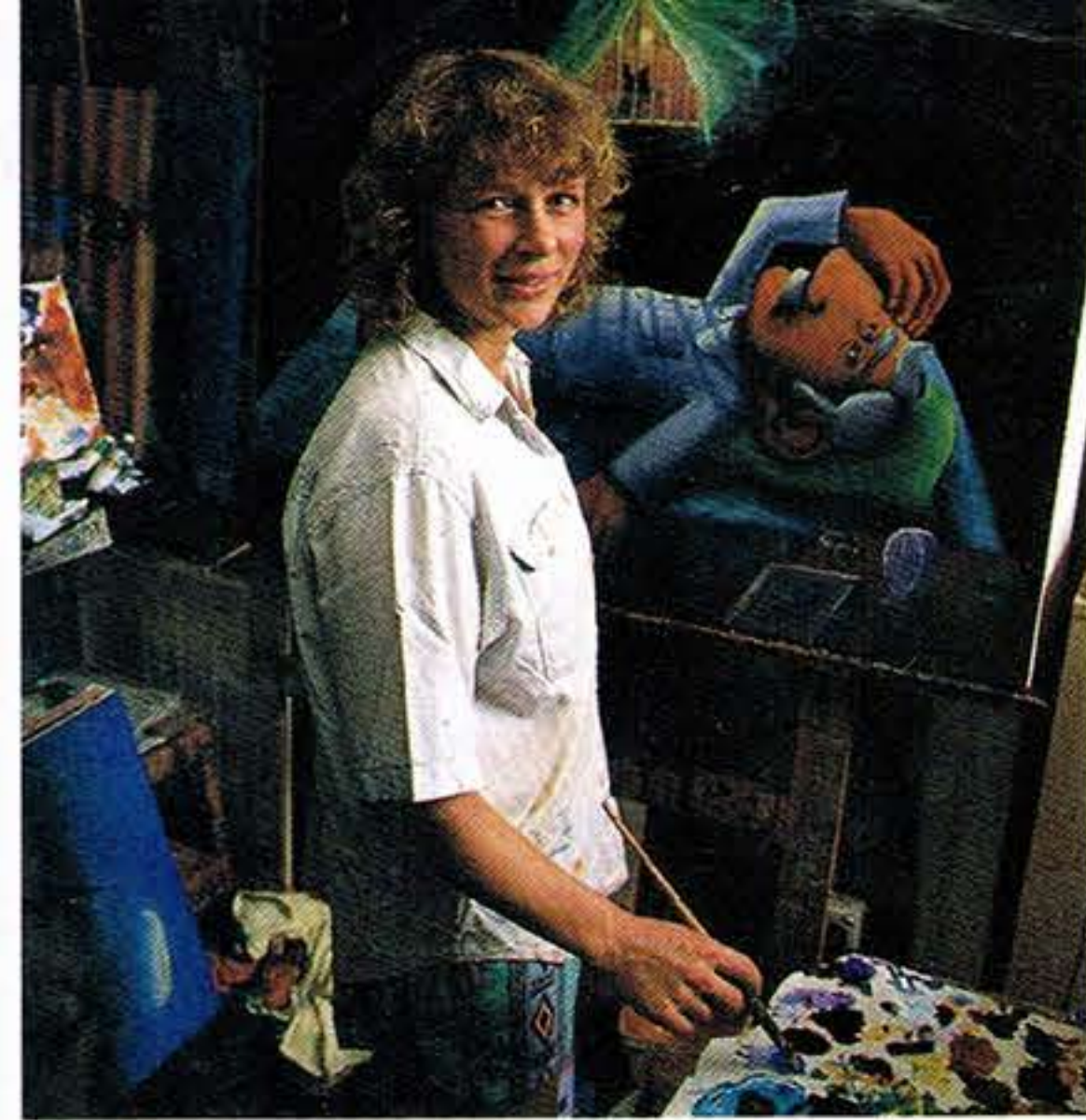
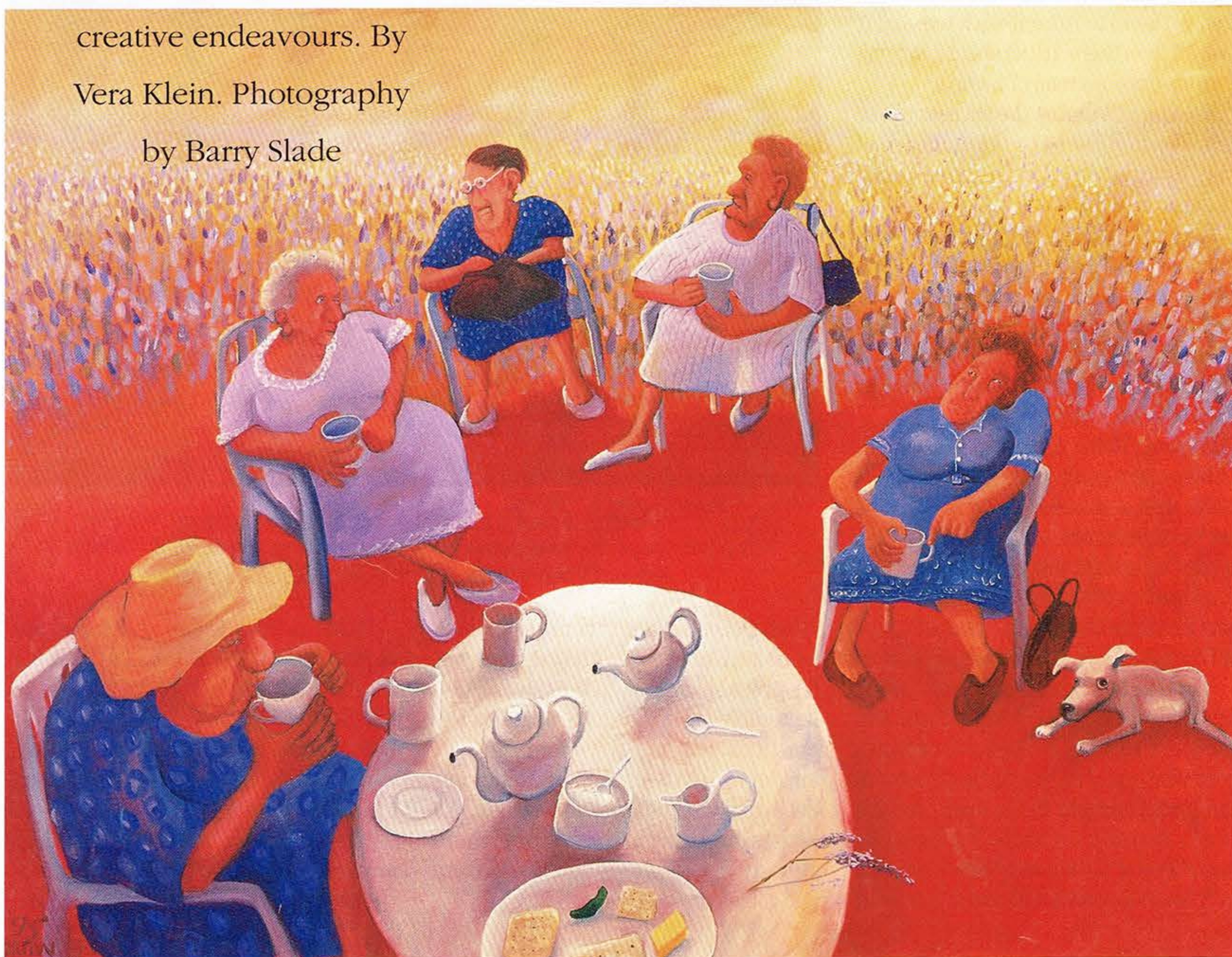


State of the Arts

With such a spectacular backdrop of red earth and blue sea and sky, it's not surprising that Broome has become an artistic centre contributing to Western Australia's already impressive



creative endeavours. By Vera Klein. Photography by Barry Slade



Above: God's Wife and the Lavender Ladies at Serendipity Farm by Helen Norton

B R O O M E

Once, it was easy. Splashing out on some Broome pearls before leaving the area was almost obligatory — until some impressive galleries emerged in the town. Now it's a dilemma. Paintings or pearls? But with the increasingly common sight of slim, brown-paper packages carefully tucked under arms at the airport, the question seems to have been answered. Most visitors don't choose — they opt for both.

Michael Tanner opened the Monsoon Gallery 18 months ago after promising himself a container load of Javanese antique furniture when he finished his house. His furniture received so many favourable comments that he imported more and opened a gallery. "The art started off just by inviting a few friends of mine who are artists [Ashley and Cliff Jones among them] to exhibit with me, and it took off from there. It's all about indulging my own passions really," he says.

Michael attributes the success of the galleries in Broome to the standard of work being produced by the artists living in and around the town.

"Not only is there very exciting work coming out of Balgo Hills, there's Helen Norton, who's one of our original artists and, probably, most successful. And Bob Juniper and Ian de Souza, who's just completed two months' residency here at Monsoon Gallery," he says.

Perpetua Hobcroft, owner of the Durack Gallery, spent many years of her childhood in the area, and decided to make Broome her permanent home four years ago. She opened the gallery, and now organises regular themed exhibitions as well as permanent hangings and an important collection of Elizabeth Durack historic prints.

"Broome has become a popular tourist destination, and the development and glamour that Lord McAlpine [an English peer who invested heavily in Broome in the 1980s] brought to the town, and the pearls themselves, make it a romantic upper level of the market," says Perpetua.

"There's no doubt artists are attracted



Above: *Is God a Duck Shooter* by Helen Norton.
Opposite page, top: Perpetua Hobcroft, owner of the Durack Gallery.
Below: *Broome Morning 1957* by Elizabeth Durack

to the feel of the place, there's something in the air. Heaven knows how or what, but it's probably related to the tides. These incredible tides that have a pull on the emotions. It's not a town for being cool and logical, I think. A lot of things are done on intuition and impulse. Some of the artists are living and working right in Broome, and others are based elsewhere and come here and respond to it."

Helen Norton is one artist who has responded to The Kimberley in a big way. She left her Melbourne home at 16 (she's now 34), travelled the interior working, among other things, as a cook, cleaner and jillaroo before finding herself mesmerised by the land.

More often than not, Helen's paintings are the ones being gripped with pride at the airport. ("Helen's struck a chord, and

"True artists are a rare breed, and it's usually the older people ..."

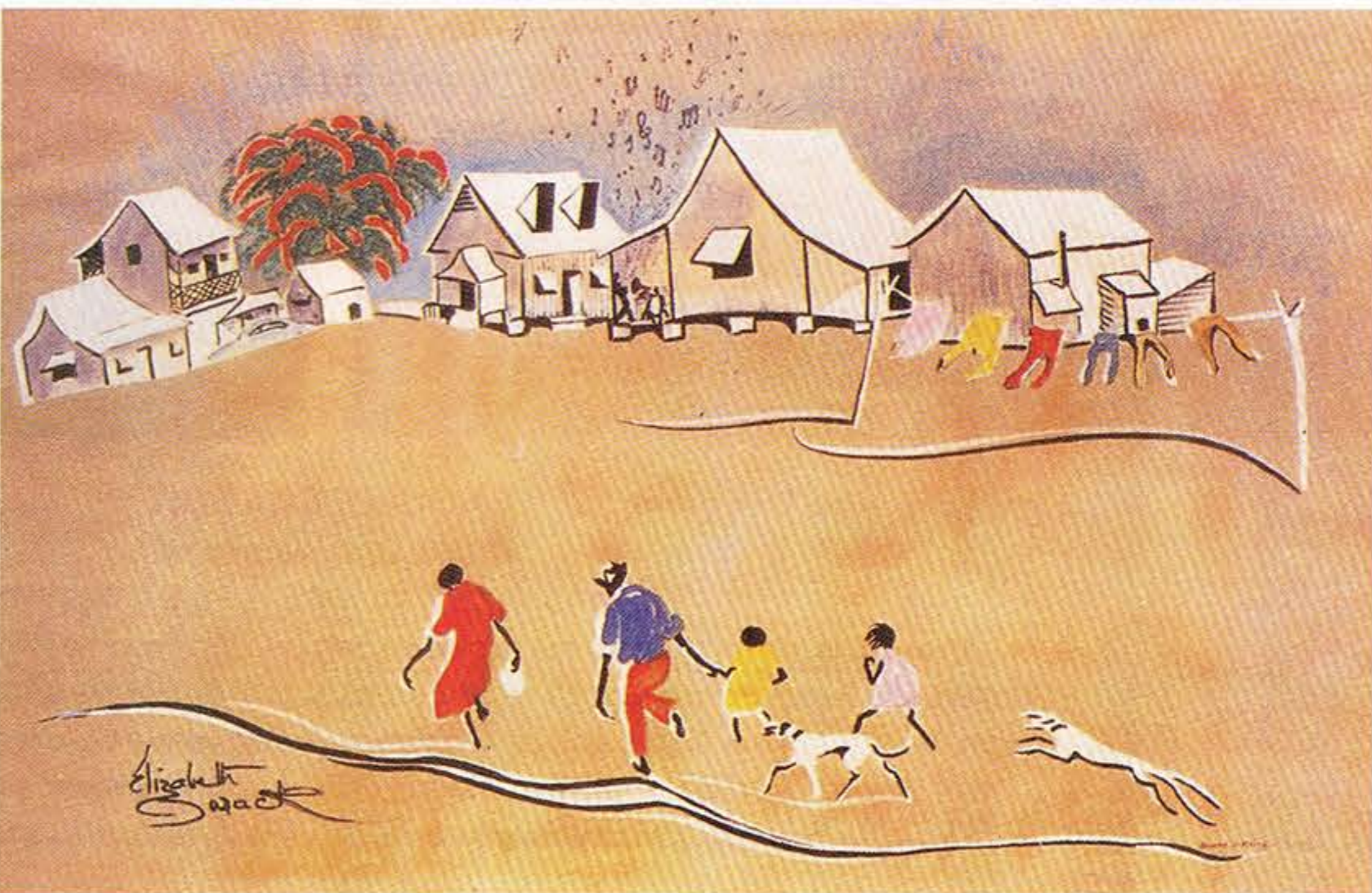
B R O O M E

people have really responded to it," says Perpetua.) Her work is bright and powerful, and, on the surface, full of humour, which Helen admits to using as a tool. Once she's caught your eye with colour and gaiety, she expects you'll linger long enough to receive the sadder underlying message. Sales prove that people do.

"Travelling through some of the places in outback Australia, untouched places, I was very responsive to the power in the country and the spirituality of the land," says Helen. "When in Windjana Gorge, I felt it had this power over me. No wonder the Aborigines drew their mythology and spiritual beliefs from this country. I respect that they've got a closer connection than we do because we've been set apart from our spiritual connections to the land for many, many thousands of years. The Aborigines have only been pulled apart from it in the last 200. So their grounding to their spiritual base is much closer than ours. Our memory's fading. That's what I'm painting about a lot, about our faded memories. Where's white people's spirituality? We've forgotten what it is. White people are also displaced because we don't have the beautiful grounding that the Aborigines do. That's why they hang on so strong now, and they should because we've lost that."

Helen's energy isn't limited to producing works of art. In the past few months, she too has opened a gallery, Cockatoo Gallery, which exclusively hangs original Nortons. It has a personal atmosphere as her home, from where she and her husband, Tony, continually respond to requests from interstate galleries wanting to stage exhibitions, is next door.

A community that hasn't lost touch with the land is that of the Balgo Hills. Here, in an isolated part of Western Australia, are Australian artists that are causing a commotion overseas, particularly among North Americans and Germans, who are regarded as the major collectors of indigenous artwork.



initiated in the old way"