

It's all about the light.

works by Margaret Olley from public collections

18 January - 14 April 2013



Bedroom Still Life 1997
oil on board
61.0 x 91.0cm
Purchased by Maitland Art Gallery Society, 1998
Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection

As the momentum for the construction phase of the purpose-built Margaret Olley Art Centre builds, the Gallery is delighted to host this major exhibition of works by one of Australia's best-loved artists.

Drawn from the public collections of national, state and regional galleries, this exhibition showcases Olley's passion for the genres of still life and interiors.

Olley's practice was always concerned with the nuances created by the fall of light; whether depicting landscape, still life or portrait, her work deftly captured the complexities of her subject through a mastery of light, composition and colour.

The Margaret Olley Art Centre will house a re-creation of rooms from the artist's well known Paddington abode which she made her home in 1964. Olley painted many works in this much-loved space, chasing the light from room to room through the seasons.

Education Resource and Learning Activities written and developed by Robyn Sweaney
Education and Audience Development Officer, TRAG

It's all about the light:
works by Margaret Olley from public collections

EDUCATION RESOURCE

CONTENTS

PART I

INTRODUCTION

- About this resource
- Introduction to the exhibition

ABOUT THE ARTIST

- Artistic beginnings
- Biography
- Selected Solo Exhibitions
- People in Margaret's life

THE WORK

- Themes
Still life and Interiors

EXHIBITION FOCUS WORKS

- Still life and Interiors

CATALOGUE ESSAY

It's all about the light. works by Margaret Olley from public collections
Christine France

EXHIBITION LIST OF WORKS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PART II

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESOURCE STAGES 1 - 6

EXHIBITION FOCUS MATERIAL

- Looking and thinking
- Making and doing

BRIEF HISTORY OF STILL LIFE

- 14th Century – 21st Century

ACTIVITIES

- Colour
- Shape and Composition
- Homage to Manet

INTRODUCTION

It's all about the light: works by Margaret Olley from public collections is a Tweed River Art Gallery initiative exhibition.

ABOUT THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE

This education resource is intended as a starting point for generating ideas and classroom activities before, during and after a visit to *It's all about the light: works by Margaret Olley from public collections*. It is intended to complement the exhibition and be used in addition to information provided in the exhibition catalogue essay and the exhibition artwork.

The resource includes an introduction to the exhibition, suggested points for discussion and practical activities for primary and secondary school students.

Teachers can either select relevant sections of this resource to compile their own exhibition response sheet for students prior to their planned visit, or use the attached worksheets.

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

It is an honour for the Tweed River Art Gallery to present the stunning exhibition *It's all about the light: works by Margaret Olley from public collections*. The works assembled in this exhibition span a period from 1955 - 2009, and specifically focus on the artist's passion for the genres of still life and interiors.

I am very grateful to the sixteen public galleries who, in support of the Tweed River Art Gallery and Margaret, responded so enthusiastically in lending works from their collections and allowing them to be viewed by a wider audience. I would like to extend my thanks to the staff of each of these institutions for their assistance, generosity and professionalism.

This is the first time that these works have been shown together, and the exhibition is a celebration of artistic skill, colour, aesthetic arrangement and proportion. It is also a chronicle of the artist's beloved home, as she so deftly depicts changing arrangements of elements from her domestic environment to create vibrant and evocative works of art.

Susi Muddiman
Director Tweed River Art Gallery
January 2013

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Margaret Hannah Olley AC
(24 June 1923 - 26 July 2011)

Margaret Olley was born in Lismore, New South Wales in 1923. Margaret spent her childhood years in Tully, in Far North Queensland, Tyngah, near Murwillumbah, on the north coast of New South Wales and Brisbane. Margaret spent many years living between Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane as well as travelling to Europe, Asia, the UK, and the US to paint and view exhibitions.



Greg Weight
Margaret Olley, 2001
photograph, coloured permanent pigment on cotton rag paper
24.2 x 30cm
Pending donation to the Tweed River Art Gallery collection

Olley is noted for her colourful still life paintings and intimate interiors. Not easily swayed by changing fashions and movements of the art world, Olley chose to paint her immediate world, immersing herself in everyday subjects that reflected her interest in the personal and the intimate:

“The art of Margaret Olley is the art of deliberate choices. The same could be said of Olley herself, who dispels all theories of Australia's isolation, repression of women and fashion following. (...) she persists in painting that which is around her; one reason for this is loathing of pretence, of adopting ways of thinking that are not true to the reality of self”¹

Olley is also known for her friendships with important Australian artists including William Dobell, Russell Drysdale, Donald Friend and Jeffrey Smart and was also a generous benefactor donating many of her own works and other artists to major public and regional galleries around Australia.

Olley passed away at her home in Paddington in July 2011, aged 88.

Artistic Beginnings

Her first drawing book, kept by her mother, contains a collage of a still life on a table with a chair, a further collage and drawing of ‘the lady’s garden’ and another of ‘God’s sun and sky’. So even at this age she was attracted to the idea of her immediate surroundings as subject matter for her art.²

Olley's art teacher (Caroline Baker) at Somerville House (Brisbane) persuaded Olley's parents to send Margaret to art school. In 1941, she started at Brisbane Central Technical College. The next year Olley moved to Sydney and enrolled at East Sydney Technical College, where her boarding school friend and fellow artist Margaret Cilento also attended. Olley graduated in 1945 with A-class honours.³

“East Sydney Tech was where my life began. I was like a flower that has suddenly been fertilised or pollinated. This was what I had been waiting for my whole life. It was where friendships started that lasted lifetimes. I just loved the environment at tech.”⁴

¹Jacki Thomas, Margaret Olley, Australian Story, Australian Government website referencing Christine France. *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, 2002 Edition, p.13

²Christine France, *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, 2002 Edition, p. 13

³Op.Cit.

⁴Meg Stewart, *Margaret Olley*, Far from a still life, Random House, 2005, p. 80

MARGARET OLLEY BIOGRAPICAL NOTES

1923

- Born 24 June in Lismore, NSW. Eldest daughter of Joseph and Grace Olley.
- Lived on a property at Horseshoe Creek, near Kyogle.

1925

- Family moved to Tully in Far North Queensland, to establish a sugarcane farm.
- Sister Elaine, born in 1925 and her brother Ken, born in 1927.

1929

- Attended St Anne's school in Townsville as a student boarder.

c.1931

- Family moved back to the far north coast of NSW where they lived on a sugarcane farm at Tygalgah, near Condong. Margaret attended school in Murwillumbah.



The Olley house at Tygalgah circa 1940's
Photo from Henderson family collection

c. 1935

- Family moved to Brisbane, and then to Tully.

1937

- Margaret attended Sommerville House as a boarder. Caroline Baker was the school's art teacher who also taught Anne Thompson, Betty Churcher and Philip Bacon. Margaret Cilento attended the school and became a lifelong friend.

1941

- Enroled in art classes at Brisbane Central Technical College.

1943-45

- Moved to Sydney.
- Enrolled in Art Diploma course at East Sydney Technical College. Taught by Herbert Badham, Dorothy Thornhill, Lyndon Dadswell, Douglas Dundas, Frank Medworth and Jean Bellette.
- Shared a flat at McMahons Point with Margaret Cilento.
- Worked on theatre sets with Cedric Flower for the Mercury Theatre Group and Sam Hughes's Sydney University Drama Society productions.
- Began showing paintings in group exhibitions with the Royal Queensland Art Society, the Sydney Under Thirties Group and the Sydney Contemporary Art Society.
- Met many artists including Fred Jessup, James Gleeson, Russell Drysdale, Donald Friend, Mitty Lee-Brown, David Strachan, Sydney Nolan and Justin O'Brien.
- Graduates with first-class honours.

1947-48

- Painted landscapes and stayed with Donald Friend at Hill End, near Bathurst.
- Awarded Mosman Art Prize.
- Runner up in the NSW Travelling Art Scholarship.

1948

- First solo exhibition at Macquarie Galleries, Sydney and her second at the Moreton Galleries, Brisbane.
- Anne Wienholt sends Margaret money to go abroad.

1949-52

- Announced on 21 January 1949 that William Dobell's portrait of Margaret Olley had won the 1948 *Archibald Prize*.
- First trip to Europe with Mitty Lee-Brown. Visited London and studied in Paris at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière. Met Moya Dyring in Paris. Viewed works by Matisse and Bonnard in commercial galleries and visits the Gauguin retrospective.
- Met painter Sir Francis Rose and writer and art collector Gertrude Stein.
- Spent the next few years living in the Chateau Fontcreuais at Cassis, near Marseilles, in the south of France. Completed many drawings, monotypes and watercolours of the French countryside. Sent work to Macquarie and Marodian Galleries for exhibitions.
- Worked with Strachan and Rose in Lisbon designing wallpaper.
- Solo exhibition of monotypes at Libraire Paul Morihien, Palais Royal, Paris.
- Returned to London and worked on designs for proposed film *The Tempest*.

1953

- Returned to Australia after the death of her father. Lived in Brisbane in her mother's house, *Farndon* (also known as *Fardon*) in Morry St, Hill End, Brisbane.
- Worked on theatre sets and murals, including one for the Queensland Art Gallery exhibition *French Art Today*.

1954-56

- Worked on murals, including one for the Leagues Club, in Phillip St, Sydney, the Grosvenor Hotel and the Lennon's Hotel, Brisbane where she worked with Donald Friend.
- Travelled to Townsville, Cairns and Magnetic Island with Donald Friend.
- Travelled to New Guinea, staying and painting for a month on Kwato Island.
- Visited Donald Friend at Hill End.
- Many friends visit her at *Farndon*. Met artists Ray Crooke, Jon Molvig and Charles Blackman through Johnstone Gallery.

1958

- Won the Lismore Art Prize.
- Increased drinking affects the production of her artwork. Entered a clinic and joins Alcoholics Anonymous to overcome drinking problem.
- Painting trips with Strachan, Dyring or Friend.

1959

- Opened an antiques shop at Stones Corner, Brisbane.

1962-64

- Painting excursions with Fred Jessup to Queensland and northern NSW and with Friend and Dyring to Noosa and Magnetic Island.
- David Strachan bought a house in Paddington where Margaret often stays when visiting Sydney.
- Won the Helena Rubinstein Portrait, Redcliffe, Bendigo Finneys Centenary, and the Johnsonian Club Art Prizes.
- Bought and renovated her first house in Paddington St, Paddington, Sydney with some of the proceeds of her sell-out exhibition at the Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane.
- Met and visited Ian Fairweather on Bribie Island.

1964

- Bought a house in Duxford Street, Paddington and lived in small flat between house and old hat factory.

1965-68

- Renovated Duxford St house.
- Moya Dyring died in 1967.
- Traveled to Papua New Guinea on three occasions.

1969

- Traveled to Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia, visiting Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phnom Penh and Siem Reap. Stayed with Donald Friend in Bali.

1970

- Bought and renovated houses in Newcastle.
- Deaths of William Dobell and David Strachan.
- Moved between Newcastle, Brisbane and Sydney.

1971

- Traveled through Asia, India, London, Morocco and Europe and spent three months painting in the Moya Dyring Memorial Studio at Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris.

1972-75

- Divided her time between Sydney, Brisbane and Newcastle.
- Worked in Strachan's Paddington home for *Homage* exhibition.
- Reunited with Sam Hughes and then traveled to London and Europe to see exhibitions including Chardin and Miro in Paris.
- First solo exhibition at Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane.

1976-77

- Continued to work on Newcastle houses.
- Mother moved to a nursing home in Sydney.
- Traveled to London, Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris. Traveled to Italy and stays with Jeffrey Smart.

1978-79

- Stayed at Moya Dyring Studio, Paris for a month with Hughes. Visited Bonnard exhibition in Strasbourg and traveled through France.

1980

- Traveled to London, Paris, Venice and Athens with Hughes seeing Monet and Balthus exhibitions.
- Sold some of the Newcastle houses.
- Visited Bali.
- Family home, *Farndon* burned down, losing many early works and photographs.

1981

- Lived in Sydney.
- Visited Thailand, India and Sri Lanka. Traveled to USA for the first time mainly to see Morandi retrospective as well as viewing other major collections. Then visited Hughes in London.
- Russell Drysdale died.

1982

- Death of mother and Sam Hughes.

1983-88

- Continued to live and work in Sydney, exhibiting regularly.
- Purchased a house in Gurner Street, Paddington where she lived for four years.
- Traveled extensively, including to the Philippines, Burma, Greece, Egypt, USA, China, Russia, Italy, South Africa, England and France, sometimes traveling with Van Hodgkinson.
- Viewed exhibitions by Bonnard, Balthus, van Gogh and Matisse.
- Enrolled in a six month course in Egyptology at Sydney University with Hodgkinson.
- Contracted meningitis while travelling in Greece.

1988

- Sold Gurner St house and moved back to the Hat Factory at Duxford Street, Paddington.
- Began to donate artwork to public collections.
- Traveled with Van Hodgkinson to Beijing, Leningrad, Moscow, London, Belgium, Paris and Rome.

1989

- Lived in Sydney. Justin O'Brien visited and Donald Friend died.

1990

- Publication of Christine France's monograph, *Margaret Olley*.
- Established the Margaret Hannah Olley Art Trust to purchase and donated works of art to public collections.

1991

- Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Letters by Macquarie University.
- Appointed Officer Order of Australia (AO).
- Traveled to Korea and Japan.

1992-96

- Traveled to New York, Prague, Munich, Heidelberg, London, Paris, Scotland, The Hague and the south of France. Viewed major exhibitions by Matisse, Poussin, Derain, Cezanne, Degas, Giorgione, Titian, Corot, Degas and Vermeer.
- Purchased a Degas drawing for the AGNSW.

1997

- Declared an Australian National Treasure.
- Awarded Life Governor of AGNSW.

1998

- Traveled to London with Barry Pearce, Georgie Swift and Christine France for Bonnard exhibition, and to Paris and Switzerland to see Beyler and other collections.

1999

- Honored with an Achievers Award from the Federal Government.
- Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Letters, University of Queensland.

2000

- Co-curator with Barry Humphries of *Favourites* exhibition at S.H. Ervin Gallery.
- Worked at Brian Moore's home at Woolloomooloo and Elizabeth Bay.
- Traveled to London via Cairo.
- Awarded Honorary Doctorate of Visual Arts, University of Sydney.

2001

- Painted at Brian Moore's house at Woolloomooloo and Elizabeth Bay.
- AGNSW named the Margaret Olley, Twentieth Century European Gallery.
- Van Hodgkinson died.
- Suffers from depression.

2002

- Co-curator with Jeffrey Smart second *Favourites* exhibition at S.H. Ervin Gallery.

2005

- Publication of Meg Stewart's biography, *Margaret Olley - Far from a Still Life* by Random House.
- Attended opening of her exhibition at Nevill Keating Galleries in London, afterwards visiting Edinburgh, Paris and Cairo.

2006

- Appointed Companion of the Order of Australia (AC).
- Awarded Honorary Doctorate from University of Newcastle.
- Opened Stage II of Tweed River Art Gallery in Murwillumbah, NSW.

2007

- Awarded Honorary Doctorate by Southern Cross University, Lismore.

2008

- Awarded Honorary Doctorate by Griffith University, Brisbane.

2010

- Health is deteriorating; short periods in hospital being treated for emphysema and cancer.

2011

- Continued to paint works for a planned exhibition in September at Philip Bacon Galleries in Brisbane.
- In April Ben Quilty won the 2011 Archibald Prize with his portrait of Margaret.
- 26 July died at her home, in Duxford St, Paddington, Sydney, aged 88.
- 24 August State Memorial Service held at the AGNSW.



Photo:
Robyn Sweaney
Margaret Olley
2011 Archibald Prize announcement AGNSW

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

AUSTRALIA

Queensland

Moreton Galleries - 1948, 1950

Marodian Gallery - 1951

Johnstone Gallery - 1952, 1956, 1960, 1962, 1964, 1966, 1968, 1970, 1972

West Toowoomba Apex Club - 1967

Philip Bacon Galleries - 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1989, 1993, 1996, 1998, 2000 (at Sotheby's Sydney), 2001, 2005 (at Sotheby's, Sydney), 2007, 2012 (at Sotheby's, Sydney)

Brisbane City Hall Art Gallery and Museum - 1990 & 1997 (retrospectives)

The University of Queensland Art Museum - 2009

Queensland Art Gallery - 2003 (retrospective)

Redcliff City Art Gallery - 2006 (retrospective)

DELL Gallery, Queensland College of Art - 2008 (survey)

New South Wales

Macquarie Galleries - 1948, 1953, 1955, 1956, 1961, 1963

Darlinghurst Galleries - 1965, 1967

Barry Stern Galleries - 1972

Holdsworth Galleries - 1973, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1982

S.H. Ervin Gallery - 1990 (retrospective) & 2009

Australian Galleries - 1991, 1995, 1997

Art Gallery New South Wales - 1996 (retrospective)

Brian Moore Fine Art - 2000 (at Sotheby's)

von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle - 1964, 1966, 1969, 1971, 1974, 1976

Newcastle Gallery - 1997 (retrospective) & 2009

Lismore Regional Gallery - 1990 & 2006 (retrospectives)

Tweed River Art Gallery - 2013

New England Regional Art Museum – 1997 (retrospective) & 2006

South Australia

Bonython Gallery - 1963

Greenhill Galleries - 1990

Canberra

Macquarie Galleries - 1967, 1969, 1973

Anna Simons Gallery - 1975, 1977

Solander Gallery - 1980, 1982

Victoria

Australian Galleries - 1964, 1990

Savill Galleries - 2002

Western Australia

Skinner Galleries - 1974

Greenhill Galleries - 1985

INTERNATIONAL

Paris

Librairie Paul Morihien, Jardins du Palias-Royal, Paris - 1952

Port Moresby

Horticultural Society of Papua, Port Moresby - 1968

London

Browse and Darby - 1994

Nevill Keating Pictures Gallery - 1999

Nevill Keating Pictures Gallery - 2005

Selected significant people from Margaret's life

“Oh, where would we be without friends? Friends to me are everything.”

Margaret Olley, ABC, 7.30 Report Interview with Maxine McKew, 28/09/2005

Philip Bacon AM

Bacon is an art dealer, patron of the arts, philanthropist, Margaret Olley's commercial agent and a co-executor of Margaret's Estate. Since establishing the Philip Bacon Galleries in Brisbane in 1974, Philip has been a member of the Board of Opera Australia and the Council of the National Gallery of Australia from 1996 to 2003. He was a Founder and Benefactor of the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation and a Perpetual Donor and member of the Board of the Foundation of the National Gallery of Australia, and has been a Trustee of the Gordon Darling Foundation since 2000. Philip was honoured with a Member of the Order of Australia in 1999.



From left: Phillip Bacon AM, Margaret Olley AC and former Vice-Chancellor Professor John Hay at *The National Artists' Self-Portrait Prize 2007*, University of Queensland .

Edmund Capon AM, OBE

Capon was born in London where he obtained a Master of Philosophy degree (MPhil) in Chinese art and archaeology (including language) from London University's School of Oriental and African Studies. He also studied 20th Century painting at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London University. From 1973-1978 he held the position of assistant keeper, Far Eastern Section at the Victoria and Albert Museum, having started there in 1966 in the Textile Department.

Capon was appointed Director of the AGNSW in 1978 and retired after 33 years in 2011. During his tenure as Director, Capon became recognised as a world expert in Chinese Art and published several books including *Princes of jade* (1973); *Art and archaeology in China* (1977); *Qin Shihuang: terracotta warriors and horses* (1982); and *Tang China: vision and splendour of a golden age* (1989), as well as many articles for Australian and international newspapers and professional art journals. He was also the Chairman of Football club, Sydney FC from 2006-2007.

In September 2008 the AGNSW announced that it was making its biggest-ever acquisition with Paul Cézanne's landscape *Bords De La Marne*, for \$16.2 million to mark Capon's 30th anniversary as Director. Margaret donated \$1million dollars towards the acquisition. Capon was a close friend of Margaret's and they supported each other personally and professionally for over thirty years. Capon is a Trustee of the Margaret Olley Art Trust.



Edmund Capon with Margaret Olley looking at the Cezanne painting *Bords De La Marne* purchased by the AGNSW with her generous support in 2008.

Margaret Cilento 1923 - 2006

Margaret was a painter and printmaker who during her life lived in Queensland, New South Wales, America and Europe. Cilento attended Somerville House where she became a close friend of Margaret Olley. She also attended Sydney Technical College in Sydney during the 1940's and shared a flat with Margaret at McMahons Point.

Sir William Dobell OBE 1899 - 1970

Painter, teacher and an important figure in the Sydney art scene particularly in the 1940's. Dobell won the Archibald Prize three times. In 1943 he won with a painting of Joshua Smith that was controversially contested and which subsequently emotionally affected him. In 1948 he won the Prize with a portrait of Margaret Olley that was purchased by the AGNSW.

Moya Dyring 1909 - 1967

Moya was an Australian artist who was one of the first women artists to exhibit her cubist paintings in Melbourne. After visiting Paris in 1928, she studied at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School. Dyring lived permanently in Paris from 1939 where she met Margaret in 1949. She produced a substantial body of work, most of which was sold at exhibitions throughout Australia, and also hosted and encouraged other visiting Australian artists. On her death she bequeathed a studio apartment for the benefit of Australian artists. The Moya Dyring Memorial Studio, at the Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris, is administered by the AGNSW.



Margaret Olley in conversation with Christine France, The University of Queensland Art Museum 7 February, 2009

Christine France

Christine France is an art historian and curator. She has been responsible for numerous exhibitions for public galleries in Australia including *Merioola* at the National Trust S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney in 1986 and *New Directions* at Penrith Regional Gallery and Lewers Bequest, in 1991. She writes regularly for art journals such as *Art and Australia*. She is the author of monographs on Justin O'Brien, Marea Gazzard and Margaret Olley (1990). Christine met Margaret in Sydney in the 1970's and became a close friend and a member The Margaret Olley Art Trust.

Donald Friend 1915 - 1989

Donald was a painter, writer and a close friend of Margaret's from the 1940's until his death in 1989. In 1947 he bought a small miners cottage at Hill End, NSW which he shared with Donald Murray. He met up with Margaret in London on her first trip overseas and they travelled and painted together in Brisbane and North Queensland when they returned from overseas. Much of Friend's life and career were spent outside Australia, in places as diverse as Nigeria, Italy, Sri Lanka and from 1968 in Bali until his final return to Sydney in 1980.

Van Hodgkinson 1919 - 2001

Van was a close friend and travelling companion of Margaret's, particularly in the 1980's. Van was married to the artist Frank Hodgkinson (1919 - 2001). Van was loved by her friends for her lively personality and the enthusiasm and enjoyment she had for life.

Sam Hughes d.1982

Sam was a Theatre Director, Gallery Manager and Interior Designer. From 1935 – 39 he managed the Zwemmer Gallery in London. Sam met Margaret when he lived in Sydney in the 1940's and 1950's. After this time he lived between London and Mykonos before reuniting with Margaret in the early 1970's. Olley said Sam was "the love of her life", and they lived and travelled together for ten years until his death in 1982.

Frederick Jessup 1920 - 2007

Fred Jessup studied in Sydney at the East Sydney Technical College from 1945-48 where he met Margaret. He was awarded the NSW Travelling Scholarship in 1945, but didn't take it up until after the war. In 1948 he moved to France where he remained until his death in 2007, revisiting Australia in 1959 and 1962. Fred travelled with Margaret and Mitty Lee-Brown to Paris in 1949 and went on painting expeditions with Margaret to Queensland and Northern NSW when visiting Australia in 1962.

Mitty Lee-Brown 1922 - 2012

Mitty was an artist who lived at *Merioola*, Woollahra, Sydney c.1944-c.1945, and studied at East Sydney Technical College at the same time as Margaret where they met and became friends. Mitty travelled with Margaret to London, Paris and the South of France in 1949-1952. Lee-Brown spent many years as an expatriate in Europe and then in Sri Lanka where she remained until her death in 2012.

Barry Pearce

Barry Pearce studied art in Adelaide and London. He worked as a Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Art Gallery of South Australia, Curator of Paintings at the Art Gallery of Western Australia and then was Head Curator of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales until his retirement in 2011. Over three decades he has curated many exhibitions including national touring retrospectives of Sali Herman, Elioth Gruner, John Passmore, Jeffrey Smart, Francis Lyburner, Kevin Connor, Donald Friend, Arthur Boyd, Brett Whiteley, William Dobell, Margaret Olley, Charles Conder, and Sidney Nolan.

He has published many exhibition catalogues, essays and lectured extensively on Australian art. He is the author of monographs on Michael Johnson, Jeffrey Smart and Margaret Olley (2012). Barry was a friend of Margaret's for over 30 years and organised her retrospective at the AGNSW in 1996.

Meg Stewart

Meg is a filmmaker, journalist, and author. She is the daughter of artist Margaret Coen and poet Douglas Stewart. Her writing includes a biography of Margaret Coen, *Autobiography of My Mother*, and the novels *Modern Men Don't Shift Fridges*, and *The Dream Life of Harry Moon*.

Her biography *Far From a Still Life: Margaret Olley* was first published in 2005 and has now been revised and republished in 2012 to include Margaret's last years.

David Strachan 1919 -1970

Painter and printmaker best known for his mining landscapes, poetic still lifes and contemporary nudes. He studied at the Slade School in London in 1936 and the East Sydney Technical College in 1945, where he met Margaret Olley. He also studied at the Académie de la Grande Chaumiére in Paris in 1947. In 1960 he returned to Australia, and in 1963 he bought a house in Paddington, Sydney. Margaret often stayed with him on her visits to Sydney until she purchased her own house nearby. Margaret painted a number of works in his house, including a series of interiors and still lifes after his tragic death in a motor car accident in 1970.

Other friends from Margaret's life

Steven Alderton
Joan Bowers
Ian Fairweather
Elaine Haxton
Nick Mitzevich
Jocelyn Rickards
Anne von Bertouch

Marie Bashir AC CVO
Cressida Campbell
Jenny Ferguson
Barry Humphries
Brian Moore
Loudon Sainthill
Anne Wienholt

Pam Bell
Lyn Clarke
Paul Haefliger
Brian Johnstone
Justin O'Brien
Leo Schofield AM
Sally Wilkinson

Jean Bellette
Russell Drysdale
Nicholas Harding
Frank Mitchell
Ben Quilty
Harry Tatlock Miller
Jocelyn Zander

It's all about the light: works by Margaret Olley from public collections

THE WORK

Margaret Olley's paintings and prints featured in *It's all about the light: works by Margaret Olley from public collections* span the period from the mid 1950's to 2009. They include works completed when she was living in, or visiting friend's homes in Brisbane, Newcastle, Hill End and Sydney.

MEDIUM AND TECHNIQUES

Painting - oil on board

Print - multi plate coloured etching

THEMES AND CONTENT

Interiors and still life



Pots and objects 1975
oil on board
75.0 x 121.0cm
Rockhampton Art Gallery Collection.
Purchased 1976, Art Acquisition Fund, with assistance from the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council

Still life

A *still life* is an artwork featuring an arrangement of inanimate objects that can be natural (such as flowers, shells, fruit, vegetables, fish) or man-made (such as bowls, cups, bottles, books). The Tate Britain Glossary puts it very succinctly, defining the subject of a still life as 'anything that does not move or is dead'.¹

A still life can simply be a depiction of objects, a celebration of life's abundance or hint at the ephemeral and brevity of human life. Historically, some of the objects depicted in a still life work were likely to have been selected for their status or symbolic meaning.

1. TATE Collection, online Glossary, Still Life, National Archives, UK

Interiors

As with a landscape or townscape, an interior can be either the setting for human activity or the subject of a painting in its own right. Either way, interior scenes hold a particular fascination because they provide a glimpse into other people's lives – they are the acceptable equivalent of peering into a window as we walk along the street.

Collins Artist's Manual, pg 213, Harper Collins, London, 1995



[Morning interior] c.1973
oil on composition board
60.7 x 75.8cm
Collection: National Gallery of Australia
Canberra. Gift of Gretel Bootes in memory of Gordon Bootes 2010

EXHIBITION FOCUS WORKS

Still life with leaves c.1960
Eucharist lilies 1963
Interior IV 1970
Spare Bedroom 1970
Late afternoon 1972
Interior night 1972
Kitchen still life with fennel 1975
David Strachans's kitchen 1975
Chinese screen and yellow room 1996
Ranunculus and pears 2004



Still life with leaves c.1960
oil on hardboard
77.5 x 103.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Sali Herman Gift Fund 1982

Margaret Olley travelled overseas many times to visit exhibitions of artists she admired and France was one of her favourite destinations. After Olley returned in 1953 from her first trip overseas, she began exploring bold colour and light in her paintings. In Australia, abstraction was gaining in popularity but Margaret continued to paint her representational still lifes, for example the painting *Still life with leaves*, the difference compared to her earlier work was that they were executed with a freer more expressive style.¹

In 1954 Margaret wrote to her good friend the artist Donald Friend (1915-1989) “...my painting has changed quite a bit, I wonder whether you would like it or not. I suppose not. All of the old brown scrubby paint is disappearing, and for the first time I’m trying to tackle the problem of colour which is something of an ordeal but I am enjoying it, which is the main point and its also becoming more personal and I am afraid to say more feminine, which I suppose is only natural”²

Barry Humphries also wrote about Margaret’s use of colour in the catalogue published for Margaret’s 1997 retrospective at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, “Her understanding of colour and her unerring placements of objects suggests Bonnard and Matisse without a hint of imitation, and her feelings for the romantic implications of pigment evokes the later Derain.”³

¹Christine France, *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, 2002 edition, p. 41

²Barry Pearce, *Margaret Olley*, The Art Gallery New South Wales, 1997, p.16 Quoting from *Donald Friends diaries*, 9 and 11 May 1948, National Library of Australia, vol.33

³Barry Humphries, *A note of exclamation*; Barry Pearce *Margaret Olley*, The Art Gallery New South Wales, 1997, p. 8



Eucharist lilies 1963
oil on board
99.0 x 72.5cm
Gift of the Margaret Olley Art Trust, 2012
Newcastle Art Gallery collection

A sensation rendition of colour and light is the means by which Margaret Olley conveys her sensitivity to varieties of flowers.....

*One of the most urbane works of this period is **Eucharist Lilies, 1963**. Here the surface has been flattened by the white cloth being brought forward towards the picture plane, which brings the viewer in direct contact with the objects. The flow into the grey mauve background suggests that the flowers fill the space. At the same time a feeling of delicacy is brought about by the translucent urn, decanters and glasses, while the firm greys of the Phaidon print tacked to the wall further anchor the composition.¹*

Eucharist Lilies, 1963 was donated to the Newcastle Art Gallery by the Margaret Olley Art Trust after her death. Olley had a tradition of donating works to the Gallery around the time of her birthday (June 24) and they were, as she loved to point out, her birthday gifts to Newcastle. Margaret left five artworks to the Newcastle Gallery, including three sketches by French artist Auguste Rodin, a nude painting by Emanuel Phillips Fox, her still life painting titled *Eucharist Lilies* as well as \$50,000 for the redevelopment of the Gallery. All these works were from Olley's private collection. "The Gallery has a later still life from Margaret so we wanted them to have an earlier one," Ms France said. "She was particularly fond of this painting. She sold it in 1960s and bought it back in the late '90s." Margaret lived in Newcastle in the late 1960s and early 1970s and still owned a house in the city up until her death. "She loved Newcastle, loved its masculinity and the fact that it was a working city and she could hear BHP humming in the night," Ms France said. Olley donated more than 48 works of art including some of her own paintings to Newcastle Art Gallery since the early 1990s. Many of the works were by well-known artists or younger emerging artists she deemed worthy of recognition.²

¹ Christine France, *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, 2002 edition, p. 46

² Amy Edwards, *Still life in the giving from Margaret Olley's estate*, Newcastle Herald, June 24, 2012



Interior IV 1970
oil on composition board
121.5 x 91.5cm
Gift of the Margaret Olley Trust through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2002
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Margaret Olley is best known as a painter of still life and interior subjects. In the 1950's and 1960's, after Margaret returned from Europe, she exhibited her vibrant and colourful still lifes, landscapes and figurative studies in galleries in Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle, Canberra and Melbourne.

Olley produced her first interiors for her solo exhibition at the Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane in 1970 with 12 large works inspired by the Olley family home *Farndon* (also known as *Fardon*), in Hill End, Brisbane. *Farndon* was purchased by her mother in the late 1930's, and it is where Margaret in 1953, aged 29, returned to live and paint after her father died. Margaret states "*I liked Brisbane ever since I was a child, so really I was quite happy to be back there*".¹ In 1962 Margaret begins to move between Sydney and Newcastle, buying her first house in Paddington in 1964. *Interior IV* is a painting of the lounge room at *Farndon* that was shown in her 1970 Johnstone Gallery exhibition.

As in her still lifes, the formalist values of painting are the prime concern of Margaret Olley's interiors, yet the impossibility of divorcing the narrative overtones of any interior painting gives these works an intimacy not necessarily present in the still life. For example, **Interior IV, 1970**, depicts her Brisbane sitting room; here the Victorian bookcase, occasional table and chintz sofa portray a middle class background of English origin. Contradicting this is the luxurious tropical vegetation viewed through the window, while the Papua New Guinean carving, and the paintings amassed on the wall, tell of travel, adventure and interests. If the viewer is aware that this is the artist's Queensland home the work can function as an expanded self portrait. The format of the painting, however, suggests that this was not the artist's intention and the perspective was chosen because of the integration of particular shapes and forms. Angular sculpture offsets the rounded form of the chairs which, in turn, set up a rhythm with the framed paintings on the wall and are compositionally balanced by the cut-off form of the sculpture at the end of the room.²

In 1976 Margaret's mother left Brisbane and *Farndon*, and relocated to Sydney where she moved into a nursing home. Tragically *Farndon* burnt down four years later, in November 1980, with the subsequent loss of generations of furniture, cherished possessions and some of Margaret's favourite paintings.

*"Losing things in fire is so final. For years afterwards if I couldn't find anything I used to say it was in Brisbane. It was almost as if I was denying the fire never happened. I just didn't want to think about it. It was quite a while before I accepted that Sydney now was really my home."*³



Spare Bedroom, 1970, was donated by Margaret Olley to the Lismore Regional Gallery in 2006. Curator Kezia Geddes said, *"Spare Bedroom came from Olley's own collection and, as a result, has rarely been reproduced. It is a beautiful painting. I always notice the use of white in Olley's paintings from the early 1970s. She used white very freshly during this period and this gives a sense that sunlight has somehow been captured in the paint. I think warmth is contained in Olley's paintings in a similar way. It's there because she paints the homes of family and friends. Margaret Olley has never painted just any house."*

Spare Bedroom 1970
oil on board
122.0 x 91.5cm
Lismore Regional Gallery Permanent Collection.
Donated from Margaret Hannah Olley Art Trust, 2006.

Spare Bedroom was painted in 1970 at *Farndon*, the Olley family home in Brisbane. It is a significant painting as there are few records of her family home, which burnt down in 1980, resulting in the loss of many of Olley's art works and belongings. Writing about *Spare Bedroom*, Meg Stewart in her biography notes how a family guest to *Farndon*, Alice "Nanny" McGlew, would occasionally occupy the narrow little room featured in the painting, a room which was more, like a passageway than a proper bedroom. Stewart tells how on one particular occasion Nanny McGlew went into the spare bedroom to sleep but was confronted by one of Olley's paintings of a nude, a painting so large it virtually took up the entire wall. Straight away, Nanny McGlew asked Olley's mother Grace for a towel, claiming she wouldn't be able to sleep unless the nude was covered up.⁴

¹ Meg Stewart, *Margaret Olley, Far from a still life*, Random House, 2005, p. 272

² Christine France, *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, 2002 edition, p. 53

³ Meg Stewart, *Op.Cit.* p. 450

⁴ Bronwyn Watson, *Public Works: Spare Bedroom*, *The Australian*, 6 February, 2010



Late afternoon 1972
oil on hardboard
90.0 x 122.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Gift of the artist 2001

Late afternoon is a still life that Margaret Olley painted in the home of the artist David Strachan (1919-1970). Margaret met Strachan in Sydney in the mid 1940's at Jean Bellette's life classes held at East Sydney Technical College. They meet up again in 1949 when Margaret travelled to Paris for the first time. Strachan joined Olley and Moya Drying on short painting trips to the French countryside and later visits to Cassis, Brittany and Lisbon, before Margaret came back to Australia in 1953.

David returned to Sydney from overseas in 1960. In 1962 he bought a terrace house in Paddington where he created a comfortable home that was filled with antique wooden furniture, rugs, copper pots and pans, paintings, objects and artefacts from his travels. Strachan loved cooking and entertaining his friends and Olley visited him often, sometimes painting in his house. Tragically David died from injuries received from a car accident in 1970. Strachan's family preserved the interior of his home for many years after his death. Margaret continued to use the house as a studio during the 1970's as at the time she was living in two rooms of her Duxford St house, in-between trips to Brisbane, Newcastle and overseas.

Late afternoon was painted in 1972 and must have been a painting that had personal significance to Margaret, as she had kept it in her own collection until 2001, when she gifted it to the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Here (David Strachan's home) she did a large body of work most of which was based on the house and its contents. These paintings avoid sentimentality, but they do possess a strong poetic or spiritual feeling that is indicative of Olley's great understanding of Strachan. In October 1972 they were exhibited at the Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane. Brian Johnstone entitled the exhibition 'Homage'. In many ways these paintings perpetuated the atmosphere that had been created by Strachan. Strachan had always been interested in the notion of creative impulse. For years he had studied the theories of Carl Jung and as a consequence believed evening to be a very special time of day, the time most pregnant with creativity. Several of Margaret Olley's works from this period refer to this theme. In **Late afternoon, 1972**, she uses the half light of evening to express a stillness and universal harmony that can be found in the spacing and arranging of textures and shapes. Although held in unifying triangular composition the power of individual objects is revealed by the evening light that shines through the dried flowers and transparent vase. Reflecting from the marble surface, bottles and glasses, the light catches the quasi faces of the Papua New Guinean pots and emphasises the enduring shapes of the crescent bowl and fluted pot.¹

The theme of evening or night continued in many of Margaret Olley's works, but Christine France states, "in most cases it has been used in a metaphysical rather than a poetic context".² In **Kitchen still life with fennel, 1975**, and **Interior night, 1972**, objects are arranged in front of a dark window. "This reverses the traditional depiction of light shining through a window and heightens the viewer's perception of the actual objects and their special relationships".³



Interior night 1972
oil on composition board
59.0 x 49.0cm
Collection of The University of Queensland
Gift of Mrs Brenda Hughes through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2004
The University of Queensland Art Museum
Photo: Carl Warner



Kitchen still life with fennel 1975
oil on composition board
66.7 x 90.2cm
Collection of The University of Queensland.
Gift of Dr Cathryn Mittelheuser AM through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 1998
The University of Queensland Art Museum
Photo: Carl Warner

¹Christine France, *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, 2002 edition, p. 65 with references by Daniel Thomas, *David Strachan 1919-1970*, exhibition catalogue, AGNSW, 1973, p. 6

²Ibid. p. 66

³Ibid. p. 66



David Strachan's kitchen 1975
oil on board
90.0 x 60.0cm
Gift of the Margaret Olley Art Trust, 2012
Tweed River Art Gallery collection

David Strachan's kitchen was created during a time that Margaret Olley was using her friend David Strachan's (1919-1970) home as a painting studio following his death in a tragic traffic accident in 1970. Margaret met Strachan in Sydney in the mid 1940's at Jean Bellette's life classes held at East Sydney Technical College. In 1962 David bought a terrace house in Paddington, Sydney, where he loved to cook and entertain his friends. In this interior, the afternoon light is evident with its soft shadows, imbuing the composition with a soft glow. The patterned tiles, warm wooden furniture, baskets and draped stripy red cloth, along with the glowing oranges depict a well-loved corner of a room of a good friend and fellow artist.

*"I'd painted there before when I'd stay with him. It just physically suited me to use it as a studio. I painted there for several years. I did interiors and still life. An interior is like painting a portrait, so in that sense the paintings are a reflection of David. I've always been intrigued by interiors. You gain a lot of information from a room. I've also always liked artists who painted interiors: Bonnard, Vuillard, Matisse. An interior will result in a portrait of the person who lives there, but it is also to do with approaching the room as if it was a person whose portrait you're painting."*¹

David Strachan's kitchen painted in 1975 must have been a work that had personal significance to Margaret, as she kept it in her own collection until she died. In 2012 it was gifted it to the Tweed River Art Gallery by the Margaret Olley Art Trust.

¹ Margaret Olley, from Meg Stewart, *Margaret Olley: Far from a still life*, Random House, 2005, p. 427



Chinese screen and yellow room 1996
oil on hardboard
75.0 x 75.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased 1996

Chinese screen and yellow room, 1996, depicts an ornately carved oriental screen that acts as a backdrop to a simple arrangement of white and green glazed ceramics, with a bunch of native dried flowers, in one of Margaret's favorite rooms, known as the Yellow Room, in her Duxford St home.

*In the late 1980's she had begun painting the Yellow Room. This room and the adjoining blue kitchen are at the back of her terrace house and lead through to the old Hat Factory. One side opens onto the courtyard garden with its pergola and mass of tumbling plants, which influence the daily and seasonal changes of light. Apart from accommodating the occasional overnight guest, this room has been organised as a place in which to paint. Here she will change the artworks on the walls, introduce a Chinese Screen and set up various arrangements of still life.*¹

*"Oh, I love this little room. It's like a little cave. Life is like one big tapestry. People weave in and weave out through your life. I've always loved Sam (Hughes), ever since I was at art school. He kept on weaving in and out of my life and then he came and lived with me. Actually, this was the room. This yellow room was ours."*²

¹ Christine France, *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, 2002 edition, p. 109

² Margaret Olley interview; Peter Thompson, ABC1, *Margaret Olley*, Talking Heads, 19/11/2007



Ranunculus and pears 2004
oil on hardboard
76.0 x 101.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Edward Stinson Bequest Fund 2005

Ranunculus and pears was painted at Margaret's home in Duxford St Paddington, Sydney, where she lived for over 20 years. This painting depicts a corner of the kitchen in the old Hat Factory section of her Duxford St property that Margaret renovated and moved into in 1988. The window in the kitchen was south facing and looked out into the courtyard garden. In this painting Margaret has extended her still life composition with the use of space and perspective to include the cupboard benches, sink, bottles, china, fridge and window.

*"I do have other places in the house that I work in. I like working in the kitchen, much to the amusement of my friends. They come and say they could tidy it up. And I say "Excuse me! It's a very unique kitchen. It's a studio first and a kitchen second". If you think about it, I suppose my painting is an extension of my life and my life and surroundings are part of my paintings, so I feel I'm in harmony with where I live and who I am. So, I'm in one with the painting."*¹



Greg Weight
Kitchen dresser, 2001
photograph, permanent pigment on cotton rag paper
26.7 x 40cm
Pending donation to the Tweed River Art Gallery collection

¹ Margaret Olley interview; Peter Thompson, ABC1, *Margaret Olley*, Talking Heads, 19/11/2007

ESSAY

It's all about the light: works by Margaret Olley from public collections

Christine France

In anticipation of the reconstruction of Margaret Olley's studio at the Tweed River Art Gallery, Director Susi Muddiman has curated an exhibition of selected paintings of still life and interiors from public collections. This is entirely appropriate, for since the time of her very first solo exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries, Sydney in 1948, when both the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of New South Wales purchased paintings, her work has been collected and displayed in public institutions throughout the country.

Although Olley painted landscapes and portraits, still life and interiors were the *raison d'être* for establishing her studio and creating her unique environment in the old Hat Factory, Duxford Street, Paddington, which will soon be housed at the Tweed River Art Gallery in the purpose-built Margaret Olley Art Centre.

She often said, "I could not paint in an ordered studio. I have to have lots of things around me that suggest painting". Her house was the living part of her art. Objects moved, flowers were changed, old flowers kept, different tablecloths and new works of art displayed. Nevertheless you always knew exactly where you were as each object was chosen for its shape, texture and colour and placed with a knowledge of where light fell, or how disparate objects could form a balance of form and composition. To turn in any direction your gaze would fall on the subject matter of a still life painting.

In one sense still life painting is a genre which gives an artist the greatest sense of freedom as it can be set up or rearranged at any point. It gives an artist endless possibilities to examine reality, experiment visually and create their own vocabulary. Quite often Olley would leave an arrangement set up for years only to return to it in a different light or in the context of other objects.

Still life and interiors gave her the freedom she desired. There was no looming storm forcing her to complete a landscape, and no anxious model waiting for her to finish a portrait. She often said, "It's my house and I can do as I like. I can move from room to room giving a sideways glance at paintings on the go. I can sit and work things out, voyage within myself as it were."

She was exactly where she wanted to be in the midst of her art and her life and it was here that she produced some of her best work.

In looking at this exhibition it tells us something of the acquisition policy of public institutions, but it also tells us more about the changes in Olley's painting over five decades. There are changes in her palette, changes in subject matter, in composition, in emotional involvement and the ways in which she uses light.

The earliest works from the 50s were done at a time when Olley had returned to Australia after living for five years in Europe where she had restricted most of her creative output to drawing, having spent most of her time in museums. She also attended commercial exhibitions by artists such as Matisse, Vuillard, Cezanne and Bonnard. Looking afresh at Australian painting she felt the thing it lacked was colour and responded with works such as *Still Life with kettle* 1955 and *Allamandas I* 1955-58, which, compared to her sombre works of the 40s, showed a flattened perspective and a palette of mauve, blues, greens and yellows, reminiscent of Bonnard.

These concerns continue with two 1962 works *Lilies* and *Agapanthus and plumbago*, but already she is experimenting with stronger flatter colour and tighter linear definition of objects in *Still life with leaves* 1960. If there were one word we could use to describe Olley's work in the 60s it would be exuberance. Oranges and lemons burst out from their baskets; there is a warm sensuality, strong colour and radiance. The artist and critic James Gleeson commented on her full palette, and the uninhibited richness of the work, he said, "there is nothing skimmed, cramped, lean, undernourished or impoverished in her pictures."¹

A sensuous rendition of colour and light is indicative of the way in which Olley responds to her subject. In a work such as *Eucharist lilies* 1963 the delicacy of the flowers is accentuated by the translucent glassware and soft light greys of the background. While in *Lemons and oranges* 1964 the dark panelled background emphasises the bold colour and spherical shape of the fruits.

If the 60s were marked by exuberance, the 70s were characterised by an interest in structure and interiors. The earliest of these was perhaps *The spare room* 1970, painted in the family home "Fardon" then situated in Hill End, Brisbane. Here we see an interest in architectural detail as a diagonal of light draws the viewer through the subtly coloured wood panelled room. It seems in direct contrast to *Interior IV* 1970 where the sitting room of the same house is flooded with a warm light and our attention is drawn to the contents of the room and the narrative they contain. The Victorian furniture and chintz-covered chairs suggest a middle class family of English origin. Contradicting this is the lush tropical vegetation outside and the Papua New Guinea sculptural pieces which tell of travel and adventure.

Perhaps the most memorable interiors are those she painted in the house of her friend and fellow artist David Strachan after his tragic death in a motor accident. Both Strachan and Olley were interested in the soft light of evening as being the time most pregnant with creativity. Several of the works done in the Paddington house were able to investigate both night and evening light. In *Late afternoon* 1972, the gentle light draws quite disparate objects into a harmonious whole with a prevailing sense of uneasy stillness. By comparison two night works *Interior night* 1972 and *Interior* 1972, convey a more settled feeling of quiet comfort and self-containment.

The 70s and 80s were a time of much overseas travel for Olley and again this is reflected in her still life paintings with references to Spanish bottles, Chinese and Turkish pots. In the paintings *Spanish bottles* 1985 and *Chinese pots and lemons* 1982 the placement of objects, chosen for their colour and texture, set up a rhythm which is enhanced by the warm light of the painterly background and its transience as it glints on the objects portrayed. The rationale for many of Olley's overseas trips was often to see a big blockbuster exhibition by artists she admired. On her return she would think deeply about what she had seen and quite often pay tribute to that artist, as she has in *Homage to Manet* 1987. Here she includes a reproduction of Manet's *Le Balcon* 1868-69 behind the still life of cherries and plumbago, and to the right a large detail of the painting.

Anyone who has travelled with Olley can tell you how much she liked to acquire things. The tradition of including objects from exotic countries in still life painting goes back to the 16th Century. In Olley's case they are chosen for their shape or colour and became a part of her dictionary for painting.

These are the works for which she turned the Hat Factory into her studio, placing tables under windows, moving from room to room as the light changed, setting up a still life which no one was allowed to move. It is interesting to observe the way in which different objects can create different moods in Olley's work. In *Apples* 1980 she uses well-worn kitchen objects and a homely light reflecting some of the warmth and simplicity of Chardin - quite different to the 2004 work *Ranunculus and pears* painted in the kitchen, in which a number of objects are unified in optimistic bright light. Perhaps Olley's positioning of objects and control of complex spaces and that all pervasive light is best seen in *Chinese screen and yellow room* 1996. Placing a screen across the fireplace, arranging a still life in front of that and bringing together the busy pattern of an Indian bedspread and a kilim rug is all united by the warm shaft of light which carries the eye to the plain yellow wall and Balthus poster.

Tweed River Art Gallery visitors will soon be able to test this for themselves when the Yellow Room is recreated here.

Christine France 2013

¹ James Gleeson, *Paintings by Margaret Olley*, exhibition catalogue, Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane, 1964

EXHIBITION LIST OF WORKS

Allamandas I c.1955 - 58
oil on canvas
75.0 x 92.3cm
Purchased 1961
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Still life with kettle 1955
oil on canvas on hardboard
68.0 x 90.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Gift of Margaret Olley 2001

Lilies and Grapes 1958
oil on board
100.5 x 75.0cm
Lismore Regional Gallery Permanent Collection
Acquired 1958

Still life with leaves c.1960
oil on hardboard
77.5 x 103.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Sali Herman Gift Fund 1982

Lilies (Eucharist Lilies) c.1962
oil on canvas
99.0 x 74.0cm
Albury Art Gallery
On loan from private collection

Oranges on a table 1962
oil on composition board
74.4 x 100.0cm
Collection of The University of Queensland
Bequest of the Estate of P.L. Cannon, 1996
The University of Queensland Art Museum
Photo: Carl Warner

Still life with melon 1962
oil on composition board
100.0 x 75.0cm
Collection of The University of Queensland,
purchased 1962
The University of Queensland Art Museum
Photo: Carl Warner

Shasta daisies 1962
oil on composition board
74.5 x 100.0cm
Collection of The University of Queensland
Bequest of Galina Potarochin, 2011
The University of Queensland Art Museum
Photo: Carl Warner

Still life - agapanthus and plumbago 1962
oil on composition board
102.0 x 75.8cm
Collection: Geelong Gallery
Gift of anonymous donor, 1999

Eucharist lilies 1963
oil on board
99.0 x 72.5cm
Gift of the Margaret Olley Art Trust, 2012
Newcastle Art Gallery collection

Lemons and oranges 1964
oil on composition board
76.6 x 102.0cm
Purchased 1964
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Oranges 1964
oil on board
74.8 x 100.3cm
Gift of Toowoomba Art Society, 1965
Toowoomba City Collection
Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery

Bush lemons on a white cloth 1965
oil on composition board
75.0 x 100.0cm
University Art Collection, The University of
Sydney
Donated anonymously 2002

Basket of mandarins 1967
oil on composition board
76.0 x 61.0cm
University Art Collection, The University of
Sydney
Donated anonymously 2002

Basket of calendulas 1967
oil on composition board
74.5 x 100.0cm
University Art Collection, The University of
Sydney
Donated anonymously 2002

Interior IV 1970
oil on composition board
121.5 x 91.5cm
Gift of the Margaret Olley Trust through
the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 2002
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Spare Bedroom 1970
oil on board
122.0 x 91.5cm
Lismore Regional Gallery Permanent Collection
Donated from the Margaret Hannah Olley Art
Trust, 2006

Late afternoon 1972
oil on hardboard
90.0 x 122.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Gift of the artist 2001

Interior night 1972
oil on composition board
59.0 x 49.0cm
Collection of The University of Queensland
Gift of Mrs Brenda Hughes through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2004
The University of Queensland Art Museum
Photo: Carl Warner

Interior 1972
oil on board
69.0 x 61.0cm
Cairns Regional Gallery collection
Donated through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program by Ray Croke, 1999

Still life with marigolds and oranges c.1973
oil on board
61.0 x 75.0cm
Cbus Art Collection

[Morning interior] c.1973
oil on composition board
60.7 x 75.8cm
Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of Gretel Bootes in memory of Gordon
Bootes 2010

Self portrait with everlastings 1974
oil on board
59.3 x 74.6cm
Anne von Bertouch OAM bequest through the
Newcastle Region Art Gallery Foundation 2003
Newcastle Art Gallery collection

Early morning still life c.1975
oil on composition board
60.0 x 89.6cm
Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

Kitchen still life with fennel 1975
oil on composition board
66.7 x 90.2cm
Collection of The University of Queensland
Gift of Dr Cathryn Mittelheuser AM through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program,
1998

Pots and objects 1975
oil on board
75.0 x 121.0cm
Rockhampton Art Gallery Collection
Purchased 1976, Art Acquisition Fund, with
assistance from the Visual Arts Board of the
Australia Council

David Strachan's kitchen 1975
oil on board
90.0 x 60.0cm
Gift of the Margaret Olley Art Trust, 2012
Tweed River Art Gallery collection

Still life - objects on a table c.1976
oil on composition board
75.0 x 115.0cm
Gift of Ray Croke 1994
City of Townsville Art Collection

Kitchen still life 1976
oil on hardboard
67.0 x 89.0cm
University Art Collection, The University of
Sydney
Donated by Dr Margaret Olley AC through the
Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program,
2001

Pomegranate I 1976
oil on composition board
61.0 x 76.0cm
Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1976

Cornflowers c.1978 - 1982
oil on hardboard
61.0 x 76.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Gift of Van Hodgkinson 1988

Apples 1980
oil on hardboard
64.5 x 77.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Gift of the artist by exchange 1998

Aubergine and jug c.1982
oil on composition board
67.3 x 90.0cm
Collection of The University of Queensland
Gift of Margaret Olley, 2001
The University of Queensland Art Museum
Photo: Carl Warner

Turkish pots and lemons 1982
oil on hardboard
68.6 x 91.5 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Gift of the artist 2001

Chinese pots and lemons 1982
oil on composition board
100.5 x 74.8cm
Gift of the Newcastle Gallery Society presented on the 25th Anniversary of the opening of the Gallery 1997
Newcastle Art Gallery collection

Spanish bottles 1985
oil on board
71.0 x 101.4cm
Gift of Ann Gruen in memory of her mother, Margaret Darvall (by exchange) 1987
Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

Still life 1986
oil on composition board
61.0 x 91.5cm
Ipswich Art Gallery Collection
Acquired with funds donated by CS Energy through the Ipswich Arts Foundation, 1999

Homage to Manet 1987
oil on hardboard
76.0 x 102.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Gift of the artist 2001

Green grapes 1989
oil on board
64.6 x 51.9cm
Donated by Pamela Bell to the Southern Downs Regional Council Collection and held at the Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery

Katie's apples 1989 - 1992
oil on hardboard
76.0x 102.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased 1995

Chinese screen and yellow room 1996
oil on hardboard
75.0 x 75.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Purchased 1996

Bedroom Still Life 1997
oil on board
61.0 x 91.0cm
Purchased by Maitland Art Gallery Society, 1998
Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection

Self portrait 2001
oil on board
76.0 x 61.0cm
Gift of the Margaret Olley Estate, 2012
Tweed River Art Gallery collection

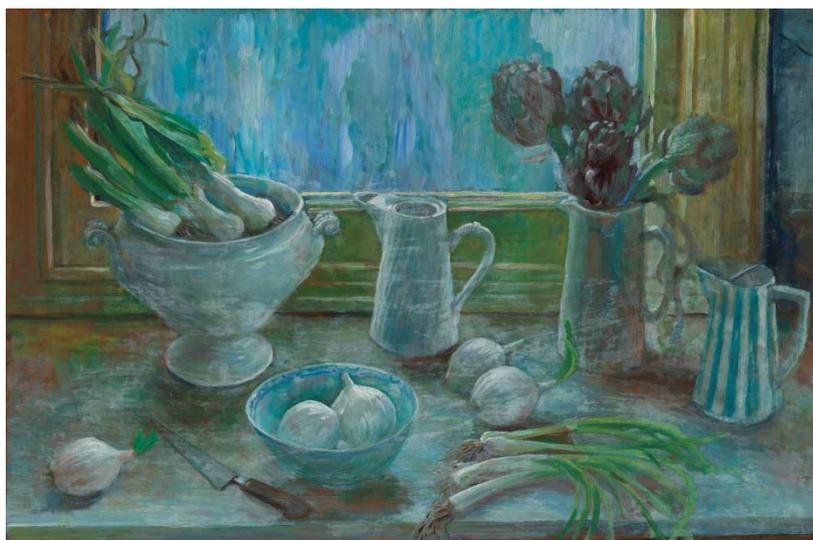
Turkish pots and lemons 2004
multi-plate coloured etching (62/70)
59.0 x 78.0cm
Gift of Margaret Olley, 2008
Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection

Ranunculus and pears 2004
oil on hardboard
76.0 x 101.0cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Edward Stinson Bequest Fund 2005

Yellow Tablecloth with Cornflowers 2008
multi-plate coloured etching (A/P)
65.2 x 59.5cm
Gift of Margaret Olley, 2008
Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection

Poppies and Checked Cloth 2008
multi-plate coloured etching (59/75)
58.5 x 73.0cm
Gift of Margaret Olley, 2008
Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection

Marigolds and Fruits 2009
multi-plate coloured etching (77/80)
59.0 x 78.0cm
Gift of Margaret Olley, 2009
Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection



Early morning still life c.1975
oil on composition board
60.0 x 89.6cm
Collection: National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
Purchased 1975

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

France, Christine, *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1990 & revised edition in 2002.

Pearce, Barry, *Margaret Olley*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1996 & revised edition in 2006.

Stewart, Meg, *Margaret Olley, Far from a still life*, Random House, Australia, 2005 & 2012.

Pearce, Barry, *Margaret Olley*, The Beagle press, Sydney, 2012

Collins Artist's Manual, Harper Collins, London, 1995

Exhibition Catalogues

Margaret Olley, Interiors and Still Lifes, Lismore Regional Gallery, 2006

Margaret Olley, Home, Interiors at Duxford St, Museum of Sydney and Philip Bacon Galleries.

Articles/Interviews

Thompson, Peter, ABC1, *Margaret Olley*, Talking Heads, 19/11/2007

Watson, Bronwyn, *Public Works: Spare Bedroom*, The Australian, 6 February, 2010

Edwards, Amy, *Still life in the giving from Margaret Olley's estate*, Newcastle Herald, June 24, 2012



Greg Weight
Classic FM, 2011
photograph ,permanent pigment on cotton rag paper
26.7 x 40cm
Pending donation to Tweed River Art Gallery Collection

Tweed River Art Gallery

PO Box 816 (2 Mistral Road)
MURWILLUMBAH NSW 2484
T: 02 6670 2790 F: 02 6672 7585 E: tweedart@tweed.nsw.gov.au
W: www.tweed.nsw.gov.au/artgallery
Open 10am – 5pm (DST) Wednesday to Sunday Free admission
Tweed River Art Gallery is a Tweed Shire Council Community Facility

It's all about the light: works by Margaret Olley from public collections

18 January – 14 April 2013

Margaret Olley is represented by Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane.
Copyright for texts in this publication is held by the authors.
No image in this publication may be reproduced without the permission of the copyright owner. All of Margaret Olley images © Estate of Margaret Olley.

Education Resource and Learning Activities written by Robyn Sweaney, Education and Audience Development Officer, TRAG

Acknowledgements:

Susi Muddiman would like to thank the staff of the lending institutions listed below for their generous contribution and invaluable assistance in the development and presentation of this exhibition.

Albury Art Gallery
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Cairns Regional Gallery
Geelong Gallery
Ipswich Art Gallery
Lismore Regional Gallery
Maitland Regional Art Gallery
National Gallery of Australia

Newcastle Art Gallery
Perc Tucker Regional Gallery
Queensland Art Gallery
Rockhampton Art Gallery
Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery
University Art Collection, The University of Sydney
Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery
The University of Queensland Art Museum

Tweed River Art Gallery Staff

Director
Assistant Director
Exhibitions Curator
Education and Audience Development Officer
Public Programs Curator
Administration Assistant
Gallery Technicians

Susi Muddiman
Anne Schardin
Gail McDermott
Robyn Sweaney
Anouk Beck
Leeanne Carey
Deborah Cocks, Barry Mossop, Peter Schardin

