

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5970

Moore, Mina Louise

(1882 - 1957)

Born 6 October, 1882, Wanui New Zealand

Died 30 January, 1957, Croydon Victoria Australia

Occupation Professional photographer

Summary

Mina Moore was a successful photographer who worked initially in New Zealand and then in Sydney and Melbourne. Together with her sister she specialised in portraits of prominent people and artists, including society/celebrity portraits, with some wedding and children's portraits. Mina Moore later set up her own studio in Melbourne and utilised unconventional backdrops, such as untreated hessian.

Details

Mina Moore was a highly successful photographer working in Melbourne, and like her sister, May Moore, she specialised in portraits of prominent people including those from the art world.

She was born on 6 October 1882 in Wainui, New Zealand, one of seven children (May being the eldest and Mina the second eldest daughter). Their father, Robert Walter Moore, was an English immigrant who was a timber cutter and farmer, and their mother was Sarah Jane, née Hellyer. The couple were not wealthy but were able to save enough money to purchase a small property in Wainui, a small farming settlement just north of Auckland, in which to settle and raise a family. Prior to this they had lived in various forestry camps.

Mina had no art school training but worked as a teacher in a country school, which was situated near their home. In 1907 she travelled to Australia, visiting Sydney and Melbourne, taking with her the Box Brownie camera that she had borrowed from a relative. During this trip her interest in photography was ignited. She later recalled her wonderment at being in a friend's darkroom in Footscray and seeing film being processed: 'I was tremendously interested. Five years later I returned to Melbourne and opened a photographic studio in the newly built J. & N. Tait Auditorium Buildings in Collins Street' (Australian Gallery Directors Council 23).

When Mina returned to New Zealand she did not return to her work as a teacher. Instead, she decided to pursue her interest in photography. At this time the Alexander Orr studio in Wellington was being sold and the two sisters bought it from him for £170, quite a large amount of money at the time. Prior to the Alexander Orr studio's departure, May was able to learn camera-handling skills from the staff and Mina learned the printing process, all in a space of six weeks.

Both sisters were deeply interested in theatre, and some of their early work was of 'costume studies' for theatre companies. Their first major assignment was photographing the entire cast of an American theatre company that was visiting New Zealand at the time.

In 1911 Mina joined May in Sydney. Much of the work they did here was co-signed 'May and Mina Moore,' and it has been suggested that the sisters may have had an agreement to share their success together. They went on to develop a distinctive style and a reputation for producing high quality portraiture. Initially, they could not afford to rent large, light-filled studio spaces with glass walls and roofs (as was the practice of at the time) and had to make do with the limited light available to them from windows. As Jack Cato explains, this resulted in photographs that 'were in low key, with a strong light on one side of the face and strong shadow on the other. It was the light Rembrandt used for his paintings and was particularly suitable for men' (Cato 130).

Mina moved to Melbourne in April 1913 and set up a studio of her own. It has been suggested that there may have been some conflict between the sisters, although May assisted Mina make the move (Australian Gallery Directors Council 23).

She quickly established herself in Melbourne, initially knowing only the musician Fritz Hart and Mrs Hart. One of her early commissions was to photograph the members of the Quinlan Grand Opera Company. The studio she established did not utilise any props and her backdrops were made of untreated hessian, unlike the conventional painted backdrops that were popular at the time. Mina worked with a freelance female journalist in 1913, and utilised the relaxing environment of her studio to conduct interviews and photo sessions.

In 1914, with the outbreak of the War, both May and Mina produced hundreds of portraits of young soldiers before they set off for the battlefields in North Africa and Europe. Like her sister May, Mina would take the time to familiarise herself with her sitters, trying to put them at ease, a personal quality that helps account for the appeal of their photographs.

All of Mina's professional work was completed in studio settings and she was not known to photograph outdoors. Her last major commission involved the photographing of the Shell Oil Company's employees. She printed the photographs taken by interstate photographers of employees from their states, and compiled a single volume which was finally completed in 1927.

On 20 December 1916 she married William Tainsh, a poet and executive of an oil company. In 1918 she gave birth to her first child (she had three children in total). Although her interest in photography had not abated, her family's needs took precedence and she decided to devote herself to bringing up her children. She later said of her decision: 'I had to choose between caring for a baby daughter and paying someone else to do so while I went to business' (Australian Gallery Directors Council 24), and so it was that in she sold her Melbourne studio to the Melbourne photographer Ruth Hollick.

Mina and her family moved to Warrandyte later that year and she established friendships with the artists Clara Southern, Jo Sweatman, Penleigh Boyd and Jessie Traill. They moved again in 1922 to Croydon and it was here on 30 January 1957 that Mina eventually died aged 75.

Collections

Art Gallery of New South Wales

Art Gallery of South Australia

Grainger Museum, University of Melbourne

La Trobe Collection, State Library of Victoria

Macleay Photograph Collection, Macleay Museum Collection, NSW

The Shaw Research Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria

National Gallery of Australia

Events

1996 - 1996

Mina Moore was featured in *The Reflecting Eye: Portraits of Australian Visual Artists*

1981 - 1981

Mina Moore featured in *Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950*

1907 - 1907

Mina Moore featured in *New Zealand International Exhibition*

Mina Moore exhibited her painted miniatures at the NSW Society of Women Painters

1911 - 1927

Was active as a professional photographer

Published resources

Photograph

Portrait, c.1916?, Moore, May and Moore, Mina, 1995

Portrait of an Actress, Moore, May and Moore, Mina, 2000

Resource Section

Annie May and Mina Moore,
<https://www.daa0.org.au/bio/group/references/annie-may-and-mina-moore-1/>

Moore, Annie May (1881-1931), Hall, Barbara, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100546b.htm>

Book

Australian Women Photographers 1840 - 1960, Hall, Barbara and Mather, Jenni, 1986

Australians Behind the Camera: Directory of Early Australian Photographers 1841 to 1945, Barrie, Sandy, c1992

'I was only a maid': The life of a remarkable woman: May Moore: Reminiscences of May Moore as related to members of her family and to her friends., Burkett, M. E., 2003?

The Story of the Camera in Australia, Cato, Jack, 1979

The reflecting eye: portraits of Australian visual artists, Ennis, Helen, National Library of Australia and National Portrait Gallery (Australia), 1996,
<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/125722/20110309-0156/www.nla.gov.au/pub/ebooks/pdf/the+reflecting+eye.pdf>

Exhibition Catalogue

Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950, 1981

Mirror with a memory: photographic portraiture in Australia, Batchen, Geoffrey and Ennis, Helen, 2000

Resource

Beyond the Picket Fence: Australian Women's Art in the National Library's Collection, Carr, Sylvia and National Library of Australia, 1995,
<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/36337/20030703-0000/www.nla.gov.au/exhibitions/fence/picket.html>

Thesis

Making Pictures: Australian Pictorial Photography as Art 1897-1957, Ebury, Francis, 2001

Magazine article

Versatile May Moore- Photographs, Miniatures, and Domesticity, Hutton, Bruce R., 1925

A First For Women Photographers in Australia: Quick Thinking and Ladders Got the Top Shots, Bowen, Jill, 1981,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55457051>

Book Section

May Moore and Mina Moore, Newton, Gael,, 1995

Newspaper Article

May Moore, 1921,
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article125391061>

Archival resources

National Gallery of Australia, Research Library Archive

[[May Moore : Australian and New Zealand Art Files](#)].

National Library of Australia, Ephemera Collection

[[Moore, May : photography related ephemera material collected by the National Library of Australia](#)]

Author Details

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