



**EVENT:  
MELBOURNE CUP DAY**

**CLIFFORD PARK, TOOWOOMBA:** 1. Emily Coulter with Sheree Peterk. 2. Natalie Dugdell, Hannah Cole and Shannon Harrington.  
**GPO, FORTITUDE VALLEY:** 3. Georgina Garrett with Adele Sutcliffe. 4. Margaret Hills with Karon Wikman and Lisa Bryan. 5. Renee Morgan, Linda Wilson and Lisa McBride. 6. Liesl Moncrieff with Fiona McDonald.

DANCE SHOPPING MOVIES LIFESTYLE FASHION MUSIC ART OPERA DANCE SHOPPING MOVIES LIFESTYLE FASHION MUSIC

# Ms contrary

For unconventional artist Wendy Sharpe, painting is like spying on people in the street, writes **Debra Aldred**

**W**ENDY Sharpe lives and works on the wrong side of the tracks. She is moved by bold, colourful, figurative works while her peers obsess with cool, detached, minimal lines.

Her 690sqm warehouse studio is on the lower, untrendy side of Sydney's Newtown arts district.

And she was the first woman to snatch Australia's Archibald Prize for portraiture out of the male dominion in 1996.

When a busload of school students from Kyogle State High decided to tour the Philip Bacon Galleries in Brisbane recently, they could not have stumbled upon a more inspiring role model. Many hovered around Sharpe as she spoke about her first solo exhibition in Queensland.

"I am going against the fashion trend," says Sharpe, who also teaches at the National Arts School in Sydney.

"There are less and less paintings which are figurative and narrative. Everything is becoming more minimal and cool, and that's a fashion trend not just in art but in interior decor and the general fashion industry. I want

paintings with lots in them, that's fashionable to me."

All Sharpe's paintings are about people and relationships, whether real or imagined, in various domestic, social or absurd situations, and all are drawn from a female perspective.

"Because I am a woman it makes sense that there is usually a woman in my work," she says. "I almost never do a painting that has only a man in it. I don't know the male viewpoint, how they think, so she's always my angle of getting into a painting."

Sharpe's Queensland exhibition, which continues until November 23, can be broken into three sections: works drawn from the imagination, a series of life drawings with three female friends, and paintings from her Australian War Memorial commission to East Timor as Australia's first female war artist since World War II. It was as a war artist that Sharpe confronted the extremes of human relationships.

"Because I had no other reference point, I've never had anything to do with a war zone, everything was surprising to me," she says. "It was all so new, all so surprising, all so shocking. Seeing that devastation, all those things that



you see on the television all the time but walking around in it. Sandbag barricades, barbed wire everywhere, and utter destruction and then children laughing and running among it all.

"It surprises me that they still do commission war artists, after all you've got film and photography, it's not like a few hundred years ago when that was all you had.

"But I think it's great that we do. It is acknowledging something beyond technology, saying we want someone to show how they reacted to a situation in a personal way."

Although Sharpe has won two awards for portraiture —

the Portia Geach Portrait Prize in 1995, and the Archibald Prize — she does not consider herself a portrait painter.

"I really wouldn't like to do that; I find it uninteresting," she says. "I imagine a picture of a friend but it wouldn't just be them, it would be them in their world. I would be too worried about potential compromise if I was doing portraiture. I don't care if it is flattery or insulting, that's irrelevant."

Sharpe often finds herself studying others in public places, and equates it to carrying around a "dirty secret", sketching people in public

without drawing attention to the fact. "When you are painting a lot, it is the same as if you were writing a novel," she says. "If you're writing a novel you are thinking about the character, what is she doing, and you might be out walking down the street when something happens and you suddenly realise, I could put that in the story."

"It's like that with painting, if I'm painting something and someone walks past in a striped dress, I might say, I could put that in my painting, black and white stripes."

Colour, however, is central to most of Sharpe's work, particularly the last three

years' worth which are the focus of this exhibition. "One of the things I have been doing is combinations of very clean colour and bright colour with some subtle murky colours together, to give it vibrancy but not make it garish," she says.

"The other thing I am doing is using lots of different textures. I am using an oil stick, which is like a big fat crayon of oil paint in solid form. So I've got some textures like a drawing texture, and contrasting that with smooth surfaces. They enhance each other through their differences."

Wendy Sharpe, Philip Bacon Galleries, 2 Arthur St, Fortitude Valley, until November 23

## EXPRESS

with Noel Mengel



**I**T WASN'T so long ago that promoters were bemoaning how difficult it was to get performers to Australia because of the lowly state of the Australian dollar.

The dollar hasn't improved all that much, yet the concert diary for the next few months is filling rapidly. We're told it's a logjam as promoters try to secure venues and dates that don't clash.

Red Hot Chili Peppers play two shows in Brisbane this month, and Pearl Jam will kick off their world tour here in February.

And how often do international acts tour Australia twice in the one year?

Chris Isaak is doing just that, returning in December just six months after his last trip.

Another Australian favourite, Michael Franti, toured in April and also returns next month, playing shows at The Tivoli, Fortitude Valley, on December 11 and the Surfers Paradise Beer Garden on December 12, as well as two shows at Byron Bay.

The full Spearhead line-up won't be with him for the acoustic shows, but he will be accompanied by bandmates Dave Shul on guitar and rapper AudioActive.

The tour is titled Power to the Peaceful, and Franti says he hopes the shows will emphasise the anti-war message in his songs.

Tickets go on sale on Monday through Ticketek and the venue.

**■ IT'S hard to think of a singer who could manage to find the emotional core of, say, *Hurt* by Nine Inch Nails,**

then somehow make the song work on an album that also includes versions of Simon and Garfunkel's *Bridge Over Troubled Water* and The Eagles' *Desperado*.

Other than Johnny Cash, that is. He manages to do it in the latest instalment of his American Recordings series, *American IV: The Man Comes Around*, which is out on November 18.

But that unironic voice, as sturdy as something chiselled from granite, is as moving as ever.

Other tunes include Lennon and McCartney's — oh all right, Lennon's — *In My Life*, Depeche Mode's *Personal Jesus* and a haunting version of *The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face*.

All this and Hank Williams's *I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry* performed with Nick Cave.

**■ UNIRONIC**, of course, is an adjective that has never been applied to Dave McCormack, back in Brisbane with The Polaroids for a show at The Healer on Sunday, where he entertained the gathering by incorporating the riff from Survivor's *Countdown*-era hit *Eye of the Tiger* into his songs at every opportunity. Without comment to the crowd.

An Express spy speculates that these references could have been prompted by his foray into film with his soundtrack for *Garage Days*. *Eye of the Tiger* was the theme song for *Rocky III*, but if Sly Stallone ever cranks up a *Rocky VII*, he'll know who to call for a theme tune.