

House of rising sun

An artist will turn a Melbourne hotel into an art gallery, writes **Harbant Gill**

THE Yarra has turned blue and the sun is ablaze in visual grandmaster John Olsen's largest work for Melbourne.

The 6m creation — two years in the making — will take permanent pride of place when the 14-storey boutique hotel named after Olsen opens in South Yarra in December.

The painting will hang in the foyer with about 10 more Olsen originals in the \$115 million five-star hotel at the corner of Chapel and Daly streets.

"Frankly it's beyond my wildest dreams," Olsen says as he applies the finishing touches to his painting in his Bowral studio.

"When I was a young artist, one was very, very poor. You did it because that's what you essentially were, there was no great economic incentive. In those days the highest price was 110 guineas for a Drysdale. Now it's \$1 million to \$2 million. Amazing, isn't it?"

"Of course we don't get too big for our boots either."

The 81-year-old Archibald Prize winner, whose entire first exhibition sold for 40 guineas, now sees his works fetch up to \$1.5 million apiece.

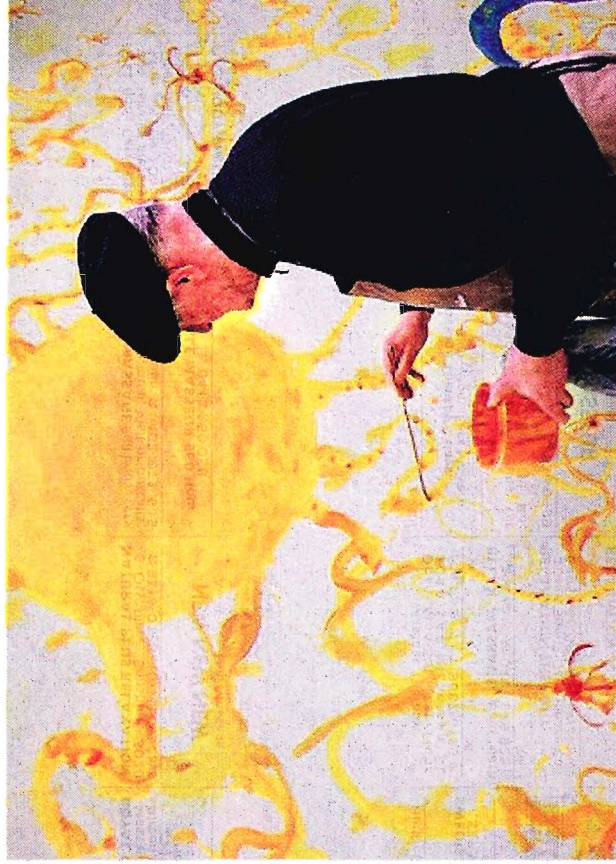
He will be taking off his boots in December to hop into the hotel's glass-bottomed swimming pool, which will hang over Chapel St. Pedestrians below will be able to watch swimmers doing their laps.

» visual art



Five-star man:

John Olsen and (right) working on his painting for the hotel named after him.



William Deague says the hotels are a great way for overseas and local guests to learn about our leading artists.

The Olsen will be draped in a canvas-like facade of opaque white glass while the windows will collectively reflect the painter's artwork.

For the moment, Olsen is content to keep painting.

"I'm so enthusiastic about this aerial composition of the meandering Yarra River and the sun and the gardens that are on the edge of the river," he says.

"What is different is that you will remember that the old cliché for the Yarra



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was that the river flows upside down. It's not like that any more.

"This is the new vision of the river and its environ, the interesting restaurants and life at the edge of the river itself.

"The river has really become part of the city, where before it was just emptying itself out into the bay.

"This painting is going to really have an impact in Melbourne.

"You have to be of a certain age, which I am, to have that kind of confidence. This isn't some young kid telling you, this is a man in his late burgundy period."

named after leading Australian artists. It will be followed by the Smart (Jeffrey Smart) and Larwill (David Larwill) in Prahran, the Whiteley (Brett Whiteley) in South Yarra and the Quilty (2009 Moran Prize winner and Archibald runner-up Ben Quilty) in Hawthorn.

Each hotel will show art in the foyer, screen documentaries and sell merchandise such as books on the artists, limited-edition prints, etchings and lithographs.

Asian Pacific's managing director

"I'll probably christen it, God forbid. Being an old Bondi boy, I'd have to."

The hotel's 241 rooms will have prints of Olsen's work. His images of spoonbill birds, frogs and swinging monkeys will be used in features throughout the hotel. He will design even the menu cards and letterheads in a "full-on expression".

"This is something new and original and I have a feeling it's going to work."

The hotel, a project of Asian Pacific Building Corporation, is one of several