

# Norton's heroes

by JONATHAN SMITH

OVER the years New Collectables Gallery, on the corner of Duke and George Streets, East Fremantle, has firmly established its commitment to showing the best work by the best artists.

The current exhibition - *Heroes*, by Helen Norton - is no exception. Originally from Melbourne, Norton started travelling in her teens, living and working on stations in South Australia and the Northern Territory to eventually come to rest in Broome.

Drawing on her experiences in the bush, Norton has developed a very forthright attitude to Australia's colonial history and the ways white Australians cling to their often shameful past. Norton uses acrylics, oils and mixed media to produce vibrant images, full of the bright reds and deep blue skies of the bush.

Her style seems to have been strongly influenced by the likes of Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and Russell Drysdale. In *Dead Ned*, Norton has borrowed Nolan's (in)famous black box motif to portray Ned Kelly's corpse lying in a tainted landscape. The message is clear; it's time to kill our heroes and re-form Australian culture to deal with the harsh realities of the present.

Norton depicts a sardonically humorous meeting between the Queen's house pets and an Aboriginal couple with a dingo in Cape Fear and *Corgies*. The humour subsides as one realises the corgies are protected from the "unfriendly natives" by the blood red cape of Imperialism.

In *The Recording*, Norton juxtaposes a lone tourist



Photo by Shane French

• Helen Norton - questioning the nature of Australian perceptions.

wearing a garish Hawaiian shirt against a barren landscape. The tourist's video camera hangs useless in his hand, as all the native animals which have lost their habitat have been replaced with large billboard images. Norton

Little clay figures peer anxiously out of their tents in the middle of the Bungle Bungles, while an Aboriginal guide watches over them, dressed in para-military green and armed with a clipboard and radio.

objects to form an archetypal "adventurer", preserved in a glass case. We are invited to see how these objects function as icons, revealing much about the way whites live in an alien environment.

For many, the bush is simply a convenient setting for some of our more bizarre cultural myths. All too often Australians refer to a romantic image of the outback which was handed down by the Heidelberg School of art. Norton seeks to shatter these stereotypes by showing a land filled with dynamism and tension. She confronts us with a land bearing the burden of our own ignorance and neglect.

This is a heavy dose of reality. Go and see *Heroes* (until December 12) and learn something about your home.

**"Norton seeks to shatter these stereotypes by showing a land filled with dynamism and tension."**

brings out the tensions between an industry based on the beauty of the natural environment and the ecologically unsound structure of our society.

The New Guardian displays a combination of two-dimensional painting and three-dimensional sculpture.

As a response to the finding of bodies from ancient cultures which have been preserved in peat bogs and glaciers, Norton has put together her own Australian Future Excavation Proposal. She has made a clay figure and equipped him with various found and borrowed