

## Notes on The Gilgamesh Series

Artist Helen Norton, has used the five thousand year old epic poem of the Sumerian King, Gilgamesh, as the inspiration for this exhibition of work. Her highly narrative paintings draw upon the story of the highly cultured Gilgamesh and his wilderness man-friend Enkido through various archetypal trials of life.

Enkido and Gilgamesh are inseparable and insurmountable, however, the value and danger of this union is not fully understood by Gilgamesh until he loses Enkido as a result of them getting too big for their boots, thinking they were larger than the gods and nature. The tidal wave of Enkido's death crushes Gilgamesh, and manifests a realisation and fear of mortality, thus launching his futile search for immortality.

Gilgamesh, it is said, really did exist and upon the eventual return home from his great journey, carved the story upon the walls of his city - Uruk. Thank heavens for stone notepads.

"I was attracted to the epic as it is not only a beautiful poem; but even at 5,000 years old, a surprisingly comparable metaphor to how we develop and come to maturity about our place in the natural world today. The process of living a full life, ranging from the loss of innocence, the striving for a sense of personal power, the getting of bigger and bigger things, to the inevitable realisation of the emptiness in material striving. The latter coming 'later', and often after a tragedy slaps one in the face to bring proportion about what matters in life.

The Gilgamesh story has all the rudiments of a story of man becoming aware of his mindless destruction of the wilderness but only after it is lost. It seems environmental consciousness is not a new thing".

There are strong metaphors throughout the epic, but one of the very first most significant that stood out to me was this desire by the great king to 'conquer' the wild man. Metaphorically each rational man or man of the day time might do well to acknowledge his inner Enkido (wild man) or instinctual self. Furthering the metaphor - was that the rational man or the 'man in charge' (the persona and ego of an individual) cannot defeat the wild man or instincts. He can however come to appreciate what that part of himself is and so come to keep both close at hand to live a full and meaningful life.

Helen Norton October 2010

## 'The Capture Of Enkido' – Oil on Canvas 200 x 150 cm



Early in the epic Gilgamesh the great king of Sumeria becomes aware of another being who may just be as strong as if not stronger than himself. At this stage of his life Gilgamesh placed great value in being the mightiest of all men. The hunters in the wilds would come back and tell tales of the wild man 'Enkido' - a crazy hairy untamed creature/man who was the protector of all the animals in the forest. He would not let the hunters take a beast, and if they did, he was known to kill them brutally and efficiently.

Gilgamesh wanted to pit himself against this wild man who was untouchable and unreachable. Enkido cared not for the offered riches or temptations Gilgamesh sent to try to lure him into the kingdom and civilisation. However Gilgamesh eventually came up with a plan he was sure would work. He knew no man (or beast) could resist the call of lust when confronted with a woman of fantastic beauty and of course the most well tested powers of seduction. So he sent Shamesh, the royal harlot or whore to lure Enkido away from the animals (which would keep the hunters happy), and so he could finally test his strength against him in a fight in the city.

Shamesh went to Enkido and as planned, seduced Enkido, who promptly forget his life purpose for the sake of lust. Shamesh spent days and nights with him, until Enkido followed her like a puppy back to the city. After this – the dual eventuated and in short summary – neither of them won. It was a draw. Out of respect for this great wild man warrior, Gilgamesh did not have him killed, and instead became friends with Enkido. The two became so close that this bond in itself would become the first point of vulnerability for the great invincible king.

The great epic is just beginning at this point. The many adventures of the two are about to begin.