

# HEIDE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

## Care and Conservation: The Heide Collection

(Abridged version for website)

A resource suitable for: VCE Art Making and Exhibiting

Unit 4, Area of Study 3: Conserve: Present and Care



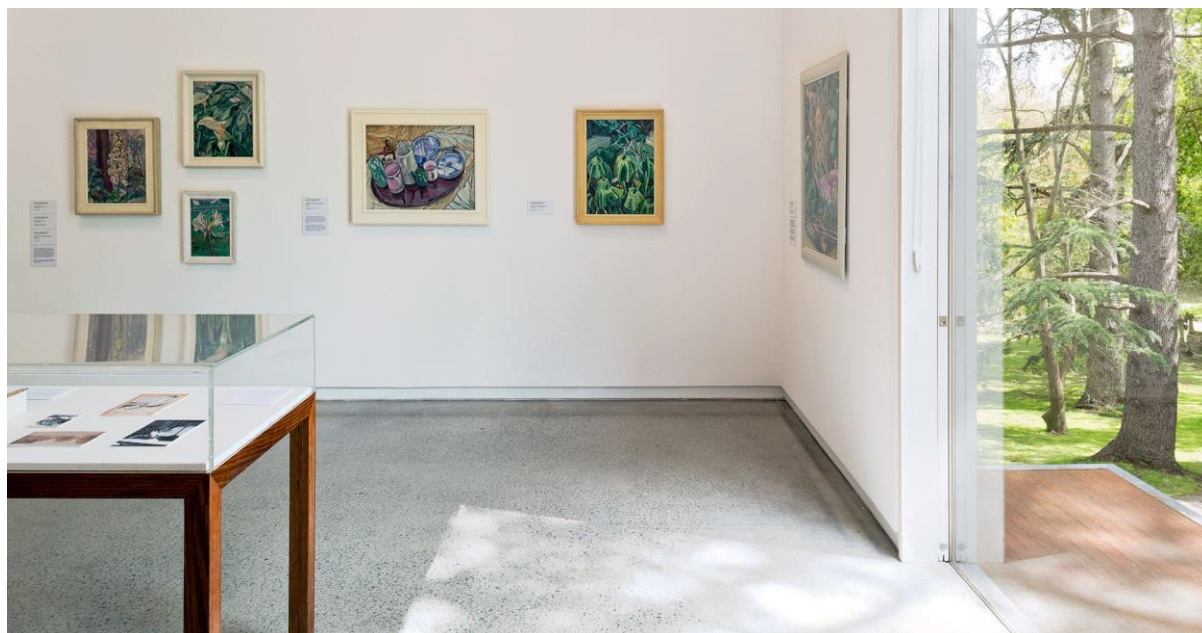
## Introduction to the resource

This resource focuses on the methods and considerations used to present, conserve and take care of artworks in the Heide Collection. The core of the Heide Collection comprises 500 artworks assembled from the 1930s to the 1970s representing artists now regarded as central figures in the history of Australian modernism—particularly Arthur Boyd, Joy Hester, Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Albert Tucker and Danila Vassilieff, a group known as the Heide Circle or Angry Penguins. A selection of these works is exhibited in *Always Modern: The Heide Story* in Heide Cottage.

Specific conservation techniques and materials (e.g. climate control, lighting, gloves, display cases) are used in this unique gallery space, which is itself a heritage-listed building and must also be protected for its historic significance, while also functioning as a gallery space.

This resource also explores Heide Modern as another distinctive gallery space that similarly has heritage overlays. Heide Modern exhibitions are often site-responsive installations that are in conversation with the building's much admired warm palette of materials and harmonious spatial qualities, whereas the Heide Cottage display celebrates the foundation story of the museum with works from the Collection by artists in the Heide Circle.

## Public Museum Case Study: Heide Museum of Modern Art



Heide is a public art museum and sculpture park located on a stretch of the Birrarung/Yarra River in Melbourne that has long served as a meeting point and as a creative hub. Once a significant Wurundjeri gathering place, the site later attracted the artists of the Australian Impressionist School before becoming the home of art patrons John and Sunday Reed in 1934.

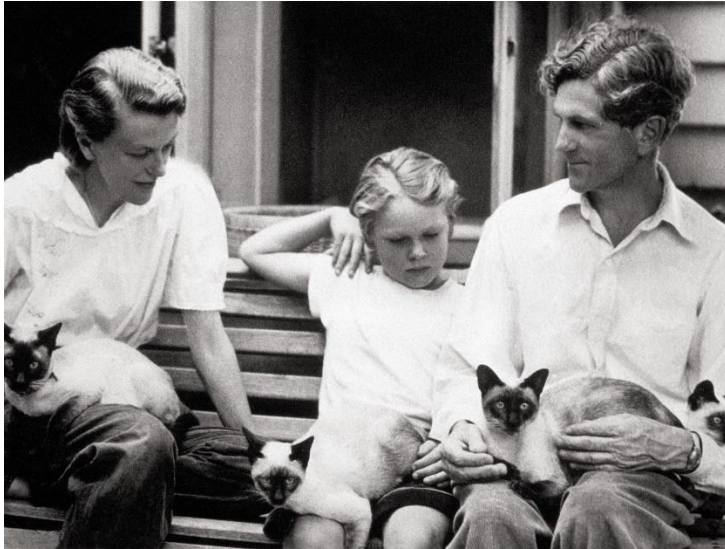
The Reeds and their circle of artists and writers embraced the brave and the new in art and ideas and their spirited legacy inspires the museum's activities today, from collaborating with emerging and mid-career artists to celebrating those who have made major contributions to Australian and international art.

Set on 6.5 hectares of parkland with five gallery spaces, award-winning architecture and a distinctive collection of more than 3,600 works of art, Heide holds a special place in the cultural landscape of Australia. Presenting over 300 solo, group and thematic exhibitions of modern and contemporary art since becoming a public art museum in 1981, Heide has gained a national reputation for artistic excellence and established a unique position in the artistic and cultural history of Australia.

Heide Museum of Modern Art fulfils all of the definitions for a public museum. It is a not-for-profit entity formed in 1981 for the purposes of operating and managing the assets of Heide, which were purchased by the State Government on behalf of the people of Victoria. Its objectives and purposes

are outlined in its constitution (the document which sets out the rules governing the internal affairs of the organisation). Heide's income is derived from a range of sources including commercial operations, government partnerships with state and local government bodies and philanthropy. Any profits made from sales in the Heide store and catalogue sales are invested back into the organisation to support and extend the museums capacity to deliver high quality programs.

## History



Heide was the home of John and Sunday Reed, champions of modern art, literature and music and two of Australia's most important art benefactors. Both from privileged backgrounds, the Reeds met in 1930 at a tennis party in Toorak and married in 1932. In 1934 they purchased the property on which Heide Museum of Modern Art stands today. They christened it Heide after the nearby township of Heidelberg and the Heidelberg School of impressionist artists who used to camp and paint in the area.

In 1935 after renovating the old farmhouse in a French provincial style and establishing a kitchen garden, the Reeds settled in. They slowly transformed the property from a neglected dairy farm into gardens and informal parklands, developing a largely self-sustaining lifestyle. They opened their home to like-minded creative individuals and Heide became a focal point for progressive art and culture.

Many acclaimed artists such as Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, John Perceval and Danila Vassilieff were nurtured and assisted financially through their formative years by the Reeds. Nolan, who lived at Heide intermittently for almost a decade, painted his celebrated Ned Kelly series in the dining room of Heide Cottage.

In the 1940s the Reeds set up a publishing firm with young Adelaide poet and editor Max Harris. Reed & Harris published modernist novels and social commentaries as well as the radical cultural journal *Angry Penguins*. The infamous Ern Malley hoax poems appeared in *Angry Penguins* in 1944, causing a literary scandal that made international headlines. John and Sunday Reed were also actively involved in arts organisations that promoted modern art, beginning with the Contemporary Art Society, which they helped to set up in 1938. In the mid-1950s they established the Gallery of Contemporary Art as a venue for Contemporary Art Society exhibitions. In 1958, with the assistance of friend and entrepreneur Georges Mora, they re-launched the Gallery as the Museum of Modern Art of Australia, modelled on MoMA in New York. The Museum operated from 1958 to 1966.

In 1950 the Reeds adopted Sweeney Hallam Tucker, the son of artists Joy Hester and Albert Tucker. Sweeney went on to have a career as a poet, gallerist and artist. He and his wife Pamela lived in Heide Cottage from 1968 to 1979, and had two sons, Mishka and Danila. Sweeney died in 1979.

In 1967 the Reeds moved into Heide Modern, their award-winning house built lower down on the property. Designed by architect David McGlashan as a 'gallery to be lived in', Heide Modern was the Reeds' home until 1980 when they sold it, most of their property and part of their art collection to the Victorian State Government. Heide Modern was the first building of Heide Park and Art Gallery, which opened to the public in November 1981. The Reeds lived to see their vision for Heide to become a public museum realised before they both died in December 1981.

Heide's artistic program honours the legacy of founders John and Sunday Reed through a variety of changing exhibitions that draw on the museum's modernist history and the Reeds' philosophy of supporting innovative contemporary art and ideas.

In recent years the program focus has been on mid-career Australian artist surveys, the work of women artists, and thematic exhibitions that reappraise modern art movements.

## Heide's five unique exhibition spaces



Heide has five unique gallery spaces. In 1993 the Heide Main Galleries were designed as a purpose-built exhibition space by Andrew Andersons of architectural firm Peddle Thorp Architects. In 2006 this was added to by O'Connor + Houle Architecture, who won a competition to redevelop the site to include two new galleries (the Albert & Barbara Tucker Gallery and the Kerry & Andrew Myer Project Gallery), along with an upgraded loading dock, art storage areas, a new foyer/shop and amenities, as well as an outdoor sculpture plaza, second carpark and garden area.

As an exhibition space Heide Main Galleries:

- are purpose-built with large interior spaces that can accommodate all kinds of artworks. Temporary walls can be added and adjusted according to exhibition needs.
- feature several windows providing views out to the gardens. These are fitted with blinds which can be used to protect works from UV light, or filter the view. The windows are sometimes closed in with a temporary wall so as to create additional hanging space.
- has walls that can be easily repaired, so works are mostly hung via screws drilled directly into the wall.
- has a concrete floor with a high load-bearing capacity. Works of reasonable weight can also be hung from the ceiling.
- connects to a large loading bay, allowing the galleries to directly receive and accommodate large objects.

- connects to the collection storage area for ease of access to collection works.

By contrast, two of Heide's exhibition spaces, Heide Cottage and Heide Modern, were formerly the domestic residence of the Reeds, and have been modified to accommodate the display of art. Both are heritage-listed buildings, with restrictions on how artworks can be displayed. The property's gardens are also used to exhibit sculpture and site-specific installations.

## Heide Cottage



Heide Cottage  
Heide Museum of Modern Art,  
Melbourne  
Photograph: John Gollings 2010

Heide Cottage was bought by the Reeds in 1934. It was a timber villa built in the 1880s for farmer Thomas Dowd. The Reeds made alterations that included enlarging the kitchen wing, removing the verandas, roofing the bay windows with slate and adding a covered porch so that the villa resembled a French-styled farmhouse or cottage.

In 2001 Heide Cottage underwent major restoration in order to open it to the public. Until 2007 it was used for exhibitions from the collection and other sources, while the original John and Sunday Reed library remained as a heritage room.

The Heide Cottage display celebrates the foundation story of the museum with works from the Collection by artists in the Heide Circle.

As an exhibition space Heide Cottage:

- has a hanging system of wires extended from rails at the top of the walls due to heritage regulations precluding the drilling of holes into the walls. Adjustable hooks on the wires are attached to D-rings on the back of artworks. This hanging system protects the interior walls.
- cannot accommodate very large works, which will not fit through the doors or work well in a domestic space.
- has a ceiling with a low load-bearing capacity, therefore very heavy hanging objects cannot be displayed.
- has been installed with international museum-standard environmental and security systems.
- has been installed with blinds to protect works from direct natural light but which allow filtered light to animate the spaces.

## Heide Modern



Heide Modern

Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

Amassing an outstanding collection of the contemporary art of their time, the Reeds outgrew their original farmhouse, now known as Heide Cottage, and in 1963 commissioned the promising young architect David McGlashan to design a house that would be ‘romantic’ with ‘a sense of mystery’; it had to be suitable for their paintings and it had to have light. The architect designed this house with art in mind – the Reeds wanted a ‘gallery to live in’ that appeared liked a sculpture in the landscape.

Now regarded as an exemplar of modernist architecture in Australia, this iconic building opened as a public art museum in November 1981 following its purchase by the State Government on behalf of the people of Victoria. John and Sunday both died shortly afterwards in December 1981, ten days apart. They are remembered as champions of modern art and literature and remain two of Australia’s most important art benefactors.

Built from 1964 to 1967 using only four materials—terrazzo, limestone, timber and glass—the house is formed by a series of cubic spaces, some inside, some outside, for sitting, sleeping, eating and



displaying the owners' collection of paintings and sculpture. The construction is simple and the design modernist: there are no architraves, skirtings, cornices plaster or wall tiles.



Inside of Heide Modern (previously the Reeds' living area)  
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

Heide Modern exhibitions are often site-responsive installations that are in conversation with the building's much admired warm palette of materials and harmonious spatial qualities.

As an exhibition space Heide Modern:

- has generous wall spaces for large paintings, though the domestic-scaled entrances limit the size of works that can be brought in and displayed.
- has a wall of double-height windows, making it difficult to display light-sensitive works. Blinds are used to filter direct light.
- combines interior and exterior spaces. The outdoor terraces and courtyards can accommodate larger sculptures, provided they are securely placed and weatherproof.
- utilizes the same hanging system that used in Heide Cottage to protect the walls. Occasionally works may be attached with very small pins or tape.

## The Heide Museum of Modern Art Collection



### **Ned Kelly: 'Nobody knows anything about my case but myself'**

#### **Maker**

Sidney Nolan (Australian, b.1917, d.1992) - Artist

#### **Production date**

1945

The Heide Collection comprises art and cultural material from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and includes:

- Modernist and contemporary Australian art (the Art Collection)
- An extensive support collection of artefacts, ephemera, artists' papers, and archives relating to the history of Heide as a domestic residence of John and Sunday Reed and as a public institution, and to the artists and art works represented in the Art Collection (the Heide Archive)
- A library collection of reference books acquired from numerous sources (the Library)

The Art Collection of Heide was established in 1980 when the Victorian State Government purchased 112 works of art from John and Sunday Reed along with the property comprising Heide II and its associated grounds. In 1982 a further 388 works were acquired through bequest from the Estate of John and Sunday Reed to consolidate the foundation collection of 500 artworks.

The original foundation collection represents artists associated with the Reeds and with Heide, and the various personal affiliations and cultural involvements of the Reeds, including the *Angry Penguins* journal, the Contemporary Art Society, the Gallery of Contemporary Art and the Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia. The Reeds supported innovative contemporary art of the day and the artists they first championed are now regarded as central figures in the history of Australian modernism—particularly Arthur Boyd, Joy Hester, Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Albert Tucker and Danila Vassilieff, a group known as the Heide Circle or Angry Penguins.

In the 1950s and 60s the Reeds collected the work of progressive newcomers such as Charles Blackman, Mike Brown, Mirka Mora and Fred Williams. During the following decade they focused on the work of a younger generation of artists including Sydney Ball, Col Jordan and Les Kossatz, contemporaries of their adopted son Sweeney Reed, whose text-based works in the Heide Collection have been subsequently augmented by substantial holdings of concrete poetry.

Since the museum opened in 1981 the Collection has expanded through numerous individual gifts as well as several significant sub-collections—the Baillieu Myer Collection of the 80s, the Barrett Reid Bequest, the Sweeney Reed Collection, and most recently, the Albert Tucker Gift. Through such donations the Collection now represents many leading contemporary Australian artists. Heide also has one of the largest collections of outdoor sculpture in Australia, including major works by Anthony Caro, Simryn Gill, Anish Kapoor and Inge King.

In 2005 more than 80 works that the Reeds had given to establish the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia were transferred back to Heide Museum from the National Gallery of Victoria, where they had been held since 1966.

## **Professional Roles within the Museum**

### **Focus on Collection Manager and Registrar**

Staff members at Heide Museum of Modern Art work together very closely to fulfil the various functions of a public art museum—to acquire, care for and conserve works of art, and to develop varied exhibitions from the collection and other sources.

This resource will focus on two roles specific to the care and conservation of works at Heide: the Collections Manager and the Registrar.

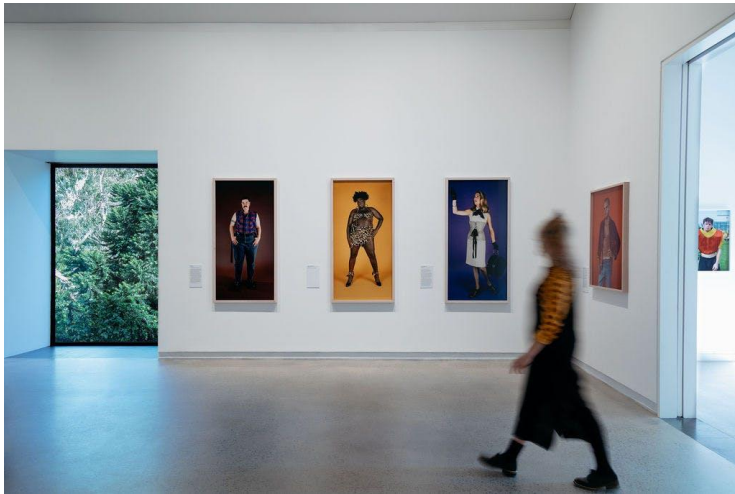
### **Collections Manager**

- Supervising storage conditions for the Collection and Archive
- Managing preventative conservation
- Coordinating records and documentation regarding the Collection and Archive
- Administering new acquisitions
- Administering outward loans of the Collection and Archive to other institutions for exhibitions
- Accompanying touring exhibitions or outward loans of the Collection and assisting with the installation and demounting of the exhibition in the host venue
- Observing the condition of the Collection and sourcing appropriate conservation treatment for damaged or deteriorated artworks
- At Heide, the Collections Manager also coordinates the installation and de-installation of Collection artworks for each exhibition
- Organising an installation team to hang and display artworks
- Completing comprehensive documentation including cataloguing and condition reporting
- Coordinating display equipment, carpentry and paintings as required

### **Registrar**

- Coordinating records and documentation for incoming and outgoing loans of artworks for temporary exhibitions, including writing legal contracts, preparing insurance cover, organising the packing, crating and freight of artworks and undertaking other relevant safety precautions
- Supervising handling and movement of artworks. Condition reporting artworks on arrival at Heide
- Ensuring that all artworks, when on display or in storage, are cared for appropriately and environmental factors such as light, pollutants, humidity and temperature changes do not affect the artworks' condition

## Conservation considerations related to the display of artwork



- Lighting: Some artworks, particularly works on paper, photographs and textiles borrowed from museum collections, are usually required to have low light levels. This prevents them from fading over time. This requirement may affect the design of an exhibition; as such works may need to be placed together if the rest of the exhibition is shown under stronger light. However, contemporary artists using photography may wish their work to be shown in bright light.
- Touching: In general, art galleries instruct visitors not to touch artworks. There are often exceptions—for example in the Heide exhibition *Simryn Gill: Gathering*, the artist invited visitors to make paper boats from the pages of a 1968 *Encyclopædia Britannica* for her artwork *Paper Boats*. Another work, *Garland* (2006) encouraged visitors to hold, touch and rearrange objects collected by Gill on the beaches of Port Dickson, Malaysia, and the islands off Singapore—fragments reshaped by sea and sand that take on almost organic form.
- The look of an exhibition is affected if a work has to be encircled by a rope or other device to prevent visitors stepping on it. This may not be satisfactory from an aesthetic point of view and so different solutions may be sought, such as moving the work into a corner.
- Also notice the wall labels and how they invite viewers to handle works in some cases and that vitrines prevent us for other artworks.