

Two Margarets



— *Margaret Preston*

Margaret Olley —



Garry Law

Margaret Preston 1875 – 1963

Margaret Olley 1923 – 2011

Both Australian

Both primarily representational - particularly still life

Both were content to live in Australia though much travelled

Output of both much loved, lauded and well represented in Australian public galleries

Margaret Preston

Born Port Adelaide

- Painter (oil, egg tempera, gouache)
- Printmaker (wood block, wood engraving, linocut, screenprint stencil, lithograph, monotype)
- Potter
- Teacher

Born Margaret Rose MacPhearson. Father was a ship's engineer – died young – syphilis. Close relationship with her mother who encouraged her art – and paid for study to the disbenefit of her other daughter.

Went by the name of Rose MacPhearson until her marriage.

Formal realist academic training – while life class outputs were well regarded and did some landscapes she chose to concentrate on still life. Some teachers were attempting to create an Australian art – but this little influenced her then.

Mother moved to Melbourne so Margaret could attend the National Gallery School.

Gold wealth had left Melbourne with a well stocked gallery of European work to use as models.

Some prominent artists who taught her were Frederick McCubbin and Hans Heysen

Returned to Adelaide to the Adelaide School of Design

Taught in Adelaide – to help family finances. Held life classes





First European Trip 1904-1906

Shortly after death of her mother

Wishing to advance her formal academic training.

Companion was Bessie Davidson - former student of Preston younger and wealthier – supplied financial support.

Davidson's parents forbade Paris as a destination so they went to Munich but later reverted to Paris.

Exposed to Fauves, Secessionists - confused by them.

Her formal studies in Paris were of Japanese Art.

Travelled widely – including Morocco

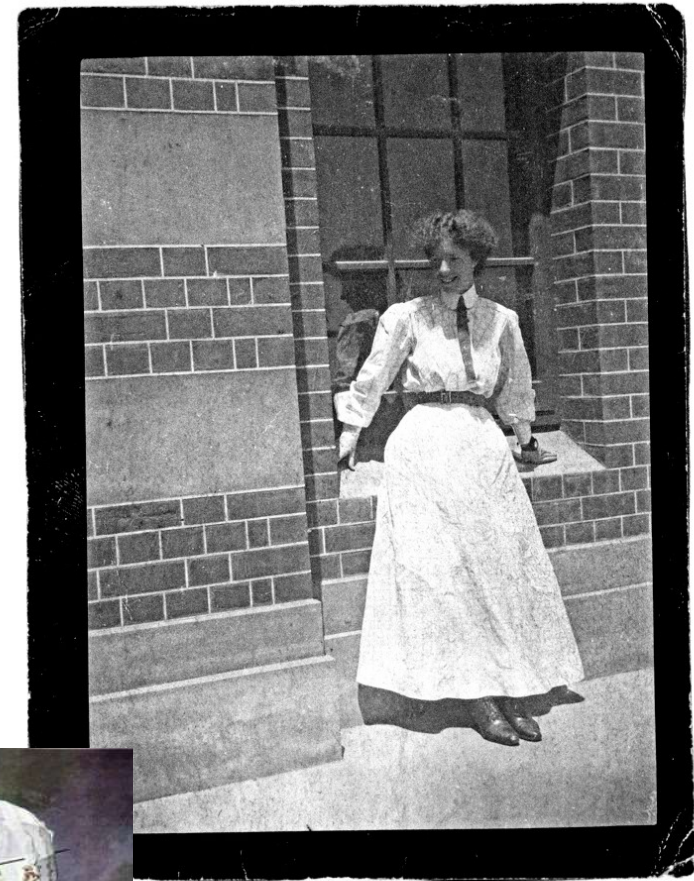
Had paintings accepted at two successive Paris Salons

Was exposed to post-impressionists, Gauguin and Cezanne to greatest effect.

On return resumed teaching in Adelaide.

Provocateur on art matters

Later in Sydney – was a resident in the Davidson House – invited for the weekend – stayed two years.



Preston in Paris





1908

1905

Second European Trip 1912-1919

Paris 1912-13

London 1913-19

Companion this time was Gladys Reynell – again younger and wealthier and an artist.

Studied pottery and the principles of modernist design with Roger Fry.

Studied print-making.

Exhibited at the New England Art Club, Royal Academy, New Salon.

Saw and understood cubism.

Scottish colourists were much admired.

Late in the war taught painting, pottery and basketwork to recuperating soldiers.

On return was determined to be a modernist and determined to produce a distinctively Australian art.

Wanted her art to be accessible – hence the concentration on prints – often in large editions – over 400 different prints in her career. Did not stop painting



Adelaide 1909



1911



1915

Marriage

William George Preston – he as a soldier. Met in Britain. Returned to Aus together via USA.
Married in Aus 1919 – she 44, he 6 years her junior.
Successful businessman so not financially dependent on her art after that, but still taught at times.
No children.
Rarely out of each other’s company. He outlived her.
Very widely travelled. Never painted during travels but did use photography. Europe, USA, Japan (studied wood block technique), NZ, in Australia – to NT by truck, Pacific trip in Gauguin's path.

Character

“hussy” – when positioning herself closest to models in life class.
“That red-headed bitch” – father of a female student of Preston’s.
“... red-headed little firebrand of a woman who was not only an excellent painter but a most inspiring teacher.”
“...very feminine in an old-fashioned way”
“Most envious thing I know, a raging creature who burns her work when it doesn’t sell. Hasn’t one ounce of gratitude in her carcass.”
(Preston) “I never forgive” (There is a small book dedicated to her many aphorisms)
“... a dynamic figure”
“She was a delightful person.... In an open way one of the most egotistical artists I ever knew.”
“She had a delight in childish things.”
(Preston) “Travelling is what I like best. Washing up and gardening is what I like least.”
It’s as well the male part of the Society of Artists selection committee were non-aggressive because we've had to put up with Mrs Preston and Thea Proctor...”





The aeroplane
1925 reworked 1936

Essay in vorticism

Brilliant at self promotion
Articles and covers in women's, home decoration and art
magazines
Articles about art in art magazines written by herself
Exhibitions in department store displays areas as well as
galleries.



1927













Cochinos & Banksias

Margaret Preston



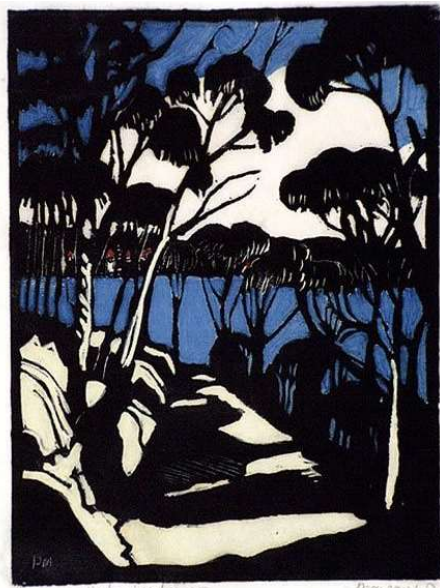
M.P.



Self portrait 1930 Commissioned by the Art Gallery of NSW



"Flapper" – was actually her maid

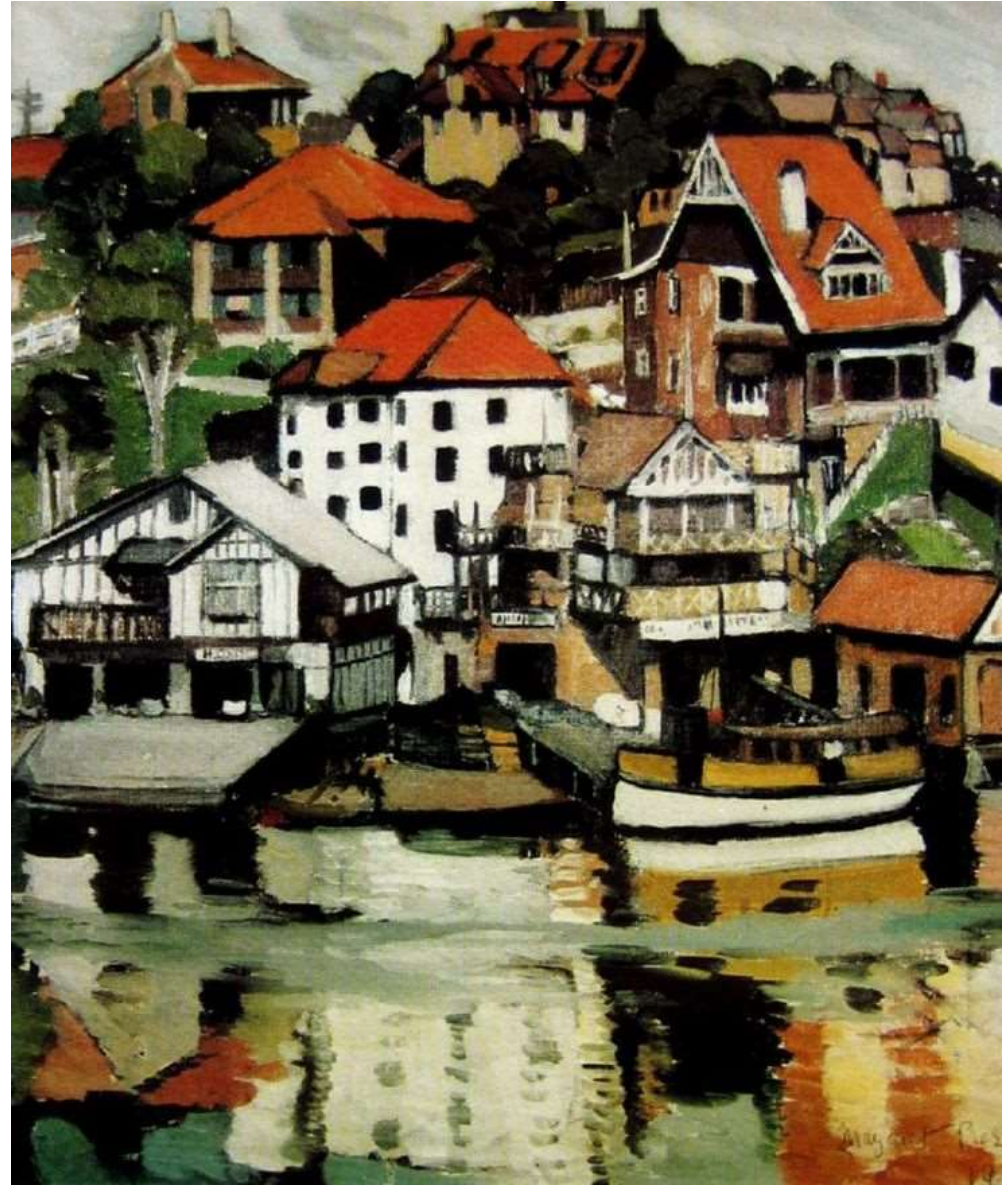


Hilbertsches - 50

Mansueti - 1900



Mansueti - 1900





19th May Circular Quay NSW

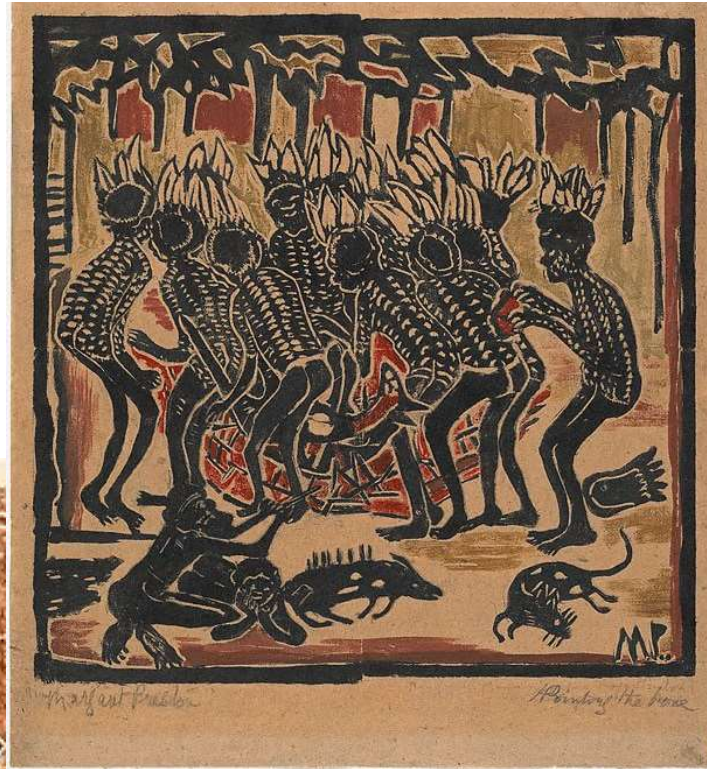
Margaret Preston



Sydney Bridge

Margaret Preston

Aboriginal Themed





Religious Pictures

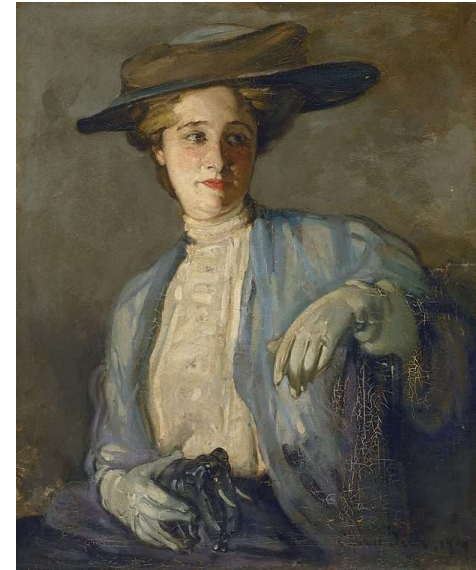


Thea Proctor

Contemporary fellow print artist and friend

Joint exhibition Grosvenor Gallery Sydney 1925

Thea Proctor by
Charlie Davis

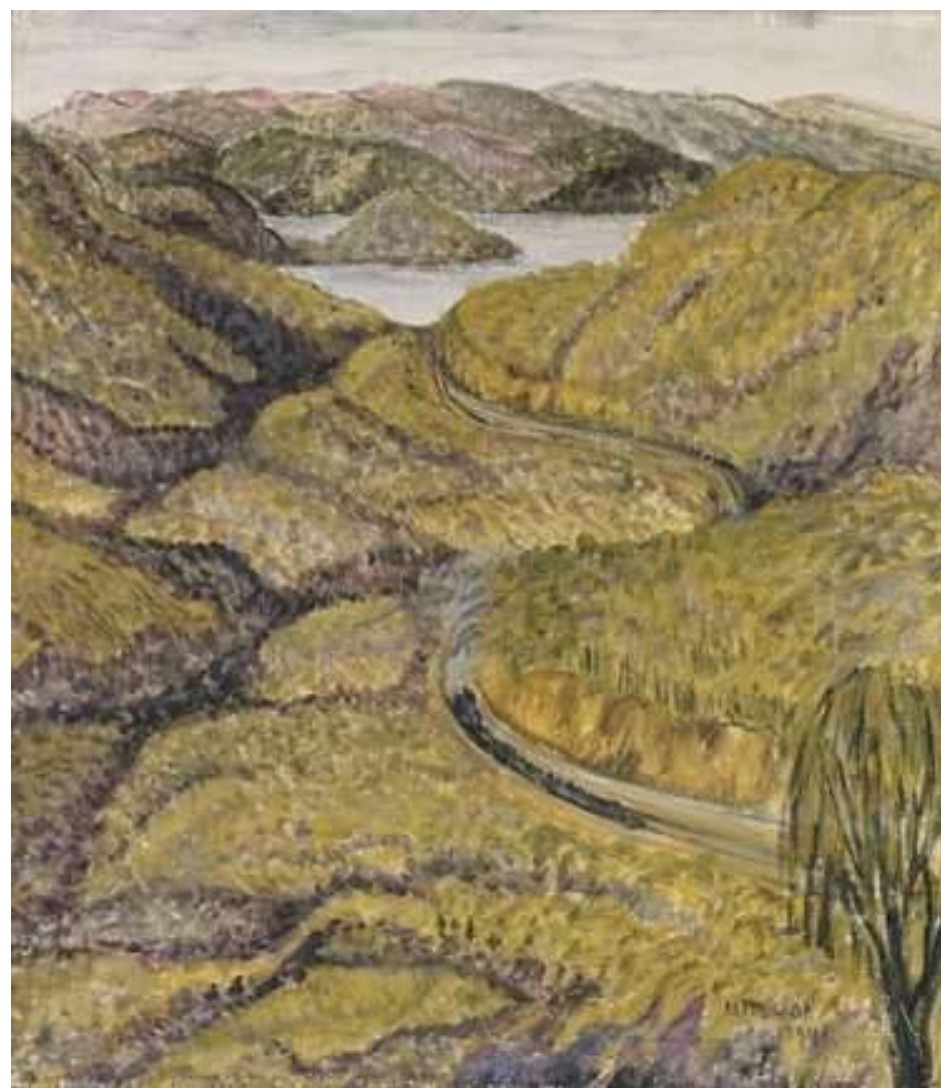


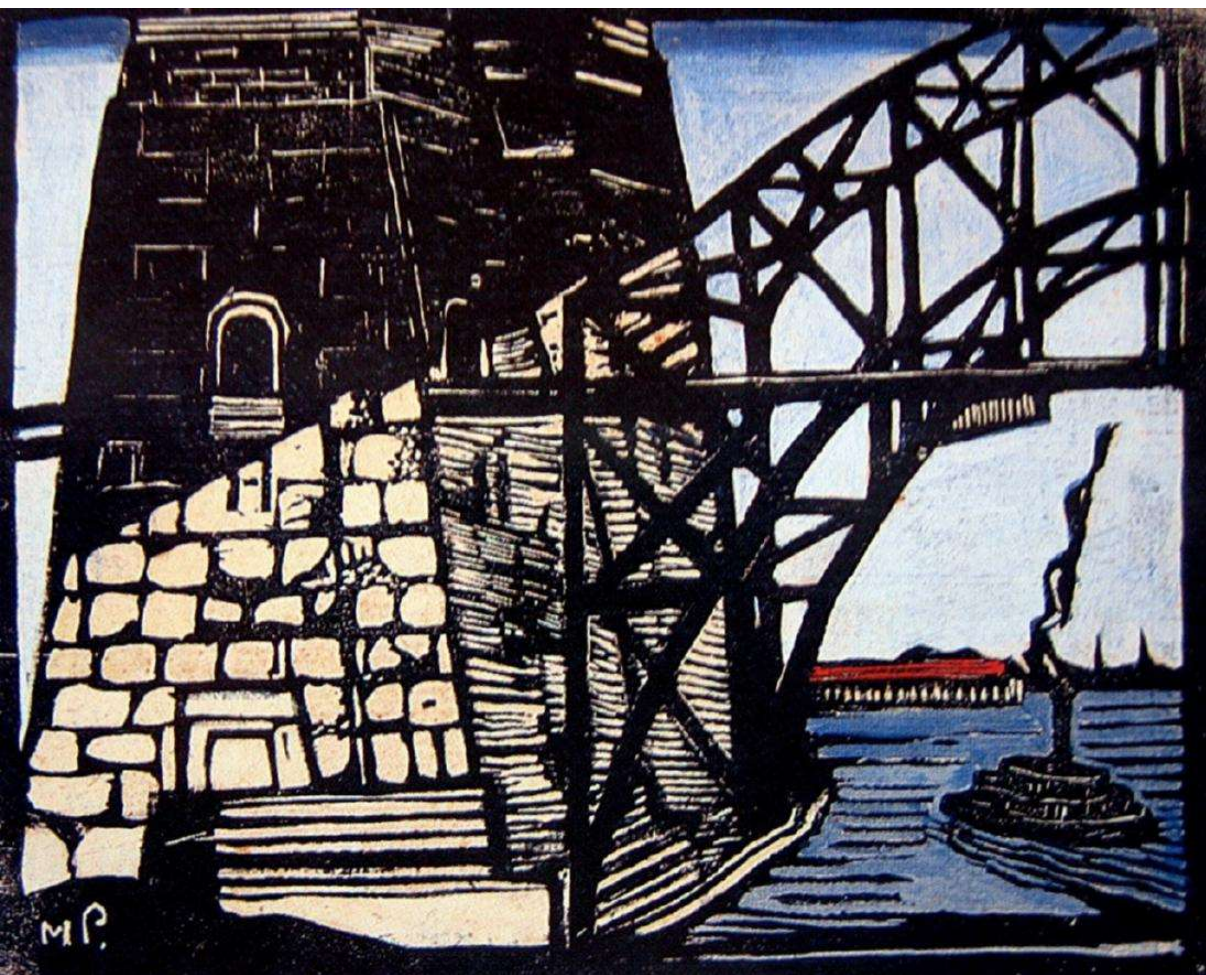






Late discovery of landscape





Where to see?



Recognised – in a small group of Australian modernists in the 20s and 30s
- but

Not formally honored – why?

- Not collegial? - but she was supportive in her writings of progressive artists.
- Not much done for women in her era?
- Certainly the later establishment saw her as operating more in the decorative sphere.

Margaret Olley

Landscape, figure and still life painter, mentor, patron, muse.

Born in Lismore, New South Wales 1923. Parents were farmers.

Tully in north Queensland and Margaret, aged barely five, was sent to board at St Anne's school in Townsville.

The family moved to Murwillumbah NSW.

High school Somerville House in Brisbane.

1941, classes at Brisbane Central Technical College.

Sydney in 1943 Art Diploma course at East Sydney Technical College.

1949 to Europe, study at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere in Paris

1953, returned to Brisbane to live with her mother.

Failed love affairs and an abortion led her to (unsuccessfully) propose marriage to her close companion, gay artist Donald Friend.

Thereafter she lived in Australia but travelled regularly, Europe, United States, New Guinea, India, Turkey and Cambodia.

Alcoholism (at the start a shyness prop) – finally beaten in 1959 – never drank again.

Shared time between Brisbane, Newcastle and Sydney – for a while had an antiques shop in Brisbane.

Permanently in Sydney from 1980



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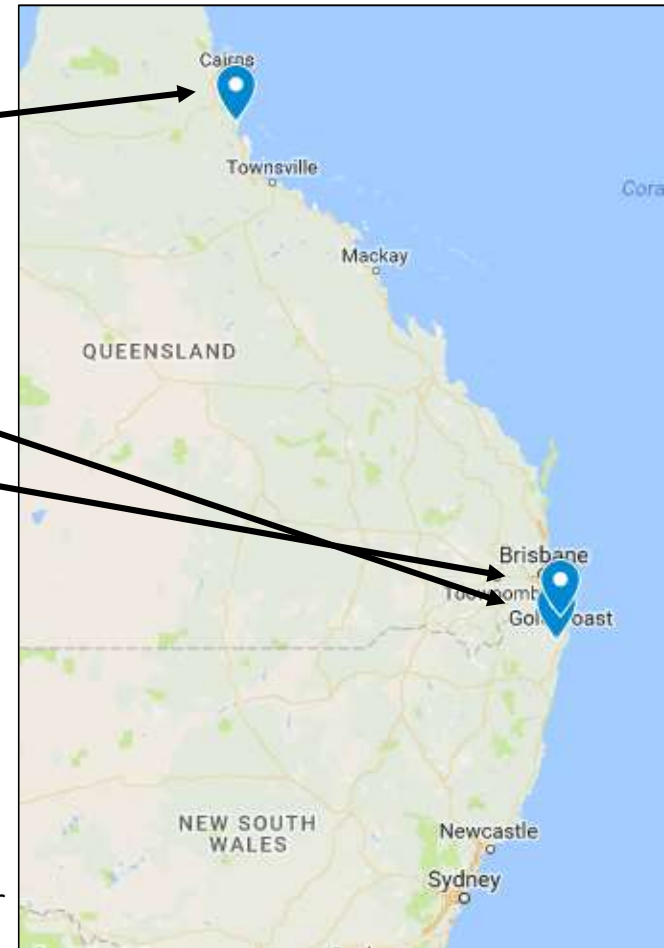
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New England NSW 1947
Mosman Art Prize winner

Landscapes

Brisbane 1956



1960s did a series of figure studies which had glowing reviews and sold very well but exposed racist attitudes in some viewers.



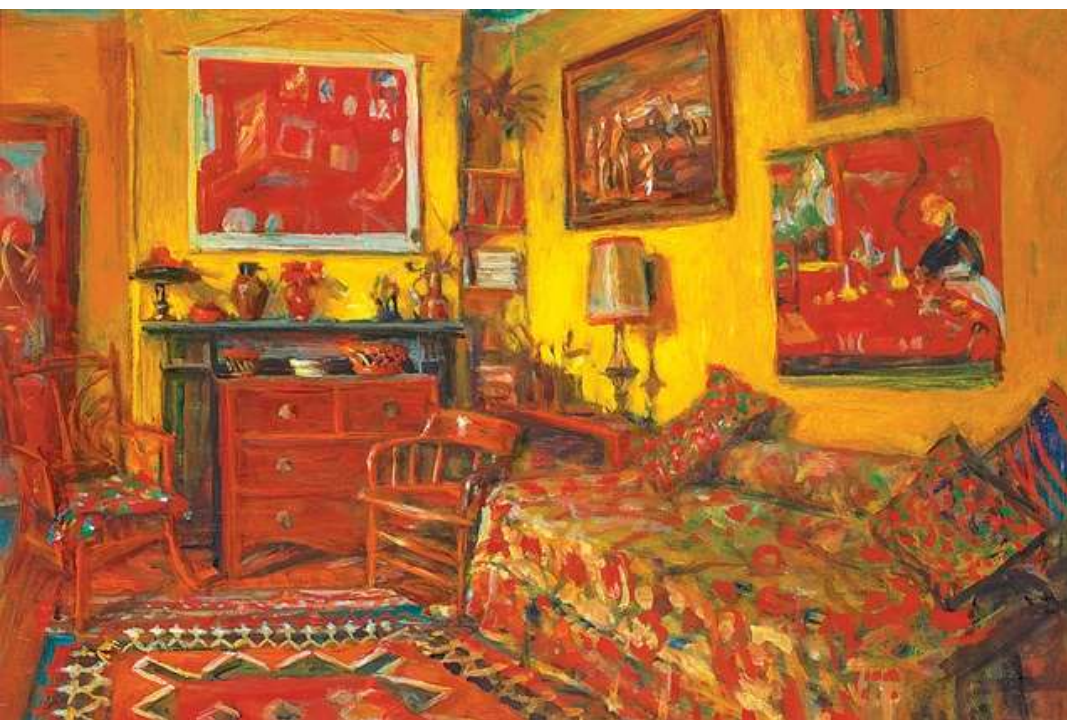


Still Lives

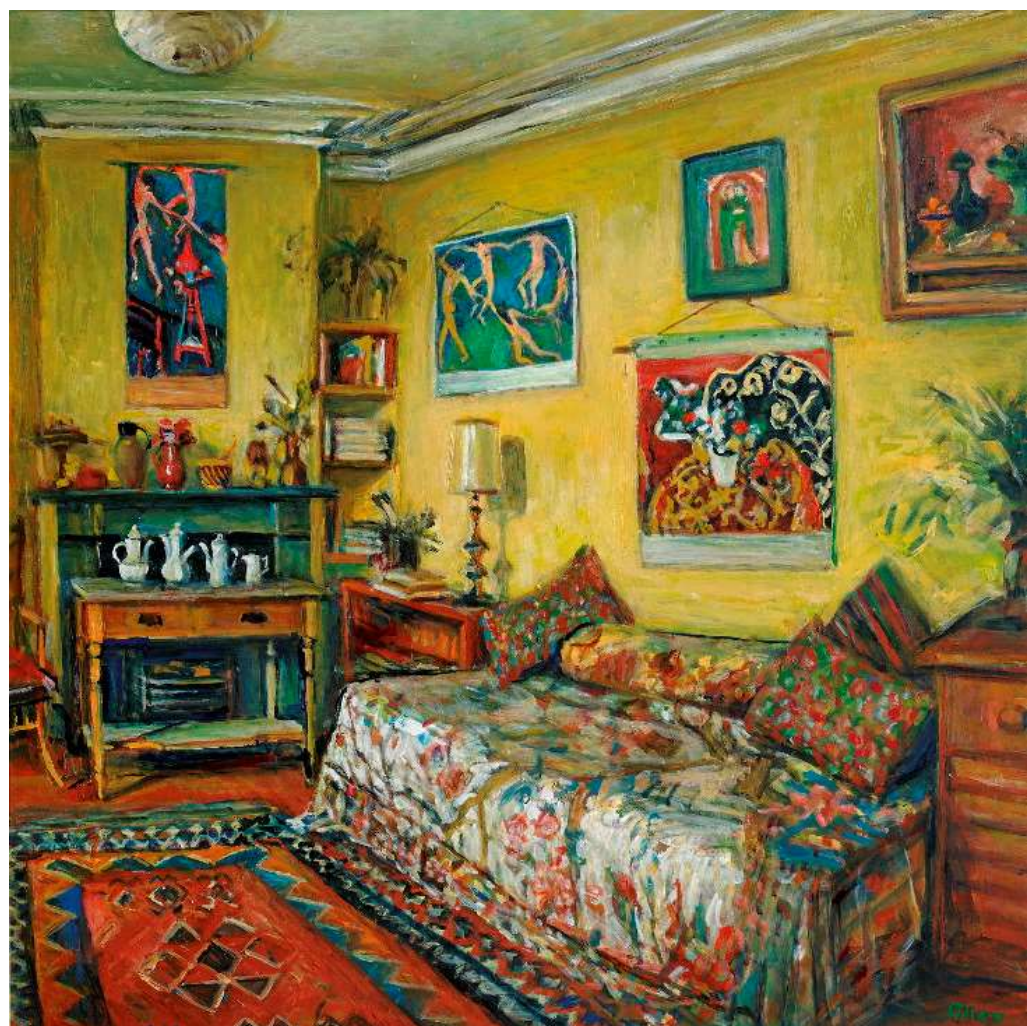






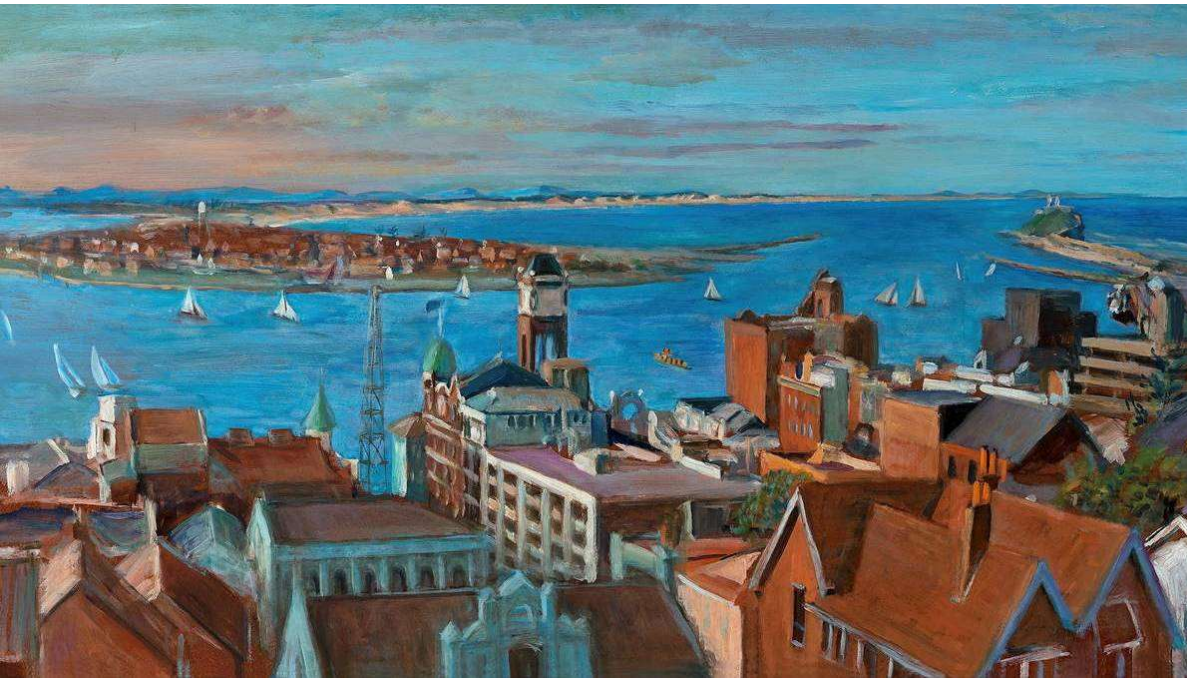


Interiors





Background pictures -
Manet



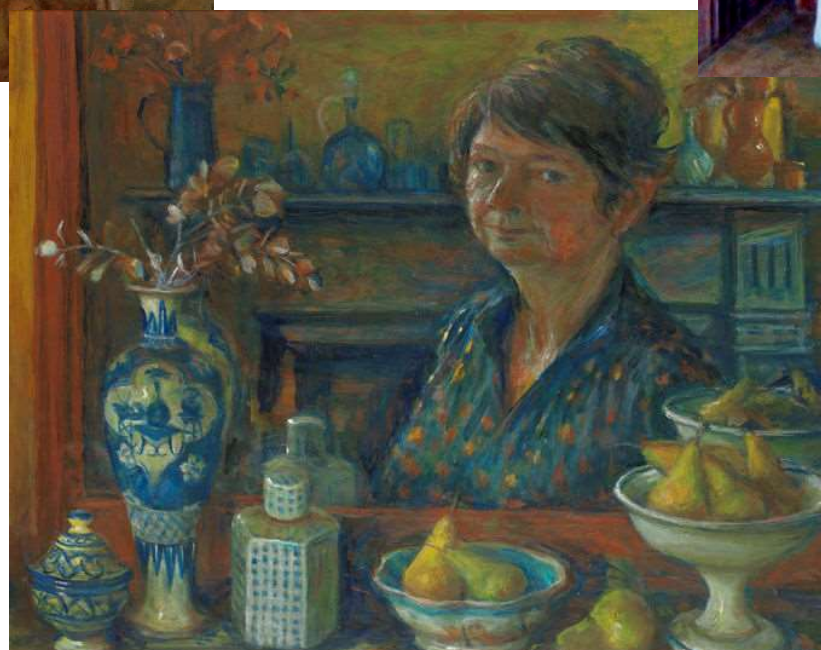
Newcastle



Sydney – triptych



Self Portraits



Much Photographed



With William Dobell





Painted Portraits

William Dobell

Portrait Margaret Olley 1948

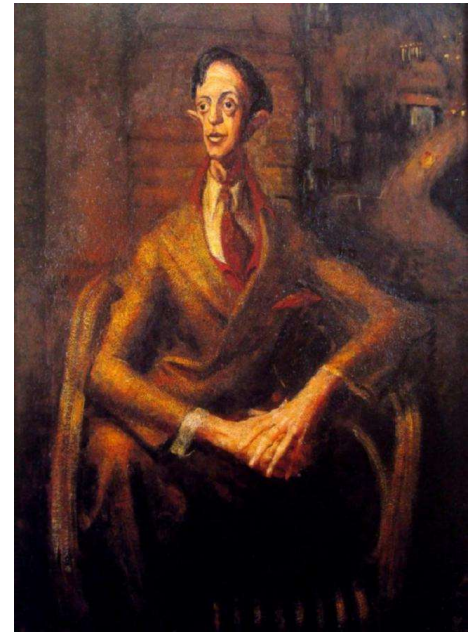
Winner of the Archibald Prize for portraiture

Accused of being a distortion

Questioned if a likeness

One Doctor critic diagnosed a particular medical condition from the portrait!

Gallery of NSW



William Dobell

1943

Portrait Joshua
Smith



Russel Drysdale 1948

Danelle
Bergstrom





Ben Quilty
2011

Winner of the Archibald
Prize
– only subject ever to have
been in a winner twice



Character:

- Fun
- Loyal
- Dedicated
- Collector
- Never reluctant to ask for something
- Loved travel, entertaining
- Garrulous with friends
- When young – plump, like a Renoir model
- “.. capable, matter-of-fact, hard working, a woman who has suffered and not whined, generous, a giver. Her tolerance and wry humour, her rare capacity for love and friendship envelops us.”

Love of her life, art dealer and theatre director Sam Hughes. Hughes would come and go, which suited Olley. He was bisexual.

Lived together for about 8 years. She inherited Hughes estate – mainly pictures.

“...never liked the institution of marriage - I dislike the notion of being owned”.

Also shunned motherhood: "I never had that nesting urge,”

Olley was awarded the inaugural Mosman Art Prize in 1947 Many others followed.

Made a Member of the Order of Australia in 1991.

In 1996 she was awarded the Companion of the Order of Australia.

1997 added as Australian National Living Treasure (100 living people).

Awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Visual Arts by the University of Sydney in 2000.

Shrewd property investor and renovator.

Generous donor to the Art Gallery of NSW, which received works estimated to value about \$7 million from her. Works by Picasso, Cezanne and Bonnard. Other galleries as well.

Last exhibition before her death Philip Bacon Galleries Brisbane 2007 sold out before it opened.

In 2009 she gave the NSW gallery \$1m to help in the \$16.2m purchase of Cezanne's landscape Bords de la Marne.

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In her studio in Paddington in Sydney
“A combined terrace house and former hat factory”
It had a small courtyard garden that she developed.





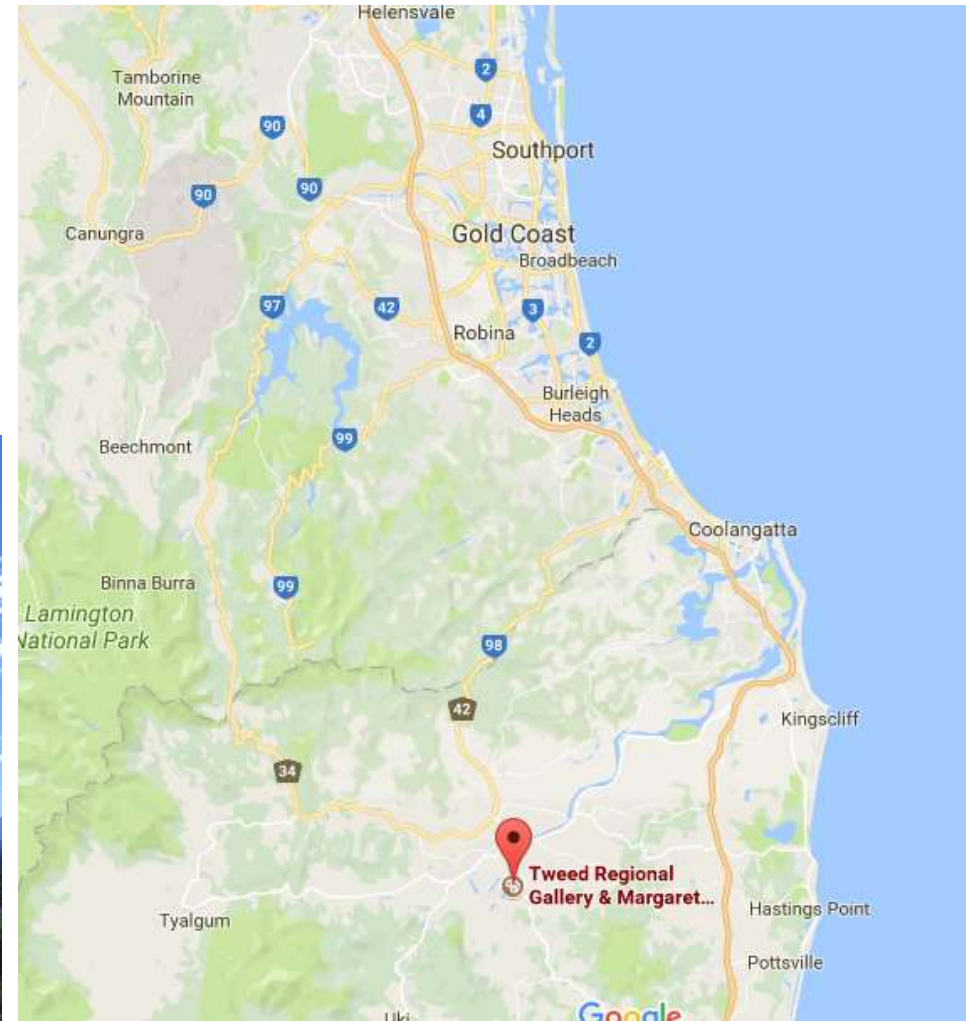
Photos by Greg Weight, taken in her studio in the last weeks of her life, while she was still working.



Where to see her pictures

Well pretty much every state and regional gallery in Aus has examples – often on display.

Tweed River Gallery and Margaret Olley Art Centre Murwillumbah



Olley

Gift from the Margaret Olley Art Trust was the genesis – with a purpose built extension to the gallery resulting.
Bequest – house contents and \$1M



Hoarding in the area



Her dining room recreated at the gallery – one of several recreated Olley rooms there.

Values at Market

Preston

Oils – A\$40,000 - \$80,000, but most early ones now in galleries so probably worth a lot more.

Lithographs - to A\$1000

Woodcuts – to A\$30,000

Olley

Oils - A\$30,000 - \$100,000 Estate still selling.

Art prints, watercolors – up to A\$10,000



End

