



Media Release



NSW State Library mounts landmark exhibition in new underground photography gallery

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The State Library of NSW is staging its biggest and most significant photography exhibition to date in its new underground Photography Gallery, now open to the public.

The inaugural exhibition *Shot* delves into the State Library's extraordinary collection of two million images and delivers a visual feast of 400 captivating moments – many displayed for the first time – by 200 photographers over three centuries.

According to State Librarian John Vallance: “The new gallery is the largest permanent space in Sydney dedicated to photography, made possible with funding support from the NSW Government and private benefactions. Visitors will be able to see almost every photographic format and every year between 1845 and 2022 represented.”

Located underneath the Library's historic Mitchell building, the gallery space boasts an innovative transparent design which showcases the images as original objects, starting with an 1845 daguerreotype – Australia's oldest surviving photograph.

“The images are arranged into decades like a time tunnel, which allows the collection to tell its own story,” says Senior Curator Geoff Barker. “Visitors will see things like fashion, architecture and transport, as well as photographic styles and printing processes, change over time.”

Geoff spent two years trawling through the Library's extraordinary collection – one of the largest and most diverse in Australia – and made some surprising discoveries.

He came across an ordinary looking exercise book and discovered it contained close to 100 rare photographs documenting Australia's first engagement in World War I. And there's the book of mugshots (1924–1950s) by Sydney's first official undercover police officer, Frank Fahy (nicknamed 'the Shadow').

On display for the first time are the astonishing 25 large glass-plate negatives, taken in 1875, which form a nine-metre panorama of Sydney.

IMAGE: SHADOW PORTRAIT, C.1950 BY ROB HILLIER

SHOT

**NEW
PHOTOGRAPHY
GALLERY
NOW OPEN**

SHOT has been generously supported
by the State Library of NSW Foundation

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“The Library’s collection is a revelation for the fascinating development of photographic technology, and the impact it had on the way Australians saw themselves,” says Geoff. “No other collection in the country is so rich in its ability to explore the photographic history of the nation.”

Other highlights include:

- a rare example of an ambrotype where the image has been captured outdoors (of a publican out the front of his establishment in northern NSW in 1861);
- early examples of colour photography (including rare photo-crayotype prints);
- one of the original Paget plates Frank Hurley saved from Shackleton’s sinking ship *Endurance* in Antarctica in 1915;
- iconic works by some of our most acclaimed photographers, including Max Dupain, Harold Cazneaux, David Moore and Olive Cotton; and
- contemporary images and commentary by more than 30 living photographers, including Stephen Dupont, Tony Mott and Anne Zahalka.

Due to the delicate nature of the glass plate negatives and other works, this may be the first and only time visitors get to see some of these rare images of Australia’s pictorial history on display.

Shot is a free exhibition in the State Library’s new Photography Gallery, on show until 20 October 2024. sl.nsw.gov.au/shot

For more information, interviews and publicity images, please contact:

Vanessa Bond, Media & Communications Manager, State Library of NSW
0411 259 898, vanessa.bond@sl.nsw.gov.au

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