

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE5995

Coleman, Dorothy

(1899 - 1984)

Born 9 January, 1899, Croydon Queensland Australia

Died 1 January, 1984, Everton Park Queensland Australia

Occupation Painter, Professional photographer

Summary

Known as D.C., Dorothy Coleman was a successful commercial photographer known for her photographs of society people in Brisbane. An innovative photographer, D.C. was highly sought after for the effects she could achieve in portraiture and dance photography. D.C.'s photography was published widely in newspapers and magazines of the time. She employed and trained a number of women photographers and colourists in her photographic studio.

Details

Dorothy Coleman (or D.C., as she was also known) was born on 9 January 1899 in Croydon, North Queensland. She was the eldest child of Owen Duffy, an American gold miner, and Henrietta, who had previously managed a hotel in Croydon. The family lived in Croydon where her father owned a crushing mill, but moved following the separation of her parents in 1908. Her mother went on to manage a number of hotels in Queensland and was able to purchase a guest house in South Brisbane in 1912.

Coleman was educated in Brisbane. She received tuition in painting by Mrs Muntz Adams and Oscar Fristrom. In 1915, at the age of 15, she began working as a retoucher at the Thomas Mathewson & Sons photographic studio at North Quay, Brisbane, where she became an 'expert retoucher' (Kerr 332).

She married John Coleman in 1920 and continued to work as a retoucher and colourist, working part-time from home until 1927, when her daughter went to boarding school. She lived in Ipswich for a period but moved back to Brisbane in 1926 and began working at the Regent Studios and then for Noel Maitland. During the period 1935-1938 she was able to purchase the Murray Goldwin Studio at Ascot Chambers, corner of Queen and Edward Streets.

For over 20 years D.C. was an eminently successful photographer of society people and society weddings, often travelling further afield for these events. She also photographed the annual debutantes and ballroom dances at the Blue Moon. Her clients were 'charmed when they visited the studio, which was always filled with bowls of roses' (Design and Art Australian Online).

As the demand for her work increased D.C. was able to employ about ten assistants (most of whom were women). These included the photographers Shirley Eutrope and Faye Turner, as well the colourists Flora Hosking, Hazel Yule and Yvonne Hoffman.

D.C. developed her own techniques to enhance photographs, such as using mirrors and silhouettes to more effectively capture the dances of the ballet students of Patricia Macdonald, Gwen Ricketts and the Milligan sisters. She used a Speed Graflex camera to capture couples dancing 'at full spin,' which was unusual for the times.

D.C. was also known for her child portraiture, which was very popular during the war years when such photographs were sent to fathers serving in the armed forces abroad. At the same time, the demand for armed service men to have their photographs taken was great. US soldiers and sailors were said to have queued for portraits to be taken to send home. D.C. was so innovative that '[s]he could remove a moustache from a soldier's portrait intended for his mother, or enhance an image from a war widow's faded snapshot' (Design and Art Australian Online).

Her photographs were published in many magazines and newspapers at the time, including *The Truth*, *The Courier-Mail*, *The Telegraph*, *The Australian Women's Weekly* and *Queensland Country Life*, among others.

D.C. participated in a number of exhibitions, submitting black and white photographs of the unemployed at the St. Vincent de Paul hostel in Margaret Street. She was also involved in the Twelfth Night Theatre Company, which she documented through her photographs.

In 1960, after the death of her husband, she sold her studio and moved to Everton Park, aged 61; here she pursued her love of painting. D.C. became a member of the Royal Queensland Art Society and in 1978 (aged 79) had her first solo exhibition at the Galloway Galleries, Bowen Hills, with another to follow in 1979. The subjects of her paintings were mainly landscapes and flower studies.

D.C. died on 1 January 1984.

Technical

Dorothy Coleman used a Speed Graflex camera to capture couples dancing 'at full spin' which was unusual for the times.

Collections

National Library of Australia Manuscript collection: G.M. Mathews Collection of Portraits of Ornithologists

State Library of Queensland

University of Queensland Library

Events

1978 - 1978

Solo exhibition at the Galloway Galleries

1979 - 1979

Solo exhibition at the Galloway Galleries

1995 - 1995

Dorothy Coleman's work featured in *Queensland Image: Women's Visual Art of Yesterday and Today (1887-1995)*

1935 - 1960

1951 - 1951

Dorothy Coleman's work featured in the *4th Annual Exhibition of the Brisbane Art Group*

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Newspaper Article

Australasian Dancing Championship Comment by Fudge,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article184352195>

Barrister At Law,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article184374622>

Charming Bridal Study,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article40880508>

Dance News and Gossip,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article197272265>

Miniature Painting is Hobby of Dorothy Coleman,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article186609539>

Sensible,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article97056613>

To Honeymoon in June,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article52254263>

To Marry in Townsville,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article172597485>

Two Art Shows,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article50088272>

Book

The Story of the Camera in Australia, Cato, Jack, 1979

A Complementary Caste: A Homage to Women Artists in Queensland, Past and Present, 5 November-4 December 1988, Lerner, Bronwyn, Considine, Fran and Centre Gallery, 1988

Resource Section

Dorothy Coleman, 1995,
<https://www.daa.org.au/bio/dorothy-coleman/>

Journal Article

We Remember Dorothy Coleman, McGonagle, Dorothy A.

Book Section

Dorothy Coleman, Robins, Deborah, 1995

Edited Book

Heritage : the national women's art book, 500 works by 500 Australian women artists from colonial times to 1955, Kerr, Joan, 1995

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Dorothy Coleman, artist, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

National Gallery of Australia, Research Library Archive

[\[Dorothy Coleman : Australian and New Zealand Art Files\]](#).

John Oxley Library, Manuscripts and Business Records Collection

[Dorothy Coleman / Deborah Macfarlane](#)

Author Details

Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

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