed a modern extension that merges with the landscape and fits the scale of the existing building.

In this new and entirely contempo-

rary space, Perram intends to branch out with all forms of contemporary art. Melburnians can look forward, for example, to dropping in on the performance festival scheduled for April. This will feature everything from drag acts drawn from gay pubs to

Rodney Berry playing weather balloons fitted with organ pipes. July offers something different again in *Dream Homes*, an architecture show displaying the work of Australia's six best domestic architects in conjunction with Peter Greenaway's architec-

tural drawings for the film, *The Draughtsman's Contract*.

Meanwhile, *Paintings for Venice* packing them in. It moves to the A Gallery of South Australia from April 17 to June 7.

JAN MCGUINNESS