Our artist in residence, Wendy Sharpe writes about what she is seeing and drawing ‘behind the scenes’.

I have been drawing at the State Library for over a year as part of the innovative artist in residence program. It is thrilling that this has coincided with the extraordinary $15 million transformation of the historic Mitchell building. A transformation that promises to open beautiful heritage areas to the public for the first time, while at the same time creating exciting new exhibition spaces and much more!

I have drawn in the fascinating rabbit warren of the ‘back stage’ part of the Library the public never gets to see, both documenting the changes but also imbuing the drawings with my personal response to each space. I had the opportunity to work up on the roof of the Library as well as drawing in building sites wearing a hard hat.

I particularly enjoyed seeing the layers of different architectural styles revealed as the building was prepared for the new work - mid-20th century stained glass, parquetry floors and joinery, as well as 1960s cabinetry and marble detailing.

The internal mezzanine floors, built in the 1960s were removed, revealing grand arched windows on the ground floor of the Mitchell building, which overlook the Domain.

I also loved seeing and drawing ‘behind the scenes’ areas of the Library like the Collection Care labs, where books and objects are being treated and prepared for exhibition, and the incredible art collection.

Besides drawing the Library itself and the changes that are taking place, I have also done many drawings of the people who visit the Library. It is a vibrant busy place full of people of all ages and backgrounds using the Library for everything from entertainment to complex research.

I decided to make all of my work in gouache (like watercolour) in different types of artist folding books and scrolls of
varying sizes – one the size of a matchbox – that can be unfolded for display. I often work in these types of books and decided that this would be perfect for the Library residency.

I have always loved the State Library of NSW. I used to come here with my father, historian Alan Sharpe, while he was reaching in the archives. I have also done research here myself for various projects.

It is already a wonderful place but it's set to get even better!

- Wendy Sharpe

Read more about Wendy's Residency [2]


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