

Shining lights in our art market

■ SNAPSHOT

Where: John Buckley Gallery,
8 Albert St, Richmond until
Wednesday
Reviewer: Jeff Makin

THE new John Buckley Gallery has several things in common with the new Scott Livesey Gallery, reviewed two weeks ago.

Both are a timely upgrading of exhibition facilities that beam an optimism for the future of the Melbourne art market.

You enter both through small ante-rooms that open into larger high-ceilinged, white-walled, well-lit interiors.

With the Buckley it's a mixture of natural and halogen wall-washing lights that diffuse rather than spotlight the paintings.

The result is a functional neutral space well suited to the display of two- and three-dimensional works. Somewhere to sit while contemplating the art is the only thing missing.

Buckley began as an artist. At RMIT in the early 1960s he was an outstanding student.

He completed an MA in Canada and turned to teaching and curating exhibitions and collections in public galleries.

In the 1970s, as director of the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, he mounted major survey exhibitions by Sidney Nolan, Fred Williams and Arthur Boyd.

He became the foundation director of Melbourne's Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in 1984-85 and bought many overseas artists to Australia, including Carl Andre, Michael Craig-Martin, William T. Wiley, and later, Keith Haring. Buckley then worked as a freelance art consultant in the private sector.

In 1998 he opened his first commercial gallery at 114 Bendigo St, Prahran.

Former National Gallery of Australia director Betty Churcher, in her opening address at the new gallery, described him as "having an excellent eye", as someone with a history for "anticipating trends and identifying great art". True.

His opening exhibition, Snapshot, is exactly that. There is something by each artist Buckley



And a full exhibition to come: Su Baker's work *Red Cover*.



High praise: Betty Churcher and John Buckley at the gallery.

represents, including Geoff Bartlett, Bruce Armstrong, Jennifer Goodman, Jeremy Kibel, Gareth Sansom and Su Baker (who has the next exhibition).

Bartlett is noted for his many public sculptures on some of the town's best contemporary architecture; Sansom is known as an ageing *enfant terrible* in several recent surveys of his paintings, and Armstrong is noted for his totemic big bird at Docklands.

Each is well represented, particularly Bartlett with his hefty tableaux of wood, copper and found materials.

Outstanding among the paintings are two pensive, abstract, rectilinear designs by Goodman. The meaning is in the colour key that could have been painted by Claude Debussy.

It is soft and philosophical, and in her larger work, appropriately titled *Zip*, reaches a chromatic climax with a central rectangle of mellow yellow.

INVESTIGATIONS of colour continue with the dazzling optical exercise by Mark Galea — it is startlingly discordant in its non-figurative associations, architectonic in its form.

By comparison, the Baker looks a little drab. It is dressed in what looks like army surplus olive green with a centralised, tonally modelled volumetric form placed against a poured, let-run lattice of dribbles. It's a prescriptive piece, reflecting the pictorial manners of an art school project, and therefore academic.

The Type C photograph by Simon Strong combined social commentary (urban decay reclaimed by primeval forest) with the lurid chemical palette of colour photography.

Hanging alongside, is a beautiful pink mountains-in-the-mist (very Chinese) allegory by Christian Lock.

In the end, what this new space represents is a cutting-edge venue, a larger space amplifying what John Buckley has become renowned for — as Betty Churcher so aptly put it: "Identifying who's hot and what's what".

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Wide vision: the inaugural exhibition at John Buckley Gallery in Richmond.