

# Cheaper works draw auction interest

LEONARD Joel's first major art auction of the season, at its new headquarters in the former Hawksburn primary school, was packed, despite the firm's smallest catalogue for years.

Usually Joel's lists more than 1500 works. This week, bound by the size of the former school, slightly more than 850 lots were offered, which was still almost twice the size of the Sotheby's catalogue for its sale next week.

By JEFF MAKIN

The action on Tuesday night was solid in the middle-to-lower end of the market, with a noticeable shortage of good pictures at the top end of the range.

Only one painting had an estimate of more than \$100,000, Louis Buvelot's *Australian Pastoral*. The bidding started at \$50,000 and the painting was passed in at \$80,000.

Conrad Martens' *Cockatoo Island from St Leonards* also drew little enthusiasm, falling \$5000 short of its low-end estimate of \$65,000.

While the top end quickly ran out of muscle, there was athletic bidding in the less than \$10,000 market for excellent smaller works by Max Meldrum, Sidney Nolan, Donald Friend, Norman Lindsay, Robert Dickerson, Leon Morrocco and William Frater,

with most selling within or just above their estimates.

Fred Williams' *Kew Billabong* seemed a gift at \$55,000 as many paintings of this size and quality recently have fetched six figures.

Both of the Michael Shannon works also deserved to do better. *The Cenotaph* is an important early painting that was passed in at only \$1400. The other Shannon, *Landscape Near Sunbury*, which was painted four

years before Shannon's death in 1993, is a mature work that captures the windswept plain and animated sky so typical of that region, and went to a lucky collector for only \$7500.

The big surprise was the Clifford Possum, *Legends of the Western Desert 1977*, a huge, dotted, ash-colored, major oil on canvas.

Its estimate was \$5000 but it sold for \$36,000.