

# Media release



## Garage discovery gives rare insight into private life of Australian icon Olive Cotton

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The romantic notion of hidden family secrets became a reality for photographer and writer Sally McInerney when her aunt Haidee showed her a handful of damaged photographs which she had salvaged from her flooded garage in Gunnedah.

Sally painstakingly pieced together the stories behind the photographs, along with her own collection, by interviewing family and friends over 10 years.

Sally crafted a beautiful and haunting artist's book which includes eleven rarely seen photos by Sally's mother, the late Olive Cotton, one of Australia's greatest photographers. It also reveals little-known aspects of Olive Cotton's life after her marriage to photographer Max Dupain ended in separation in 1941.

**Family Fragments, a new exhibition opening at the State Library of NSW from 13 February 2016**, showcases the artist's book in which Sally weaves together the fragments of photographs, amusing anecdotes from family and friends, letters, and her own memories, into a fascinating and tangled family history of love and loss.

According to curator Avryl Whitnall, "little is known about Olive's life after running Max Dupain's Studio in the 1940s, and before she was 'rediscovered' as an Australian photographer of note in the 1980s. The artist's book, now part of the Library's collection, helps to fill in those gaps."

The artist's book explores Olive's romance with farmer Ross McInerney whom she married in 1944, trading her life in the city for country life in Cowra.

In the artist's book, Sally quotes a letter Olive wrote to Ross in 1944: "I consider myself very lucky to have found you, darling. Sometimes I think that we'll show the world how to live."

Olive opened a studio in Cowra in 1964 and became well-known in the area. Sally McInerney says, "I wanted to make clear what sort of world she went into, and that her artistic life continued in Cowra. Olive was never the typical farmer's wife - she didn't even like animals up close."

The artist's book tells a complex story spanning three generations. It illuminates moments from Sally's father Ross and uncle John's childhood in Cowra between the wars, as well as the story of Olive's lifelong friend Jean Lorraine (the subject of Max Dupain's famous image 'Untitled: Jean with the wire mesh').

It was the sudden death of her beloved uncle in a plane crash in Papua New Guinea in 1953 that formed Sally's initial inspiration behind the artist's book, which was published in 2004. The tragedy left Sally's cousin Pam without a father. Some 40 years later the family discovered that John also had a son who was born three months after the crash.

Family Fragments

Photographic  
etchings  
by Sally  
McInerney



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“I had a notebook that he kept in Papua New Guinea, and I wanted to make a record so that he wouldn’t vanish. As long as things are remembered, they still exist in some way,” she says.

Sally says exhibition visitors will experience how complex things can be and how endlessly fascinating human behaviour is - “The story behind a photograph might not be what you assume.”

*Family Fragments: Photographic Etchings by Sally McInerney* is a free exhibition at the State Library of NSW from 13 February to 8 May 2016. [www.sl.nsw.gov.au](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au)

**Avryl Whitnall and Sally McInerney are available for interviews.**

**For more information, interviews and images, please contact:**

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