



A VISIT TO AN EXHIBITION

Anne and Ian Smith are an artist/printmaker and potter who have a long established gallery in the Blue Mountains. Falls Gallery, at their 1900s weatherboard home, is almost hidden in the green glow of a leafy cool climate garden. Here we are just a stone's throw from the place where Charles Darwin once stood to admire the magnificence of Wentworth Falls and the Grose Valley.

Wendy Sharpe and Bernard Ollis are a colourful, high profile couple of art 'hipsters' from a very different world. They work out of vast shed-size studios in inner Sydney—international travellers when they're not running workshops or headlining major exhibitions of their work. Wendy has been twice an Archibald Prize winner and Bernard formerly headed the National Art School.

You would be forgiven for imagining that—apart from their art connections—these are people who have little in common. So this impressive and very beautiful exhibition entitled *Connections: Art & Collaboration* (Blue Mountains City Art Gallery in October 2019), would certainly have relieved you of any misconceptions.

As working artists Anne and Ian spend part of every day in their studios, painting, producing etchings and pottery. Anne is an expert printmaker and the focus of Falls Gallery is on her own prints together with the work of

other high profile artists—and, of course, Ian's elegantly crafted pots. Verandahs and house are filled to overflowing with ceramics, paintings, prints and sculpture including the work of many of Australia's leading contemporary artists—John Olsen, Arthur Boyd, Charles Blackman, Max Miller, Michael Leunig and Andrew Sibley.

In a unique practice for a gallery, Anne and Ian have for many years collaborated with other artists to create limited print editions of their etchings and series of hand painted and glazed ceramics, all processes completed in the studios at the gallery. In addition to Wendy and Bernard, collaborators have included Garry Shead and the late Alan Peascod. Friendships with like-minded artists have been an important source of inspiration for all concerned.

Anne and Ian and Wendy and Bernard have also become travelling companions which has added another dimension to their relationship. In *Connections*, we see the journals of the three artists, recording, for example, their experiences in Mexico and in France, and - on their return - the resulting prints and hand-painted platters and pots..

The four hosted an artists' panel on the opening day of the exhibition, describing their experiences working together, the learning curve when applying one's brush to



Previous page: Ian Smith
This page: Wendy Sharpe
ceramics and paintings
Opposite: Bernard Ollis and Anne Smith
Photographs Silversalt (courtesy
Blue Mountains City Art Gallery)

ceramic or scratching with a stylus on an etching plate. All spoke with enthusiasm for their shared travels and the freshness they felt this gave to their art practice. An audience member questioned them on this, reminding us all that many of the world's greatest and most respected artists virtually never left their studios. . But these times are different and for these artists it is clear that the excitement and stimulation of travel and seeking out new scenes is important for their work. Not only that, immediately after the opening of this show, Wendy Sharpe flew to Africa to take up a month-long residency at Dr. Catherine Hamlin's Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital, creating artworks which will be auctioned in Sydney to raise money for the hospital. In *Connections*, the colour and life 'out there' as recorded by this trio of artists and a potter literally jumps off the walls in what feels like a very Australian rendering of the world as we see it.

<http://www.ozarts.net.au/images/oz-arts/2015-summer/FALLS-GALLERY.pdf>



