

## HEIDE LEARNING RESOURCE

### Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise

**Exhibition dates:** 19 February – 13 June 2022  
**Curator/s:** Kendrah Morgan and Nancy Underhill  
**Heide gallery venue:** Central Galleries



Sidney Nolan  
*Bathers* 1943  
Ripolin enamel on canvas  
62.9 x 75.5 cm  
Heide Museum of Modern Art  
Bequest of John and Sunday Reed 1982

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## Learning Objectives

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This resource is designed to support school learning levels 7-12 and Heide Connect and Create Tours of the exhibition *Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise* as well as self-guided tours of the exhibition.

- Analyse how Nolan's ideas, intentions and viewpoints are expressed in his artworks
- Identify and discuss Nolan's influences and how these informed his practice
- Consider where the works in *Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise* sit in relation to the artist's personal framework and wider art contexts
- Explore materials, technologies and techniques used by Nolan to support his ideas, concepts and themes

## Extended learning in the gallery

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Students are encouraged to make their own observations and conclusions when viewing the works in person. Visiting the exhibition enables students to extend their learning by gaining a visual sense of the scope of work that Nolan produced across his career, as well as the evolution of his practice both creatively and conceptually. They can also view the development of Nolan's practice through narrative, material usage and technique.

The exhibition may be viewed in conjunction with the installation *Dean Cross: Sometimes I Miss the Applause* in the Project Gallery. Dean Cross, a multi-disciplinary artist of Worimi descent has created a dual channel moving image commission that draws upon some of Nolan's most recognisable imagery and explores Heide not only as a site of Australian modernism but as a place of First Nations cultural practice.

## About the Artist: Sidney Nolan

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**This brief biography provides a timeline of key events in Nolan's life and artistic career. For more comprehensive data, please refer to the links provided throughout this resource and in the [Additional Research](#) section.**

Sidney Nolan (22 April 1917 – 28 November 1992) was born in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton. He was the eldest of four children and grew up in the bayside suburb of St Kilda, where he attended the Brighton Road State School and Brighton Technical School. He left school at the age of 14 to enrol at Prahran Technical College in the department of design and crafts where he studied lettering and drawing. He had a relatively carefree adolescence, spending his time swimming, visiting the Luna Park fun fair and training as a competitive cyclist.

From the early 1930s Nolan worked in several jobs including as a sign painter and in the art department of Fayrefield Hats in Abbotsford, where he produced display stands using spray paints and dyes. He was very interested in the properties of the commercial paints that he used during this period and often took materials home to experiment with in his studio.

Nolan enrolled in night drawing classes at the National Gallery School of Art, but attended only sporadically. Instead he spent much of his time in the Melbourne Public Library next door, immersing himself in books on the European avant garde art movements, philosophy, modernist literature, and the work of influential European poets Rimbaud and Rilke. Nolan married fellow art student, Elizabeth Paterson, in December 1938.

Earlier the same year, Nolan met art patrons John and Sunday Reed and became a regular visitor to Heide, their semi-rural property in Melbourne's outer east. The Reeds were avid supporters of progressive artists and writers and collected modern art. Heide was enticing to Nolan as it was a place of culture and creativity, where he believed all of his artistic dreams could come true.

In 1941 Nolan separated from his wife Elizabeth and their infant daughter Amelda and moved in with the Reeds at Heide. Sunday Reed encouraged him to focus on his painting, supplying him with art materials and offering ideas and support.

In 1942 Nolan was conscripted into the army and was stationed in the Wimmera district in north-western Victoria. During this time Sunday Reed continued to provide him with art supplies and Nolan produced a series of works depicting the flat, expansive rural landscape around him. In 1944, fearing that he might be sent to the frontline, Nolan failed to return after a period of leave and was declared an illegal absentee. In 1948 he applied for and received a dishonourable discharge from the army when an amnesty for deserters was declared.

In 1945 Nolan painted his first depictions of the notorious bushranger Ned Kelly. Created while he was living in hiding, these works suggest Nolan's empathy with Ned Kelly's outlaw

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status. In 1946 he returned to live at Heide and during the next fifteen months produced the series of 27 Ned Kelly paintings for which he is most renowned, inspired by the mythology of Kelly gang and their exploits and accounts of the police hunt for the gang in the 1880s.

In July 1947, Nolan left Heide for a trip to Queensland to find new subjects to paint and never returned. Within a year, he had moved to Sydney and married his second wife; John Reed's estranged sister, Cynthia Reed herself a writer and supporter of young artists and designers. During his time in Queensland, Nolan was inspired by the nineteenth-century story of Eliza Fraser, who became another recurring Australian subject in his work for years to come. The survivor of a shipwreck off the coast of Queensland, Eliza Fraser made it to K'gari (Fraser Island), where she was taken in by the local Butchulla people. In the version of the tale that Nolan knew she was rescued by the escaped convict David Bracewell (also known as Bracefell), whom she then betrayed to the authorities. While in Queensland Nolan also found inspiration in the Indigenous cave wall paintings he saw in the Carnarvon Ranges.

Another important source of inspiration was the panoramic aerial perspective on the outback that Nolan saw on his flight to Queensland. In search of further outback subjects he subsequently travelled to central and far north Australia and Western Australia with Cynthia and his adopted daughter Jinx. Observations of the forms of the land, combined with his reading of the stories of explorers who had failed to cross its vast expanse served as a springboard for new series as Nolan explored life and death in the desert.

After winning the Dunlop Prize for the painting *Inland Australia* 1950, which was purchased by the Tate Gallery in London, Nolan travelled overseas for the first time in 1950. To capitalise on his growing reputation, he and his family left Australia to settle permanently in London in 1953, where he completed a second series of the Kelly paintings.

In 1955, at the invitation of the Australian writers George Johnston and Charmian Clift, Nolan and Cynthia travelled to the Greek island of Hydra, where they lived for several months. Nolan drew inspiration from the creative expatriate community living there as well as the local culture and the landscape. His reading of Homer's *Iliad* and Robert Graves's *Greek Myths* led to paintings about the Trojan War, and by extension, the Australian Gallipoli campaign, as well as a later series on the classical myth of Leda and the swan.

Following his stay in Greece, Nolan travelled to Turkey, India and Cambodia. In 1963, he visited Africa, where he and Cynthia sought out the French poet Arthur Rimbaud's residence in Harar, Ethiopia. Taking his cue from both Rimbaud's narrative and his own experiences of the African landscape Nolan created, upon his return to London, a sequence of paintings exploring exile, death, nature and destiny.

Nolan continued to travel extensively throughout his prolific career. In 1964, he visited Antarctica with the writer Alan Moorehead and during 1965-6 he lived and worked in New York and journeyed across America for several months. Between 1966 and 1976, when Cynthia died, he visited Indonesia, China, the Pacific Islands, South America, Scandinavia,

Ireland and Japan, to name only a few of his later destinations. He also returned to Australia on almost an annual basis, where he exhibited regularly.

After Cynthia's passing, in 1978 Nolan married his third wife, Mary Boyd, the former wife of fellow artist John Perceval and the sister of artist Arthur Boyd. In 1983 they purchased and moved into The Rodd, a seventeenth-century manor house and farm on the English-Welsh border.

Nolan's thirst for artistic exploration did not wane throughout his career. His creative expression extended to stage and costume design for the ballet and opera; for example for the 1962 production of Stravinsky's Rite of Spring at Covent Garden. He also produced expansive mosaic-like murals comprised of hundreds of smaller artworks, such as the multi-panelled *Paradise Garden* 1968-70. He continued to push the boundaries of conventional painting and in his later his career he made work using spray paints and even experimented with a pre-cursor to modern-day photo editing software called Quantel Paintbox.

Arguably one of Australia's most successful and widely recognised artists, Sidney Nolan was highly celebrated throughout his lifetime. He was honoured with retrospectives at the Whitechapel Gallery in London (1957), the Art Gallery of New South Wales (1967, and national tour), Dublin (1973) and a major travelling exhibition to mark the artist's seventieth birthday in 1987.

In 1981 Nolan was appointed a Knight Bachelor for his services to Art. He received the Order of Merit (OM) in 1983 and was awarded the Companion Member of the Order of Australia (AC) in 1988.

Sidney Nolan died on 28 November 1992 aged 75.

## Exhibition Overview: *Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise*

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In celebration of Heide's fortieth anniversary, the exhibition *Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise* pays tribute to a central figure in the history of the museum and the lives of its founders, John and Sunday Reed. For Nolan Heide was a garden of Eden that he later saw as a 'season in hell'. His creativity became fuelled by a life-long fascination with the elusive notion of paradise and the consequences of its loss. *Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise* thus examines one of the artist's deepest impulses and the journey of self-discovery it engendered.

The exhibition elucidates particular aspects of the theme, beginning with Nolan's nostalgia for St Kilda, his childhood heaven, his arcadian Heide years, and his revelations about the Australian landscape in the Wimmera in the early 1940s. It includes later representations of Australia and its mythic figures, including Ned Kelly, Eliza Fraser, and Burke and Wills, which embody similar ideas of the 'promised land' and escape, exile and futility. Paintings of travels to alluring locations from the mid 1950s and beyond further document Nolan's realisation that 'nothing is fixed— everything keeps being transformed—and you have to sense where Paradise is in the process'.

*Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise* acknowledges Nolan's significance to not only the history of Heide and its reputation as a crucible of modernism in Australia, but also to its legacy. Including several well-known masterpieces, the exhibition considers Nolan's diversity of interests, techniques and aesthetic approaches during pivotal periods in his career as he sought critical recognition and commercial success and embarked on his life beyond his relationship with the Reeds.

## Exhibition structure and themes:

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**Section 1: St Kilda: Childhood Heaven:** explores Nolan's ongoing nostalgic connection to St Kilda, for him a utopian site of evocative memories from his childhood and youth.

**Section 2: Heide: Garden of Eden:** focuses on Nolan's formative period time at Heide with art patrons John and Sunday Reed, leading into his reinvention of the Australian landscape in the Wimmera, and his creation of a uniquely Australian myth in the form of his visual narrative of the Kelly gang's exploits.

**Section 3: Paradise Lost and Found:** traces Nolan's 1947 trip to Queensland, encounter with Fraser Island and the difficult ending of his relationship with the Reeds, as expressed through his preoccupation with the story of Eliza Fraser and her betrayal of the convict Bracewell. Examines the Australian outback as both paradise and its inversion through lyrical studies of Queensland scenery, flora and fauna and surrealist-inflected drought images, along with paintings of Burke and Wills' ill-fated expedition.

**Section 4: Wanderings:** 1950s to 1980s: follows Nolan to Europe in the 1950s, charting his visits to Italy, the idyllic Greek island of Hydra, and subsequent travels to far-flung alluring locations such as Africa and Antarctica.

**Section 5: Search for Self:** features a number of celebrated self portraits and representations of alter egos that explore Nolan's identification with complex and romanticised anti-heroes, from the fugitive bushranger Ned Kelly and fictitious poet Ern Malley to the revolutionary poet Arthur Rimbaud.

**Section 6: Paradise Garden:** the exhibition and Nolan's wanderings come full circle in an immersive installation of tropical Paradise Garden images that were conceived in tandem with vengeful poems reflecting on Nolan's past relationship with the Reeds and Heide. At once sensuous and venomous, these works suggest that in the absence of a suitable Eden, the artist attempted to construct his own. They embody the paradox of Nolan's ceaseless quest, with paradise forever beyond his reach.



## Curator/s

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Kendrah Morgan

Kendrah Morgan is Head Curator at Heide, joining the staff in 2003. Formerly a curator at Auckland Art Gallery, she has also held academic roles at Monash College and the University of Auckland and regularly publishes and lectures on modernist and contemporary Australian art.

Her major exhibitions include *Joy Hester: Remember Me*; *Charles Blackman: Schoolgirls*; *Arthur Boyd: Brides*, *Fiona Hall: Big Game Hunting*; and *Sidney Nolan: Unmasked*.

Kendrah has co-authored four books on aspects of Heide's history, including *Modern Love: The Lives of John and Sunday Reed*, a biography of the museum's founders, which was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier's Literary Award and the Colin Roderick Literary Award, and received a commendation at the Victorian Local History Awards.

Nancy Underhill

Dr Nancy Underhill joined the Heide Board in January 2016. Dr Underhill is an author, curator and art historian. Educated at Bryn Mawr College, USA, and the Courtauld Institute, London, she was Foundation Head of Art History and Inaugural Director of the University Art Museum at the University of Queensland.

Nancy has served on the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, chaired the Art Association of Australia and the Museums Association of Australia, and been a Visiting Fellow at the Humanities Research Centre at ANU, and the Centre of Australian Studies, Kings College, London.

Her books include *Sidney Nolan: A Life* (2015), *Nolan on Nolan: Sidney Nolan in his Own Words* (2007), *Letters of John Reed* (co-editor, 2001), and *Making Australian Art 1916–1949* (1991). She is currently Deputy to Lisa Gasteen AO at the Lisa Gasteen National Opera School.

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## Exhibition Venue

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The exhibition is on display in the Main Galleries at Heide Museum of Modern art from 19 February – 13 June 2022.

This is the largest exhibition space at Heide and is housed in the purpose-built gallery designed in 1993 by Andrew Andersons of architectural firm Peddle Thorp Architects. In 2006 the building was refurbished and extended by O'Connor + Houle Architecture, who won a competition to redevelop the site to include two new gallery spaces the Albert & Barbara Tucker Gallery and Kerry Gardner and Andrew Myer Project Gallery, a new main entrance, improved and extended back of house and facilities, as well as an outdoor plaza, carpark and garden area.

For more information on the structure of this space and the considerations made when installing an exhibition such as this, please refer to Heide's [Inside the Museum](#) resource.

## Section 1: St Kilda: Childhood Heaven

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Sidney Nolan  
*Giggle Palace* 1945  
Ripolin enamel and oil on hardboard  
61.5 x 91.2cm  
Collection of Nelson Meers, AO

The painting *Giggle Palace* 1945 depicts an idyllic scene of a family posing for a photograph on a day out. This picture was produced during the period when Nolan had absconded from the army and was hiding out alone in Parkville in inner Melbourne.

### Discussion:

- Consider the composition of this painting. How has Nolan used elements such as line to structure the work?

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- Examine the colours, style and subject matter of the painting. What emotions do they convey?

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At first glance, this painting appears to be a family standing on a promenade at the beach, however, this is a painting of a family posing in front of a *painted backdrop* of a beach scene that photographers used at Luna Park.

- Why do you think that Nolan might have painted this illusion?

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Upon and painting works about his childhood memories of St Kilda while in isolation, Nolan said

'I tried to recapture things, to see things again, to re-experience them.'

- How does this statement, in combination with the artwork, inform your sense of how Nolan felt about his childhood?
- How does this compare to the way Nolan might have been feeling at the time he created painting?

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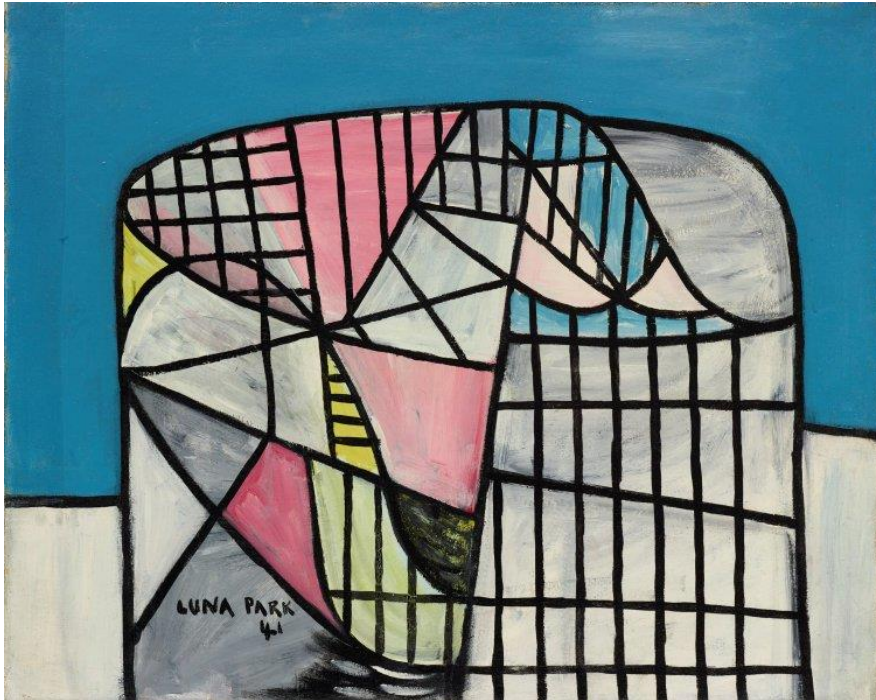
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Sidney Nolan  
*Luna Park* 1941  
nitrocellulose lacquer on canvas  
67 x 84 cm  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
Purchased with funds provided by the Nelson Meers foundation 2003



Sidney Nolan  
*Girl and Horse* 1941  
enamel on canvas  
58.5 x 54cm  
Private collection, Melbourne

Nolan, like other progressive artists in Melbourne in 1939, visited an exhibition at the Melbourne Town Hall titled the *Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art*. This exhibition was initiated and financed by Australian newspaper magnate Keith Murdoch and included the work of fifty nine painters and nine sculptors of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century art. It was seen as a cultural turning point in Australian art. For Nolan, it was a life changing experience as he, and many other Melbournians were able to see masterpieces from artists such as Picasso, Cézanne, Modigliani, Gauguin and Soutine for the first time.

The exhibition delighted progressive creative minds and outraged those opposed to modernism, including the then director of the National Gallery of Victoria, J.S. MacDonald, who described the works as 'putrid meat'.

### Discussion:

Find two artworks by two different artists featured in the *Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* and compare and contrast these works with Nolan's paintings *Luna Park 1941* and *Girl and Horse 1941*.

- What similarities and differences can you find when comparing these works?

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- What do you think attracted Nolan to these types of artists?

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- Discuss why this approach to painting and sculpture may have offended some viewers at the time.

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## Section 2: Heide: Garden of Eden

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Sidney Nolan  
*Rosa Mutabilis* 1945  
enamel on composition board  
91 x 122 cm  
Heide Museum of Modern Art  
Bequest of John and Sunday Reed 1982

The time spent with John and Sunday Reed and the other artists who frequented Heide was integral to Nolan's early development as an artist. The Reeds had opened their home on the outskirts of Melbourne to an array of like-minded individuals as a place of discussion, creation and promotion of modern art and writing. The artists supported by the Reeds during this time are known as the Heide Circle, and included Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, John Perceval, Arthur Boyd and Danila Vassilieff amongst others.

With access to John and Sunday's art-world connections, their personal library containing a wide range of literature and art publications, and their ongoing encouragement, Nolan created works for the first solo exhibition of his work, which opened at his Russell Street studio in Melbourne in 1939. For the next few years, with John's knowledge, Nolan and Sunday were romantically involved until Nolan decided to leave Heide to explore further artistic endeavours in 1947. Nolan wished for Sunday to join him, but Sunday refused to leave her husband and Nolan and the Reeds parted ways permanently, a rift which had long-lasting implications for all involved.

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In 1981 the Reeds' lush, sixteen-acre property became a public art gallery. The original Victorian-era cottage and modernist second residence on the property are today open to visitors.

## Discussion

Examine the above painting by Nolan titled *Rosa Mutabilis* 1945.

- Look closely at this picture. What do you think is going on? Write a short description of what you can see.

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- Where do you think that this painting is set? What visual clues can you find to support this?

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- Who do you think the figure might be? Why do you think that Nolan has painted this person surrounded by flowers?

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Nolan saw Heide as a Garden of Eden, which is a reference to the Christian biblical story of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were granted a paradise by God for them to live in, with one unbreakable rule—not to eat the fruit of one particular tree. A snake in the garden convinced Eve to break this rule, and she in turn convinced Adam to do the same. The couple were expelled from the garden as a punishment for their actions. Nolan would be drawn back to the story of Adam and Eve throughout his career.

- What connections can you find in this story to Nolan's time and memories of Heide?

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Sidney Nolan

*Ned Kelly: 'Nobody knows anything about my case but myself'* 1945 Ripolin enamel on cardboard

Ripolin enamel on cardboard

63 x 75 cm. Heide Museum of Modern Art

Purchased with funds provided by the Friends of Heide and the Heide Circle of Donors 1998

From 1942 to 1944 Nolan was stationed in the wheat growing district of Victoria's Wimmera region after being drafted for army service during World War II. During this time he created numerous landscapes depicting the area's flat expansive wheat plains, sparse features and enormous empty skies. The prospect of being sent to the frontline of battle prompted him to go AWOL (absent without leave) from the army in July 1944.

Isolated and hiding out in a friend's studio loft in Parkville, Nolan created the above artwork *Ned Kelly: 'Nobody knows anything about my case but myself'* 1945. The picture is a precursor to Nolan's famous series of 27 Kelly paintings that were mostly painted on the dining room table at Heide, aided by Sunday Reed.

### **Research the story of the outlaw bushranger Ned Kelly.**

- Why do you believe Nolan may have been inspired to paint Ned Kelly during this time?





Sidney Nolan  
*Mrs Fraser* 1947  
66.2 x 107 cm

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane

Purchased 1995 with a special allocation from the Queensland Government. Celebrating the Queensland Art Gallery's Centenary 1895 – 1995

After leaving Heide in July 1947, never to return, Nolan took a holiday in Queensland. Within a year he was living in Sydney and married to Cynthia Reed, the estranged younger sister of John Reed. During his travels in tropical Queensland, Nolan was taken by the story of Eliza Fraser, the survivor of shipwreck in 1836 who was marooned on K'gari (Fraser Island). Eliza was allegedly held captive by the local Indigenous people and later guided back to 'civilisation' by the escaped convict David Bracewell (also known as Bracefell), in return for promising not to turn him over to the authorities—a promise that she broke.

## Discussion

- Look at the composition and forms in the work *Mrs Fraser* 1947. What does this suggest to you about the narrative Nolan is telling the viewer?

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Sidney Nolan  
*Burke and Wills expedition, 'Gray sick' 1949*  
ripolin enamel and oil based red ochre on hardboard  
91.5 x 121.5 cm  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
Gift of Edron Pty Ltd through the auspices of Alistair McAlpine 1995

At times Nolan took an academic approach to his art making, undertaking extensive research on the stories, historical figures and places he used as inspiration. He often took photographs and kept visual diaries of his travels. He did not create the majority of his works in situ, but later in the studio via memory and reflection, allowing him to process his thoughts in the interim.

Nolan's travels through the drought-ravaged Australian outback led him to the tales of the explorers who had failed to cross it, such as Robert O'Hara Burke and William Wills. He read Burke's diaries and historical accounts of the expedition and examined archival photographs from the era.

Nolan was also fortunate to experience the Australian outback in person as well as fly over it on many occasions, which allowed him a new perspective on the typography of the land and informed his conception of its geological forms.

## Discussion

- Why do you think it was important to Nolan to extensively research the subjects of his paintings?

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- How may have Nolan's use of visual diaries and photographs aided his art making process?

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- If Nolan were alive today, what contemporary Australian figures or issues do you think he might be drawn to?

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- Research and create a drawing or painting of a contemporary myth or issue that inspires you. Do not use any text to convey your narrative.

## Section 4: The Promised Land

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Sidney Nolan  
*Leda and the Swan* 1960  
Ripolin enamel on composition board  
122 x 152.5 cm  
Private collection  
Courtesy of Deutscher and Hackett

Two years after Nolan, Cynthia and Jinx moved to London in 1953, Nolan and Cynthia travelled to the Greek island of Hydra at the invitation of writers George Johnston and Charmian Clift. Nolan was inspired by the intellectual company of the expatriate community of creatives living on Hydra, as well as the landscape and Greek mythology. He likened the story of the Trojan War to the mythology surrounding Australia's Gallipoli campaign and began drawing further connections between Anzac Cove and memories of his childhood at the beach in St Kilda.

Nolan later produced a series of paintings around the classical Greek myth of Leda and the Swan and was intrigued by the psychological elements of this tale, which is a prequel to the Trojan War. He infused the series with references to aspects of the human psyche, such as love, betrayal, tyranny, violence and abuse of power.

Nolan created many of these works by pouring thick layers of polyvinyl acetate onto the surface whilst it was laying horizontal, he then revealed the forms by scraping back sections to expose the board beneath.

## Discussion

Contrast and compare the above painting *Leda and the Swan* 1960 with a painting that Nolan made earlier in his career.

- Describe how Nolan's approach to art making and / or storytelling has evolved over time.

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- Noting the method in which *Leda and the Swan* 1960 was created, what do you see as the strengths and limitations of creating art in this manner?

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Research the story of *Leda and the Swan* and compare this story with the Australian tales of Ned Kelly, Eliza Fraser and Burke and Wills.

- What similarities in the themes and story arcs can you find that may have drawn Nolan to these narratives?

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## Section 5: Search for Self

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Sidney Nolan  
*Ern Malley* 1973  
oil on hardboard  
122 x 122 cm  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide  
Gift of Sidney and Cynthia Nolan 1974

### Discussion

- Create a table with ten rows and two columns. Write quick list of ten words that you would use in response to this artwork in column one. In column two, add a sentence to explain what it is that you *see* or *feel* that draws you to this conclusion.

<i>eg: Mountains</i>	<i>eg: The points on the hat remind me of a landscape with two mountain peaks.</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	



Ern Malley was the name of a fictitious poet whose entire biography and body of work were invented in 1943 by two conservative poets, Harold Stewart and James McAuley. Stewart and McAuley submitted a series of poems under the name Ern Malley to a young writer called Max Harris, who, together with John Reed, edited and published a modernist art and literature journal named *Angry Penguins*. Max Harris thought the poems were brilliant and published them in the 1944 autumn issue of *Angry Penguins*. Stewart and McAuley then exposed their ruse, damaging the reputation of the journal and its editors. The Ern Malley Affair has since become known as Australia's most famous literary hoax.

The Ern Malley poems were composed from cobbled together lines and phrases lifted from various sources such as a rhyming dictionary, Shakespeare's plays, a book of quotations and even an army manual on mosquito control. The hoaxers opened books at random pages and copied the lines out of context, constructing absurd sentences in a deliberately nonsensical manner. The idea was to make a mockery of the modernist literature published in *Angry Penguins* by way of experiment, yet many commentators have argued that the poems have literary merit. The way in which they were produced aligns with the 'automatic' methods and use of chance and accident that characterises much Surrealist writing and art.

Sidney Nolan wrote poetry himself, and he admired the Ern Malley poems from the first time that he read them. Throughout his life he returned to them again and again as a source of inspiration for his own work.

## Section 6: Paradise Garden



Sidney Nolan  
*Paradise Garden* 1968-70  
 mixed media on cardboard  
 3 of 230 panels, each 112.5 x 82 cm (framed)  
 Art Collection, Arts Centre Collection, Melbourne  
 Gift of Sir Sidney and Lady Nolan 1982

By end of this resource, you will have gleaned some insights into Sidney Nolan's life and art practice, taking note of the following:

- People – The key people Nolan encountered, resulting in love, inspiration, artistic support, and loss.
- Mythology – The stories and historical figures that Nolan researched and represented in his paintings.
- Place – The culturally and geographically diverse and far reaching places that Nolan travelled to in his lifetime, and how the physical environment and cultures of these locations influenced his practice.
- Time – What was happening in the world and in Nolan's community at various points throughout his life.
- Materials – The use of unconventional materials in Nolan's work, such as commercial industrial paints (eg Ripolin enamel) and unusual supports including pieces of cardboard and even recycled windows.
- Theme – The way in which the curator has presented the works to draw out particular theme or connecting threads within the artist's oeuvre.

The curators of the exhibition *Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise*, Kendrah Morgan and Nancy Underhill have researched and observed the recurrence of the notion of

'paradise' and its inversion in Nolan's work, supported by Nolan's own musings on the idea in journals, personal accounts and interviews.

The exhibition is presented in a loosely chronological way, with works from a similar period and on related themes grouped together. This means that a visitor can view these works in the general timeline of when they were created.

The exhibition culminates in an expansive, immersive mural titled *Paradise Garden 1968-70*. Nolan created a total of 230 panels in this monumental work as a whole, of which eighteen are on display. This repetitive and reflective work was accompanied by a text Nolan wrote about his time at Heide and expresses his bitterness about the manner in which that time ended.

## Discussion

- Why do you think that the curators chose the concept and title *Search for Paradise* as the theme of this exhibition?

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Later in Nolan's life, three years before he died, Nolan remarked:

'The thing you come to realise is that nothing is fixed—that everything keeps being transformed—and you have to sense where paradise is in the process.'

- What do you think the term 'paradise' refers to in Nolan's statement?

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## Additional Research

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- Exhibition catalogue – *Sidney Nolan: Search for Paradise* 2022, by Kendrah Morgan and Nancy Underhill
- *Sidney Nolan: Mask and Memory* 2008, directed by Catherine Hunter
- Heide Museum of Modern Art Sidney Nolan Resource 2006 – [Unmasked Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly](#)