



Media Release



William Yang's landmark exhibition reimagined at NSW State Library

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Iconic photographer William Yang's breakthrough 1977 exhibition *Sydneyphiles* is being restaged for the first time at the State Library of NSW as part of the Sydney WorldPride 2023 celebrations and opens to the public on Saturday 11 February.

When *Sydneyphiles* debuted at the Australian Centre for Photography it broke all artistic conventions and launched the self-taught photographer's 46-year career.

"It was one of the first times Australian gay photos were shown in a gallery," says William.

"You have to remember, this was 1977 and homosexual acts between men were illegal in NSW. The wider community generally disapproved of homosexuality, and some people were against any depiction of gayness, especially in an institution," he says.

Yang's diaristic display of Sydney's vibrant cultural life – the parties, the rising stars, the city's gay subculture – saw over 200 photos tightly packed on to the gallery walls.

"Somehow, I'd stumbled upon a formula – people wanted to see photos of themselves, it didn't matter if they were in a compromising situation, it was better than being left out," says William.

Already a collector of Yang's work, the State Library jumped at the chance to work with the prolific photographer and celebrated storyteller who made his mark by evocatively capturing real-life interactions in public and private spaces with unflinching candor.

"It provided a rare opportunity to reflect on William Yang's unique participatory (and sometimes voyeuristic) perspective of Sydney at the time, before politics and the AIDS epidemic altered the city's mood forever," says State Library curator Margot Riley.

"William (or Willy Young as he was known then) had this knack for training his lens on people, many of whom were friends, who would later become cultural leaders and queer icons, including Brett Whiteley, Jenny Kee, Linda Jackson, David McDiarmid and Peter Tully," says Ms Riley.

In consultation with Yang, the Library has digitally reimagined the 'DIY' scrapbooking style of the original show combined with rarely seen vintage *Sydneyphiles* prints from the photographer's personal archive, recently acquired by the Library.

IMAGE: 'SYDNEY HEIR'S HORROR DEATH' ... 1976 PHOTO BY WILLIAM YANG

SYDNEYPHILES
REIMAGINED



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The exhibition not only looks at the heady days of Yang's early career, but also the aftermath of the show's success. Whether it was a private party, public gathering, police raid, pop concert, gallery opening, fashion parade or dinner party with friends, Yang was most certainly there, creating the photo stories which would enable him to move from behind the camera and onto the stage to become a renowned performance artist in the 1980s.

Sydneyphiles Reimagined is on display in the State Library's Amaze Gallery from 11 February to 4 June. 2023. sl.nsw.gov.au/amaze

The Library will also present little-known LGBTQI+ stories from the collection in the Amaze Gallery (from 11 February) and in the upcoming *Pride (R)evolution* exhibition, opening 18 February. sl.nsw.gov.au/pride

William Yang will be performing *Gay Sydney: A Memoir* at the Seymour Centre from 19 to 23 February.

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