

Jimmy and Pat meet the Queen

Jimmy Pike and Pat Lowe are an unlikely couple — one is an ex-convict, the other a prison worker. Today both are making their names in the arts world

ARTIST Jimmy Pike's early years were spent living the traditional Aboriginal nomadic existence in the Great Sandy Desert. He did not even encounter his first white person until the early 1950s, when as a child Pike and members of his family joined one of the last migrations out of the desert to the European settlement at Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley.

"When white people came into the Kimberly region they brought cattle and the area soon became pastoral land. They needed workers and people in the north of the desert started drifting that way to work on the cattle stations.

"A lot of the other Aborigines heard stories about what was going on. It was fascinating for them to hear about all the meat and the flour that came in drums rather than from seeds — in fact it must have sounded like Shangri La," laughs Pat Lowe, Jimmy's wife.

Jimmy's own journey to Fitzroy Crossing was a result of hearing about life on the cattle stations from a sister who married a man from one of the stations.

Like the others who had gone before her, Jimmy's sister walked all the way across the desert to the station and, on her visits home, would walk all the way back. These days the Aborigines drive.

It was inevitable Jimmy and the others would go. The cattle stations were slowly destroying indigenous society and life could not carry on as it had. "There were few people around; it was affecting those who could marry," says Pat.

After one of his sister's visits Jimmy and his nephews accompanied her on the long walk back, leaving behind his mother and younger brother who later left the desert — and the traditional life they had led for so long.

On the station Jimmy learnt the trade of a stockman, but life in white man's society was not all that conducive.

In 1979, Jimmy met Pat Lowe. "He was in Broome Prison for stealing a car or something," remembers Pat. Pat migrated herself, though from further afield than the Great Sandy Desert. "I always wanted to leave the UK and go to Australia and in 1972 my wish materialised," she explains.

A Masters degree in psychology, which Pat finished in the country, had led to a job as a psychologist working with prisoners. And in 1980, in Fremantle Maximum Security Prison, Pat came across Jimmy again. This time the charge was more serious: murder. Jimmy had been convicted in 1981.

In the prison Jimmy signed up for art classes and also learnt to read and write. "The prisoners were doing landscape-type paintings which Jimmy soon got fed up with," says Pat. "He started doing his own work based on his native land as his way of expressing evidence of his belonging to the country."

Periodically, local school teachers would put on shows of the prisoners' art, and Jimmy Pike's distinctive work became quite well-known. These days Jimmy's work hangs in Australia's National and State Galleries and in private collections around the world.

In 1986 Jimmy's sentence came to an end. "He was on parole and I was on long service leave," explains Pat. "His family happened to be in Broome and they said he'd asked if I would visit him. I was helping him with his art, sorting out contracts etc, and had said I would see him when he got out, although I didn't know if I actually would."

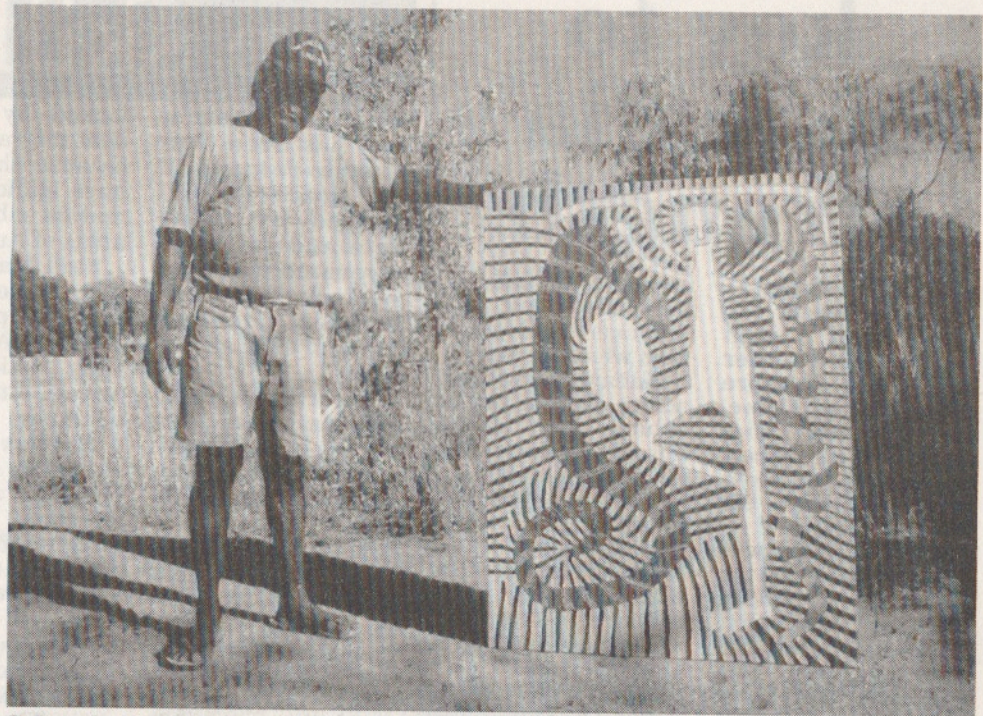
But Pat did go and says: "it was just different seeing him as a free man". Instead of staying overnight as she had planned she stayed with Jimmy in the desert for 10 days.

It wasn't long before Pat decided to give up the temporary job she had and join Jimmy. Living with a convicted murderer didn't worry her. "There are just some things in life that you know. I just knew it was right even though it was a momentous decision.

"Besides", she continues, "there are ex-murderers and rapists walking about all over the place just getting on with their lives. Nobody knows that they are there, but I know who they are because I've met them in my work. They're all over."

Pat says she learnt afterwards that "there was a lot of gossip around town that I'd left town and gone to live with Jimmy Pike...the parish priest was saying, 'oh no, she wouldn't do anything like that'.

"I thought that the prisons wouldn't want



Cultural...Jimmy Pike with Kanyjimangka. In Aboriginal culture Kanyjimangka is the rainmaker and brings rain and lightning. Kanyjimangka lives in a Jila with the snakes. If people are angry with someone they can take a message to him and he'll do his best to send lots of rain and lightning down upon these people.

fine. I still work part-time; they haven't rejected me despite my marrying Jimmy. In fact, it has helped me understand Aboriginal prisoners' culture a lot more and I'm related to half of them now. When I turn up they say, 'oh hello aunty', Pat adds.

The rest of her time Pat is a writer — "I'm a psychologist by trade but a writer by desire," she laughs. Her latest book — there have been four previously — *Jimmy and Pat Meet the Queen*, aroused much interest in Australia and is now available in the UK, from the Rebecca Hossak Gallery in London.

The book centres on the issue of native land rights. Jimmy's clan, the Walmajarri, were involved in the Native Title Tribunal last year where they gave a presentation on their land claim. They utilised a 10x8-metre painting of their land. Each one of the land owners sat on

try. At the tribunal each one stood on their piece of land and made their claim in their native tongue.

"Everyone knows who's responsible for which parcel of land even though there's no borders as we know them — they all have watering holes they're responsible for," says Pat.

The land that belongs to Jimmy's clan is crown land and "belongs" to the Queen. In the book Jimmy invites the Queen over to prove the land is hers. She comes with a hat box and with corgis. She scoffs at the suggestion of water holes and digs (but then gives up) and finally relents that the Aborigines are the land's true owners.

The Native Title Tribunal has yet to make a decision on Jimmy's clan's land. He's hoping hoping they make the same decision as

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Artists recreate traditions of old

THE Rebecca Hossack Gallery is hosting an important exhibition of aboriginal art this month.

The Artists of Fitzroy Crossing will run from August 3rd to September 5th and promises to be a show not to miss.

Fitzroy Crossing, in remote north Western Australia, is one of the more recent Aboriginal communities to emerge as a major artistic force.

The area became a focus for Aboriginies seeking work in the 1950s and as a result many Aboriginal groups have become settled in and around the town.

As well as the likes of Jimmy Pike, the area

boasts artists such as Butcher Chereh, Boxer Yankarr, Ivy Nixon and Paji honeyhild Yankarr. Work from the Magkaja arts centre is considered by some to be amongst the most exciting and vital being produced in Australia.

Art has proved a means for these artists to assert and reclaim their individual cultural diversities and their half-lost traditions.

The artists' works not only record the Dreamtime stories of their land, they recall incidents of everyday life in the "station days" as well as their present day experiences.

● **For more information on the show call Tel: 0171-436-4899.**



Colourful creations...
The Fitzroy Crossing area is renowned for its art. Above: Collaborative work by the Mangkaja artists, acrylic on canvas, 4m x 1.5m, 1995.