

# THE INDEPENDENT

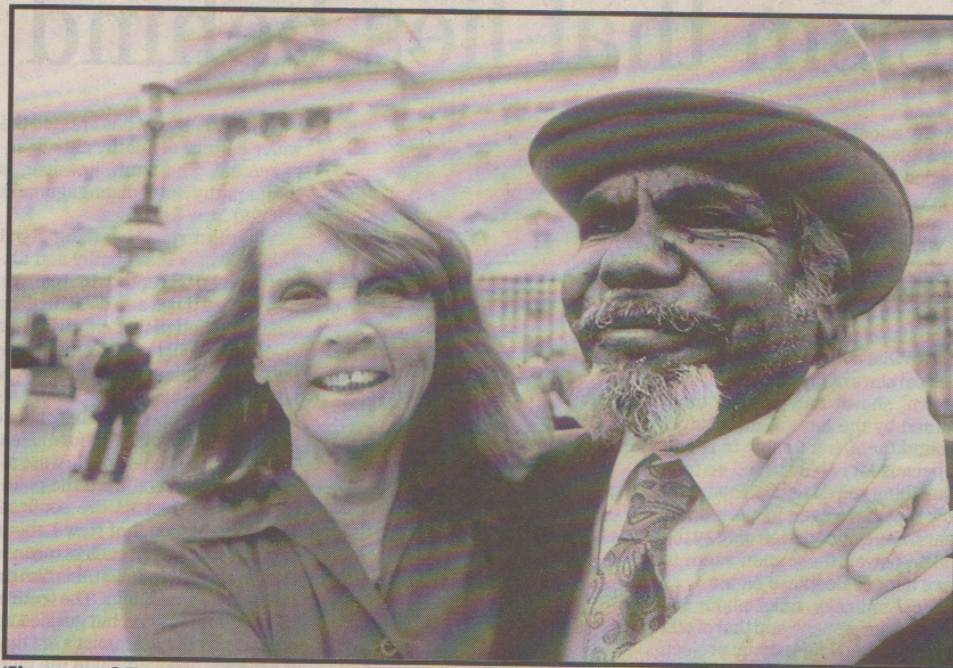
THE BROADER VIEW

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FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2002

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## OBITUARIES



'Jimmy and Pat Meet the Queen': Pike and his wife Pat at Buckingham Palace, 2000

### Jimmy Pike

*Aboriginal artist open to Western subjects*

JIMMY PIKE'S painting style is unique. With its mixture of traditional Aboriginal iconography and modern "Western" motifs, its command of line and enjoyment of colour, it is instantly recognisable.

His origins are obscure. He was born Kurntikujarra in the remote wastes of the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia during the Second World War. He belonged to the Walmajarri people, one of the last Aboriginal groups to make contact with white Australians. He did not meet his first white man until he was 13.

After living a traditional nomadic life with his family group, he gravitated towards the cattle stations of the Kimberley. At the Cherrabun station near Fitzroy Crossing he became a stockman, learning to ride horses and round up cattle. (Pike's English-language name was borrowed from that of a famous Australian jockey.) To make additional money he also began carving wooden ornaments and boomerangs for sale to tourists. Otherwise his early artistic training was confined to learning the ceremonial designs – often applied as body-paintings – that contained the secrets of his tribal lore: the creation myths of his traditional lands and the location of its waterholes.

After moving off the Kimberley cattle stations he found work as a carpenter building community housing for the Aboriginal settlement at Fitzroy Crossing. In 1979 he was convicted of killing another Aboriginal man, and sent to prison – first at Fremantle and then at Broome. It was during the course of his sentence that he began to draw, paint and make prints. He took part in several prison shows. The boldness of his designs and his confident use of colour at once attracted attention. The prison art teachers, Steve Culley and David Wroth, set up a company – Desert Designs – to market his work.

It was in prison too that Pike met Pat Lowe, a British-born woman working as a community welfare officer. On his release in 1986 (and after he had submitted himself to the tribal justice of his people – and been acquitted) Pike and Lowe married and returned to the desert, where they lived for the next three and a half years. One result of this sojourn was *Jilji* (1990), a fascinating account of desert life and desert living, written by Lowe and illustrated by Pike. It was the first of several collaborations. The pair's other books include *Yinti: desert child* (1992), *Desert Cowboy* (2000) and *Jimmy and Pat Meet the*

*Queen* (1997) – a delightful fantasy that gives one of the clearest accounts of the Aboriginal land rights issue.

Although most of Pike's pictures depict the sites of his traditional territory and the stories connected with their creation, he was also open to new experiences. As he gained first a national and then an international reputation, he travelled widely. He had successful exhibitions in China, the Philippines, South Africa, Italy and England, and produced work relating to his experiences in each of these countries.

He was a man of extraordinary energy and mischievous humour. Time spent with him was often full of laughter, as he described the pleasures of eating roast feral cat for Christmas dinner, or explained how he made himself "invisible" when being chased by the police for yet another motoring offence.

He returned often to the desert, visiting his family. It was there that he died of a heart attack on Sunday.

REBECCA HOSSACK

*Kurntikujarra (Jimmy Pike), artist: born Japirnka, Western Australia c1940; twice married (two daughters, and one daughter deceased); died Derby, Western Australia 3 November 2002.*