

# Jimmy brings an ancient new vision to London

By CHRISTOPHER HENNING  
in London

Is this the most expensive piece of real estate in London? It is just outside the Rebecca Hosack Gallery in Bloomsbury. A week ago it was just another piece of footpath. Now it is a Jimmy Pike original (high-gloss exterior enamel on paving stones, 4x1 metres, kindly lent by Camden Borough Council).

Inside the gallery, original works of the artist sell for around £25,000 (\$65,000) apiece. This piece of footpath is five times the size. That would make it worth £125,000, which is spectacular even in London's inflated property market.

The painting shows an emu, a kangaroo, and over on the other side of a maze of interconnected square vortices, a man.

Jimmy Pike has painted the Kimberley, his own country, on this footpath, in yellow and brown and blue.

The paintings are more than just images: they are information – a culture handed down from one generation to the next.

"This is a painting of the laws in the Kimberley country in Australia," he told the *Herald*.

"It is men's culture, not women's culture. It is teaching the young men."

But few men of the younger

generation of his Walmajarri people are going to see this painting here, half a world away from where it is relevant. Whom is it going to teach?

Pike's wife, Pat Lowe, explains: "I think he definitely sees it as integrating with white culture. He would not be doing it for his own people. For them, he would be doing what he is talking about through the stories and songs, but not through painting pictures."

In a way the need to communicate with ignorant whites, and the possibilities of modern technology have liberated Pike: to tell their ancient story, his canvases come alive with 20th century colours – aquamarine, yellow and peach are mixed with more traditional ochre and black.

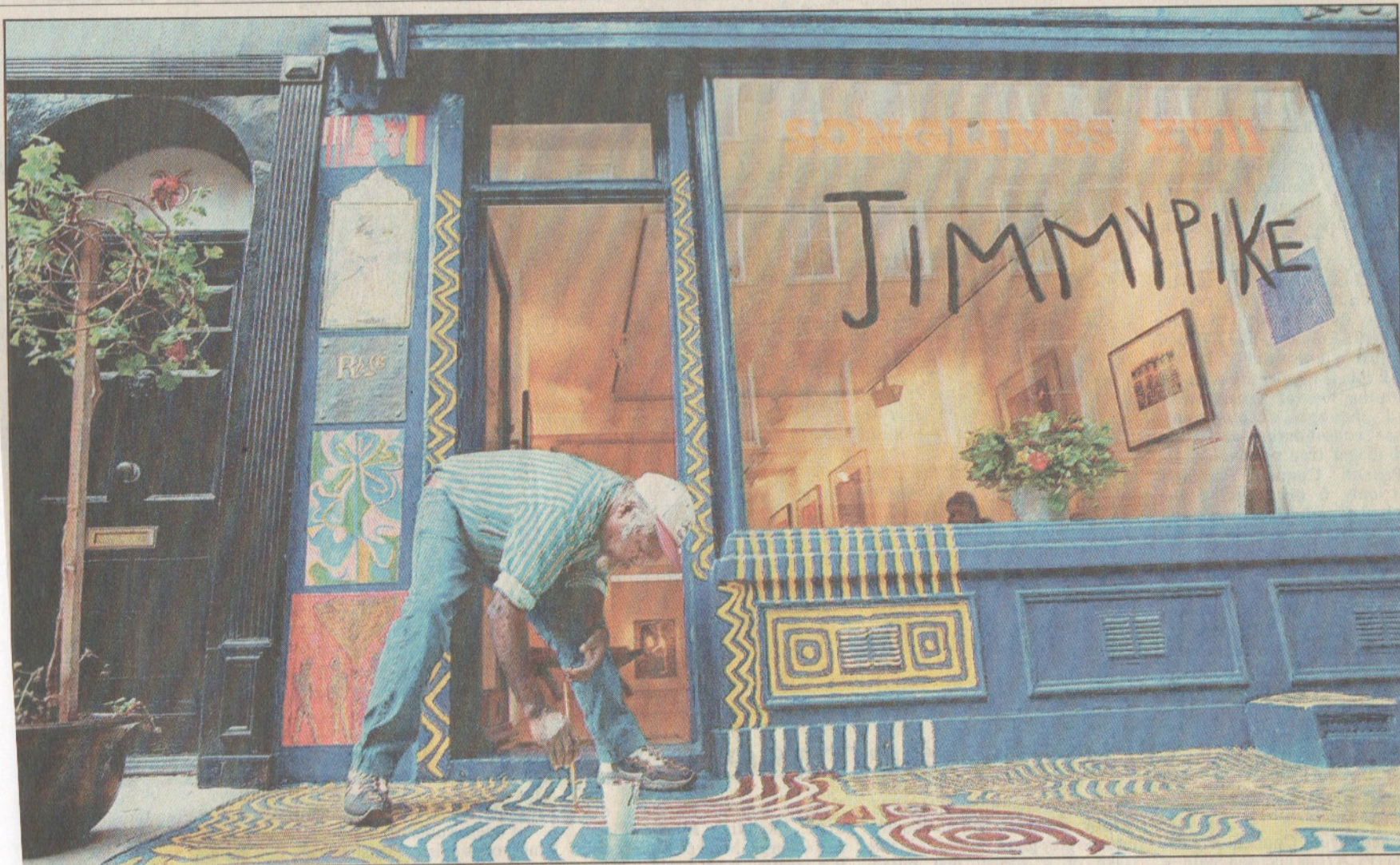
How did he think London responded to his work?

"Big party last night. Big mob. Have a drink and all gone. They liked it."

This is an understatement. Just two weeks after the two-month exhibition opened, half the paintings are sold.

Pike has done no painting in London, but he finds it hard to resist slipping away to do some ink drawings. On Thursday he went to Russell Square. Its solid, orderly Victorian facades and its tightly controlled foliage gain





Pike makes the pavement part of his exhibition . . . "This is a painting of the laws in the Kimberley country in Australia."

Photograph by SIMON GROSSET

something of the outback when interpreted by him.

One reason for his visit to London has been to attend a garden party at Buckingham

Palace. He and Lowe collaborated on a book about land rights and the Mabo and Wik cases, called *Jimmy and Pat meet the Queen* – which gave

the palace visit added point.

Although the pair did not meet the Queen, Pike has drawn his experience of the palace: a page surrounded on four sides by

windows and walls, with a small space in the middle which is where the guests are met. Most of his drawings have human beings in them. Not this one.

You get the sense that, despite the warmth of his welcome here, Pike may not be entirely desolate when he gets back home to the desert.