



Wendy Sharpe, *Suai Cathedral at 11.30 pm, Christmas Eve*
East Timor official artist
charcoal on paper
drawn in Suai, East Timor, in 1999
acquired under official art scheme in 2000

(Accession number 91188.028)
Australian War Memorial



Wendy Sharpe, *Children at Suai*,
East Timor official artist
gouache over pencil on paper
painted in Sydney in 2000
acquired under official art scheme in 2000

(Accession number 91125)
Australian War Memorial



Rick Amor, *Atrocity site, Church altar, Suai*
East Timor official artist
watercolour over pencil
painted in Melbourne in 1999
acquired under official art scheme in 2000

(Accession number 91055)
Australian War Memorial

Suai Cathedral at 11.30 pm, Christmas Eve

Wendy Sharpe

East Timor official artist



charcoal on paper

drawn in Suai, East Timor, in 1999

acquired under official art scheme in 2000

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About the artwork:

On Christmas Eve, 1999, a concert and mass were held at a temporary chapel near the unfinished Suai cathedral, scene of a massacre in September 1999. Artist Wendy Sharpe observed the scene:

It seemed the whole town of Suai was standing in the dark watching the concert ... Then the locals performed an extraordinary re-enactment of the massacre that had taken place in the cathedral only a few months before. They acted out the killing of the nuns and priests, the burning of the houses and Interfet coming in as heroes to chase away the militia. It was a very moving tribute ... I drew by moonlight with charcoal in my sketchbook.

Sharpe's vigorous style, with the charcoal applied in heavy, expressive strokes, powerfully evokes the emotional atmosphere of the event.

Children at Suai

Wendy Sharpe

East Timor official artist



gouache over pencil on paper
painted in Sydney in 2000
acquired under official art scheme in 2000

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About the artwork:

In Timor Wendy Sharpe witnessed the aftermath and destruction of the militia rampages, but was struck by the sense of optimism evident in the faces and behaviour of the children. Her sketchbooks, filled with drawings of the people, are particularly expressive in their depictions of East Timorese children.

In this work, Sharpe has rapidly painted the faces, figures and expressions of a group of these children. Her use of bright colours and gestural brushstrokes conveys a sense of energy and enthusiasm for her subject matter.

“There would be so many children around me I would end up painting them. ... They are so friendly and so warm. ... Children were saying things like ‘G’day, mate’ and ‘G’day, cobber’ in perfect accents.”

Atrocity site, Church altar, Suai

Rick Amor
East Timor official artist



watercolour over pencil
painted in Melbourne in 1999
acquired under official art scheme in 2000

(Accession number 91055)

About the Artwork:

After the East Timorese voted for independence in 1999, pro-Indonesian militia went on a rampage of killing, burning, and forcing people from their homes. One of the worst events came a week after the vote, on 6 September 1999, when a large group – estimated by some as one hundred people – was massacred in and around the unfinished Ave Maria cathedral in Suai.

Later that year, artist Rick Amor visited the site: “After lunch we drove to the cathedral where there had been a massacre. People had tried to climb the scaffold and been shot down. There was blood spattered over the stair well and scaffolds. A church next door showed similar damage ...”

Despite this destruction and horror, *Atrocity site* also reveals a sense of hope. The altar, hastily constructed, not only comments on the suffering and loss of the East Timorese people, but also provides an insight into human resilience.

Questions: CASE STUDY

1. Write a brief description of what happened at Suai.
2. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper expressing how you feel about what you have just read.
3. Why are candles used to help us think of people who have died?
4. Can you think of a way for the local people to commemorate the Suai Massacre in future years?
5. Design a card that you could send to the children in the painting. Include a short poem for the children