

THE VOICE

PIKE MAKES BIG SPLASH

Top Aboriginal artist steals show with London exhibition

By Patricia Gordon

AN ABORIGINAL painter who spent his early years living in the Australian desert is set to draw in the crowds with an exhibition of his work in London.

Jimmy Pike, one of Australia's foremost artists, has already won international acclaim for his paintings, screen prints and, more recently, book illustrations.

His work has been shown in the national and state galleries of Australia and all over Europe and America.

His output reflects his nomadic upbringing in the remote Great Sandy Desert and a life spent outside mainstream society.

Naturalistic

Pike did not meet a white Australian until he was a teenager and grew up learning the trade of stockman, or 'Desert Cowboy' - the title of his recent work.

"He is the most famous Aboriginal in the world, and his paintings exemplify that," said Rebecca Hossack, owner of the gallery in London, which is currently featuring his work.

"I am delighted that we can display such a rare blend of boldness through bright colours and composition. He combines the traditional iconography of desert art with newer, more naturalistic elements of representation."

Pike is not the only artist making the world take note of his culture. Aboriginal art was recently featured at a Sotheby's auction, with a painting by another Aboriginal artist, Rover Thomas, selling for £150,000.



JIMMY PIKE: Developed his artistic talents behind bars.

"Aboriginal is the fastest-growing art movement in the world at the moment," said Hossack.

Dreamtime

"It accounts for a £1 billion industry. The works represent strong individuality and the cultural tradition of the Aboriginal, which hasn't been accepted before."

Pike did not begin painting and print making until 1980, when he was well into his 40s and serving five years in prison

for murder. He realized that he had a rare talent and his fondness for painting grew. Ironically, one of his paintings was later used as evidence in a court case.

After his release from jail, Pike decided to record the land of his childhood and youth through such images as its life-sustaining water holes.

He also explored his mythological origins in the Aboriginal concept of 'Dreamtime', often equated with the beginning of creation,

and explored the experiences of his early working life on the cattle stations.

In 1986 he returned to the desert and set up camp with Pat Lowe, an English-born writer who he married in 1987. Lowe has recorded their life together in the desert in a series of extraordinary books, including *Aqi - Life in the Great Sandy Desert*. Determined to remain true to his roots, Pike stubborn-

ly refused to visit the National Art Gallery during a recent visit to London, preferring to go shopping in Brighton, in London. He said: "It was the best day of my life. I loved clothes, the food, and the people."

● The Jimmy Pike exhibit *Desert Cowboy*, is at Rebecca Hossack Gallery, Windmill St, London W2. It runs to 6pm until August 4.