



A taste for art: Rebecca Hossack's dining room is known as the Robert Campbell room after the artist whose three canvases hang on the walls

Tribal rites in deepest Fitzrovia

THERE cannot be many people in London who have had their bedroom painted by an artist who is represented in the Queen's personal collection. But then 39-year-old gallery owner Rebecca Hossack is not like many people, Aboriginal artist Clifford Possum is not like any other artist and Rebecca's bedroom door is definitely quite unlike anything you might have seen before.

Rebecca came to Britain from Australia in 1980 to read for the bar at the Middle Temple. "I suppose going to the bar here seemed exciting and eating dinners sounded so romantic." The appeal of the bar lasted barely a week and on the advice of family friend and art lover, Sally Duchess of Westminster, she decided to train at Christie's before going to the Guggenheim in Venice.

In addition to loving art, Rebecca had another reason for staying in England. On a visit to Oxford on May Day in 1983, she met an undergraduate called Matthew Sturgis, now an academic and dramatist. The couple (who married four years ago) share a cheerfully bohemian existence in Fitzrovia in a small flat above the gallery, which was opened by Sally Duchess of Westminster in Windmill Street, just off Tottenham Court Road, in 1988.

Turn up for a private view at the Rebecca Hossack gallery and you never know whether you will be examining a selection of works from Papua New Guinea or a series of small African sculptures fashioned from cattle dung — it is that kind of place. Hossack traces her interest in tribal art to a New Guinea death

Australia really does have a cultural attaché in London. She lives in colourful style in Fitzrovia and, as **NICK FOULKES** found out, looks nothing like Sir Les Patterson

mask which her father brought back from the Sepik river.

In November last year she was also appointed as Australian cultural attaché in London, setting up literary evenings and exhibitions. "Barry Humphries told me I had stolen his job when he visited, and gave me a signed picture of Sir Les, saying 'all the best Becky'," she laughs. Yet even this unconventional employment pattern scarcely prepares the uninitiated who visit Hossack at home. Her front door is glossy purple, studded with golden scallop shells and surrounded on the frame, in more gold, by lines from Tennyson's *Ulysses*.

Inside, her colour schemes are equally uncompromising. "One grey February day I went to the National Film Theatre to see a film by David Lascelles on Tibet and decided to paint my flat in bright Tibetan colours." The colour schemes — audacious combinations such as yellow and petrol blue, red and green and purple and yellow — are eye-catching enough, but Hossack has also crammed every available surface with canvases, textiles, scrolls and gew-gaws. A few spears and shields are stacked in one

corner, a conical head-dress of the sort worn by the Kuba people sits on a side table while an Ethiopian magic scroll is fixed to the wall in her bedroom. She scuttles around her flat, pulling out pieces with the eagerness and excitement of a child showing off new toys. "This is a lip plate from the Mursi people in southern Ethiopia," she says, proffering a dark ceramic disk which looks like a clay pigeon. But it is the art which is most noticeable. Aboriginal art enjoys most prominence in her flat. Her dining room, with its gold and blue ceiling, green door and crimson walls is known as the Robert Campbell room and three of the artist's canvases hang on its walls.

A CLIFFORD Possum circular canvas depicting two snakes, flanked by two cobra skulls, gives the room a faintly sinister air, reinforced by quasi occult items such as a pair of chicken's feet candlesticks and a small "shrine" to Rebecca's late bulldog, Moon, fashioned from various Ethiopian pieces. Another of her favourite works is an autobiographical painting by an artist called Kauage from the highlands of Papua New Guinea. It shows him as a young child being given an injection by the first white colonists; vivid, eye-catching and simple, it dominates her drawing-room. She describes Kauage's life as: "Fred Flintstone meeting the modern world." His father never went anywhere without a stone axe and Kauage himself used to think helicopters were large birds and shot arrows at them. It says something for his adaptability that Kauage has now carved out a new career for himself as a chic artist popular in bohemian Fitzrovia. Such artists are free from the conventions of Western art. "They don't come into the textbooks," she says. Nor indeed does her flat.

● *Songlines XIV is showing at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery 10 July-2 September.*





Going native: one of Rebecca's favourite works is an autobiographical painting by an artist from the highlands of Papua New Guinea

Bedtime reading: books and aboriginal art dominate the bedroom, left

Pictures by
Denis Jones

SHOW

URGE

We will install a superb quality kitchen that is that you allow us to show your offer from a leading supplier with designs to choose from. **CALL S**