

## Packing up the Paddington home

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**Monday, 10 March 2014**

*This is the fourth in a series of feature articles about the Margaret Olley Art Centre and the celebrated artist it honours.*

### **Moving home can be stressful at the best of times.**

So imagine the pressures of moving the possessions of a late and treasured icon of Australian art; and knowing those thousands of items had to be placed in exactly the same order when they finished their 800km journey north.

Then add the complexities of packing in rooms with barely enough room for one person to move - jammed between a celebrated lifetime of furniture, piles of books and other items including flowers and fruit made famous in Margaret Olley's still-life paintings.

Margaret Olley Art Centre (MOAC) Project Coordinator Sally Watterson faced all of this as she spent a year cataloguing, cleaning and packing nearly 76,000 items, doing it alone for the first few months because there literally wasn't enough space for another person in the rooms of Olley's Sydney home.

If there was one pressure relief valve for Ms Watterson, it was the absence of any precedent for her task.

"This had never been done before on this scale - a private housing going into a gallery - so there was no way of measuring whether it was done well. It was just a case of getting in and getting it done," she said.

"I had been to Margaret's twice while she was alive and I was very aware of her legacy, but it had to be an intellectual process rather than an emotional process.

"The items needed to be recorded and stored quickly so they were secure and could be transported to the climate controlled storage we had organised in the Tweed.

"It's extremely rare for an artist's space to be preserved and put on display for the long term, so there was an unusually high level of preservation required."

She said the work in Olley's Paddington home was highly intricate, meticulous and, therefore, mentally demanding. Attention to detail included monitoring light in the room so it could be recreated at MOAC.

"We also had to make a lot of quick decisions about what should go into MOAC and what should remain part of her private life," Ms Watterson said.

"It was important to respect the legacy of Margaret Olley without prying too much into her personal life."

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The Gallery and Café is open from Wednesday to Sunday 10am – 5pm.