

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE6023

Donald, Margot

(1923 -)

Born 1 January, 1923, Roseville New South Wales Australia

Occupation Professional photographer

Summary

Margot Donald worked as a commercial photographer in Sydney and London. Donald was known at the time as one of the best colourists working in Sydney.

Details

Margot Donald was born in Roseville, New South Wales in 1923; she was one of eight children, with two brothers (one of whom became a commercial artist) and five sisters. Her father was William John Donald, a cartoonist and illustrator who worked in Sydney on the Sunday newspapers.

Donald received her first camera, a Box Brownie, from her father when she was 13 years old. She completed a short course in tinting with Jean Cazneaux, the daughter of Harold Cazneaux, in 1939. Donald left school at 15, and was offered 'a position as a junior colourist at the "American-influenced" Russell Roberts Advertising Studios, Sydney who were known for "chic" and smart advertising' and remained there until 1942 (Hall 106).

She subsequently found work at the Faulk Studios (founded by Walter Barnett) in Pitt Street, Sydney. At the time these studios were considered 'more conservative' (Kerr 343).

As well as a talented photographer, Donald was also a designer. She worked in various commercial studios in Sydney, and later worked in London from 1949-1952. In addition to portraits and other general photographs, she produced sets, backgrounds and photo-murals for the studios. Donald's photographs revealed the influence of Modernism, with 'sharp focused subjects, soft modelled and highlighted with grand architectural geometrics in background' (Hall 106)

With many men away during WW2, Donald was able to gain considerable experience in photographic processes, camera operating and studio work (often using people she met on the street as models). She regularly sought feedback from the other photographers at the studio:

Initially Donald retained her position behind the camera back with Russell Roberts, where a young David Moore, working as her assistant in 1947, observed her 'very special creative talent' for setting up studio shots. This period seems to have marked Donald's greatest visibility as a commercial photographer in Australia: publications carrying her work included *Australian Photography* (1947), *Photograms of the Year* (1947) and *Contemporary Photography* (1949). (*Design and Art Australia Online*)

After the end of WW2, Donald and other women working in the studio had to give up their work for the returning soldiers.

In 1949 Donald travelled to London, where she worked at the British branch of the *American Lintas Advertising Studios*. Here, she impressed with her photographic skills and colouring techniques. The quality of her work was such that the studios wanted to incorporate her style 'into British advertising' (Australian Gallery Directors Council 14).

On her return to Australia in 1952 Donald worked as a colour retoucher for some of the large laboratories in East Sydney and was considered one of the best colourists in Sydney (*Design and Art Australia Online*). Around this time she was also introduced to colour photography.

Donald continued working as a commercial photographer after her marriage in 1952.

Collections

National Gallery of Australia

Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales

Events

1939 - 1952

Active as a commercial photographer.

1981 - 1981

Margot Donald's work featured in *Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950*

Published resources

Edited Book

Australian Photography, Ziegler, Oswald, 1947

Contemporary Photography, Le Guay, Lawrence, 1949

Silver and Grey, Fifty Years of Australian Photography 1900-1950, Newton, Gael, 1980

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

Book

Photograms of the Year, 1947

Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

Exhibition Catalogue

Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950, 1981

Mirror with a memory: photographic portraiture in Australia, Batchen, Geoffrey and Ennis, Helen, 2000

Book Section

Margot Donald, Malor, Deborah, 1995

Resource Section

Margot Donald, 1995,

<http://www.daa0.org.au/bio/margot-donald/biography/>

Archival resources

National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Margot Donald, photographer, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

Author Details

Anne Maxwell (with Morfia Grondas and Lucy Van)

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