

Olive Muriel Pink (1884 – 1975)

artist, Aboriginal rights activist, anthropologist and gardener.

1884 born on 17 March in Hobart. Educated at Miss Ayton's School in Brisbane Street, Hobart and then at the Girls High School . She kept in touch with her first headmistress, Miss Sarah Walker and was influenced by her Quaker philosophy for the rest of her life.

1899 studied art at Hobart Technical School with sculptor Benjamin Sheppard.

1907 exhibited four pictures in the annual exhibition of the Tasmanian Art Society. Her father died and she started giving private art lessons.

1909 joined Hobart Technical School as a teacher.

1911 moved to Perth WA. and gave private art lessons.

1914 moved to Sydney and qualified for a Town Planning Diploma

1915 employed as a tracer by NSW Government Railways and Tramways until retrenched during the depression. Attended classes at Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School during this period.

1926 – 27 visited Daisy Bates at her camp at Ooldea, South Australia sketching and had first experience of aboriginal culture

1930 embarked on sketching tour of Central Australia and further investigation of how aboriginal people lived.

1932 studied anthropology at University of Sydney.

1933-1936 received grants from ANRC to visit Northern Territory and carry out research into the Arrernte and Warlpiri people. Met Albert Namatjira and purchased two early paintings.

1942 returned to Alice Springs where she attempted to set up a 'secular sanctuary' for the Warlpiri people from which police, government and missions would be excluded. Settled at Thompsons Rockhole where she camped for four years and continued her research.

1946 moved back to Alice Springs where she survived by selling fruit and flowers, cleaning the courthouse where she monitored aboriginal court cases and exhibiting her wildflower paintings for a small admission fee.

1956 – 1958 lived in a tent outside Alice Springs and lobbied to have a small area of land turned into an arid flora reserve. This was granted in 1956 and she was made honorary curator.

1958 - 1975 now known as the Olive Pink Botanic Garden, she lived and worked here until her death on 6 July 1975.



Olive Pink at the Reserve
Photo: courtesy of Olive Pink Botanic Garden



Olive Pink pictured on her 90th birthday,
17.3.1974
Photo: Courtesy of Northern Territory Library
and Information Service, File05/05085

Olive Pink's death

'In the winter of 1975 as Olive Pink lay on the cold floor of her corrugated iron hut she was determined never to have to endure another centralian summer. She was just past her ninetieth birthday. It had been a grand occasion and she had permitted her most valued and trusted friends to take the photographs of her which, until then, she had always refused. Her 'weak heart' had survived physical hardship, malnutrition, serious bites from centipedes and redback spiders, several falls and accidents. Now she had come full circle and was ready to go.'

(from: Marcus, Julie 'The Indomitable Miss Pink' Sydney, UNSW Press, 2001 p.298)

Olive Pink died on the 6th of July 1975 in the Alice Springs hospital.

'Her funeral was a quiet affair. Many of her friends were away and the service was conducted by a Quaker. As she wished, she lies close to the Aboriginal section of the cemetery and, somehow, her headstone faces in the opposite direction to those of her companions. She looks out at the glorious colours of the Macdonnell Range...'

(from: Marcus, Julie 'The Indomitable Miss Pink' Sydney, UNSW Press, 2001 p.299)