





THIS PAGE, 'THE LUCKY COUNTRY' ACRYLIC ON CANVAS 1991.

OPPOSITE, 'DROVER'S BOY' OIL ON CANVAS 1992.

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SOUL TRADING IN THE GOOD OIL

As the handicapped observer of a fragile continent, artist HELEN NORTON is inspired not only by the secret beauty of the land that surrounds her in the vast outback up north and out east, but also it's inhabitants; the feathered, four-legged and foul-mouthed variety.



At 16 Norton left St Kilda alone to explore life beyond the black stump. She did her fair share of bottlenose washing amongst the glamorous professions of roo-shooting and station fencing on these isolated bush camp outposts, which didn't allow much time for the finer art of painting: but it was in these years that a lot of the solid groundwork was laid and stored for the 'right time', and it was here that she fell in love with this sunburnt country.

She has no formal training, remarking that 5 years personal study of technique, materials and method should do it. She uses different mediums in as many different ways as the spirit of each painting demands, her images portrayed in oil, gouache, acrylic, watercolour and charcoal in private collections locally, interstate and overseas.

After recent expeditions into the Kimberleys and the Northern Territory her work has taken on a stronger personal direction. Issues of conflict in our history between white settlers of Australia, the Aboriginals and the land. The works are explorations of emotions and incidents as the artists tries to understand the ironies that came from ignorance, which in turn formed our much edited, very young, white nations history.

"I've not set out to change the world. I would like however to pry it's eyes open a bit. Ignorance and turning the other cheek leads to misunderstanding. I

We are lucky in that we have only to look back such a short time, 100 -200 years, to see a wonderful spiritual society in action. We've got to acknowledge and respect that culture and spiritually to the land quickly and learn from it. Thus preserving it, but not like a pickled onion or a scorpion in a metho jar, but more a living, breathing, experience.

If we wanted a national identity then surely part of that multi-cultural symbol would have to come from the people of the very land we tread, and a very large part. We must understand that this fragile continent is not like others. We do not have rich volcanic soils and growling hard animals and as much as we have tried to make it so we are a very different and delicate balanced existence here down under.

There are a lot of mixed feelings that surface in the audience of my work. In some ways the Western religion helped place band-aids on some of the shocking history as it was taking place. And the survival of many Aboriginal groups would have been impossible had they not sheltered them, but there was a price to pay as is always the case in our world of trading. I can't help feel uncomfortable at the thought of having to trade ones soul and spirituality for the right to exist. So with a realistic world now of mixed races I find people now not sure of where there loyalties lie, thus interpreting my work in different ways. There are a lot of grey areas in this world and

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want to creep deeper than the history books and move through the psyche and the souls of the people. It was a time in history where one race treated another badly. It could have been anywhere in the world, I've no drama with being black or white, right or wrong; we're human. But the culture of our Aboriginal people must be saved. Us Whitey's have lost our tracks over this civilised time and seem to be coming undone at the seams. Our society structure isn't working. Some very basic ingredients have been so distorted that they no longer work. Our whole earth system is totally reliant for survival on a series of relationships and connections, each important for the other species survival. Our 'civilised' disconnection from these principals - our 'exclusiveness' and refusal to respect what formed us in the first place makes us an outcast, breaking the chain which in a dramatised sense will lead to our extinction and disintegration.

this is one of them. And grey areas are a part of this world, one needn't be sacrificed for the other.

I consider that I am not taking sides in my depictions of our history but merely making observations of incidents from my white, handicapped distance. I want to remove the dark curtains from the windows and let some reality and light stream in. Some of these pieces may not be what you would sip tea and eat fairy cakes to, but no person has ever slain a haunting guilt or solved a problem of the past or present without looking at it in all it's truth. I have executed these pieces to flush out some of my own misunderstanding and what were learned patterns of prejudice, assumptions and fear. Perhaps we could all take a dose of some of the most marvellous Aboriginal traits of all. Their most incredible sense of humour, tolerance, family and love which has helped them to cope with their European visitors, invaders, refugees and friends.