

Brush with reality



□ Helen Norton's *Submit*, now on show at the Margaret River Art Galleries.

P AINTER Helen Norton is refreshingly candid in her views of what she calls the arts scene and the arts establishment.

By her own admission, she's more likely to be found in a workshop sitting on a 44-gallon drum chatting to a few guys at work than sipping a cappuccino in a cafe and talking about art.

"I don't give two hoots about the establishment," she said.

"I'm an artist for the people, the working man and woman."

She prefers to be called a reporter of the human condition rather than an artist.

"I report back truthfully on rite of passage, how we deal with crises, how we move through life," she said.

A self-taught artist who has travelled and worked in a variety of jobs all over Australia, she began painting and exhibiting professionally after settling in Broome in 1986.

She is also the owner and director of a small art gallery framing and print business, an earthmoving business, and a busy single mother of two young boys.

Norton's paintings are a form of storytelling.

She describes her work as using paint and poetry to explore the journeys of the human spirit.

The works are intensely coloured — watercolour, gouache and pastel or oils on canvas —

with deceptively naive, almost mythological figures in them.

They are often accompanied by poetry to expand on the complex storyline.

"The players in the paintings become actors dressed in cloaks of symbolism to ease their sometimes arduous, lonely and painful journey through life," she said.

Butterflies, Bulls and Angels is at Margaret River Art Galleries until January 17.

□ SAM HARDCASTLE