



**Loyalty:** *Bride Marries Dog* by Helen Norton symbolises absolute faith and friendship.

# Report card rates Norton

By TRACEY JOYNSON

SHOOTING and skinning rabbits in the outback is an odd apprenticeship for a painter.

But then Helen Norton never had "any intentions of being a painter".

It was an appetite for adventure which lured a 16-year-old Norton from St Kilda.

For 10 years Norton mixed it with the hard men of the bush, shooting feral cats, building fences and working as a jillaroo and cook.

Norton says she was fighting for equality in the male world "without burning my bra".

In 1986, she settled in Broome, driving trucks with husband, Tony.

"Psychic experiences" told her to stop driving and soon after Tony survived a crash in which Norton could have died.

Norton turned her "dabbling" in painting into a full-time job.

Her first exhibition was a sell-out and now she commands from \$750 to \$8500 for each painting.

Topics for her works range from the contact period when white settlers met Aborigines to the New World Order.

She even travelled on the *QE2* to get a taste of seaboard life to paint

a cover for the Qantas Club magazine *The Captain's Table*.

But the subject of her latest work is mid-life crises and the breakdown of her marriage 2½ years ago leaving her to raise two boys, aged three and five.

"Marriage can't conform to society's boundaries," she says.

Norton's painting of a woman marrying a dog symbolises absolute faith and a friendship that can not be destroyed.

Helen Norton's *The Angel and the Butterfly Man* exhibition runs from tomorrow to Friday at The Windsor First Floor Gallery.