

ON SHOW

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CONTRARY to popular belief, artists put in long hours of hard labour before their work is good enough to show. Given this, one would hardly expect an easygoing place like Broome to have a thriving art community.

Yet when I went there last week to judge the Shinju Matsuri 1992 Art Awards, with guest artist Bruce Malloch, it was clear that Broome has a growing group of committed artists and a keen art audience.

This is due, in good part, to the work of the Kimberley Kreations Gallery, from the veranda of which Premier Carmen Lawrence launched the 1992 Festival. Helen Norton, the winner of this year's Shire of Broome Acquisitive Award, has been showing there for some time, building up her technique and her highly pointed range of images.

The winning painting, *Stairway From Heaven*, showed an Aboriginal in disguise, rescuing children from a perfectly depicted group of Europeans in Christian uniforms, sanctimonious religiousness oozing out of them. It is an outback version of William Blake's protest against the treatment of the dispossessed young by "official" Christianity in 18th century England.

Norton has a fine figurative style. She builds up tonal gradations to great effect to provide a spatial link between the figures and events in different parts of the canvas. Parts of her handling are reminiscent of early Nolan or Boyd but she has an ironic humour.

Her other major painting, *The Creation of a Nation's Master*, was a pastiche on Tom Roberts' Heidelberg epic *Baled Up*, with a sidelong glance at some local pioneer mythology.

She makes equally cutting boxed tableaux along the lines of Joseph Cornell, the American surrealist. Her *White Man's Cocky Dreaming* took the prize in the sculpture section. It shows an executive snoozing away in his office in a tower block on the Terrace. All the objects around him must be terribly important because it says so on them. Yet outside the window a jovial giant white cockatoo suggests both he and us might be better off elsewhere.