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Cover Image
Greg Weight
Classic FM 2011
photograph, permanent pigment on cotton rag paper
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2013
Tweed Regional Gallery collection

About this Resource

This resource is intended for use by teachers and community arts audiences. It can be utilised by education groups engaging directly with the Margaret Olley Art Centre during a visit as well as for individual study and research. The content can also assist with pre-visit preparation.

The material is intended to complement the information provided in the Margaret Olley Art Centre wall texts, digital media and the Kids MOAC Guide (a resource produced for primary aged visitors).

A guide to additional reading and resources has been provided to assist with further study. Syllabus based Education Activity Resources for Primary and Secondary students are available on request.

This spread
Greg Weight
Apples and pear (detail) 2011
photograph, permanent pigment on cotton rag paper
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2013
Tweed Regional Gallery collection

About Margaret Olley Art Centre (MOAC)

From the Director

The Margaret Olley Art Centre honours the much-loved artist's wish that her studio and elements of her home be re-created in a purpose-built extension at the Tweed Regional Gallery.

As well as continuing Margaret Olley's legacy and mentorship, the Gallery offers visitors a unique experience that provides an insight into Australian art history and practice. The Margaret Olley Art Centre houses a re-creation of rooms from Margaret's home-studio, including elements of her home and collections from Duxford Street, Paddington, Sydney.

The new wing also includes exhibition space, storage and multi-media areas. The Frances Mills Education Workshop and the Marks Family Library have also been relocated to the new Centre and in completing the artist's vision, the Nancy Fairfax Artist in Residence Studio operates as a stand-alone facility adjacent to the Margaret Olley Art Centre.

Susi Muddiman
Director
Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre

Pre-visit Planning & Visiting

The Tweed Regional Gallery is open to the public Wednesday to Sunday, from 10.00am to 5.00pm.
The Gallery is closed Christmas Day and Good Friday.

Information on exhibitions, education, public programs and tours can be found on the Gallery website: artgallery.tweed.nsw.gov.au

Contact Us

For more information, or to make a booking for a group or school, please contact the Gallery on (02) 6670 2790

For more information on education programs and resources please contact the Education & Audience Development Officer.

Email: GalleryEducation@tweed.nsw.gov.au
Telephone: (02) 6670 2712

 **TWEED REGIONAL GALLERY**
& MARGARET OLLEY ART CENTRE | MURWILLUMBAH



Exterior view of Margaret Olley Art Centre, 2014.



Exterior view of The Nancy Fairfax Artist in Residence Studio, 2014.

Concept and Construction

In early November 2011, the Margaret Olley Art Trust offered Tweed Regional Gallery a contribution of \$1 million towards the establishment of the Margaret Olley Art Centre, which is now housed in a purpose-built extension to the Gallery. This new wing completes the Stage III element of the original Tweed Regional Gallery design concept by Brisbane-based architect Bud Brannigan.

In late November 2011, the Federal Member for Richmond, Justine Elliot announced the Government's contribution of a further \$1 million toward the funding for this project. Other funds have been contributed by Tweed Shire Council, the NSW State Government through Arts NSW, the Friends of the Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre Inc., the Tweed Regional Gallery Foundation Ltd and many generous donations from community members.

The Margaret Olley Art Centre was officially opened by Her Excellency the Honourable Quentin Bryce AC CVO, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia on 15 March 2014.

Floor plan of rooms from the Duxford St home re-created in the Margaret Olley Art Centre, Bud Brannigan Architects, 2012.

Duxford St Re-creation

Before Margaret Olley died, she requested that her home and contents be offered to the Tweed Regional Gallery. Within the Margaret Olley Art Centre, three spaces have been recreated; the Hat Factory, the kitchen and the Yellow Room.

After being recorded, documented and carefully removed from Duxford St in 2011, an estimated 6–10,000 items were stored and later placed back in the re-creation of Margaret's home in the Margaret Olley Art Centre.

This unique and fascinating facility offers visitors an insight into Margaret Olley's home and the rooms in which she lived and painted. The Margaret Olley Art Centre is one of the largest re-creations of an artist's studio in the world.



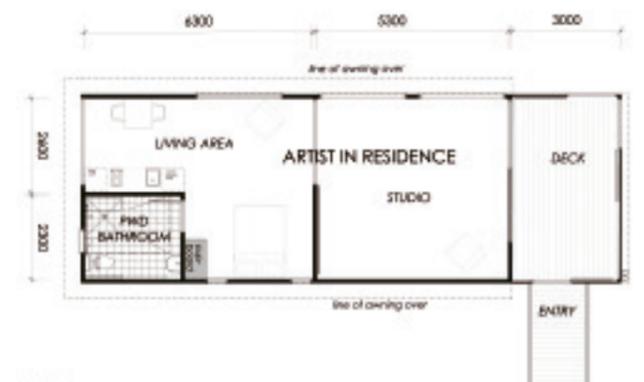
The Nancy Fairfax Artist in Residence Studio

The Nancy Fairfax Artist in Residence Studio will extend and complete the re-creation of Margaret Olley's home studio at Tweed Regional Gallery. Throughout her life, Margaret Olley supported many artists through mentorship and financial assistance. To Margaret, the most productive ways of supporting artists was to encourage the public exhibition of an artist's practice and to create sales. It is widely known that Olley mentored many younger artists and encouraged their representation in public and private collections. She actively supported artists and advanced their careers through purchasing works for collections or offering artists the opportunity to further their development through fellowship programs.

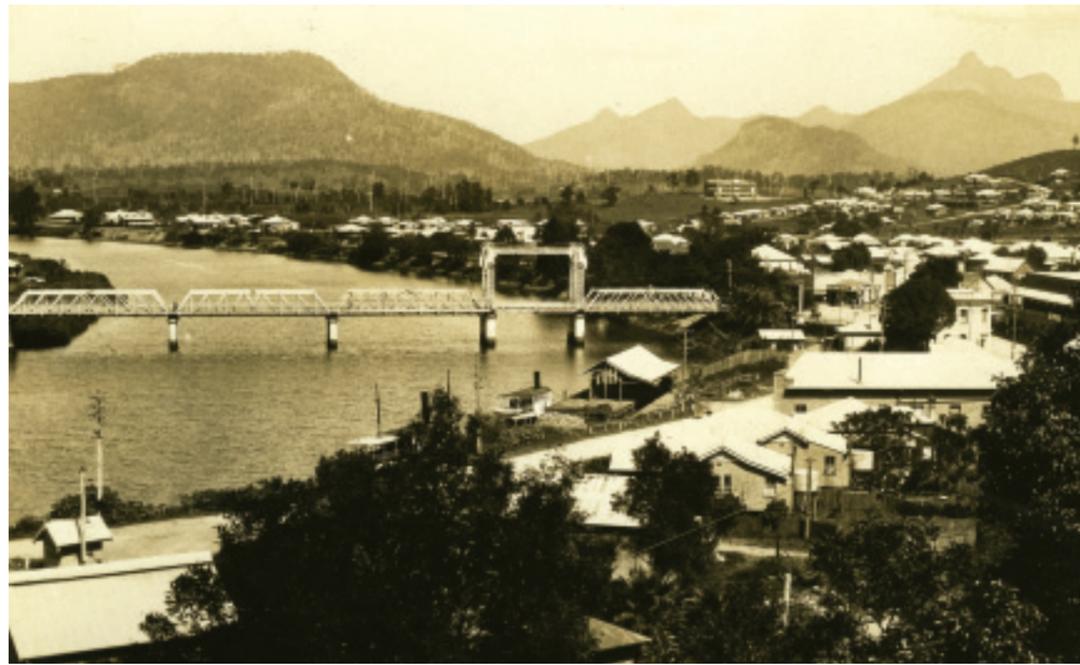
The Artist in Residence Studio program offers artists an opportunity to stimulate their practice in a creative environment. Annually two invited artists will participate in funded residency programs at Tweed Regional Gallery. The artwork resulting from these residences will be included in the Gallery's exhibition program and displayed in the Friends of the Gallery space in Stage II of the building. This program is funded through the generous benefaction of Mr Tim Fairfax and also complemented by government grants and the Gallery's support organisations.

The Nancy Fairfax Artist In Residence (AIR) Studio program encourages arts practice and creative engagement between artist, community and place.

During the remaining months of the year, the Artist in Residence Studio will be occupied by artists who have successfully applied to use the space on a fee-paying basis. The Gallery allocates a number of residency periods ranging from a week to a maximum of two months. Income generated through this program feeds into the Gallery's artistic programs.



Floor plan of the Artist in Residence Studio by Bud Brannigan Architects, 2012.



Clockwise from far left:

Margaret and Elaine Olley on horseback. c.1928 Tully, North Queensland. Photographer unknown. Margaret Olley Estate. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

Scene of Murwillumbah and bridge to township and view of Mt Warning from Reservoir Hill c.1930 TH119-35. Tweed Regional Museum Collection. Source: Reg Walker.

A jinker (cart) load of sugar cane to be taken to the derrick (crane loader) on the river at Byrne Farm, Stotts Creek c.1930 TH162-13. Tweed Regional Museum Collection. Source: Ted Byrne.

Murwillumbah Primary School 1931 Class 1A. Image published Daily News March 9, 1999 p. 10, courtesy Murwillumbah Public School Archives.

Loading sugar cane from the derrick onto the punt, c.1940s. Photo: Henderson family collection.

Margaret's early life on the Tweed

Margaret Hannah Olley was born on 24 June 1923 at Alkoomie Private Hospital, Conway Street, Lismore.¹ Margaret's parents, Joseph (Jo) and Grace Olley, met in Nimbin on the far north coast of NSW and lived for a short time at Horseshoe Creek, near Kyogle. The family moved back to northern NSW in 1931 after spending five years in the Tully region of north Queensland. Margaret was the eldest of three; her sister, Elaine was born in 1925 and her brother Ken was born in 1927.

Margaret stated that, *'Living by the Tweed River I first experienced the intoxicating smell of grass after rain.'*²

Joseph and Grace still had family living in the region and at the time that they moved south again from north Queensland, Margaret's uncle Tom Temperley was working as an Inspector of Cane Fields for the Condong Mill near Murwillumbah.

The years spent near Tully must have been quite tough for the family — especially for Joseph, who worked hard clearing the tropical native vegetation to establish sugar cane and dairy farms in the district. When Margaret first attended school in Tully she had to ride on horseback with her slightly older cousin Douglas, often through swollen creeks. A short time later at the age of six, she was sent to board at St Anne's school in Townsville. Margaret said of this, *'my umbilical cord was cut early.'*³

In February 1931 Margaret and Elaine were enrolled at the Murwillumbah Primary School. In March the same year their father purchased a property at Tyalgah from Thomas McConnell, which was 46 acres, 2 roods and 39¾ perches (2 portions: 15 acres and 31 acres). The property was on the western bank of the Tweed River, a little north of the Condong Sugar Mill, along the road now known as Tumbulgum Road. At this time the farming in the area was predominately sugar cane and dairy. Until bridges and punts were established in the 1930s, the main modes of transport were by river.

When the Olley family arrived in the area the verdant subtropical area of Tyalgah had similar features to the landscape of Tully with its wide rivers, flat river plains sown with tall canes of sugar and dramatic mountain ranges.

After years of harsh living conditions and isolation from schools and amenities, moving to the area of Tyalgah, between the established townships Murwillumbah and Tweed Heads, must have made life a little easier for the family although they still had to be self-sufficient and work hard to make ends meet. In the early 1930s Australia was in the grip of The Great Depression with high unemployment and poverty. Joseph was trying to make the best of agricultural opportunities with sugar cane. As the farm had been previously used for cattle, he replenished the soil with

*'The Tweed is really where my childhood began.'*⁴

nitrogen by growing a crop of edible peas. It was only after the plants were ploughed back into the soil that Jo planted the fields with sugar cane.

Like most families during this time, the Olley's grew their own vegetables and fruit, raised chickens, milked cows, fished, preserved fruit, made jam and baked cakes.

*'Having been brought up in the country in the Tweed, making your own way, catching fish, making your own butter, and with no electricity, you created your own enjoyment.'*⁵

*'It was an idyllic childhood in the area beside the Tweed River. We spent a lot of time fishing, rowing and having many adventures. We lived there with no electricity. I remember when we had the phone put on ... and sitting listening to the windup gramophone. And to get to Tweed we had to take four punts (vehicle ferry). Life was much more of an adventure that's for sure ... we used to spend holidays camping at Cudgen Headland — I guess that's vastly different these days.'*⁶

Twenty million years ago there was a huge shield volcano stretching from Byron Bay to Nerang on the Gold Coast and out to sea. Over time, the volcano became extinct and the lava washed away to form a fertile caldera. After this time a large volcanic plug remained, known as *Wollumbin (Mt Warning)*,

as well as a beautiful valley and mountains covered in lush subtropical rainforest. The landscape surrounding the district of Tyalgah has changed very little in the 80 years since the Olley family lived there. The Condong Mill is still operational and the farmers still grow sugar cane in the district.

Meg Stewart, Margaret's biographer, describes: 'By far the most exciting aspect of growing sugarcane and living on a cane farm for all the Olley children was the burning of the cane at night.'

*'They'd light it after dark. Very pyromaniacal, balls of fire lighting up the night. You'd hear it crackle and crisp with all the dry leaves burning. And smell it, the whole air was filled with an acrid mixture of sugar and smoke. When the trash was burnt all that was left was black ash and black stalks, with maybe a few bits of green.'*⁷

The Olley house was a low-lying 'Queenslander style' timber cottage on a riverside road. The Henderson family owned the property from 1940–1959. John Henderson was a young boy: *'...as far as my recollection goes the house had 4 main rooms (2 bedrooms in the front, lounge and kitchen at the rear) with verandahs on the southern (facing the river), eastern and northern sides. Half of the eastern and the northern verandahs were enclosed, the northern verandah had the bathroom on the*

¹ Meg Stewart (2005), *Margaret Olley: Far From A Still Life*, Random House Australia, p. 16.

² *ibid.*, p. 34.

³ Barry Pearce (2012), *Margaret Olley 1923–2011*, The Beagle Press, p. 104.

⁴ Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

⁵ Pearce, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

⁶ Nadine Fisher (2006), *Margaret Olley: was still painting at 80 plus*, Daily News, re-published October 2013.

⁷ Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 24.



Clockwise from far left:
 Family outing with the Chevrolet Tourer c.1932 (Margaret Olley in the middle with her hands on her hips).
 Photographer unknown. Courtesy Art Gallery NSW Archives, Margaret Olley Estate.
 Loading cane onto punt on the Tweed River at Tyngalga, Condong Mill in background c.1920s TH173-25. Tweed Regional Museum Collection. Source: Marrie Handley.
 The Olley House at Tyngalga c.1940s. Photo: Henderson family collection.
 Margaret, Elaine Grace and Ken Olley in a rowboat on the Tweed River to meet the school bus. c.1931 Tyngalga, NSW. Photographer unknown. Courtesy Art Gallery NSW Archives, Margaret Olley Estate.
 Main Street, Murwillumbah showing many early model cars c.1930 PP139. Tweed Regional Museum Collection.

western end, and I think the other filled in parts were sleepouts ...as far as I remember no alterations were made to the house during our possession. There was a large barn behind the house with the outhouse between.'⁸

Margaret recalled, 'The roof of our house was tin. I loved snuggling up in bed, hearing the rain on the tin roof overhead.'⁹

The Olley children's favourite haunt inside the Tyngalga house was the kitchen. They loved watching Grace cooking, especially when she was making cakes and jams, or bottling fruit from the trees.....The only food items Margaret remembers being bought were flour, sugar and ice....¹⁰

Having the Tweed River on their doorstep not only provided the family with an abundant supply of food but also supplied them with a means of transport and recreation activities.

'What a place for children to grow up — living by a river! My father loved fishing in it and catching mud crabs in crab pots, which we could get because the river was tidal and partly salty. We were always fishing.... I learnt to swim there. I was just thrown in the river and started dog paddling. There was a tiny island between us and Condong. To us children it was a magical place.'¹¹

To attend the primary school and Sunday school in Murwillumbah, Margaret and her siblings crossed the river in a rowboat to meet the bus which took them into town.

Margaret's favourite subject at school was art, yet she didn't have any idea at this age what an artist was. This was to come later when she was a teenager boarding in Brisbane at Somerville House school. Her independent and single Aunt Mary, who often visited the family, became a great mentor and Margaret had an idea that she wanted to be like her when she grew up. A visit from her cousin Tom Temperley, who worked in the city in advertising, also sparked her curiosity when he produced art materials to create landscape paintings in the back paddock.

Though a boat was often used to traverse the river, the Olley family did have a car which Joseph Olley had purchased while living in Queensland around 1927. It was a dark coloured Chevrolet Tourer. The roof folded down and it became the perfect vehicle for many exciting road trips, picnics and family holidays. Most weekends the family would head off with the packed hamper via four river punts to cross the rivers and creeks to get to the beach at Tweed Heads or another beach along the coast.

The family also went on other outings to visit friends and relatives, to Byron Bay, Bangalow, Lismore and Armidale. Margaret reminisced to Meg Stewart about making her parents stop the car as she had spotted something: a 'find', such as a flower that caught her eye.¹²

Every Christmas, or soon afterwards, the Olley family went camping, usually with her Temperley cousins, for an extended period. Most often this was at Cudgen Headland at the southern end of Kingscliff.

'Cudgen was such a romantic place, with the creek and the long beautiful beach. Children now haven't got the freedom to move about as we did at Cudgen and Tyngalga. It was such a busy life. You were completely absorbed in what you were doing. It was really like Zen Buddhism. No one ever said they were bored or didn't have anything to do. They were golden days.'¹³

In 1935 the Olley's sold their property at Tyngalga; the Olley family was on the move again.

'Always moving, things changing all the time — that was our life. Moving was very disruptive and it didn't help with my schoolwork — the only thing that glued it together for me was the art classes.

I think I'm part gypsy because of all those moves. And we were always discarding. I suppose that's why now I don't want to throw a thing out. So those two different aspects of my early life have governed me.'¹⁴

In either late 1934 or early 1935 Margaret's mother Grace and siblings went to Brisbane while her father went back to Tully to see to the family properties. Grace and the two younger children joined him around 1937 while Margaret stayed behind to board at Somerville House girls' private school in South Brisbane. This was when she discovered that art was what she wanted to do in her life.

Margaret's art teacher, Caroline Barker was a great supporter and advised Margaret's mother that she should study art after leaving school. Olley said, 'So my first paintings in oils were done with Caroline Barker. They were kept under the carpet in my mother's bedroom.'¹⁵

From this time Margaret Olley's lifelong, fascinating journey and passion for art began.

⁸ John Henderson in email correspondence with Kay J. Robinson, 30 May, 2012.

⁹ Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 38.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 36.

¹² Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁵ Pearce, *op.cit.*, p. 104.



Clockwise from far left:

Greg Weight, *Yellow room* 2011. photograph, permanent pigment on cotton rag paper. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2013. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

View of the exterior front terrace view of Duxford St, c.1970s. Date and photographer unknown. The Margaret Olley Estate. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

Margaret and Sam Hughes in Paris, 1978. Photograph Eddie Batache. Margaret Olley Estate. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

Margaret in her Duxford St home, 16 October 1996. Photographer unknown. Margaret Olley Estate. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

Inside the Hat Factory near the stairs to the loft bedroom. c.1976. Photographer unknown. Margaret Olley Estate. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

Greg Weight, *Kitchen dresser* 2011. photograph, permanent pigment on cotton rag paper. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2013. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

View of the exterior lane view of the Hat Factory, c.1970s. Date and photographer unknown. The Margaret Olley Estate. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

Duxford Street

In 1964 Margaret purchased a terrace house in Duxford St, Paddington, Sydney. Margaret said *'It had a separate ramshackle wooden building at the back, falling into the laneway, which had once been a hat factory and still had a whole shelf of wooden hat moulds inside.'*¹⁶

At first Margaret rented out the terrace house, but kept two rooms as a small flat to stay in when she was visiting Sydney. These two rooms, a kitchen and a small bedroom, were situated between the main house and the adjoining old Hat Factory. During the early 1970s these two rooms became the base for Margaret and her great love Sam Hughes. During this time Margaret began using her friend and artist David Strachan's house as a studio after he passed away in a car accident in 1970. Around 1976 Margaret and Hughes moved out of the little flat into the larger area of the Hat Factory and the upstairs loft bedroom.¹⁷ They lived here together, between overseas travels, until Sam's death in 1982.

In 1984 Margaret purchased a house in Gurner St, Paddington and lived there until 1988 when she moved back to her Duxford St home. She then set about permanently establishing herself and her studio in the Hat Factory buildings at the back of the property. Margaret remained living and painting there until she died in 2011.

Margaret loved entertaining her friends around the large dining table which had been moved down from the family home *Farndon*, Brisbane in the late 1970s.

Margaret's good friend Lynne Clarke said: *'Her large dining table became a seething mass of papers, letters and invitations, pushed aside to make room to eat if I or another friend called in at lunch time. Where this clutter disappeared to when she entertained was a mystery. Out came her exotic Indian miniature tablemats and a wild assortment of plates for the dinner parties she gave, invariably soup, shoulder of lamb — "the sweetest meat" she would say — and Surprise packet peas as they were light and easy to transport from the shops.'*¹⁸

Margaret's home was her studio, and her studio was her home. She preferred painting to cleaning, and over the years her home became increasingly more cluttered. When she was asked whether this stubborn refusal to throw anything out stemmed from her parents' home burning down in 1980 she replied: *'It would all add up to that ... [but] if people would only stop writing letters to me ... [about 250 a week] ... They just come piling in and sometimes I can't cope.....I mean, I would rather paint than cope with rubbish.....You can spend your entire life cleaning the house or doing other things, and I would rather do other things, although I do have a cleaner who comes once a fortnight and all she does is the floors.'*¹⁹

*'Her house was the living part of her art ... 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.'*²⁰

Barry Humphries puts the experience of visiting Margaret's home succinctly in his essay *A note of exclamation:* *'As the artist conducts her visitor through the rich labyrinth of her magically transformed terraced house, she may extinguish her cigarette here, emphasise the ruddy highlight on a painted pomegranate there; for each room seems to have its uncompleted canvas, its wet palette, its sheaf of brushes and of course, its ashtray. On her journey from the kitchen to the telephone she may impart some final touches to a consummate still-life. Yet it would be false to imply a sense of disorder. The house is her studio, and its contents are her subject. Her method — seemingly vagrant — is in reality a sophisticated artistic assembly line from which emerge her vibrant tableaux of inanimate things.'*²¹

The Yellow Room

'In the late 1980s she [Margaret] 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.'²²

*'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.'*²³

The Kitchen

*'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.'*²⁴

¹⁶ Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 378.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 437.

¹⁸ Lyn Clarke (2013), *Margaret Olley, Home*, catalogue, Museum of Sydney and Philip Bacon Galleries, p. 41.

¹⁹ David Lesser (2008), *The Remarkable Margaret Olley*, *Australian Woman's Weekly*, p. 5.

²⁰ Christine France (2013), *It's all about the light: works by Margaret Olley from public collections*, exhibition catalogue essay, Tweed Regional Gallery.

²¹ Barry Humphries (1997 Edition), Barry Pearce, *Margaret Olley*, The Art Gallery of New South Wales, p. 8.

²² Christine France (2002), *Margaret Olley*, Craftsman House, p. 109.

²³ Peter Thompson (19 November 2007), *Margaret Olley*, Talking Heads interview.

²⁴ Thompson, *ibid.*



Opposite
Margaret Olley
David Strachan's kitchen (detail) 1975
oil on board
Gift of the Margaret Olley Art Trust, 2012
Tweed Regional Gallery collection

Margaret Olley's Practice

*'For Margaret Olley, painting was like breathing. It was a part of her existence, part of every day of her life.'*²⁵

Margaret Olley is best known as a painter of still life and interior subjects, but during her career she also painted landscapes, portraits and self portraits. As her good friend Christine France said, '...still life and interiors were the raison d'être for establishing her studio and creating her unique environment in the old Hat Factory.'²⁶

'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."²⁷

Subject Matter

- Still Life
- Interiors
- Landscape
- Self Portraits

Process and Materials

- Painting
- Drawing and Watercolour
- Print

²⁵ Ben Quilty (2013), *Margaret Olley, Home*, catalogue, Museum of Sydney and Philip Bacon Galleries, p. 35.

²⁶ France, catalogue essay, *op.cit.*

²⁷ *ibid.*



Margaret Olley
Kewpie Doll 1938
 oil on linen
 Gift of the Margaret Olley Estate, 2013
 Tweed Regional Gallery collection



Margaret Olley
David Strachan's kitchen 1975
 oil on board
 Gift of the Margaret Olley Art Trust, 2012
 Tweed Regional Gallery collection

Still Life

'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.'²⁸

One of Margaret's earliest surviving paintings, *Kewpie Doll* 1938, which is in the Tweed Regional Gallery's collection, is a still life created by Margaret aged fifteen while she was a student at Somerville House school, Brisbane. The still life became one of Margaret's favourite genres, especially when she aged and her mobility became restricted. Her furniture, textiles, flowers, china and objects that surrounded her in her home became preferred subject matter. Margaret saw endless possibilities of composition using these objects with the design elements of shape, colour, form, texture and tone. The placement of objects and fall of natural light through windows and the occasional artificial light at night from a soft lamp created mood and atmosphere.

Margaret's good friend Barry Humphries said: *'A visit to Margaret Olley is certainly an unforgettable experience. Her house is a series of studios, filled — burgeoning — with the furniture, textiles and objects which she incorporates into her ravishing natures mortes. In each room, and in various stages of completion, stands a painting, propped sometimes against a chair or flung with seemingly carelessness upon a sofa — there is no sign of so formal accoutrement as an easel. A simple table, covered with gourds and tangerines, and upon which might also rest a Turkish pot, a jar of flannel flowers or a dish of desiccated raspberries, stands against a black and gilded Chinese screen. In the foreground, Miss Olley's painting of this subject is casually appended.'*²⁹

²⁸ France, catalogue essay, *op.cit.*

²⁹ Humphries, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

Interiors

Olley produced her first interiors for a solo exhibition at the Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane in 1970 with works inspired by the Olley family home *Farndon*, in Hill End, Brisbane. Over the years she painted rooms from her own homes and many of her close friends. Her home in Duxford St became a favourite setting for her interiors, in particular the Yellow Room.

The painting titled *David Strachan's kitchen* was created during a period in the early 1970s when Margaret Olley was using her friend and artist David Strachan's (1919-1970) home as a studio following his death in a tragic traffic accident in 1970. Margaret had met Strachan in Sydney during the mid 1940s at artist Jean Bellette's life classes at East Sydney Technical College. In 1962 David purchased a terrace house in Paddington, Sydney, where he loved to cook and entertain. In *David Strachan's kitchen* 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 striped red cloth, along with the glowing freshly picked oranges, depict a well-loved corner of a good friend's personal space.

*'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.'*³⁰

³⁰ Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 427.



Opposite
Margaret Olley
Drying nets, Boyds Bay, (Tweed River) 1962
 watercolour and ink on paper
 Donated through the Australian
 Government Cultural Gifts Program
 by Dr Bill Douglas in Memory of the Morley
 Family of Tweed Heads, 2011
 Tweed Regional Gallery collection



This page
Margaret Olley
Self portrait 2001
 oil on board
 Gift of the Margaret Olley Estate, 2012
 Tweed Regional Gallery collection

Landscape

Some of the first landscapes Margaret painted were produced in Hill End, NSW. She painted there with Donald Friend in the late 1940s. Later, when living in Newcastle during the 1970s, Margaret loved painting the lively and atmospheric working harbour with its smoking chimneystacks and industrious boats.

When travelling in France, Italy, New Guinea and in Australia she would record the landscapes using pen and wash techniques. Occasionally she used a linear monotype print technique which she hand coloured when dry. In her later life, due to mobility difficulties and as she didn't drive, Margaret would paint landscapes from friends' balconies. She particularly loved a panoramic view of Sydney Harbour.

When Margaret was living in Brisbane in the late 1950s and 1960s she often went on painting expeditions with artist friends to north Queensland and northern New South Wales.

In 1960, she and her close friend Moya Dyring travelled from Brisbane to the Tweed to paint the prawn trawler fleet. This trip resulted in an exhibition at the Johnstone Gallery, Brisbane which included 24 oils and 24 drawings. 1962 saw her back in the Tweed painting with artist friend Fred Jessup, and another subsequent exhibition at the Johnstone Gallery included Tweed Heads fishing scenes. The ink and watercolor work, *Drying nets, Boyds Bay, (Tweed River)* in the Tweed Regional Gallery's collection may have been one of the paintings exhibited.

Boyd's Bay is on your right as you cross over Terranora Creek (a tributary of the Tweed River) heading north on the Pacific Motorway to Tweed Heads and Coolangatta. Ukerebah Island is one of the islands located in the middle of the Tweed River and can be seen in the background of Margaret's painting.³¹

³¹ Lyn McGrath (2012), Tweed Regional Gallery Volunteer, research on Margaret Olley's painting *Drying nets, Boyds Bay, (Tweed River)* 1962.

Self Portraits

One of Margaret's earliest self portraits was *Portrait in the mirror*, painted in 1948. She gifted this work to the Art Gallery of NSW in 2001. This painting marked an important moment for Olley at the beginning of her career and was the first of a small number of self portraits in which she portrayed herself reflected in a mirror.

'In this early self-portrait, she surrounds herself with the things that would preoccupy her throughout her career: the fruits, flowers and exotic objects that she collected about her in her home and studio. Her tribute to past great masters of art, seen in the postcard reproductions, would also become a frequent feature of her work.'³²

Another painting, *Self portrait*, painted in 2001 was gifted to the Tweed Regional Gallery by the Margaret Olley Estate in 2012. In this painting she depicts herself reflected in a mirror, possibly in the Yellow Room at Duxford St. Wearing one of her trademark

hats which she often wore when painting, she looks directly at herself; or maybe the gaze looks beyond, to her audience. A still life arrangement is behind her, which is softly lit by natural light coming in through the window. She has a brush in her hand, poised to paint. There is something quiet and contemplative about this self portrait. Margaret has captured a solitary moment in time, in a room she loved being in. There is a softness and translucency in the colours she has used and in the way she has applied the paint.

³² artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/454.2001/



Margaret Olley *Old Port, Nice* 1950
pen, wash and gouache on paper Gifted in the memory of the Pilgrim family of Bilambil Heights, 2000 Tweed Regional Gallery collection.



Moving the painting spot, 26 July 1993. Photographer unknown. Margaret Olley Estate. Tweed Regional Gallery collection.

Process and Materials

Painting

*'With painting sometimes you're almost in a daze. I used to joke to people by saying that it is 'hand-done', but that means to me you've got to allow yourself to get into a flow that is taking you somewhere and surprises you.'*³³

Some of Margaret's earlier works were executed on canvas, cardboard and paper, but the majority of her paintings from the 1970s onward were acrylic and oil on board. She preferred the hard, smooth, dark Masonite surface, which she could cut to size. It was also easy to place in front of her subject matter or lean on her lap.

In the documentary, *Margaret Olley: A Life in Paint*, 2012, Catherine Hunter films Margaret's process of creating a painting on board. Margaret also discusses her process in an interview with Barry Pearce.³⁴

³³ Pearce, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

³⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 91–103.

³⁵ John McDonald (23 May 2009), *Margaret Olley: Life's Journey*, review, Sydney Morning Herald.

³⁶ en plein air is a French expression which means 'in the open air', or painting outdoors.

Drawing and Watercolour

Art critic John McDonald describes, 'In the early part of her career Olley drew constantly, filling one sketchbook after another. In later life she has concentrated on painting, almost to the exclusion of drawing. In a catalogue interview she makes light of this change. "Mind you, you're drawing all the time with the paintbrush;" she tells Christine France, "whatever you're doing it's all drawing — it's all related.'" ³⁵

When Margaret travelled she used pen and ink on paper and added watercolour washes. This method was portable, convenient and adaptable to different local situations and enabled her to work en plein air.³⁶

This confident method of working also enabled her to work quickly, recording the new exotic landscapes she discovered in her travels. These drawings could be mailed easily to galleries for exhibitions, especially when she was living in France during the early 1950s.

Print

During the early 1950s in Italy, Margaret was introduced to a monotype (monoprint) method, which she began experimenting with. These works had strong graphic qualities yet with a softer line than when she used ink. Margaret hand coloured these prints in a similar way to her ink and pen drawings.

*'It was Francis [Sir Francis Cyril Rose] who introduced me to Monotypes. A monotype is where you take a piece of glass. I'd put some oil paint on the glass and position a clean sheet of paper in between that and a drawing, which was face up, to get an impression. Then I'd pull the middle sheet of paper off and end up with a print. Fred Jessup often incorporated this technique in his paintings. He would do a monotype and use that as the point of departure for the rest of the work. I was very taken with the medium and my own next few shows, which included works of Venice, were also made up of monotypes.'*³⁷

Margaret discusses this monotype technique in more detail in Barry Pearce's book.³⁸

³⁷ Stewart, *op.cit.*, p. 255.

³⁸ Pearce, *op.cit.*, p. 42.

³⁹ France, catalogue essay, *op.cit.*

⁴⁰ Pearce, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

Working from Life and Home

Margaret worked from life and set up her subject matter in the favourite rooms of her home, (as well as friends' houses) often chasing the natural light at different times of the day or year. Objects were chosen from her possessions and arranged to create the perfect composition. Margaret's home life and studio intertwined. There was no real differentiation within the rooms and spaces.

"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.³⁹

*'Neil MacGregor [Director of the British Museum] once asked me when I thought a painting was finished. I replied, sometimes when it's begun.'*⁴⁰



Greg Weight
Margaret Olley 2011
photograph, permanent pigment on cotton rag paper
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts
Program by the artist, 2013
Tweed Regional Gallery collection



Margaret Olley AC with The Rt Hon Doug Anthony AC CH at the opening of Stage II of the Tweed River Art Gallery in 2006.

Margaret Hannah Olley, AC

24 June 1923 – 26 July 2011

Margaret Hannah Olley was born on 24 June 1923 in Lismore, New South Wales. Margaret was the eldest of three children of Joseph Olley and Grace (nee Temperley). At the time of her birth they were living on a property of selected land at Horseshoe Creek, near Kyogle. The Olley family were pioneers in the Lismore district and the Temperley family had lived for a time in Ballina, where they owned the local newspaper *The Richmond River Times* during the 1880s.

In 1925 the Olley family moved to Tully, between Cairns and Townsville in far north Queensland, firstly to a property that Grace's father had bought. He hoped to capitalise on the profitable sugar cane growing rush. Finding the property very isolated and uncleared of natural rainforest, the family acquired another parcel of land closer to the town of Tully to establish a sugarcane farm. It was here that Margaret's sister and brother were born, Elaine in 1925 and Ken in 1927. Margaret boarded at St. Anne's school in Townsville in 1929. In 1931 the Olley family moved back to northern NSW, purchasing land at Tygalgah, near Murwillumbah. The property was on the Tweed River, a little north of the Condong Sugar Mill. At the time, Margaret's uncle Tom Temperley was working for the mill as an Inspector of Cane Fields. To attend the local primary school in Murwillumbah, Margaret and her siblings crossed the river in a rowboat to meet the bus which took them into town. The family were self-sufficient, growing their own vegetables, raising chickens, making preserves and cakes. Margaret's favourite subject at school was art and her independent Aunt Mary, who often visited the family, was a great mentor.

In 1935 the farm was sold to Thomas Edwin Grant and the family

moved back to Brisbane for a time before returning to Tully. Margaret remained in Brisbane to attend Somerville House, a Brisbane girls' boarding school. It was during her time at secondary school that her talent for painting and drawing was noticed, particularly by her art teacher Caroline Barker. Miss Barker persuaded Margaret's parents to send their daughter to art school to further her studies. In 1941, Margaret commenced classes at Brisbane Central Technical College. In 1943 Olley moved to Sydney and enrolled in an Art Diploma course 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.

After graduating, Olley quickly became involved in the post-war Sydney art scene, which included artists such as Jean Bellette, William Dobell, Russell Drysdale, Donald Friend, Sidney Nolan, Justin O'Brien and David Strachan. In the late 1940s she and Friend became some of the first artists to spend time painting in the Hill End area of NSW. In 1948 Olley held her first solo exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries. This was also the year William Dobell painted an Archibald Prize-winning portrait of Olley dressed in a gown fashioned from parachute silk, with a hat adorned with flowers.

Olley departed on her first international trip in 1949. She stayed in France and travelled extensively to parts of Spain, Brittany, Venice, Lisbon and London. When her father died in 1953, Olley returned to Brisbane to live and paint at her mother's home *Farndon* in Morry St, Hill End, Brisbane. Margaret remained in Brisbane for ten years, painting for exhibitions, designing theatre sets and murals, and opening an antique shop in Stones Corner.

During the mid-1950s, Margaret travelled through north Queensland, to Hill End in NSW with Donald Friend, Magnetic Island and Papua New Guinea. She held an exhibition of her paintings from this period in the Macquarie Galleries in 1955 to mixed critical acclaim. In 1959 she gave up alcohol, and her creative output and well being increased as a result. This time marked the beginning of decades of commercial success with galleries and collectors, enabling her to invest in properties in Sydney and Newcastle. This gave her the independence to continue to paint, travel and eventually become a benefactor to artists and public galleries.

In 1962 Margaret purchased and renovated her first home in Paddington St, Paddington, Sydney. In 1964 she purchased a terrace house in Duxford St, Paddington where she set up a flat in an area of the property between the house and the adjoining old Hat Factory buildings as a place for her to stay when visiting Sydney. During the early 1970s these two rooms became the initial base for Margaret and her great love Sam Hughes. Margaret began renovating the Hat Factory before she and Sam moved in during the mid 1970s. They lived here in between overseas travel until Sam passed away in 1982. This year also saw the passing of Margaret's mother.

Sadly in 1980 the family home 'Farndon' in Brisbane burnt down, resulting in the loss of the family's possessions and many of Olley's early works, photographs and objects collected on her travels.

Duxford St became Margaret's permanent home in 1988. She continued to renovate the rooms at the back of the property, establishing the Hat Factory as her home and studio.

Margaret travelled extensively to Asia, Europe and America visiting friends and viewing special exhibitions by artists she loved, including Matisse, Morandi, Chardin, Bonnard and Balthus. In 1990 Margaret established the Margaret Olley Art Trust to acquire paintings for public collections. The first retrospective of her work was held at the S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney in 1990, accompanied by the launch of a monograph written by Christine France. The Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW) also held a retrospective exhibition, curated by Barry Pearce in 1997.

Margaret Olley held over 90 solo exhibitions during her life time. She was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 1991, and awarded Life Governor of the AGNSW in 1997. The AGNSW named the Margaret Olley, Twentieth Century European Gallery in her honour in 2001. She was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia (AC) in 2006. Margaret was awarded honorary doctorates from Macquarie University, the University of Sydney, the University of Newcastle, the University of Queensland, Southern Cross University and Griffith University.

Margaret Olley opened Stage II of the Tweed River Art Gallery in Murwillumbah in 2006. In April 2011 artist Ben Quilty won the 2011 Archibald Prize with his enigmatic portrait of Margaret.

Margaret continued to paint, despite her deteriorating health in her last years, and had completed a new body of work for an exhibition at Philip Bacon Galleries when she passed away on 26 July 2011 at her home. Margaret Olley is best known for her colourful, painterly still life paintings and intimate interiors, but also for her friendships, generous benefaction and gregarious zest for life.

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Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre is a Tweed Shire Council Community Facility

Acknowledgements

Education Resource material and concept; Robyn Sweaney, Education and Audience Development Officer, Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre.

Creative Design; Rick Shearman, rangestudio.com

The Tweed Regional Gallery would like to thank the following organisations and people for their generous contribution and invaluable assistance in the development and presentation of this resource.

The Margaret Olley Art Trust, Christine France, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Tweed Regional Museum, Sally Watterson, Murwillumbah Public School.

Volunteers and community members who assisted with research: Kay J. Robinson, John Henderson, Anne Riddell, Lyn McGrath and Margot Loder.

Margaret Olley is represented by Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane.

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Photographs courtesy of the Margaret Olley Estate, the Art Gallery of New South Wales Library and Archive, Tweed Regional Museum and the Henderson Family collection.

Please Note: Prior to the Gallery's formal name change to the Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre in 2013, art works in the Gallery's collection were formerly attributed to the Tweed River Art Gallery collection, or the Tweed River Regional Art Gallery collection.

ISBN 978-0-9873413-7-2





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