

Heide Museum of Modern Art unveils *Song of the Earth 1968-2020*, a major survey of John Nixon's art



Installation view, *John Nixon: Song of the Earth 1968–2020*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, photograph: Clytie Meredith

IMAGES available [HERE](#)

Heide Museum of Modern Art has unveiled *Song of the Earth 1968-2020*, a major exhibition of works by **John Nixon** (1949–2020), one of Australia's most influential and experimental abstract artists. On view until **9 March 2026**, this extensive survey is the first to span Nixon's fifty-year career. Presented five years after his death, it offers a timely celebration of his life's work.

Curated by Nixon's wife, leading curator and writer **Sue Cramer**, with Heide Senior Curator **Melissa Keys**, the survey is drawn from the artist's estate, together with loans from private lenders and major institutions such as the **National**

MEDIA RELEASE

26 November 2025



Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of South Australia, Monash University Museum of Art, and the W Power collection, The University of Sydney, managed by Museum of Contemporary Art.

Nixon approached abstraction not merely as a style but as an ethical position—a way of engaging with the world through clarity, simplicity, and an irrepressible spirit of experimentation. His vibrant, materially diverse paintings combine bold geometric forms with repurposed materials—cardboard, wood, metal, hessian, and other humble fabrics, which he transforms into objects of visual pleasure. As **Nixon** said, *“There is no waste in what I do, it’s a self-sustaining practice. Everything becomes useful to me”*.

Nixon also drew inspiration from twentieth-century avant-garde movements — particularly Dada, Futurism, and above all Russian Constructivism, whose ambitious, multidisciplinary vision and geometric vocabulary captured his imagination. As a young artist, he also absorbed the formal clarity of Minimalism, with its simple, object-like forms, and the concept-driven approach of Conceptual Art, which challenged prevailing artistic norms. Ever the avant-gardist, he carried this spirit of experimentation forward into contemporary times, believing that *‘to be an artist is to question the nature of art’*.

The exhibition’s title suggests the significance of music and nature to Nixon’s work. Curator **Sue Cramer** says: *“The leitmotifs of ‘the Song’ and ‘the Earth’ have inspired this exhibition of John Nixon’s abstract artworks, drawing attention to the lyricism that unfolds in his work alongside its more formal and analytical concerns. His art of the 1980s is especially rich with allusions to music and nature, which broaden the resonance of his abstractions and connect them to wider domains. Nixon envisioned art and life as inseparable, drawing on the utopian and aspirational ideals of the historical avant-garde to affirm art—and most particularly non-objective abstraction—as an epic and far-reaching endeavour”*.

John Nixon: Song of the Earth 1968-2020 presents rarely seen minimal and conceptual works from the late 1960s and 1970s, alongside Nixon’s striking 1980s *tableaux*, in which abstract paintings are combined with readymade objects — including a grand piano, a pail of potatoes, and a bicycle. It also highlights Nixon’s long-running Experimental Painting Workshop (EPW), which he described as ‘not a physical workshop’ but a conceptual framework for his entire practice. A dedicated room explores Nixon’s ‘side projects’ including the Polaroid series *The Society for Other Photography* (1980–1982), his *Anti-Music* collective (1979–1983), a cassette recording project, and his later music and theatre ventures, including the band *The Donkey’s Tail* and the theatre troupe *The Donkey’s Tail Klang Theatre*.

Senior Curator **Melissa Keys** says: *“A much loved educator and mentor to many early career artists, Nixon was a central figure in Melbourne’s creative community, initiating publishing projects, curatorial ventures, and collaborative music and theatre activities that engaged generations of Australian artists. His influential Art Projects gallery (1979–1984)—a space for exhibiting his own work alongside that of his contemporaries—established an enduring model for today’s artist-run galleries”*.

Ends

MEDIA RELEASE

26 November 2025



IMAGES available [HERE](#)

MEDIA CONTACTS: For further information or interview requests, contact Siân Davies, sian@articulateadvisory.com, 0402 728 462, or Claire Martin, claire@articulateadvisory.com, 0414 437 588.

ABOUT JOHN NIXON

From his first solo exhibition at Melbourne's avant-garde Pinacotheca gallery in 1973, Nixon exhibited widely in Australia and internationally, including London, New York, Europe, and regularly in New Zealand from 1986. His first international solo exhibition was in London in 1978, and in 1982 he—alongside Imants Tillers—became one of the first Australians to represent the country at the prestigious documenta survey in Kassel, Germany. In his final five years, he held solo exhibitions across Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane, as well as in Amsterdam, New York, Wellington, Ottendorf (Germany), Graested (Denmark), and Paris.

John Nixon is represented by Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne.

ABOUT HEIDE

Heide is a public art museum and sculpture park located on a stretch of the Birrarung/Yarra River in Naarm/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.

heide.com.au