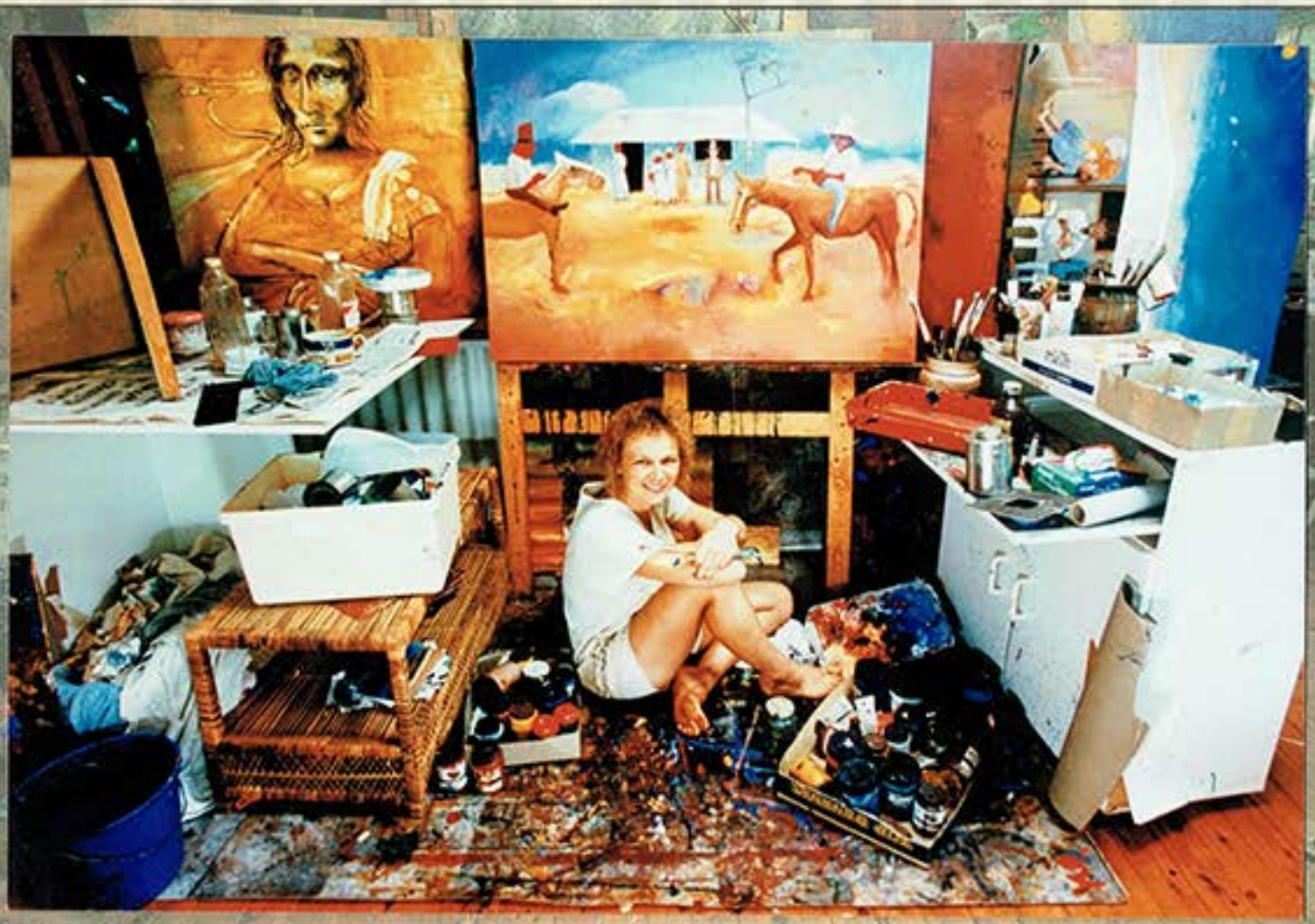


# Artist finds fame painting the outback



**BUSH PAINTER:** Further outback is the only place artist Helen Norton would like to go.

DON'T bother looking for Helen Norton at those arty social occasions where you hear deep and meaningful conversations on why the artist painted the triangle purple and the square green.

She laughs at the thought that a prominent art gallery in the affluent Melbourne suburb of Toorak is the biggest buyer of her paintings.

She grew up in working class St Kilda, where a career on the factory floor was rated more highly than wasting time sitting at an easel with a brush.

Now 33, she would not go back to the city — not even for fame and fortune.

"The only place I'd like to go is further outback," the Broome artist says.

"If you paint the outback, you have to maintain some link to it."

Norton's perspective on life in the bush is opposite to some of Australia's renowned impressionists.

"I am trying to uproot all our romantic portrayals by all the impressionists — Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin and Sidney Nolan," she said.

"I love their work, but I'm saying hang on a minute, there is another side, let's just look at it again."

Racism is a theme of much of her work, but don't dare call her extrem-



ist or pigeon-hole her as an Aboriginal activist.

"I like to portray the Australian racism problem because it's really quite stupid," she says.

"Aborigines are human beings. All right, some of them get drunk. But you take away any man's or woman's responsibility and pride, and you will get these problems."

"You get it in white society. With the Aborigines, you see it more because their society was so natural and primitive before we arrived 200 years ago."

"We've expected them all to catch up so quickly. They're trying, but 200 years is not much out of 40,000."

Her paintings hang in galleries in Fremantle, Broome, Darwin and Melbourne.

One of her favourites — in the left of this photograph — is incomplete.

She calls it the Australian Mona Lisa: a woman in the outback in a cotton frock with a tea towel draped over her shoulder and a homestead not far away.