

THE ARTS ■ GALLERIES

Making the most of everyday needs

EVERY NOW and then, something comes along in the art world that has the critics reaching for smelling salts. In the Seventies, the Tate Gallery shocked everyone by purchasing *Equivalent VIII*, Carl Andre's pile of bricks. Then the ICA exhibited *Post-Partum Document* by Mary Kelly, which consisted of a heap of used nappies. And now Bernard Jacobson, who runs a gallery just off Cork Street in the heart of the conservative art world, has created an enormous kerfuffle by showing an untitled exhibit made up of one tonne of lavatory paper. The asking price is £10,000; Charles Saatchi is very interested and David Bowie has called to make inquiries.

It is pure coincidence, but the average human, accord-

Is £10,000 a good price for a sculpture made of lavatory paper? Or is it money down the pan? **Jon Stock** reports

ing to my calculations, gets through approximately 2,700 rolls of lavatory paper in his or her lifetime (one every 10 days, 36.5 a year, for 75 years). Susan Stockwell, the 31-year-old creator of the controversial piece, was sponsored by Kimberly Clark, the makers of Kleenex, who supplied her with exactly 2,700 rolls. Perhaps it is this disturbing fact that has led art critic Brian Sewell and others to dismiss the work. Speaking recently about the controversy surrounding his coverage of contemporary art, Sewell said Stockwell's paper looked suspiciously used.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Approaching

the Bernard Jacobson gallery with a healthy degree of scepticism — I had just come from Karsten Schubert's gallery in Charlotte Street, which has been painted in dark chocolate — I was quite shocked by how clean and beautiful Stockwell's monumental piece looked. Standing 15ft high, the top half consists of 18 industrial-length rolls of uncut (and unused) lavatory paper, which are hung from high up in the gallery's skylight. Like the sails of a tea clipper, the vast sheets hang down loosely, rippling in the slightest breeze.

Below them lies the really ingenious part of the work. The remaining paper has

been arranged in a densely packed block, producing an extraordinary stratum of seersucker layers. At the bottom the paper is as hard as granite; at the top, it is wafer-thin.

"I chose to work with tissue paper because it has a feeling of fragility and impermanence," says Stockwell, a graduate of the Royal College of Art. "I hope the lavatory paper has been transformed into something more beautiful."

Beauty is a word not usually associated with his sort of conceptual installation, but in this case it is appropriate. Once you have overcome the unusual choice of material, the work takes on a trans-

lucent, ephemeral quality. The piece is certainly temporary. It only lasts a few weeks, after which time the enormous weight changes the shape irrevocably. The paper is then recycled.

Jacobson has surprised many people in the art world by showing an unknown artist like Stockwell. Six months ago, his gallery walls were covered with landscapes by Gainsborough, Constable and Turner. But he is passionate about the piece and upset by his critics.

"It's only through artists like Susan that art will carry on, not through critics like Sewell. We've already got the wheel. I am insulted that people think I would show rubbish in my gallery."

Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 14a Clifford Street, London W1 (071-495 8575)