Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE5986

Hollick, Ruth

(1883 - 1977)

Born	18830317, Williamstown Victoria Australia
Died	19770407, Sandringham Victoria Australia
Occupation	Photographer

Summary

Ruth Hollick was a well-connected and award-winning society photographer based in Melbourne, whose work was exhibited throughout Australia and internationally. Hollick's career spanned 70 years, and she is recognised as one of Australia's most successful professional photographers. Hollick's clientele included the Baillieus, the McCaugheys and the Hams. Hollick was also renowned for her portraits of children and fashion photography.

Details

Ruth Hollick was an award-winning society photographer who exhibited in Australia and internationally. She was one of Australia's most successful professional photographers, her career lasting approximately 70 years. She is best known today for her portraits of children.

Ruth Hollick was born on 17 March 1883 in Williamstown, Victoria. She was the youngest of 13 children. Her parents were originally from England and her father worked as a senior customs official in Australia. The year she was born the family moved to Moonee Ponds, Melbourne, where she lived and worked for most of her career. Her parents encouraged artistic expression and from an early age she expressed the desire to study drawing at the National Gallery School of Design, which she eventually did from 1902 to 1906. At this school the painter Frederick McCubbin taught her and became a lifelong friend. In McCubbin's classes she met Dorothy Izard, who was to become her long-time companion and professional partner. She also met the painter Dora L. Wilson and the photographer Pegg Clarke (Dora and Pegg eventually went on to share a studio). These four women forged a strong personal friendship.

Hollick's interest in photography dates back to 1907, when she first started producing portraits in a small darkroom that she set up in the family home. In 1908 she began taking on freelance portrait work and then, along with Izard, she travelled about in a small French car visiting the prosperous towns of Victoria's Western District and the Riverina, photographing the wealthy families of the district. Their method was to place advertisements in local newspapers prior to their visits, thus generating interest among the locals. Most of their photographs were created outdoors using a field camera. They included 'casually stage-managed studies of children playing under trees' and family scenes. One, for example, showed a family 'lounging around their splendid car' (Australian Gallery Directors' Council 16). Upon their return to Melbourne, Hollick continued to work from her parents' home in Moonee Ponds. This was to serve as her base during WW1, the very period when her photographic career first took shape. Working from there she was said to 'eclipse both Mina Moore and Alice Mills with her dramatic composition and free use of light in pictorial portraiture' (Hall 64).

When Mina Moore retired in 1918, and her studio at 167 Collins Street, Melbourne (situated in the Auditorium Building) became available, Hollick and Izard purchased it. They were to remain there until 1929. It was from this studio that Hollick was able to fully establish herself as a professional photographer. By the end of WW1 Hollick, along with her friend Pegg Clarke, were considered the leading photographers in Melbourne. Both were known for their fashion photography, their high society portraits, especially of debutantes and brides, and their portraits of visiting celebrities. In 1930 Hollick was appointed the official photographer of the British aviatrix Amy Johnson who made a solo flight from the UK to Darwin in the record time of 16 days. The photographing of children was one of her specialties. She was known to create a relaxed atmosphere, quietly talking with them as they played and photographing them when they were unaware.

Hollick kept up with the latest developments in photography, but she also relied on her inherent artistic sense, adapting the various techniques to her individual style. This was arguably characterised by the use of natural light, the creation of a mood

and a strong symmetrical composition (Australian Gallery Directors' Council 16). Her award-winning photograph, *Thought* (1920), was one of 483 photographs selected from several thousand submitted to the London Salon of Photography Exhibition in 1930. Executed in a Pictorialist style, it was of the character Portia from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* . Her niece, Lucy Crosbie Morrison (née Washington) was the model for this work. Portia was known to be one of the playwright's strongest female characters and Hollick placed her in a seated position against a dark background. She was wearing a white period costume adorned with Australian flowers, gum leaves and gumnuts, and her hands were held in a prayer-like gesture that drew the onlooker's gaze towards her face.

During the 1920s and '30s Hollick worked for a variety of magazines, including *The Lone Hand*, an offshoot of the *Bulletin*. Her photographic work was regularly published in *Art in Australia*, Ure Smith's *Home* magazine and *Harrington's Photographic Journal*. It was said that, '[t]he role of Cazneaux covering home and social photographs for *The Home* magazine in Sydney was shared by Hollick and Clarke in Melbourne' (Australian Gallery Directors' Council 16). She also placed advertisements for her studio in the magazines *Art in Australia*, *Home* and *Table Talk*. As her reputation grew, so did her business. This saw her expanding the Collins Street studio to an adjoining building in which she took up a whole floor. She was known for working long hours, dressing well and enjoying herself with the artistic crowd in Melbourne. She was also reputed to be without a strong business sense, but if true this did not compromise the longevity of her studio, nor her reputation for artistic excellence.

Hollick exhibited widely, both internationally and within Australia, winning medals and plaques. In 1920 she participated in the London Salon of Photography. She also received a Bronze Medal in the 1921 *Colonial Exhibition* of the Royal Photographic Society in London for her photograph *Thought*. Soon after, in 1927 she participated in the Chicago Photographic Exhibition, and then in the same year she won a silver medal at the Colonial Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society in London.

In 1928 Hollick held a solo exhibition in her Collins Street studio. In 1929 she was the only woman to participate in the Melbourne Exhibition of Pictorial Photography. Nevertheless, she struggled to have her photographs 'recognised as a creative art form' by the art world of the day (Hall). As the impact of the Depression hit, she was fortunate enough to maintain some of her wealthy clients, such as the Baillieus, the McCaugheys and the Hams. However, she was not able to maintain her city studio and along with Izard she moved the studio back to their Moonee Ponds home, where she worked until 1950. Around this time she also went back to touring the countryside, using a Kodak Grafflex camera.

Hollick was aged 67 when she and Izard travelled overseas for the first time – it was 1950 and they visited England. On their return they moved to Heidelberg. Hollick eventually retired from photography when she was 75 years of age. She died in 1977 aged 94.

Collections

National Gallery of Australia

Art Gallery of New South Wales

National Gallery of Victoria

State Library of Victoria

Events

1918 - 1950
Ruth Hollick specialised in fashion, society and celebrity portraiture, weddings and especially in child portraits

1929 - 1929
Ruth Hollick was the only female exhibitor in the Melbourne Exhibition of Pictorial Photography and one of ten medallists' winners

1981 - 1981
Ruth Hollick's work featured in *Australian Women Photographers* at the George Paton Gallery

1927 - 1927
Ruth Hollick's work featured in the Chicago Photographic Exhibition

1925 - 1925
Ruth Hollick's work featured in the Colonial Exhibition, Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain

1921 - 1921
Ruth Hollick's work featured in the Colonial Exhibition, Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, at which she received a Bronze Medallion for her photograph *Thought*

1927 - 1927
Ruth Hollick's work featured in the Colonial Exhibition, Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, at which she received a Silver Medallion

1920 - 1920
Ruth Hollick's work featured in the London International Exhibition in the Salon of Photography

1929 - 1929
Ruth Hollick's work featured in the Photographic Society of New South Wales

1928 - 1928
Solo exhibition at her Collins Street, Melbourne, studio.

Published resources

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book
The Ladies' picture show: sources on a century of Australian women artists, Ambrus, Caroline, c1984

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

Exhibition Catalogue
Australian Women Photographers 1840-1950, 1981

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

In a New Light: Aspects of Australian Pictorialist Photography, Crombie, Isobel, 1993

Ruth Hollick, Maddigan, Judy, 1993

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

Journal Article
London Salon of Photography

Resource Section
Ruth Hollick,
http://www.daao.org.au/bio/ruth-hollick/

Book Section
Ruth Hollick, Wyk, Susan van, 1995

Edited Book
Heritage : the national women's art book, 500 works by 500 Australian women artists from colonial times to 1955, Kerr, Joan, 1995

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Ephemera Collection
[Hollick, Ruth: Photography Related Ephemera Material Collected by the National Library of Australia].

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