

MEDIA RELEASE

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HELEN NORTON – Gilgamesh

11 – 25 November 2010

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

Enkido and Gilgamesh are inseparable and indomitable. However, Gilgamesh does not fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of this union until he loses Enkido. The enormity of Enkido's death, as a result of their misguided belief in their own superiority, crushes Gilgamesh, who launches a futile search for immortality.

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

"I was attracted to the epic as it is not only a beautiful poem; but a surprisingly relevant metaphor for how we develop and assess our place in the natural world today. The Gilgamesh story has all the elements of man becoming aware of his thoughtless destruction of the wilderness, but only in hindsight. Environmental consciousness is not a new thing, it seems".

Narration is the backbone of Helen Norton's work. Her art thrives on a theme, this time the ancient story of Gilgamesh, capturing, communicating and exploring the narrative through bold, imaginative paintings.

She loves the tools of illusion, of being part of the scene and surrounding the viewer with works on a grand scale. She uses the past as a mirror on to the present, not simply as a personal interpretation of the past.

Her use of colour, scale and composition emphasize the narrative context. The high drama of 'The Capture of Enkido', one of a number of large works, is closely associated with the vermillion of the robe, the tall, tall trees and the curious onlookers while the parallel commentary on contemporary life is intentional. 'Gilgamesh' gives a sense of the materiality – and poignancy – of the physical world.

Norton uses the genre on a grand scale, presenting the viewer with a monumental event, while paying equal attention to identifying the smallest parts of our existence. Her narrative paintings expose our current choices and cultural contributions.

Since the earliest paintings and etchings in rock, people have loved to tell stories. Helen Norton is without a doubt a consummate master of contemporary narrative art in Australia.

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