

Sally a perfect fit for packing Olley collection

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

All roads led to Sally Watterson when the search began to find the perfect person to relocate Margaret Olley's belongings up the Pacific Highway from Sydney to Murwillumbah.

Not only is she highly experienced in managing museums and historic houses, and was the inaugural head of the Tweed regional museum, she now lives close to Olley's Paddington home and twice visited the treasured artist's house while she was alive.

Equipped with 18 years' experienced in museum management, Ms Watterson also has a degree in fine arts. "It was lucky I had that skill set and now lived in Sydney, which spared the project the cost and logistics of sending someone down there for the year-long process of cataloguing and packing Margaret's belongings," she said.

Working as the Senior Curator at the Tweed River Regional Museum from 2004 to 2009 - before the name was changed to Tweed Regional Museum and position became Museum Director - meant she was also familiar with Council's processes.

"When Susi contacted me to see if I wanted the job, a couple of months after Margaret passed, I could see it was the perfect fit," she said.

"While I did not know Margaret personally, I had been to her home twice for work.

"It was one of the most densely populated houses you could imagine.

"There was so much to see, your eyes could not settle on anything."

However, the year she spent cleaning, recording and packing the thousands of items in the Paddington home gradually gave her greater insight to Olley and the artist's surprisingly organised nature.

"It initially seemed like chaos and I had to divide each room into workable sections," Ms Watterson said.

"However, as I packed, it became clear the piles of books and conglomerations of ornaments and other items were all well organised.

"Her close friend and executor, Christine France, had made it clear that Margaret knew where everything was, and I soon discovered that what looked like random piles was really Margaret's very informal cataloguing system."

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