

## Max puts heart and soul into his painting

**I**T TOOK nothing less than a heart attack to separate affable and immensely popular Melbourne artist Max Middleton from his easel.

Painting, you see, is an obsession with Middleton, 75, who first picked up a brush at 14 and — until about a year ago — had seldom put it down.

It was then that, as he worked on a Lake Eildon landscape, severe chest pains nearly knocked him off his perch.

"This was almost the unfinished piece," Middleton said yesterday, proudly showing me the painting he calls *Morning, Lake Eildon*.

"I knew I was in trouble, but I just kept painting," he said. "The



**Heartfelt:** Middleton and his Lake Eildon painting.

next day I was taken to Box Hill Hospital and ended up having a bypass. I had a few months off after that."

Good idea. But the first thing Middleton did when he felt better

was to finish the landscape.

"Painting is not only my hobby and my profession, it's my whole life," he said. "If I had to stop, I'd be lost."

Middleton was over-

seeing the hanging of an exhibition — astonishingly, his 50th — opening tomorrow at the Leonard Joel Hawksburn Gallery, 333 Malvern Rd, South Yarra.

It features a range of Middleton's gentle daubings — from small oils painted from nature to large works done in the studio.

Included are his usual landscapes, rain forests, cattle mustering and working clydesdales.

As well, of course, as the splendid nudes, which take anybody who meets Middleton entirely by surprise.

Some of them in fact, are the sort of paintings that give other people heart attacks.

### CONTACT:

PHONE: 9292 3100 POST: GPO Box 751F Melbourne 3001

FAX: 9292 3111 E-MAIL: bhart@newsCorp.com.au

**ADDITIONAL REPORTING: FIONA BYRNE**

**I**N the tips bowl at the splendid Mama Du restaurant in Southgate yesterday lurked a proud, Indonesian 100 rupiah note.

My advice to management: cash it, soonest, but don't expect a windfall. Yesterday, it was worth about 1.5c. But it's the thought that counts, isn't it?

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