



📷 Artist Amanda Penrose Hart with her works inside the Anzac Memorial exhibition space. Picture: John Appleyard

WENTWORTH COURIER

Amanda Penrose Hart of Darlinghurst's King Street Gallery on William makes pilgrimage for Salient

Jacqui Taffel, Wentworth Courier

November 7, 2018 12:00am

LAST year, Amanda Penrose Hart found herself looking at a potato field in Belgium. To most eyes, it looked unremarkable, a bare, brown, furrowed expanse of dirt. For her, it was the place her grandfather's brother died in the trenches in World War I. He was 20, and no one in her family had ever mentioned him until after her father died.

Penrose Hart, an artist at Darlinghurst's King Street Gallery on William, was part of a group who visited the French and Belgian battle grounds where 42,000 Australian soldiers perished.

The work they created from this trip forms an exhibition at Sydney's Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park, which reopened on October 20 after significant extensions, with a ceremony attended by the Duke and Duchess of Sussex.



📷 Mouquet Farm by Amanda Penrose Hart.

Salient: Contemporary Artists at the Western Front features 12 artists including Wendy Sharpe, Idris Murphy and Steve Lopes (who won this year's Gallipoli Art Prize with one of his paintings),

working in different mediums, from oils and watercolours to small sculptures, stonework and photographs.

One of Penrose Hart's larger works is of Corbie, an important crossing point on the Somme River for Australian troops. In the exhibition, her two-panel painting hangs opposite *Amiens from Blangy-Tronville* by Arthur Streeton. He painted it in 1918 while he was official war artist, and has remained in a private collection. This is its first time on public view, and the two paintings, created 100 years apart, show the same area from different directions.

Brad Manera, the Anzac Memorial's senior historian and curator, has led many tours to significant WWI sites.



📷 Cloth Hall, Ypres by Wendy Sharpe.

"I visit those places because that's where the Germans almost broke through in 1918," he says. The usual questions he gets are about trench positions, artillery barrages or particular battalions.

Accompanying a group of artists is quite another experience. "These guys were saying, 'This is probably close to where Streeton set up his easel.' It's a very different way of navigating the battlefields."

Penrose Hart had been on two previous trips to Gallipoli, where the dramatic coastal landscape is more familiar for an Australian painter. The flat and often featureless French and Belgian battle fields were more difficult to capture.



📷 Exposed Wood, Mont St Quentin by Steve Lopes, winner of the 2018 Gallipoli Art Prize and part of the Salient exhibition at the Anzac Memorial.

"You've got this wonderfully calm, agrarian landscape, rolling ploughed fields and charming villages but there's 956 Commonwealth war cemeteries," says Manera.

But for Penrose Hart, the Fricourt German war cemetery hit hardest.

"It has a big wall around it and each black cross has four or six men under it, as far as the eye can see. All the families suffered the same as our side did and it was overwhelming to see the waste on this grand scale."

With a couple of other artists, she stayed there for the day. "It was raining but we found shelter, to paint and to pay respect to it."



📷 Artists Deidre Bean, Harrie Fisher, Paul Ferman, Michelle Hiscock, Ross Laurie, Steve Lopes, Euan MacLeod, Ian Marr, Idris Murphy, Amanda Penrose Hart, Luke Sciberras and Wendy Sharpe during the trip to France and Belgium.

Penrose Hart hadn't heard the military term "salient" before this trip. It refers to a bulge in the battle into enemy territory, where troops are surrounded on several sides and vulnerable. The salient at Ypres in Belgium, where her great-uncle died, was one of the bloodiest of WWI, with allied troops surrounded by Germans on three sides.

"Less than 20 per cent of those who died in the Ypres salient have known graves, as the mud swallowed them," says Manera.

However the exhibition is not about war, says Penrose Hart, but capturing the landscape and its moods 100 years on. This contemporary response sits alongside the Anzac Memorial's original artworks, such as the beautiful and moving central Rayner Hoff sculpture, *Sacrifice*.

"For our work to be in here with that piece is such a privilege," she says.

Until February 17, Anzac Memorial, Hyde Park, free, salientwesternfront.com