

Artist Profile

"Helen Norton's art is an unashamed commentary on the life and history of the North West of West Australia. From animals to the people of the North, both Black and White, Helen's unique appreciation, after 17 years in "the bush" is vibrant, savage and often full of humour.

Her empathy and deep understanding of relations between Black and White Australians, her love of the Kimberley and her optimism provide the landscape for a prolific and sensitive narrative, which seems unending".

Russell Halpern '93

WINGS AND WIRE

LC /E LIFE AND DEATH IN THE NORTH WEST

This year is the 60th anniversary of the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

The RFDS is a unique service that has saved many lives and brought immediate specialist medical aid to the doorsteps of all remote residents.

I have been involved in a similar fundraising exhibition at the Perth Mint in 1991.

My personal link to the RFDS was an incident where my 5 week old baby who had contracted meningitis, was transported to specialist medical attention in Derby. It's an example of a small distance but a very sick child would not fare well on a long road journey as opposed to a 20 minute flight.

The RFDS would have to shine and stand out most prominently in the really isolated areas and communities where there is a struggle for good health care systems.

It is important to remember that the RFDS is kept going by sponsors and donations by the public.

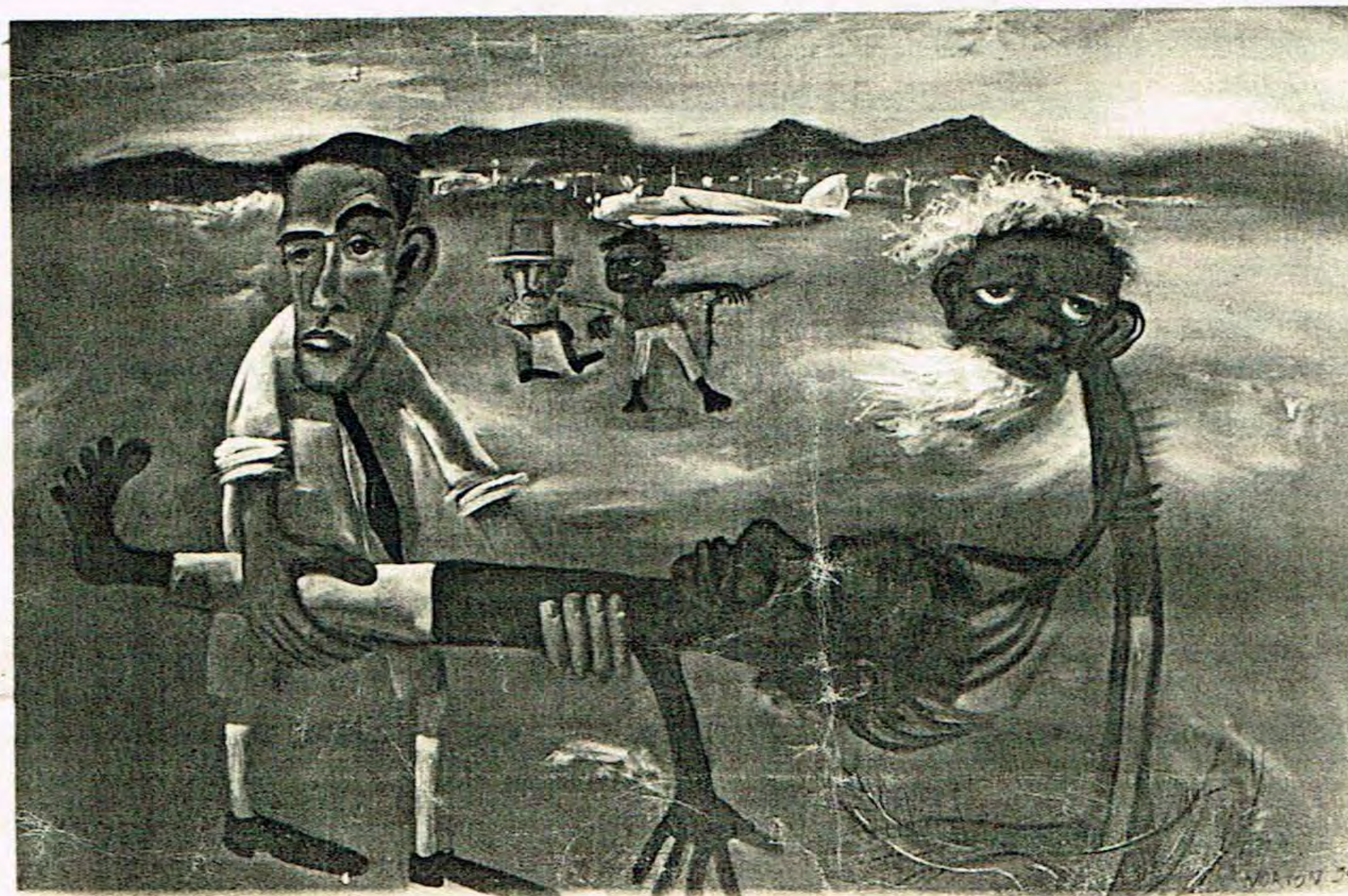
It is a unique service for a unique and vast country.

Looking at the work

There are a few pieces with direct reference to the RFDS. But I have mostly focused my attention on looking at the lifestyle in the remote regions of Australia. It's a look at the funny things we do to continually try and harness that big wild wilderness, to tame it a little bit more so it's not so nasty and wild.

I have also looked at some intimate moments in the life of isolated people. Like the starkness of death when it's not covered up in a white ambulance heading for the morgue in the city.

It looks at the rawness and strangeness of us all in our "new clothes" in our ancient country. I enjoy observing and recording with my own interpretation some of the things that construct little dramas in big landscapes. My characters are archetypal, generally. They exist in an archetypal Australian landscape. They move in and out of my picture frame enacting some little play, then moving on to enter the next scene. I like to celebrate these moments and people by immortalising them on to canvas. Pat and Anne, "THE BOREMAN AND THE COOK", "GRANDMA AND THE KIDS", are really just ordinary real people. But on a canvas they are legends. The North West Mona Lisa "LA JA CONDE" is another ordinary person becoming a masterpiece for history by being painted in a certain manner of distinction as a "NORTH WEST MONA LISA", and yet being important enough to "be painted". She is just an ordinary woman that exists within us all. Always sacrificing and always watching.



"Dr Cato"
Oil on canvas
900 x 1200
1994