12 July – 22 September 2019

2019 olive cotton award
for photographic portraiture

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The Olive Cotton Award for photographic portraiture is a $20,000 biennial national award for excellence in photographic portraiture dedicated to the memory of photographer Olive Cotton. The winning work is acquired for the Gallery’s collection. The exhibition is selected from entrants across Australia and is a significant opportunity for photographers living and working in Australia.

The Award was launched in 2005, and is funded by Olive Cotton’s family and dedicated to her memory as one of Australia’s leading twentieth century photographers. The Award has grown and gained national recognition attracting entries from established and emerging photographers across Australia. The Award boasts a major acquisitive biennial prize of $20,000, selected by the Award Judge. In addition, the Friends of the Tweed Regional Gallery and Margaret Olley Art Centre Inc. fund $4000 for the acquisition of portraits chosen by the Gallery Director for the collection. Visitors to the exhibition may also vote for the ‘People’s Choice Award’ of $250 for the most popular portrait.

The Gallery thanks art dealer Josef Lebovic and photographer Sally McInerney, Olive Cotton’s daughter, for their ongoing support of the Award. Thanks also to the Friends of the Gallery committee for their contributions, both financial and practical, to the Award and opening event.

Marian Drew is Adjunct Associate Professor at the Queensland College of Art, and is one of Australia’s most influential and significant photo-media artists, with a practice spanning more than thirty years.

She has held over thirty solo exhibitions and numerous group shows in Australia, New Zealand, USA, Germany, France, China, Dubai, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Mexico and Peru. Her work is held in collections that include the John Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Museum of Photographic Art, San Diego, National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of South Australia, Gallery of Modern Art, Queensland, Murdoch University, and University of Queensland.


The ideas and history of the portrait are ancient and fascinating. This person existed in this way, at this time. Sounds simple but it's not. In the Olive Cotton Award for Photographic Portraiture exhibition, we look and try to find the person inside the performative stage. We navigate a photographic language informed by almost 180 years of photography and by painting before that. In the context of the millions of portraits taken every day through smart devices, what do we look for in a portrait exhibition? A counterpoint to the happy ‘selfie’? As a judge, I’m looking for something genuine, reflective, curious and fragile — ideas and images that lie at the edge, generating diversity and subtlety.

It seems difficult to push too many boundaries around the portrait because we are so attached to the face, to see ourselves in history, and to find a kind of beauty in people. Objectified by the nature of photography, portraits allow us to stare at people, even though we were taught not. Even in this image-mediated world, we still tend to trust the face. We have learned from a young age to see power, how it may be used for good or bad. We have learned from a young age to see others and ourselves through the camera lens, constructed to fit various social and personal norms of how we should look and act. Happy, rich, glamorous, thoughtful, intelligent, relaxed people dominate the social pages of Facebook and Instagram. Exhibitions like the Olive Cotton Award, that represents 432 entries and 79 selected exhibitors, deepen our sense of shared history and present a more nuanced and critical view of emotions, status and humanity, represented through contemporary photography.

The photographer and the subject have collaborated to create an image that we hope is sincere. As we stare, we see a lot of different people similar to ourselves. The familiarity is heartfelt. The indexical portrait is a protest against nihilism, a statement of existence in a lineage of existence. If portraiture does anything, it tells us that something of the sitter, the photographer and the viewer brings to the image that gives it meaning. So if one makes an effort to look carefully and critically, a portrait may tell the expression of the person photographed and in the strategies, techniques and ideas that produce the photograph. Through the individual or group portrait, the viewer uses metaphor to extrapolate broader social themes, social anxieties, thresholds, prejudice and fear of one’s temporality. The function of the portrait is to see oneself in context with others.

As one that has worked with photography for decades, I am interested in how the photographic process solicits a particular response. A friend wielding a camera is enough to snap to attention our self-conscious photo face. We understand its

power, how it may be used for good or bad. We understand this humanity through various lenses: historical lenses bring experience and experimentation to the fore; metaphoric lenses reveal beauty, symbol and poetry; or a forensic lens that looks for evidence to determine what is going on. Viewers employ analysis and metaphor to search for meaning in the photograph.

In an exhibition like the Olive Cotton Award, one may recognise shifts in popular culture and slow-moving socio-emotional currents over time. One becomes aware of power structures, the photographer–‘model’ relationship, the gallery-audience relationship, the idea of a winner. Photography contributes to inquiry and knowledge, individually and as a society, within certain set shared rules and frameworks. The portrait genre creates an ancestral lineage that potentially reflects not only the changes in technology and fashion, but shifts in cultural norms, a kind of sociocultural litmus test.

Looking at portraits, one holds a mirror to oneself. Importantly it’s what the viewer brings to the image that gives it meaning. So if one makes an effort to look carefully and critically, a portrait may tell something of the sitter, the photographer and the viewer. It’s important to question the ideologies and processes that form the portrait and help shape this visual experiment of shared experience.

1 Using photographs to create a map, a drawing, a measurement, or a 3D model.
1  Hoda Afshar
born 1983, lives and works in Melbourne, VIC
The Portait of Shamindan & Ramsiyar
Manus Island 2018
inkjet print

2  Melissa Anderson
born 1974, lives and works in Brisbane, QLD
Rose 2018
silver gelatin print

3  Riste Andrievski
born 1973, lives and works in Wollongong, NSW
Elisabeth Cummings — The Artist Studio 2018
inkjet print

4  George Angelovski
born 1974, lives and works between Melbourne, VIC and Singapore
suBconscious fat 2018
cape print on white opal glass, opalotype

5  Simon Bernhardt
born 1976, lives and works in Sydney, NSW
Now I Know Why 2018
type C print

6  Isaac Brown
born 1980, lives and works in Perth, WA
Leith on the Hyden-Norseman Road 2018
inkjet print

7  Chris Budgeon
born 1955, lives and works in Melbourne, VIC
Dr. Rodney Syme 2018
chromogenic print

8  Margaret Ellen Burns
born 1983, lives and works in Perth, WA
Leith on the Hyden-Norseman Road 2018
inkjet print

9  Steve Bush
born 1958, lives and works in Brunswick Heads, NSW
Couple 2018
inkjet print

10  Brett Canet-Gibson
born 1973, lives and works in Wollongong, NSW
Elisabeth Cummings — The Artist Studio 2018
inkjet print

11  Dave Carswell
born 1983, lives and works in Melbourne, VIC
John Archer 2018
giclee fine art print

12  Peter Cheng
born 1990, lives and works in Perth, WA
Chester 2019
giclee fine art print

13  Francis Cloake
born 1969, lives and works in Byron Bay, NSW
Swim 2019
ultra chrome pigment print

14  Michael Corradiore
born 1962, lives and works in Sydney, NSW
Swim 2019
pigment print

15  Judith Nangala Crispin
born 1970, lives and works in Wamboin, NSW
Lily returns to Altair, the brightest of Aquila’s stars, wearing the body of a crow
2019
Lumachrome glass print, cliche-verre, chemigram.
Roadkill crow, ochres & dandelion seeds on fibre paper . 32 hours sunlight under marked perspex.

16  Gervyn Davies
born 1985, lives and works in Sydney, NSW
Ella — Beautifully Sad 2019
inkjet print

17  Agnieszka Davis
born 1979, lives and works in Brisbane, QLD
School Window 2018
digital art print

18  Isabella Doherty
born 1993, lives and works in Castlemaine, VIC
Pearl, In Retrospect 2017
pigment print
19 Ella Dreyfus  
born 1960, lives and works in Sydney, NSW  
giclée archival print with UltraChrome pigment inks on Canson Photographique paper

22 Jacqueline Felstead  
born 1976, lives and works in Melbourne VIC  
Loss in a simulated environment 2017  
pigment print of flattened 3D photogrammetric model made from 250 photographs

25 Gary Grealy  
born 1953, lives and works in Sydney, NSW  
Dr Ted Gott, Senior Curator of International Art, NGV 2018  
injet print

20 Stephen Dupont  
born 1967, lives and works in Scarletborough, NSW  
Man and child 2017  
injet print

23 Steph Fuller  
born 1992, lives and works in Adelaide, SA  
Stargazer 2019  
archival giclée print on cotton rag paper, framed with museum glass

26 Natalie Grono  
born 1997, lives and works in Lennox Head, NSW  
Yahndi the Dance Warrior 2018  
injet print

21 Justin Ealand  
born 1971, lives in Farrants Hill, works in Wollombi, NSW  
Ellie May & Benjamin William McDonald Law 2018  
injet print

24 Douglas Gibson  
born 1984, lives and works in Sydney, NSW  
Jim Joe, seated with hose 2019  
archival pigment print

27 Imogen Hall  
born 1963, lives and works between Barmagui, NSW and Melbourne, VIC  
Elder Robert Foster at Horseshoe Bay 2018  
injet print

28 Geoff Harvey  
born 1954, lives and works in Sydney NSW  
Workshop self-portrait 2019  
digital Type C print

31 Vanessa Howells  
born 1988, lives and works in Brunswick, VIC  
Woman in Another Landscape, A Modern History of Art 2019  
pigment print on cotton rag

34 Lisa Kurtz  
born 1971, lives and works in Brisbane, QLD  
Aslan 2018  
injet print

29 Petrina Hicks  
born 1972, lives and works in Sydney, NSW  
Oleastro 2019  
pigment print

32 Shea Kirk  
born 1985, lives and works in Melbourne, VIC  
Chelsea Wheeley self and right view 2019  
pigment print

35 Kelle Leczniksa  
born 1982, lives and works in Sydney, NSW  
Nelson East — The Ephemeral Nature of Dance 2018  
injet print on platine

2019 olive cotton award for photographic portraiture | 9
37 Robyn MacRee  
born 1965, lives and works in Tumut, NSW  
The Son  2017  
injet print

38 Gamine Maguire  
born 1965, lives and works in Melbourne, VIC  
Tony an Australian 2018  
injet print

39 Paula Mahoney  
born 1972, lives and works in Melbourne, VIC  
Clot  2019  
giclee print

40 Belinda Mason  
born 1971, lives and works in Church Point, NSW  
Taken  2019  
lenticular

41 Mia Maia McDonald  
born 1982, lives and works in Narrm/  
Melbourne, VIC  
Courtney wearing a green shirt  2018  
injet print

42 Andrew Merry  
born 1967, lives and works in Katoomba, NSW  
Fea figure stereograph, Euan Mackay  2019  
pigment print

43 Mario Mirabile  
born 1959, born lives and works in Melbourne, VIC  
Stephen McLaughlan  2018  
pigment inkjet print

44 Brett Moffatt  
born 1973, lives and works in Gold Coast, QLD  
Clot  2018  
digital chromogenic print

45 Fiona Morris  
born 1972, lives and works in Thirroul, NSW  
Family Portrait of Sisters  2019  
pigment print on cotton paper

38 * 39 * 40 * 41 * 42 * 43 * 44 *
Nathan Stolz
born 1987, lives and works in Melbourne, VIC
Mark, Alice Springs
2018
chromira type C print

Tristan Still
born 1980, lives and works in Stanmore, NSW
Raynen
2018
archival pigment print

Stephanie Simcox
born 1986, lives and works in Sydney, NSW
The waterhole
2018
inkjet print

Damien Shen
born 1976, lives and works in Adelaide, SA
One Percent
2019
analogue multimedia tintype photograph, charcoal drawing and etching

Russell Shakespeare
born 1963, lives and works in Gold Coast, QLD
Tim Fairfax
2018
digital type C / digital chromogenic print

Robert Scott-Mitchell
born 1954, lives and works in Coorabell, NSW
Communion — Lindy Lee with pack
2019
pigment print on museum rag

Chris Sinclair
born 1978, lives and works in Brisbane, QLD
The Chief
2017
giclée print on photo rag
Olive Cotton

Olive Cotton (1911–2003) discovered the art of photography during childhood and was committed to the practice throughout her life. After gaining an Arts degree, she worked successfully as a photographer at Max Dupain’s Sydney studio until the end of World War II. She was married to Dupain from 1937–1939 and then in 1944 married Ross McInerney and moved to the bush near Koorawatha, NSW.

For 20 years she had no access to darkroom facilities, but continued taking photographs. In 1964 Cotton opened a small studio in Cowra and in 1985, after a 40 year absence, re-emerged with her first solo exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney. She then concentrated on rediscovering and printing her life’s work. In 2000 the Art Gallery of NSW showed Olive Cotton, a major retrospective of Cotton’s work, curated by Helen Ennis, lecturer at the Australian National University, Canberra School of Art.

In 2016–17 Cotton was featured in the National Gallery of Australia’s touring exhibition Max & Olive: The Photographic life of Olive Cotton & Max Dupain curated by Dr Shaune Lakin.

Portrait of a Girl 1931
Olive Cotton by Max Dupain
Previous Winners

2005
Ella Dreyfus
The Lads: Natz and Dax (detail)
Judge: Sally McInerney

2006
Siri Hayes
Monty / Sally
Judge: Dr Gene Sherman

2007
George Fetting
Sheik Taj Din al-Hilali, former Mufti of
Australia – Lakemba (detail)
Judge: Richard Moore

2008
Emily Portmann
The Stone (detail)
Judge: Rex Dupain

2009
Richard O'Farrell
Savitri (detail)
Judge: Dean Sewell

2011
Tamara Dean
Damien Skipper (detail)
Judge: Naomi Cass

2013
Trent Parke
Candid portrait of a woman on a
street corner (detail)
Judge: Helen Ennis

2015
Natalie Grono
Pandemonium’s shadow (detail)
Judge: Stephen Dupont

2017
Justine Varga
Maternal Line (detail)
Judge: Dr Shaune Lakin
The Olive Cotton Award is funded by the family of Olive Cotton with additional purchase awards funded by the Friends of Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre Inc. Tweed Regional Gallery & Margaret Olley Art Centre is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.