



Lelda Sunday Reed

As the inaugural director of Heide Park and Art Gallery, I knew Sunday and John Reed along with many of the artists who are now collectively called the Heide Circle. Sunday and John had lived at Heide for almost fifty years when we started the task of turning Heide II, the property and house they had sold to the State of Victoria, into a public museum.

Meeting with them both at Heide I, I witnessed not only their passion for the arts in Australia but also the great love they had for each other. I do not see the Sunday that I knew and so admired in the sensationalised accounts of her life that have emerged since her death, and it has saddened me greatly to see her legacy reduced to monotonal imaginings.

Sunday's commitment to sharing her wealth, knowledge, ideas and home to create opportunities and a better life for artists accelerated the development of modernism in Australia. This contribution—combined with her acute artistic judgement and the strength of her convictions, at a time when subservience was expected of women—is a significant aspect of her life that is too often forgotten.

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Born in Melbourne in 1905, Sunday was schooled at home in Toorak until she was fifteen, after which she spent two years at St Catherine's School. Growing up in a privileged, sheltered environment, with a loving father and three brothers, Sunday was comfortable in the company of men but ill-prepared for the misogynistic attitudes, as prevalent during her lifetime as they are now, of the broader patriarchal Australian society.

The renowned Heidelberg School painter Arthur Streeton was a close family friend who often visited the house that Sunday's father, Arthur Sydney Baillieu, had bought and extended at Sorrento. At times, he painted the same beach scenes as Sunday's artist mother, Ethel Mary. However, it is the painting that he made of a girl dancing, while her mother sat at the piano playing Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, that is most evocative of this joyful home. The lovely girl twirling in the half-light of the terrace room, with Port Phillip Bay drenched in moonlight behind her, was Lelda Sunday Baillieu.

A sailor, James George Baillieu, had jumped ship into that same turbulent bay in 1853, not far from where the water rushed through the heads into the Bass Strait.

Maudie Palmer AO

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Sunday Reed, Heide c. 1974, photographer: unknown, Heide Museum of Modern Art Archive.

He swam all the way to the opposite shore to start a new life and make his fortune in the new colony. Sunday would go on to inherit the spirit of adventure, confidence, determination and extraordinary imagination of this young man who would become her grandfather.

In 1924, Sunday travelled with her family to London where she was presented at court as a debutante. However, the young English aristocrats proved no more attractive than the potential suitors she had met in Australia. Upon returning to Melbourne, Sunday met up again with the American-born Englishman Leonard Quinn, whom she had known briefly before going to London. His charm captivated Sunday and, shortly after her 21st birthday in 1926, they were married. Sunday had seen in Quinn a worldly man who contrasted dramatically with other men she had encountered. She was thrilled to return to Europe with him, where she could continue to develop her burgeoning interest in modern art, music and literature.

However, what Sunday had innocently misjudged to be Quinn's sophisticated lifestyle would prove to be the ruin of their marriage. She had no understanding of the decadent world that he frequented. Two years after their wedding, Quinn's philandering had brought about irreparable damage to Sunday's health and the end of their marriage. Sunday's father, who was visiting on business, and her older brother Darren, who was studying at Cambridge University, came to support her. They started proceedings for the annulment of the marriage and eventually brought her back home to Melbourne.

Soon after her return in mid-1930, Sunday met a young solicitor, John Reed, at a tennis party at the home of her aunt and uncle. John Reed's family background was not dissimilar to Sunday's. John's grandfather, Henry Reed, had sailed to Tasmania in 1827 when he was just 20 years of age, determined to make his fortune, which he did.

Six months after her divorce was finalised, Sunday married John in January of 1932. In that same year, Sunday suffered the loss of her beloved mother, who died in November. Sunday and her family were by this time no strangers to grief, as Sunday's eldest brother, Kingsbury, had died seven years prior.

Sunday and John began married life in the Melbourne suburb of South Yarra. At Cambridge University, John read law and studied the arts, and, prior to meeting Sunday, had already started mixing with artists back in Australia. They were, however, conservative in comparison with the modernists Sunday had become interested in from her time living abroad. And so, from the early days of their marriage, they became part of a group of radical individuals who would become known as Melbourne's bohemia. In the same year that the Reeds were married, John's younger sister, Cynthia Reed, opened her studio gallery on Collins Street, Melbourne, where modernist artists and designers were exhibited.

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As a wedding present, Sunday's father had given the couple a property comprising a farmhouse and approximately one acre of land, which they would name Heide, an abbreviation of Heidelberg. In 1934, John and Sunday bought the adjoining property, and the following year they moved into the farmhouse. (This subsequently acquired land would be the site on which Heide II was later built.) They now had a total of around fifteen acres of land: a former dairy farm with paddocks stripped of native vegetation bordered by the Yarra River. They would set about planting exotic trees and then, from the 1960s onwards, they planted only natives, creating the beautiful park that exists today on the river now known by the original name given to it by the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people: the Birrarung.

Sunday's love of art, gardens and languages came from her mother, an avid gardener who was fluent in French. Her passion for nature was recognised by her youngest brother, Everard, who would send her cornflowers on her birthday with no wrapping and tied with a plain ribbon. Sunday briefly attended the Bell Shore Art School, but after moving to Heide, she concentrated on developing the garden; she was especially passionate about roses and was reputed to have planted some 250 varieties.

John continued to work as a solicitor during the 1930s. Together they welcomed progressive thinkers and artists to their new home. The young avant-garde artist Sam Atyeo, who had become friends with them while they lived in South Yarra, often stayed at Heide. Sunday and John had what would be later termed an open marriage, and Atyeo and the painter Moya Dyring (who would later become Atyeo's wife) were both intimate with the Reeds. When he later went to France, Atyeo would write to Sunday, referring to their discussions about art. In one instance, writing to her about his painting *The Dancer* (1936), he says that it was her idea to change the colour in the top-left corner of the painting, and how pleased he was with the work as a result.¹

In 1938, Sidney Nolan was seeking patronage so he could travel to Paris. He was encouraged by newspaper owner Sir Keith Murdoch to pay a visit to John Reed at his office. John recognised at that meeting the potential that Nolan, then 21 years of age, had as an artist. He became a frequent visitor to Heide, eventually separating from his wife and small child to move into the farmhouse with the Reeds, where he could develop his art practice with their financial support.

During this time, Sunday was Nolan's muse and his studio assistant. She translated the French surrealist poet Arthur Rimbaud for them to discuss. A small watercolour in the Heide collection, which had been a gift to Sunday, is inscribed by Nolan with '*For the One Who Paints Such Beautiful Squares*'. Squares appear more than once in the Ned Kelly series—most prominently in *The Trial* (1947) where the floor of the courtroom is depicted in red and white squares. Nolan painted the Kelly series on the dining room table at Heide, and John Reed described Nolan painting 'with his brush in one hand and his other arm round Sunday's waist'.² The Reeds arranged an exhibition of the series of 27 paintings upon their completion; there was little interest and only one painting was sold.

1. Phipps, Jennifer, et al. *Atyeo* (exhibition catalogue), Heide Park and Art Gallery, Melbourne, 1982, p. 12.

2. John Reed in a letter to Kenneth Clark dated 1977, published in Reid, Barrett and Underhill, Nancy (eds), *Letters of John Reed: Defining Australian Cultural Life 1920–1981*, Penguin Books, Australia, 2001, p. 826.



Sunday Reed carrying a limestone block for Heide II, c. 1964, photographer: unknown, Heide Museum of Modern Art Archive.

John gave up his law practice in the mid-1940s to set up Reed & Harris with poet and publisher Max Harris, as well as Sunday and Nolan. John and Nolan were already two of the founding members of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), which was established in 1938 to promote modern art and contemporary artists. Max Harris would say these artists contributed to a 'noisy and aggressive revolutionary modernism'.³ The Heide Circle of artists flourished with the Reeds' support—Sunday herself providing funds which made it possible for many paintings to be made.

Sunday loved Heide as her organised domain, a haven from the ideologically divided public art world in which John was so invested. At home, they would debate issues preoccupying modern art movements, with Sunday contributing her thoughts on strategic alliances and planned events.

The Reeds' continued financial support and belief in the significance of Australian modernism culminated in the establishment of the Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia in 1958, where John would also be the director. The organisation ultimately failed in 1966, when the required funds to build a museum could not be raised. At that same time, the National Gallery of Victoria secured the private and public funding it needed to build its new St Kilda Road premises.

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After the demise of the Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia, the Reeds used the proceeds from the sale of Wesley Dale, a Tasmanian property that John had inherited from his father, to build the David McGlashan-designed modernist house Heide II. Situated on a hill sloping towards the river, just above the 100-year flood line, the new house was to be their 'gallery to be lived in'.⁴ Sunday was so involved in the aesthetic realisation of this building that she ordered the west wall of the double-height gallery and living space to be taken down soon after the builder had started its construction: she wanted it to be moved back to a scale more proportionate to the space. Further down the hill, with John's help, Sunday created a new fenced-off kitchen garden abundant with herbs, vegetables and scented cottage plants, and featuring pergolas covered with magnificent cascading roses.

Sunday and John moved from the original farmhouse, which would be named Heide I from that time to the acclaimed 1968 award-winning Heide II, where they would spend only around a decade. The personal events of 1979 proved to be heartbreaking, as their beloved son Sweeney died by suicide in March of that year. They sold the Heide II property, together with 112 artworks from their private collection, to the government of Victoria, and moved back to Heide I soon after Sweeney's death.

Sweeney Reed was my contemporary and friend. He was a marvellous concrete poet. Unable to have children herself, Sunday cherished Sweeney, and it had been with the permission of both of his parents, Albert Tucker and Joy Hester, that the Reeds adopted him. Given her loving friendship with Sunday and her faith in the protective environment of Heide, it seemed appropriate for Joy, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease in 1947 and expected her life to be cut short, to give her little boy Sweeney to Sunday's care.

When Sweeney died, John Reed wrote that their 'world had fallen apart ... our lives centred on Sweeney in a natural and organic way, partly perhaps because of the link between him and Joy, but essentially because of Sweeney himself'.⁵

Sunday remembered how she and John had looked up from working in the kitchen garden, raising their hands in acknowledgement when they saw Sweeney standing at the top of the hill, and how he too had raised his hand in return before turning and walking away. They would not see him alive again; Sweeney's hand had been raised in farewell forever. With this wretched memory haunting her, Sunday would never return to the Heide II property after it had been sold.

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While I had met them briefly earlier, I got to know John and Sunday Reed in the last year of their lives. During my first year at Heide Park and Art Gallery, I recall visiting Heide I for afternoon tea at the dining table, enjoying a sponge cake sprinkled with icing sugar and a single rose at its centre. I also remember a terrifying trip to Ron Upton's studio in the back of their old Volvo, with John driving and Sunday in the front seat next to him, constantly turning their beanie-covered heads to face each

4. McGlashan and Everist Architects, 'Original brief, Heide Report, January 1981, Heide Museum of Modern Art Archive, p. 1, as quoted in Harding, Lesley, and Morgan, Kendrah, *Modern Love: The Lives of John & Sunday Reed*, Melbourne University Publishing, Melbourne, 2015, p. 284.

5. John Reed in a letter to Mary Christina Sewell dated 27 August 1979, op. cit. p. 853.

3. Harris, Max, 'Angry Penguins and After', *Quadrant*, vol. 7, no. 1, summer 1962–1963, p. 6.

other as they spoke. John hardly ever had his eyes on the road, it seemed. It was some time after that when I realised that Sunday must have been lip-reading to make up for her defective hearing.

The last time I saw them both was when John called me up to Heide I for a meeting on 2 December 1981. He was talking to someone at the front door when I arrived, so he gestured for me to pass. Sunday greeted me in the hall outside the library door, saying, 'Johnnie will see you on his own today.' I was immediately struck by how odd this seemed. Sometimes, when I was working late, I would see John at a distance, walking the dog alone in the Heide grounds. And then he was also on his own, without Sunday, when he attended the opening celebration of Heide Park and Art Gallery on 12 November 1981, with Sidney Nolan's *Ned Kelly* series (1946–7), borrowed from the National Gallery of Australia, as the first exhibition. But this was the first time I had met with him in their home without Sunday.

When John came and sat down in the library to talk to me, he began by announcing that he was going to die soon. Incredulous and lost for words, I uttered some pathetic reply that denied this could be possible. I had no idea that he had been diagnosed with terminal cancer two years earlier. We focused on the success of the opening of the new gallery, which had taken place only three weeks before, and of his pleasure in seeing it happen. He gave me some strong advice about taking this long-held dream of theirs forward.

Unknown to me, John and Sunday were both believers in euthanasia, and three days after my meeting with him in the library, John was dead. Sunday held his hand as he was dying, and his last words to her were, 'Darling, you have made my life.'⁶ Ten days later on 15 December, unable to live without her husband, Sunday decided to take her life too. We said that she died of a broken heart. The Reeds' dear friend and poet Barrie Reid was there on both of these evenings, when each of them lay down to rest.

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What I know and reflect upon is that at Heide, Sunday and John created a world in which artists were nurtured and supported financially so they could make their art—first and foremost. But away from their art, they also would contribute to the running of the farm and garden, as well as enjoy the grounds and swim in the river. Sunday milked the cows and prepared vegetarian meals with produce from the garden. Winter evenings were spent sitting around the fire in the expansive library, talking about philosophy, art and literature. When Joy Hester was there, she sat on the floor, making her powerful brush-and-ink drawings. The artists learned about what their contemporaries in Britain, Europe and America were doing from books and from stories of the Reeds' travels. They understood how, while they were part of the avant-garde, their work was distinctive from that in other parts of the world. Sunday, who was ever mindful of Arthur Streeton's *Early summer - gorse in bloom*



Albert Tucker, *Sunday and John Reed* 1943, gelatin silver photograph, 40.4 × 30.6 cm, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, Gift of Barbara Tucker 2001.

(1888)—which was on the wall at Heide I—reminded them that landscape painting in Australia was not dead.

As for their polyamorous relationships, it has never been uncommon for artists to embrace creative, intellectual and sexual relationships outside the convention of marriage. But the relationship that Sunday and John shared with Sidney Nolan was one where they *both* loved him. As John Reed wrote in 1977, almost 30 years after Nolan ceased all communication, 'We were intimate friends: we loved each other ... discovering the world together, and Sunday and I were watching with fascination the daily miracle of Nolan's painting.'⁷

Nolan, who was considerably younger than John and Sunday, had a different view of the relationship. When Sunday would not leave her husband and Heide to be with Nolan in 1948, his bitterness could not be restrained. Eventually, in 1971, he published *Paradise Garden*, where images of his garden paintings were juxtaposed with cruel, offensive poems, obviously about the Reeds. These poems seem to have given the cue to misogynistic voices that write Sunday up in derogatory terms. In 1977, she gave the Nolan *Kelly* series 'with love' to the National Gallery of Australia. This gift to the nation secured Sidney Nolan's place as a major Australian artist. The Reeds had

7. John Reed in a letter to Kenneth Clark dated 1977, op. cit. p. 827.

6. Jones, Philip, *Art & Life*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney 2004, as quoted in Harding, Lesley, and Morgan, Kendrah, op. cit. p. 333.

always hoped for a reconciliation with Nolan, but he only came back to Heide with his third wife, Mary, to see the *Kelly* series on display in the summer after both John and Sunday had died.

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Heide Park and Art Gallery's future as the celebrated museum we know today was secured when it became the major beneficiary of the Reeds' wills. The properties of Heide I and Heide II were rejoined, and the couple's large and significant collection of Australian modernism is housed in what is now known as the Heide Museum of Modern Art.

It wasn't until the early 1990s, when the registered name 'Museum of Modern Art' became available, that we at Heide salvaged another part of the Reeds' dream and secured it for Heide Park and Art Gallery. I subsequently oversaw the construction of the Andrew Andersons Heide III, which opened in 1993—a purpose-built museum, situated adjacent to the Mt Gambier stone of McGlashan's Heide II. In 2005, the then-director Lesley Alway oversaw the building of the extension to Heide III and the separate Sidney Myer Education Centre designed by O'Connor + Houle, which opened to the public in 2006.

Both the Reeds were exceptional thinkers, abreast of political, cultural and artistic movements globally. Until their deaths, their support of contemporary artists and their passion for contemporary art and intellectual discourse remained vibrant. I witnessed their generosity and compassionate patronage, John's leadership values, and Sunday's dignity and grace. Their ashes rest at the base of the old 'canoe tree', which in 2014 was recognised by the Woi Wurrung name of Yingabeal and acknowledged as part of the Wurundjeri songlines. It is the Reeds' legacy that Australia is so fortunate to have preserved in the museum, the gardens and the park at Heide—the place that realises their dream for an enriched cultural life.

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