

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

EXHIBITION GOES TO TOWN ON VINTAGE STYLE

It was the hot pants that did it.

Kathy Cope recalls her father's reaction to seeing his wife's 70's outfit when she and her sisters found a treasure trove of retro fashion in the days after their mother died.

"As family and friends gathered at Dad's house in Kingaroy, my sisters and I went looking for things belonging to Mum, looking for memories or meaning in that sad time," she said.

"Finding these amazing outfits, many that Mum had made herself, was a bright spot, and when we brought the hot pants out, there was definitely a twinkle in Dad's eye. Apparently, she wore them to town to do the shopping! But that was the 70s, after all.

"There was a whole wardrobe full of retro clothing in the spare room. We knew she had used some in fashion parades for fundraisers and events she was involved in through community groups, it was the number of things she'd kept that was incredible. The idea of exhibiting some of those clothes started then, we just had no idea how to go about it."

While that was five years ago, the idea of an exhibition never faded, and it was in the following couple of years that the extent of Yvonne Cope's style and creative skill became evident.

Fran van Vegchel, curator at Kingaroy Regional Art Gallery, is excited and delighted to be hosting the upcoming exhibition, *Mum Went to Town*".

"What's so wonderful about this exhibition is that it illustrates the lifelong creative passion of a home-grown girl and proves that ordinary people do extraordinary things for the sheer pleasure of it," she said.

"Museum quality clothing and accessories through the decades brings a completely new concept of visual display art to the gallery. As Yvonne's daughters have said, ordinary people are not ordinary at all. We're looking forward to a great show."

The title refers to the habit of farming women to dress up to go into town for shopping or appointments, but also refers to the extent to which Yvonne went in expressing her creativity.

Born in the Kingaroy area, Yvonne lived in the region for almost her entire life, with a year at Condamine early in her married life to farmer Bob Cope. Coming back to settle at Haly Creek, they later lived at Coolabunia and Kumbia, where they owned farms and became involved in those communities, and later moved to Kingaroy on retiring.

A talented dressmaker, Yvonne made clothes for herself and her three daughters in an era where matching outfits were all the rage. At the age of 20 she made her own wedding dress and years later also made a another for her daughter, Sharon.

Kathy said, "We didn't realise Mum studied pottery at TAFE for a few years. We knew she had a kiln in the backyard, and I remember heading off on a working holiday to London in the 80's with half a dozen pottery platypus in my backpack. They were meant to be Aussie thank you gifts and they all found homes in England and Europe as we tripped around.

"We knew she went to a few McGregor textile workshops at USQ in Toowoomba, but it was only on finding her notes and portfolios that we understood the extent of what she did. It's been eye-opening."

The exhibition will feature clothing from the 70s to 2000's, along with a selection of textile work, pottery, quirky tea cosies and a Barbie collection.

"The Barbie collection was a surprise. Mum had kept about a dozen Barbie dolls from our childhood days, probably for the grandkids, in varying conditions, but the striking thing was the number of homemade outfits - who crochets a Spanish flamenco dress to fit a Barbie doll?"

Yvonne's colourful tea cosies can be found in dozens of homes around Australia, as she made and sold them in Kingaroy for a time but also sent them and her equally quirky beanies to the Alice Springs Beanie Festival for many years, where they were exhibited and sold.

The family is offering the collection to museums and collectors for possible donation after the exhibition.

Mum Went to Town is showing at Kingaroy Art Gallery between 6 and 26 October, with opening night on Friday 6 October between 5pm and 7pm.

Photos of items included in the exhibition

- *Pottery vase*
- *Quirk tea cosy*
- *Handmade crocheted tennis dress*
- *Two-piece summer outfit from 1975*

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