ELSEWHERE

Wendy Sharpe and Bernard Ollis

Charles Sturt University

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Front Cover: Wendy Sharpe
Detail from 'Uzbekistan Scroll', 2017 Gouache on silk and paper

WENDY SHARPE BERNARD OLLIS

ELSEWHERE

TRAVELS THROUGH MOROCCO, EGYPT, JORDAN,
SYRIA, IRAN, AND CENTRAL ASIA

A touring exhibition of the HR Gallop Gallery
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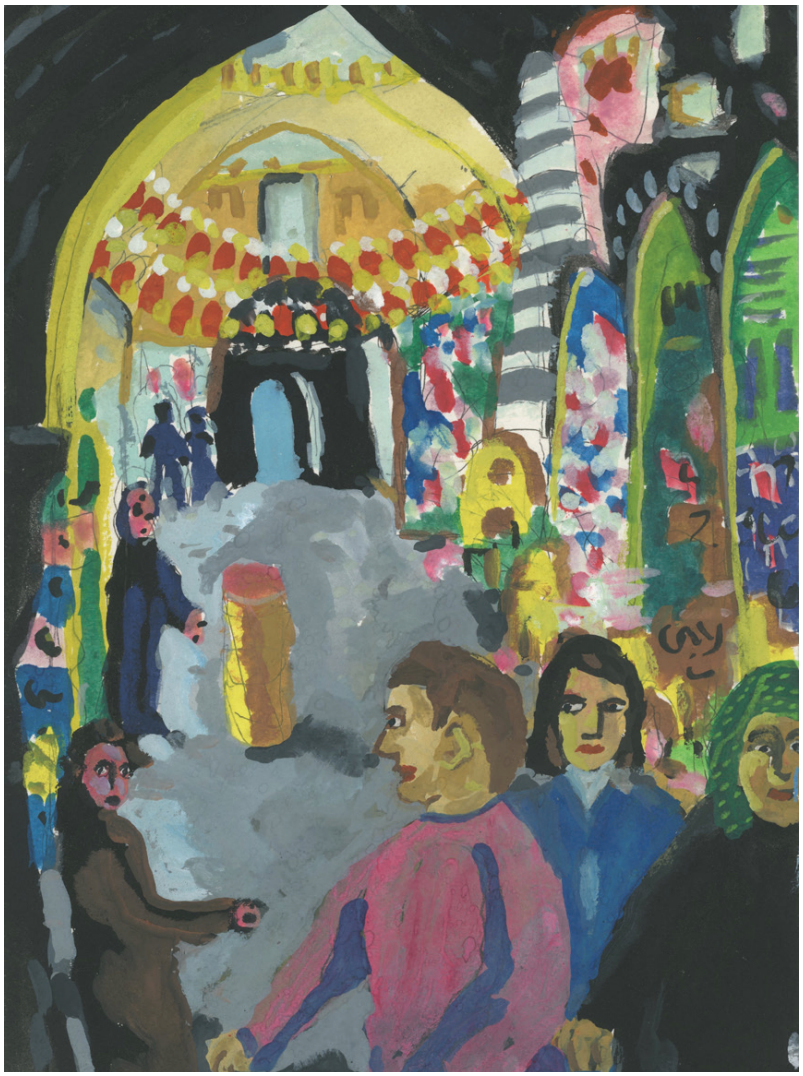

Bernard Ollis

The Souk, Damascus 2010

Gouache on paper

ART AFTER ORIENTALISM

CURATOR'S INTRODUCTION
DR SAM BOWKER

Senior Lecturer in Art History & Visual Culture, Charles Sturt University

Elsewhere was curated in response to the 40th anniversary of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978).

This seminal text argued that the representation of the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia – indeed, any place that might be described as 'Elsewhere' – was influenced by the aggregation of stereotypes, assumptions, historical interactions and conflicting ideologies.

Whilst identifying and arguing for the ways in which visual culture has misrepresented the Orient, Edward Said did not pose a solution to the problems he outlined. This is one of the reasons why this book has remained well-thumbed by generations of students and scholars, for *Orientalism* is a provocation that calls for ongoing responses. The Australian artists Wendy Sharpe and Bernard Ollis are ideally positioned to empathically and critically reply to Said's concerns.

Sharpe and Ollis are inveterate travellers. Their work is drawn from life, focussing on humanity and our interactions with each other. Over many years they have visited and revisited the regions encompassed in Elsewhere – Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iran and Uzbekistan – and I have been fortunate to occasionally travel alongside them.

They always seek to reduce the barriers faced by travellers. The advent of photography changed the speed of travel, accelerating and focussing it towards key landmarks like a collector's itinerary. By drawing, Sharpe and Ollis invest considerable time in any given place. This is used to listen and record both observations and interactions, aware of their position as visitors, and reflecting on what this means for those who call 'elsewhere' home.

After all, anywhere can be elsewhere. Just because we are used to seeing places like Egypt or Morocco through an imaginary lens, filtered by the experiences of tourists, doesn't mean that it's really all that different to how we see and imagine cities like Paris, or Sydney, or Wagga Wagga.

We visit these cities and we see their major landmarks. There's no good reason to not see those important places. But it's the places where people actually live that we miss when we leave. These matter not because they appeal to a tourist gaze, but because they are the places where daily life happens. They are the places that become meaningful on our own terms as visitors,

or if we are lucky, as residents. The longer we can stay, the richer our experiences can be. Places that have been shaped by generations of locals for their own use are privileged sites, for in these places visitors can learn about their hosts without the expectations of itineraries, visual precedents, or performance cultures. *Elsewhere* is about interpreting the zone in between – not spectacularly exotic exceptions or fantasies of faraway places, but how people live with their cultures and heritage every day.

A visitor from overseas might imagine Sydney, for example, as the Harbour Bridge and Opera House, but a resident would think of areas like Newtown as a changing and thriving heart of the community that rewards repeated visits. In Cairo, this could be the market of the Golden Chairs, or the Friday morning junk market in the City of the Dead, or the pedestrian traffic through the Street of the Tentmakers. These are sites of daily life, separated from the expectations of global tourism.

Elsewhere was developed to acknowledge the ways that travellers are encouraged to travel. It is an exploration of the zone that travelling artists work within, and how that zone shapes the ways we might understand each other. Through this exhibition, Sharpe and Ollis celebrate their experiences of travel and share those visual testimonies in the most meaningful way they can.

Throughout this exhibition, the immediacy of the sketch emphasises the normality of life in complex communities. Cameras have accelerated our itineraries as travellers. We may take longer to find the right position and anticipate the photograph we want to take, and take dozens of images as we explore a particular place. But drawing is another kind of immersion, as things change around us. The scenes aren't fixed, they are chosen and remembered and re-interpreted. We focus on what catches our eye, or what changes after we start drawing.

Drawing is a reflective practice. Some of the major works in *Elsewhere* – Wendy Sharpe's *Cairo Screen* or her concertina sketchbooks, or Bernard Ollis' panoramic *Iran* and *An Old Bazaar in Cairo* – are flowing manifestos that combine weeks of observations, encounters, individuals and places. Together they form narratives that unwind in different directions, catching our eye in unique sequences, and suggesting how these spaces might be read as first-time visitors.

Ultimately, *Elsewhere* is a manifesto for the changing purpose of traveller's art after Orientalism. It is a negotiation of many experiences by two leading Australian travelling artists, who seek to share their travels in a manner that is respectful, reflective, inclusive and authentic. It presents an alternative to persistent and reductive clichés of the Middle East, North Africa and central Asia. These artworks favour scenes drawn from ordinary life and actively situate the limits of each artist's knowledge. The resident and the visitor are not the same thing, and the reality of being 'elsewhere' is far more complex than our imaginations or headlines allow.

To this end, we thank Charles Sturt University and Create NSW, through the NSW Government's Touring Exhibitions Grant, for making this touring exhibition possible. The patronage of the HR Gallop Gallery in Wagga Wagga, the Griffith Regional Art Gallery, the Port Macquarie Glasshouse, Tamworth Regional Art Gallery and the Western Plains Cultural Centre in Dubbo has been invaluable for reaching new audiences across regional New South Wales. I also thank the generosity of the artists, Wendy Sharpe and Bernard Ollis, and the curatorial support of Jessica Green, for enabling every part of this project.

A Reflection on *Elsewhere*

Jessica Green
Assistant Curator

Assisting with the curation and development of the *Elsewhere* exhibition has been challenging to my perceptions of art history, the complexities of visual representation, and my own place in the world. One of the main aims of the exhibition is to challenge and open dialogue, so my own journey of research and internal debate is a testament to this ambition.

Wendy Sharpe and Bernard Ollis have prolific creative practices, exploring in depth humanity with travel being used as both inspiration and artistic process. The challenge for curating *Elsewhere* was how to contextualise artistic response to cultures other than your own, when history is heavy with the complexities of cross cultural relationships and post-colonial power dynamics. Edward Said's influential book *Orientalism* (1978) provides a useful tool in understanding these dynamics and the subsequent (mis)representations that still permeate society today. But as the exhibition and our research has raised, how do we move on from *Orientalism*? Is it possible to cast aside the legacies of *Orientalism*, to serve as travelling artists whilst remaining culturally sensitive and authentic witnesses?

I would reflect that there are no definitive answers or solutions to Said's *Orientalism*, only conversations and explorations. It would not make sense to address issues of misrepresentation through avoidance of the 'other' all together. Visual representation can also be an answer to the problems that visual representation can create, hence the importance of open dialogue that *Elsewhere* presents. Through their art making and travel as process and inspiration both Ollis and Sharpe present one potential means of deconstructing persistent myths. Through the intimacy of sketch, we can re-humanise, convey a multitude of authentic encounters in ways that do not speak for anyone else but focus upon the experience itself.

Artistic representation of the Middle East is nothing new. The regional tour of *Elsewhere* coincides with the 40-year anniversary of Edward Said's enduring and highly influential book *Orientalism* (1978). Academic debates continue over this work, for it is an unfinished dialogue worthy of rereading, particularly today as we try and navigate our rapidly globalising world.[1] A key area of investigation and contemplation for me is the relevance and applications of Said's *Orientalism* in the contemporary art world, especially in the rapidly evolving context of digital media sharing and globalisation. Said critiqued the structures of history that turned views of the Middle East and the Orient into the 'Other', usually a barbaric place, driven by savage environments and restrictive conditions.

1 John C. Hawley (2015) "Debating Orientalism", *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 51:3, p357

It was a setting for fantasy, distinct from modern times and geographically beyond our day-to-day realities – a setting from a long time ago and far, far away. Throughout pre-colonial and colonial history, visualisations of 'elsewhere' as a place of sensuality, strangeness, difference and prejudice informed how people understood and spoke about the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia. 'Orientalist Art' usually refers the production of images of the Middle East in the 19th century, often romanticised, timeless, and intrinsically exotic. *Orientalism* provided a way of dividing between the audience and the 'other', to create an inferior representation of the East in order to perceive the West as superior. These constructs still permeate our society today as discussed by Rachel Walls and Soseh Yekanians in relation to post-9/11 cross-cultural contexts. However, as Bowker has explained, Said's *Orientalism* presents us with a myriad of valid problems, but few solutions are offered in return.

Despite its age and complex critiques, *Orientalism* remains a useful foundation to examine the functioning of images, perception, and our construction of ideologies. With digital media, we can connect to people all over the world in completely new and rapidly changing ways. However, another aspect to this globalisation is that our perception of other places, cultures and people become largely constructed through such media. Whilst photography is intrinsic to global visual culture, the mode of image delivery has accelerated, with an increasing array of images and articles accessible to any individual.

Contemporary media images of the Middle Eastern or Muslim 'Other' have been highly visible in news media, informing mass perceptions through narratives of conflict, strife, and upheaval.[2] The evolution of orientalist imaginings from the 19th century depictions of the Middle East have evolved into today's depictions with dominant narratives of violence and displacement.[3] These negative constructions of the 'East' informed popular justifications for involvement in the War on Terror and other interventionist campaigns.[4]

So how do we navigate and interpret these constructions? What do we accept as truth and what do we challenge? Visual language itself does not reveal a pre-existing 'truth' about the world but rather provides a way to create meanings through representation.[5] This is an important concept to reflect upon. I would argue that problematic stereotypes that collectively form in one society about the other through such visual language. Fortunately, they can also be deconstructed in the same way. Wendy Sharpe and Bernard Ollis do not deny that they are an outsiders in this world they are working in, but instead they embrace this external perspective as a way to portray authentic experience and encourage cross-cultural encounters and dialogue.

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2 Maryam Khalid, (2011). "Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the 'other'" In *The War on Terror, Global Change, Peace and Security*, 23:1, p15
3 Hawley (2015)
4 Khalid (2011: 15)
5 Khalid (2011: 16)

Matthew Scott argues that *Orientalism* isn't necessarily about the excluded, but rather about the way in which diverse cultures were homogenised and simplified.[6] This reduction of Middle Eastern identities into one cultural representation is problematic and requires challenging. Contemporary travelling artists can provide one way of doing this. For example, Ollis' candid, vibrant, and compelling Cairo street scenes are particularly useful devices for simultaneously acknowledging and deconstructing stereotypes and regional differences. Ollis' paintings and drawings are observations of the visually breathtaking, a celebration of colour and texture. Their complexities in perspective, line and colour breathe life into worlds unfairly characterised by dark themes and sound-bite simplification.

Elsewhere aims to open up conversation. Feminist scholar Fatima Mernissi draws our attention to the potential problems with looking too closely through the lens of Said's idea of Orientalism, which can solidify this divide between East and West.[7] Mildred Mortimer also suggests that by identifying the colonizer as all powerful and the colonized as powerless, lacking action and independence the stereotypes are further reinforced and dialogue becomes restricted.[8] I would also stress that care should be taken to avoid a reductionist view of the Middle East as a single entity and culture, as it's hard to imagine that the answer to misrepresentation is to avoid the issue of representation altogether.

Returning to the dilemma of navigating the discourse and dialogue opened by Said, and the persistence of "these are the problems, but what are the answers?", we reflected upon the process of art making itself as research centred in creative practice.

Elsewhere emphasises the importance of a nuanced approaches through both context and form. The act of drawing creates intimate connections between the artist, subject and audience. The works are products of their time, not the representations of reductive and timeless motifs carefully constructed to fit a particular viewpoint that Said critiques as problematic. The intimacy of sketching invites the question - what can drawing offer us that digital and social media cannot? Sharpe's answer to this brings us back to that core notion of experience. In her interview for this catalogue she notes that drawings take time, and so time becomes tangible and is embedded into the work itself.

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6 Matthew Scott (2008). "Edward Said's Orientalism" in *Essays in Criticism*, 58:1, p66
7 Alessandra Marino (2014) "Orientalism and the politics of contemporary art exhibitions" In *The Post-Colonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and Pressures of History,* edited by Prof. Iain Chambers, Taylor and Francis Group
8 Mildred Mortimer (2005). "Re-Presenting the Orient: A New Instructional Approach" In *The French Review*, 79:2, p297

The personal experience of the artist is within the work, and any ambiguities just leave room for the viewer to imagine their own narratives. This is best explored in Sharpe's concertina sketchbooks, the extended format showing scene after scene with both moments of intimacy and distance. By remaining figurative and gestural, Sharpe both conveys personal encounter and sensory memory but also invites the viewer to be actively engaged in the work themselves, in a manner distinct from photographic representation.

When viewing *Elsewhere*, it is important to examine the art-making process itself. As Sharpe and Ollis have shown, visual representation provides a means of responding to the problems that visual representation can create. In a world of increasing connectivity, globalisation and cross-cultural sharing, including entrenched stereotypes and assumptions of the 'other', there is no easy answer for how we 'should' engage with people and environments different to one's own. As external observers, we can only try to navigate our way through the world with openness. This includes the reflective ability to acknowledge what we do and do not understand.

Wendy Sharpe and Bernard Ollis bring to light these pertinent conversations on what it is to share human experience. I think one of the impressive achievements in this dialogue is to show how we may have these conversations with a light heart, as you can see throughout this incredibly lively and vibrant body of work. The intimacy of the sketch, and the making of artworks from meaningful experiences, defines *Elsewhere* as the basis for open dialogue.

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Reflections on the Other: *Elsewhere*

Rachel Walls

At the heart of *Elsewhere* is a challenge – can you abandon yourself to the simple act of being?

Elsewhere is an expression of the first impact of 'otherness' as well as a long-term romance with the minutiae of cultures vastly different from those of Australia. Australia bears its history and origin as a British penal colony, the freedom of a young nation, a very high constitution of migrants (such as myself), and older migrants who pretend they are 'truly' Australian. As a foreigner, both Australia and this 'other' – that which is *Elsewhere* from here – are fascinating to me.

I consider the 'other' as a kind of reflection, mirroring and refracting within a singular Whole but separated, doubled and distorted through a lens of cognition. The familiar and foreign coexist as elements of a single social fabric, the folds of which Deleuze describes as "...a coextensive unveiling and veiling of Being."[1] For every revelation there is an equal concealment, in which identity and representation are merged through perception and depiction. The creative process of *Elsewhere* is both voyage and voyeur, in which the artist leaves and the art returns. Their lens becomes a portal for others.

Australia has, to a large extent, been a recipient rather than a transmitter of cultural agenda. Australia's cultural identity contains a reflection of two 'others' – a *dedoublement* of aspirations influenced by old and new powers that conquer, expand, and exert influence. This is the position from which Wendy Sharpe and Bernard Ollis explore international destinations – exchanging new world for old, West for East, Judeo-Christian for Islamic, and crossing language barriers. Their explorations inform energies poured into the creation of art objects – culturally distinct and yet attached to specific places and times; recording the moment of observation as much as the place of mark-making. This is Australian art being its very best future self: aloof and aware of its comparative youth in a world of much longer-established national cultures.

There are elements of Bernard Ollis's work that remind me of my childhood in New York City – the 1980s-street-art aesthetic he employs is reminiscent of reductive quotidian cultural murals which decorated and demarcated ethnically segregated neighborhoods (a dull memory from childhood of culture-war graffiti). Cacophonous joyful screams for cultural recovery emerged at that time in African American visual arts. This protozoan state of decolonization addressed trauma and cultural loss due to forced removal, the resolution of which is still an aspiration, and echoes issues in Australia that are only beginning to find expression in mainstream culture. The transition between the 1980s and 1990s in America was one of cultural widening and awakening, with the caveat that *first* you were American.

Wendy Sharpe

Egyptian Screen 2008

Oil on linen, 166 x 320cm

The curiosity of American-ness is its erasure of 'otherness' – incorporating yet burying; identifying yet deferring. While Ollis's work reminds me of this era of initial reclamation, Australia does not have the same jingoistic national agenda. Bernard Ollis is not presenting a kitsch reduction of culture, but an honest reaction to culture as other.

Wendy Sharpe's work presents an effort in recording, an unobtrusive act of mark-making to find a truth. Her concertina books of detailed yet loose landscapes, paintings of exotic costumes, and the use of cultural motifs to suggest otherness are an act of memory-making and memory-transmitting. Transmission is as much place-making as a statement of wonder and curiosity. Baudrillard suggested that the act of taking a photo abdicates memory to the machine [2] – but here there is a desire to turn the act of memory-making into the skilled actions of hands, pigments and paper. Looking at Sharpe's concertina books, her tiny, soft sketches and bold paintings; and the collection of these works as a whole – the result of many separate expeditions – they seem to be steps in a process that may never be complete. The collection is not a matter of artworks but a matter of adventures, and the haptic nature of these artworks emit a palpable wanderlust. I am moved by this exhibition full of delicate recordings and vibrant cultural declarations. *Elsewhere* is a room brimming with joy.

The observations that are present in *Elsewhere* are simple, requiring nothing more than the curiosity to see. It is tourism as a form of voyeurism, as immersion in transformation: the commitment of the artists as outliers. It is important to discern between the observer and the distant gaze of being 'the other'. This gaze forms a barrier that complicates what could otherwise be very simple. As I reflect on *Elsewhere* and its effortless display of outsider art, tourism, and the critique of Edward Said's Orientalism, I ask myself "why is it so hard?"

1. Deleuze, G., *The Fold*. Continuum Impacts Changing Minds. 2006, London: Continuum. 196.

2. Baudrillard, J., *The Perfect Crime*. English Translation ed. Radical Thinkers. 2008, London: Verso. 156.

Wendy Sharpe

Egyptian Screen 2008

Oil on linen, 166 x 320cm

INTERVIEW WITH WENDY SHARPE

JESSICA GREEN

J: Given that strong themes of humanity run throughout your practice, what would you like the 'Elsewhere' exhibition to achieve?

W: I think it's very important to mention that the last thing I'm attempting to do with this is to try and speak for people in other countries and other cultures for which I'm completely an outsider. I have gone to places like Syria or Egypt because they're such rich places, full of fascinating buildings and amazing cultures, wonderful food, warm friendly people and just so many interesting things to see. They are things which relate to Australia but are also different. I think many people have not been to places that are not 'western' - of course some have and places like Morocco are very popular tourist destinations. I think that when we hear about the countries featured in this exhibition, we usually hear about them in a negative way. It can get completely skewed in a ridiculous or very inaccurate way, which isn't what it's really like to be there.

J: Yes, many people's experiences of these places is through the news or filtered Facebook articles.

W: Yes. For example, Bernard and I live part of each year in Paris. For another month or two I'm also in Morocco. And people think Morocco is 'dangerous', but Paris has been far more dangerous. I'm not talking about terrorism. There are pick-pockets in Paris and there is a good chance you could get your bag nicked on the Metro - whereas there is almost no chance that someone would steal anything from you in Morocco. There's going to be bad people everywhere and of course there are, but encountering them is much more likely in a Western country.

J: I've found you can have more negative experiences on a night out in Melbourne or Sydney.

W: Exactly. But one of the wonderful things about travel in general, but particularly when you're travelling to somewhere that's culturally different to your own country is that you're always reminded is that we're all human and we're all so much more alike than anything else. The more you realise you have more in common than not - I think that's one of the things this exhibition does.

The other thing it does is it sort of takes the viewer to these places. Assuming you might be a person from one of these places, hopefully it will remind you of home. Sometimes it does and people have said this to me. But for other people who have never been there, it's a little bit of an insight. As I said earlier, I'm an outsider, so how could I know the whole story? But to go there as an outsider is still to experience the place and meet the people. That's something that I think these artworks do. They're about actually being there. They're not postcard views. Even though there are tourist places, because I am a tourist, there are also little intimate insights, particularly into people's lives that you would not encounter by looking through a travel brochure.

Wendy Sharpe

Detail from *'Uzbekistan Scroll'* 2017

Gouache on silk and paper

J: Just expanding on that a little more, what makes you actually decide to capture a particular place? Do you wander around first then come back to a place you were drawn to or is it more spontaneous?

W: It depends. One time was wonderful as we were staying at the Australian Embassy residence in Cairo. We were introduced to people who ran a café, so we sat all day drawing in the café, ordering cups of tea and just drawing the street. There's a whole lot of works from that day, so we had insights we couldn't get as a 'normal' tourist. We drew who came in and out, what happened and having the opportunity to sit amongst it with a table. I was painting a lot in gouache, and I'm actually really doing that there which is unusual that I could sit there and do that. That was fantastic. But sometimes it was something that you've just experienced that was quite amazing and it was wanting to draw that from memory straight after.

J: Why do you choose to work with predominately gouache throughout most of these works?

W: Bernard uses a lot of oil pastel. I am an oil painter, but when I'm working on paper I tend to work either in gouache or chalk pastel. It's a bit different to oil pastel - it's a softer, dustier version. I like gouache, it's like an opaque watercolour. You can also paint with gouache over things, so you can layer over something. It's very amenable and adaptable, and you can wipe it off. In practical terms, you're working on paper which of course doesn't take too much room, it dries fast so you can let it dry quickly then stack it up and put it in your bag and they're small tubes of paint and you're using water so if it spills you can wash it off. It's very practical and I also love the look of it, it has a beautiful feel all of its own.

J: Many pieces from the exhibition are intimate, moving between public and private spaces. Did you find being a woman changed your access to any of these spaces or maybe any spaces that you would have liked to explore?

W: Yeah that's an interesting question. In the café that I just told you about there were only men. I'm wearing western clothes but I'll make sure that I respectfully cover my arms and so on. But I'm a western woman so they didn't really mind so much. I don't think I really would be able to do that in some places if I wasn't a western woman. Also if I was sitting by myself I think I would probably still be allowed in but maybe regarded as an oddity. So there are some things like that.

Bernard and I did this little camping trip out in the White Desert in Egypt - which is amazing. The man who took us around there who was a Bedouin. He took us to his house in this little oasis town and we sat in the front room for guests and were served this beautiful food. I was the only person who was allowed to go in to the back of the house where all the women were - from young girls in their teens right through to elderly ladies. They were making bread in the back garden and they knew that we were drawing and so they all sat and posed for me. They were interested and did it for fun. I was showing them my drawings and it was really nice. But that was a lovely experience that a man couldn't have had.

Wendy Sharpe

Cairo Cafe, 2008

Gouache on paper

J: We're so used to now seeing other places and other people basically through our screens - across platforms like Instagram, Facebook, things like that. What can drawings offer us that digital and social media cannot?

W: Yes, very good question. I mean it's always been that way to a degree because of photography. But I do agree with you, and I think it's become much more so. Well, drawing is interesting because it takes time. This sounds silly but in a way the time you've spent is embedded in the drawing. You can sort of feel it's not about a split second, it's actually about an experience. It sounds very vague and mystical but it is true. It's a little bit like how a photograph of someone may not really look like them, but if you see a film of them it gives you more of what they're like because you see them moving.

Now a drawing obviously doesn't move, but the fact that it was done over a time is still part of it. You got to see things changing and moving, so learned what's around the corner, how this man walks, or sits and drinks cups of coffee. Having seen how he moves is hinted at in the drawing of him, even if he's just sitting down.

It's a funny way thing to say but somehow you gain more of an understanding of the subject then if you just took a photograph then did a drawing. Particularly if you took a photograph and a drawing on that same day. That's fine because that's nearly the same as being there, partly from the photograph and partly from memory. Whereas if I just found an image on the internet then I wasn't there and I don't really understand it. I can do a neat copy of it but that's quite different to trying to embed your own experience into it.

One of the things you're doing is using your memory to draw. If you're walking through a crowded market, and then that night you sit down and do some drawings, and maybe look at some photographs. You might be reminded of certain types of fabrics laying around. In your drawing you might want to accentuate some of the fabrics but leave out some of the other things. Whereas if you're just looking at an image that has nothing to do with you, it's just copying because you can't say anything about your own experience of that place.

In a way drawing is like writing. Or rather, writing is like talking. If you told me in great detail about somewhere you'd been, and if someone also went to the same party and did the same thing, both stories would have some things in common. But both stories would have lots of different things because you've noticed and accentuated different things. That's another thing about 'Elsewhere' too, in some cases Bernard and I have both worked on the same subject so it's interesting to see two takes on the same or a similar experience. Both of us draw to emphasize what struck us as important.

Wendy Sharpe

Portrait of Mohamed by a campfire in the Gilf Kebir, Egypt 2010

Gouache on paper

J: Yes, I get that. The concertina sketchbooks and scrolls are fascinating, creating a really engaging format to explore these narratives. What was the inspiration behind this format?

W: I've been doing this for a long time now, particularly when I travel. I do two different types really, one is sort of like a panorama which is sort of like a 360 or 180…if you're sitting somewhere and looking at something and it's a view of looking as far across left as you can go and as far across right as you can go or even right around. It's a pure drawing of what you see, that's a panorama. The others are more like a true visual diary. As in; this is us in the museum, this is us walking through the market, this is us on the local bus going somewhere, this is what I saw when I got to the temple etc. These are just things that happened.

I like the idea that the ones like a diary really are like a story. It really is a visual diary and sometimes there is a drawing that is quite big in them, say a large scene showing a lot of people walking through it, lots of interactions. Sometimes there's a tiny little scene of something I saw that afternoon, just one little thing like an interesting little dog I saw or something. That's just a drawing there on its own and then the next scene is something else. And the interesting thing is you don't know what's coming next, I don't know what's coming next. So when I start it I have no idea what's going to be towards the end, which I think is really, really nice.

J: I think the great thing about it too, is the viewer will always be able to bring their own imagination to it and make their own connections and narratives between each part which is really engaging.

W: Yes, exactly! That's what I want, so I'm glad you say that. I want people to do that and what I always want people to do. But even though they're figurative and there's people and it's a scene of people doing things, I don't want it to be like an illustration of something. I want it to be where you bring your own interpretations and experiences and imagine what's happening there. You need to have room for the viewer to bring their own experiences to things.

Wendy Sharpe

Detail from '*Uzbekistan Scroll*', 2017

Gouache on silk and paper

J: Definitely. Just finally, Hilda Rix Nicholas famously spent time in Morocco exploring everyday life. Do you feel there are similarities in your experiences and approach?

W: Now that's interesting. Have you seen photos of her drawing there?

J: Yes!

W: Oh they're wonderful. She looks like she was a fantastic person. Well in a way no, in a way yes. I'm quite conscious of those. A few years ago I did this - this is a bit off the track- I did a project about Matisse and I actually stayed in some of the places where he lived in France and I thought if I also do that I should go to where he was in Morocco and also where Hilda was at the same time as him and she must have known him. But what I like about her is she was so- I mean sometimes you could characterise someone as being this colonialist type and going there to sneer and feel superior to all these other cultures.

But she was in raptures about how wonderful it all was and loved it. But she also wrote masses of letters home to her mother about how nice the people were to her and how helpful they were and wonderful it all was and how fascinating it all was. And it's you know, it's certainly very enthusiastic and not patronising and it's about the thrill of "oh gee this is so interesting and so different to my normal life and its wonderful", which was what she was writing home.

And she also bought clothes from there and this is an interesting issue. And this is one of the difficult issues with this- you know, is this appropriating someone else's culture? I suppose it depends on what you're actually doing with it. This is kind of celebrating other cultures, by saying isn't this a wonderful thing? "I'm not trying to be you, but this is a wonderful thing and I love it". Bernard and I were recently at the NSW Art Gallery for an opening. When we were in Uzbekistan, which has the most stunning textiles, we bought several. Bernard was wearing a jacket with Uzbek fabric and I was wearing a coat with Uzbek fabric, and they both looked stunning. And a man who saw us ran across the room and said 'Oh they're from Uzbekistan, yes it's so good to see'. You're not trying to dress up and make some sort of comment, you're just saying isn't this fantastic and it's strange that we don't get to see it that often. We miss out on such a huge range of wonderful things.

J: Thank you so much for your time today. I really enjoyed the talk.

Wendy Sharpe

Camp in the Gilf Kebir (detail) 2010

Gouache on paper - concertina sketchbook

Wendy Sharpe

Guard at Karnark Temple, Luxor, 2008

Gouache on paper

Wendy Sharpe

Women in the Market of Golden Chairs, 2008

Gouache on paper

Wendy Sharpe

Cairo Cafe, 2008

Gouache on paper

Wendy Sharpe

Cairo Cafe, 2008

Gouache on paper

Wendy Sharpe

Cairo Cafe, 2008

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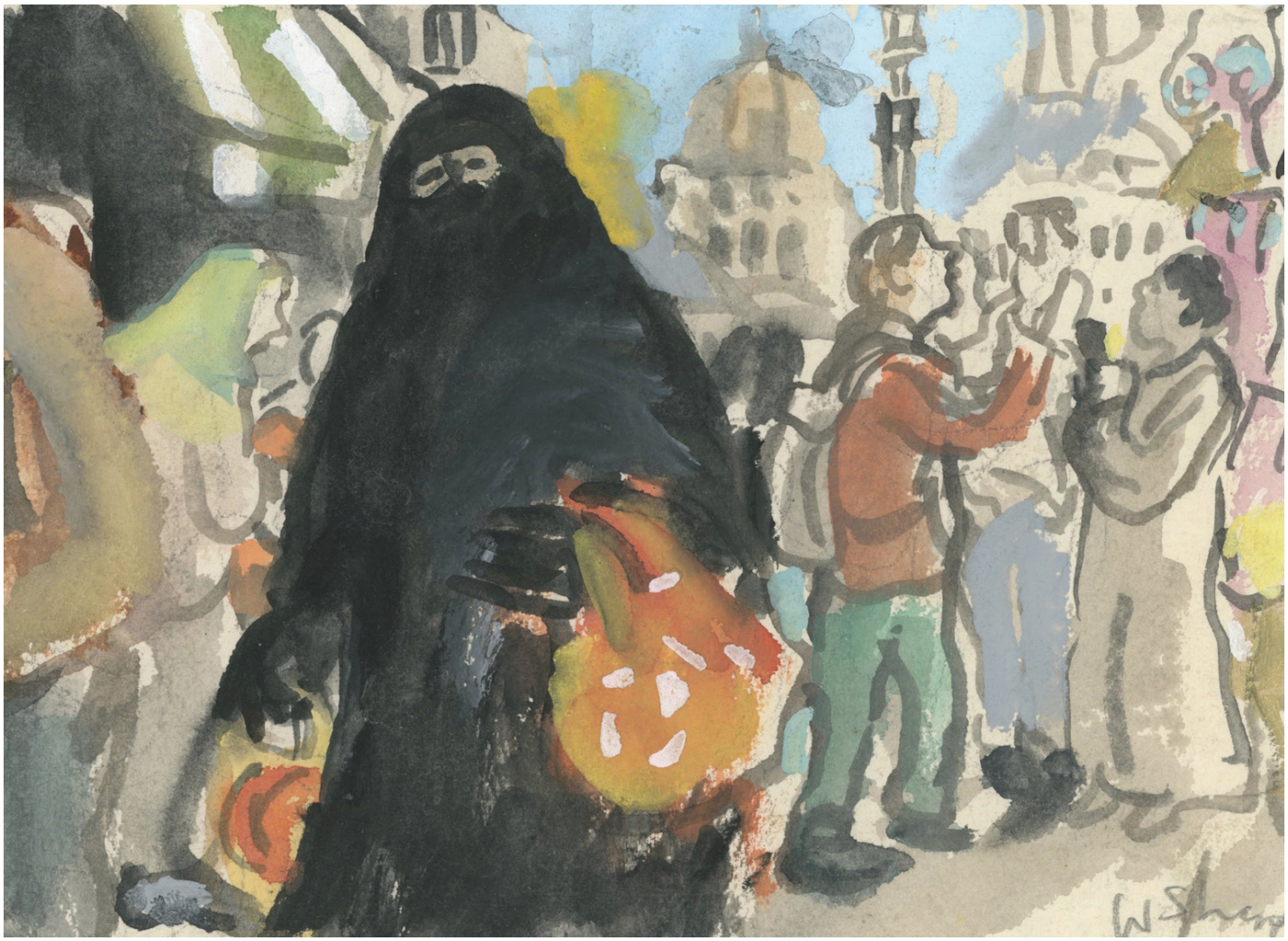
Wendy Sharpe

Cairo Cafe, 2008

Gouache on paper



Wendy Sharpe

Sketch from a Cairo Cafe, 2008

Gouache on paper

Wendy Sharpe

Sketch from a Cairo Cafe, 2008

Gouache on paper

INTERVIEW WITH BERNARD OLLIS

JESSICA GREEN

J: Firstly, Bernard thank you for your time today. So I've noticed travel informs so much of your practice, and I was wondering what you'd like the *Elsewhere* exhibition to achieve?

B: Big question! Yes, travel does inform a great deal of my practice. I think that stepping into a foreign, or different environment is the most stimulating thing that any creative person can do, whether you be a writer, composer or in my case a painter/drawer. Because when you walk down the road of a place you've never been to before, it looks different…you know the smells are different, the language is different…the drainpipes go down the houses in a different way, the guttering looks different. Everything about it takes you out of your comfort zone and I think that's an exciting thing to do. It makes you think afresh about how people live and why people do what they do. It stops you taking things for granted and helps you to see different things in different ways. Most importantly of all, it helps you to see yourself and what it's like for you back home because you can make a comparison what you know, what you've gotten used to and something which is very alien to all these things you've taken for granted. I think of so many composers that dealt with their most incredible music, so many writers that dealt with their most incredible literature when they were in some new foreign, exotic, different place, because it stimulated or heightened their creative senses in a different way.

J: I definitely agree; I have always found travelling to be such a self-reflective process.

B: To answer the second part of your question, what do I want the show to do. I think whenever I have an exhibition I always want it to be stimulating and give the audience a chance to also gain some of those things we've just talked about. And to get them to feel like they've been, you know, stimulated by, challenged by things that I am seeing and recording in my own inimitable way. So I think that it's also about other ways of looking and I think that because this exhibition is dealing with places, countries which have often been as we know, stereotyped, and that is in itself a big danger, people or governments, politicians etcetera have made over-arching simplifications…. because of all that it's good to be able to say well, I'm an artist, not a politician. I'm going in and I'm looking at places, I'm celebrating the things that I see and I'm excited by finding ways to record it, I think it's of interest for you to look at with fresh eyes and I hope you as in the audience, I hope you do. So I'd like people to be able to say, what interesting subject matter and how exciting it is that we have perhaps not had an opportunity to see, and we're seeing it from an artist's perspective.

Bernard Ollis

Nightclub dancing, Cairo 2008

Oil pastel on paper

J: Yes, to bring a really fresh perspective, I feel the exhibition will be successful in achieving that. When you travel, what makes you decide to capture a particular place? Do wander around first and come back to places that you were really drawn to or is it really quite spontaneous?

B: Ah yes, it varies, there isn't really a simple answer to that. It's often to do with the logistics of what art materials I've got on me at a particular time. It may be if I'm on a sort of, organized tour because it's the only way I can get into a country, is to do it in a, like Iran or somewhere like that, you can't just go off and be a free range tourist, you actually have to be part of groups and things like that. To a certain extent then it would depend on how long we're spending at a particular place, how much time I've got to actually work on things either back in my hotel room or on the spot. So there's not really one answer to that. But I always try to let people know who are travelling with me that I'm an artist, I'm not always going to trek around the mosque, I'm going to sit in the corner and look at things and draw things and they can meet me back in an hour or something like that. So there's that side of it too. But I walk into the place, just like you might or anybody might say "oh that would make an interesting photograph", I say "oh that would make an interesting sketch". Or I look at the materials that people are wearing and the incredible clothing or whatever and say 'wow that's a really interesting pattern, I've never seen anything like that before and I just sit down and draw. It is whatever strikes me at the moment. Sometimes they're no more than sketches and they get thrown away at the end of it all, and sometimes they go to the next stage and become more developed images.

J: So when you travel, do you finish most of your pieces out in the field or back in the studio?

B: So the little ones, sometimes on the spot. The more major works, I'm usually working on them back in the studio. I might be working on them on a table in a hotel room depending on where I am or I may have got an artist an artist residency as I did in Egypt where I can take information back and work it and rework it. I like to work on things close to the time that I was there. In other words, I don't want to just take a load of photographs and take them back to Sydney and three months later you know, try to find a way of dealing with it. Because by then it's become more of a distant memory. So I like if I can, to strike while the iron is hot. I like to look at things and deal with them and come to terms with the information close to the period I was there.

Bernard Ollis

The Colossus of Rameses II, 2008

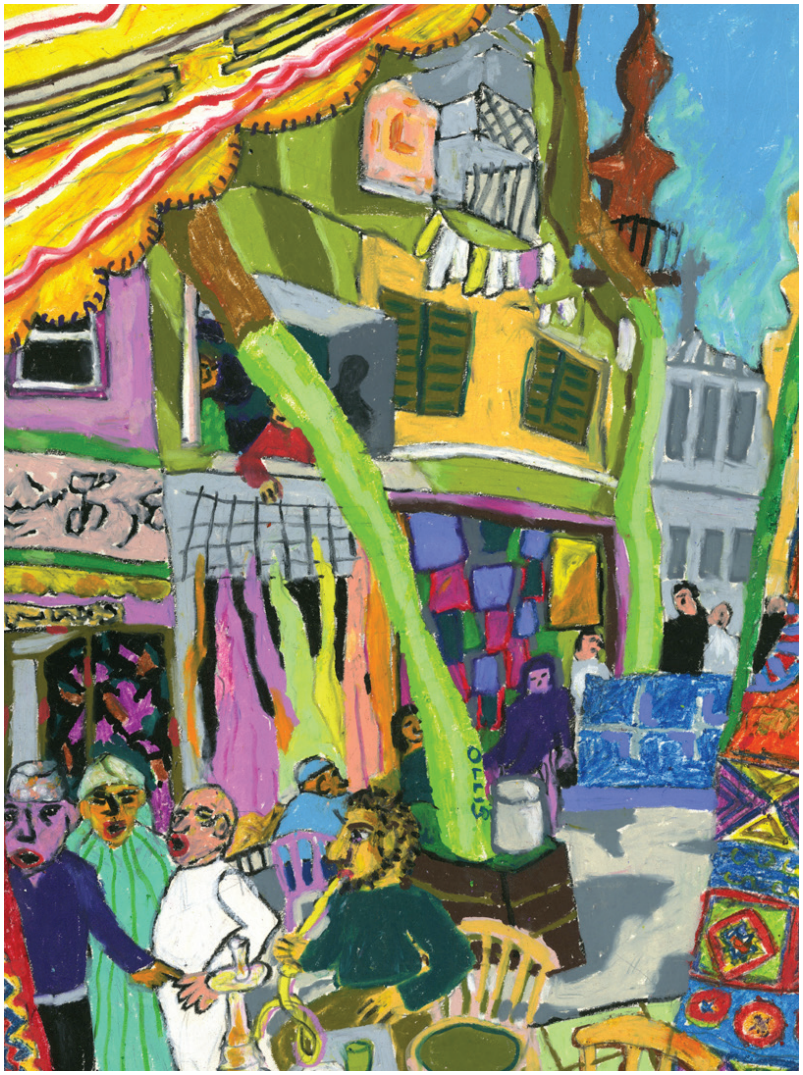
Oil pastel on paper

J: Why do you choose to work with predominately oil pastels throughout your travelling works?

B: Well that's a history of me as an artist. When I first went overseas, this was back in my days in England, when I was in my early 20s. I went to Paris and I looked at ways I could immediately respond to the things that I saw around me and I just found oil pastels to be for me a very direct medium. I could buy a box of oil pastels which had 50 different colours, all the colours in the spectrum, as the French say. Then I found it was a very quick way to work on something. If it rained I could put all the pastels back in the box and shove it in me rucksack and walk home or whatever the story was. It was to do with immediacy and directness...If you do set yourself up as an artist with an easel, canvas by the time you're starting you've got usually about 50 people stood around you for the performance. So I don't particularly want to put myself on show in that regard, I want to work more under the radar.

J: So recently you've showed at Subiaco gallery in Perth, exhibiting pieces from your travels to Paris and Morocco. The inspiration drawn from textiles, colours, architecture were really obvious and striking to me. The *Elsewhere* exhibition features works that share the same narrative and lively qualities but with a much more people-centric approach. Were your working processes different between these trips?

B: Partly. I suppose partly as well these are very honest works, the works that are in the Elsewhere exhibition.... I never thought of them about, for example, sales. It is my love of going to the places and my interest in recording in my own inimitable way the things that I see as stimulating. I suppose perhaps to a certain extent the exhibition in Perth, because I live off my art, I don't lecture anymore and I don't do other things, I am a full time artist and I have to survive. Therefore I am conscious of size and all sorts of things that come into it when you are showing in commercial spaces. This exhibition and these works have the luxury if you like as being put out there as images that I feel strongly, I'm not thinking about commercial that aspect at all. This is something I'm doing for the love of doing if you like, but I also need to counterbalance that. This exhibition is everything I've seen and if it's not popular with other people doesn't really come into my thinking. It is more about wanting to share something and tell people that what they're hearing or seeing is not necessarily what it's actually like.



Bernard Ollis

The Khan el-Khalili, Cairo 2008

Oil pastel on paper

J: Yes, I feel like that authenticity really comes through within the 'Elsewhere' works. Just finally I'd like to talk about the epic Cairo Street Scene work. Why did you choose to represent this with such an ambitious scale?

B: Well first of all I do like to work on a very large scale when I have the opportunity. And again, I'm not thinking of end product or selling it. If you work on that kind of scale from a commercial perspective, it's not a good move. So part of the reason was, I had the opportunity to sit in a café bar in Cairo in those back streets and having done a residency there, and this links in with Jenny Bowker who was there and she literally brokered an opportunity to work in the café bar for the day and just look at the streets and just observe what was happening on the street there outside. And because I was there for an entire day, drinking hot sugary drinks and just sitting in this café bar, looking out. Everything passed me, it was like a stage set. So all the things came past, the way people dressed, I started to pick out the posters on the walls, the advertising, a man pushing rabbits no doubt just about to go off to slaughter. Everything you could imagine, the smells, the sounds, the imagery of a very crowded urban city and a very foreign looking environment for me. And just watching it go down and finding ways of drawing and sketches. From those drawings and sketches I brought a whole load of them back and decided I would work on a large scale work so that's how it comes about, that I've actually been in a place or a location where I can stay for a long period of time and the café owner knew that I was there and drawing and just let me go. He didn't keep coming up to try and clear the table, I was given free rein to just sit there and look and watch and it was fascinating as it always is if you sit somewhere for long enough you start to see the nuances and the subtleties and the differences and everything else that you don't get to see if you're only there for five or ten minutes.

J: Thank you so much for your time today Bernard and for such an interesting chat.

Bernard Ollis

In an old bazaar in Cairo, 2008

Oil on canvas, 122 x 274cm

IRAN

SOSEH YEKANIANS

Edward Said (1978) considered that displacement was when an individual felt "in-between" two or more cultures. That struggle of belonging to two or more worlds often resulted in feelings of alienation from both. As an Iranian born Armenian-Australian, I have an immediate understanding of Said's idea of the "in-between", as it formed the basis of my own cultural displacement. Growing up in a world that I felt was often, unforgiving of this tri-cultural heritage.

For that reason, when I view depictions of paintings or artworks from Iran or elsewhere in the Middle East, enthusiasm fails me as I'm habitually in two minds. Firstly, as a product of Armenian diaspora I feel that personal animosity towards a [Islamic] country that aided my sense of dislocation and secondly, as a consumer of Western media, my mind immediately imagines images of gloom, impossibility and conflict – the very opposite to the buoyant experiences my parents grew up with.

Therefore, walking into Bernard Ollis' and Wendy Sharpe's exhibition I expected nothing less. What I experienced however, was the complete reverse to what I had anticipated. Immediately, bright, colourful and buoyant imaginings of love, festivity and community enveloped me as I made my way through the streets of Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Iran and Central Asia. In Ollis' *Iran* (2017) I felt a strange familiarity as I heard the beautifully chaotic sounds of the au fait language; street merchants bartering, protestors objecting and youthful shouts of happiness from soccer fans who beat the rival team. Oddly, also was the black-haired women in the colourful outfit who intersected cultural boundaries as it reminded me of the Armenian dolls I grew up playing with.

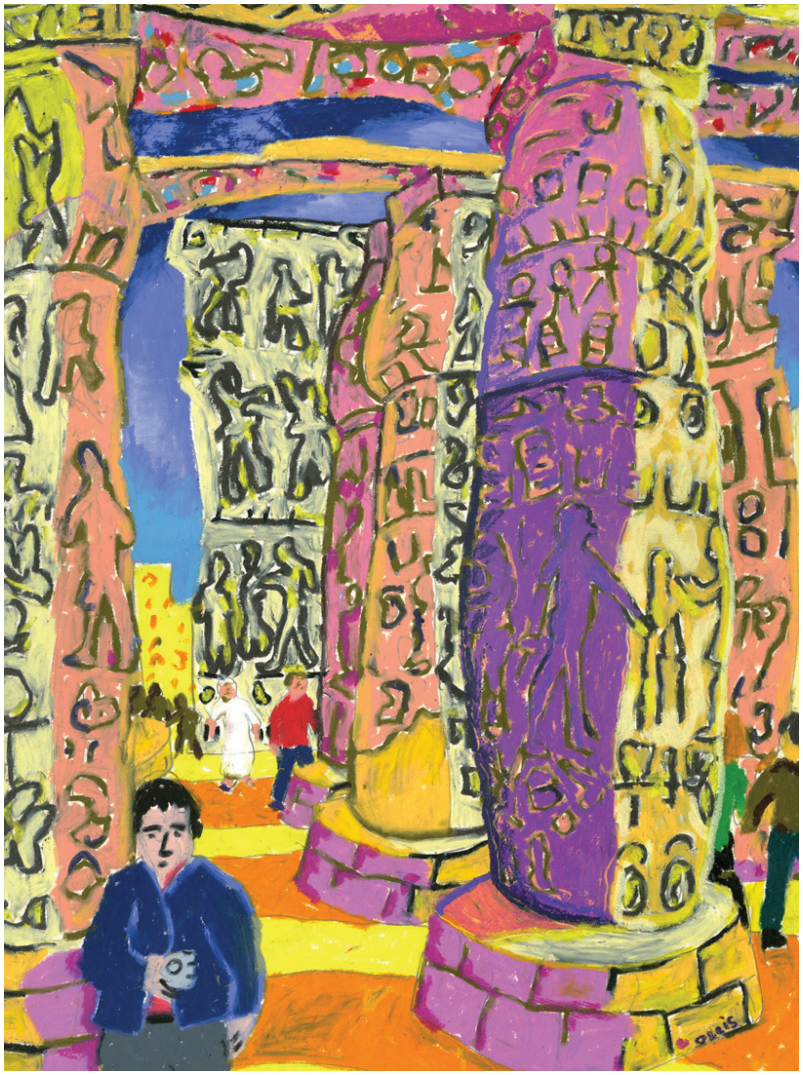
As so, as I continued to make my way through the *Elsewhere* exhibition, similar thoughts reverberated all around me. While Said (1978) may have deemed that none of us were ever outside or beyond geography and therefore, none of us were ever completely free from the struggle over geography. For a special moment as I gazed into Ollis' *Iran* (2017), I realised perhaps I wasn't as estranged from my Iranian inheritance as I once yearned to be.

Bernard Ollis
Iran 2017
Oil pastel on paper

Bernard Ollis

The Whirling Dervishes of Cairo 2008

Oil pastel on paper



Bernard Ollis

The Temple of Karnak, Luxor 2008

Oil pastel on paper

Bernard Ollis

Roman Ruins of Palmyra, Syria 2010

Gouache on paper

Bernard Ollis

Arches of Palmyra, Syria 2010

Gouache on paper

Bernard Ollis

View from Hassan's verandah over Damascus, Syria 2010

Gouache on paper

Bernard Ollis

Crowds in the Umayyad Square, Damascus, Syria 2010

Gouache on paper

Bernard Ollis

Tourists at the Treasury, Petra, Jordan 2010

Gouache on paper

Bernard Ollis

The Kasneh (Treasury) in Petra, Jordan 2010

Gouache on paper

Bernard Ollis

Camping in the White Desert, 2008

Oil pastel on paper

Bernard Ollis

Crossing the Great Sand Sea, Egypt 2010

Gouache on paper

Bernard Ollis

Tourists with camels at Petra, Jordan 2010

Gouache on paper

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NSW GOVERNMENT

Exhibition Tour Dates

HR Gallop Gallery, Wagga Wagga: 13 August - 7 September 2018

Griffith Regional Art Gallery: 29 September - 4 November 2018

Port Macquarie Glasshouse: 13 July - 29 September 2019

Tamworth Regional Art Gallery: 8 February - 22 March 2020

Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo: 27 March - 10 May 2020

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