



SHARPE EYE ON ACROBATS



Wendy Sharpe at work (main); and a unicyclist study.

legendary Cirque d'Hiver. Thinking about circuses like Circa and Absinthe, it dawned on Sharpe that circus in the 21st century was becoming quite a "thing".

"Maybe it's a reaction against technology and something totally real, like 'This woman really is holding on to a trapeze by one hand, and if she falls she really did fall,'" Sharpe says. "There's something raw and real."

Sharpe is moved by the strangeness of all kinds of theatre, from opera to vaudeville, particularly backstage.

"That's where you see the glamorous princess drinking a can of Coke. The monster is looking up his emails or something."

Sitting with Sharpe as she sketches Circus Oz under the Big Top, it's obvious she has built mutual respect with all the performers. She knows everyone's name and specialty — Spencer can hang off the trapeze by one foot, while Olivia is all-round fabulous — and gasps at their physical prowess. Some of the

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planted firmly on the ground, Sharpe has been drawing members of the troupe as they train, rehearse and perform the company's new show, *But Wait ... There's More*, which is

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In drawing and painting the tumbling, flying, unicycling performers of Circus Oz, acclaimed Sydney artist Wendy Sharpe stands on the shoulders of others.

Not literally, of course — Sharpe is quite happy to leave the stunts to the acrobats.

Rather, the Archibald Prize winner is following the lead of famous painters Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Edgar

Degas, George Seurat and others, who found in the circus an intriguing amalgam of the magic and the mundane.

With her gold sandshoes (inspired by Circus Oz performer Lilikoi Kaos)

planted firmly on the ground, Sharpe has been drawing members of the troupe as they train, rehearse and perform the company's new show, *But Wait ... There's More*, which is on at the Entertainment Quarter, Moore Park, following an international tour.

The drawings and paintings coming off Sharpe's sketchpad and easel will culminate in a solo exhibition at Darlinghurst's King Street Gallery On William in September.

Sharpe's circus project began when she was pondering ideas for her next series of artworks.

Circus Oz (far left) and one of Wendy Sharpe's sketches. Pictures: Chris Pavlich

"I thought, 'What are the things I would like to do?', which is always a good question to ask yourself," Sharpe says.

"One of the things I thought of was, 'It would be really wonderful to draw Circus Oz,' because I've seen them many times and they really are fantastic.

"I thought, 'Oh look, bugger it, I may as well just write to them and see what they say.'"

Circus Oz grabbed the opportunity to collaborate with one of Australia's leading artists, and gave Sharpe special access behind the scenes and inside the Big Top.

She had already begun her Circus Oz project when she sidetracked late last year to Paris, where she drew the performers at the

Parisian circus life in the late 19th century. "Utterly Toulouse-Lautrec," Sharpe says. elizabeth.fortescue@news.com.au Twitter: @Ozartwriter

• **Circus Oz, The Showring, Entertainment Quarter, Moore Park; until January 24, adult \$40-\$95, conc \$35-\$95, child (4-16) \$25-\$95, family \$105-\$215, 136 100, ticketmaster.com.au or buy tickets at the Big Top Box Office in the hour before the show**



hot in the city My summer in Sydney

Nicolette Fraillon, music director and chief conductor, The Australian Ballet

- After a year with nine months on the road, all I want to do is stay home and spend time with family. And home is Palm Beach, so who wants to leave paradise?
- I will be attending some fabulous Sydney Festival events, though, in particular the work of Anima Eterna Brugge (January 20-23, City Recital Hall and January 25, Sydney Opera House).
- I will also undoubtedly eat at Bistro Boulevard in

- Avalon. A great French bistro — it feels like one is in France.
- I want to catch up on all the movies I otherwise never get to see — at the amazing Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace or the charming Avalon Cinema.
- I'll read books, watch dolphins, ships and the incredible coastline from my favourite lookout, the A. J. Small Lookout, a hidden gem between Bilgola and Avalon beaches. It's a place to marvel at the world and dream dreams.

Nicolette Fraillon, and Palm Beach.

