

PRESS RELEASE 2017

Transferences: Sidney Nolan in Britain

18 February – 4 June 2017

Press View: Thursday 16 February 2017

In spring 2017, Pallant House Gallery will be holding the first major exhibition in the Sidney Nolan Centenary 2017. As part of a nationwide programme presented by the Sidney Nolan Trust to celebrate Sidney Nolan's standing as a leading figure of international 20th century art, the exhibition focuses on Nolan's time living and working in Britain and the critical reception he received there. It brings together works that reveal recurring themes such as Australian history and literature, mythology, and the tragic hero/anti-hero, whilst showing how he incorporated European influences into his Australian subjects.

Sidney Nolan was born in Melbourne, Australia in 1917 and in 1949 attracted the admiration of Sir Kenneth Clark, who encountered Nolan's paintings on a trip to Australia, declared him a 'natural painter' and encouraged him to try his luck in London. Nolan took up the challenge, moved to London in 1953 and thereafter made England his permanent home. He died in London on 28 November 1992.

During his lifetime, Nolan produced an extraordinarily diverse body of work, working in a wide range of materials and experimenting with new techniques. As evidenced in Nolan's inclusion in Lord Snowden's influential book 'Private Views', under the subtitle 'the lively world of British art', within a decade of arriving in the UK, Nolan had established himself as a pivotal figure in the British art world with important exhibitions, including a major retrospective at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1957, under his belt.

The exhibition at Pallant House Gallery will include iconic paintings from the 50s and 60s depicting solitary, often doomed figures in a style that updated landscape painting for a 20th century audience. Featuring 'mythic' figures from Australian history such as the famous outlaw Ned Kelly, the tragic explorers Burke and Wills and Mrs Fraser, who was shipwrecked



Sidney Nolan, *Convict in a Billabong*, c.1960, oil on canvas, 121 x 151cm, The University of York © Sidney Nolan Trust

and imprisoned by Aborigines, Nolan explored subjects that were equally rooted in British colonial history and grounded in universal themes such as the nature of heroism. In fact, many of Nolan's paintings of these subjects were painted in England and these transferences lend the exhibition its title.

Nolan's first one-man show at the Redfern Gallery in May 1955 showcased a new series of works depicting Ned Kelly. His Irish roots attracted him to Kelly, the villain/hero of the Irish working class, but in true Nolan style there was an additional complexity. His grandfather had been a policeman who was involved in the hunt for the elusive bushman. The somewhat naïve, but powerful, Australian renditions of Kelly became more complex when he rekindled the subject in England.

In 1955, the critic David Sylvester said 'In these new paintings of Nolan's, which should establish him among the half-dozen best painters under forty in the world, it is no longer a question of telling Ned Kelly's story: the picture *is* a myth'. Robert Melville, writing in 1963, went further stating that 'Kelly belonged to the

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company of twentieth century personages which includes Picasso's Minotaur, Chirico's mannequins, Ernst's birdmen, Bacon's Popes and Giacometti's walking man'.

Music was vastly important to Nolan and was integral to his creative process. Stravinsky's infamous 'The Rite of Spring' was Nolan's first foray into set design for the Royal Ballet. Within the exhibition are set designs and costumes from Kenneth Macmillan's ground-breaking 1962 production, in which the location was shifted from Russia to the Australian outback. Nolan's tribal themed interpretation was considered a triumph and remains the definitive version of the ballet today, using Nolan's set and costumes, as evidenced by photographs from a 2013 show.

The Sidney Nolan Centenary 2017 programme includes exhibitions at Ikon Gallery, the Australian High Commission and the British Museum, and symposiums at the Royal Academy of Arts and King's College London. In May, the Sidney Nolan Trust will open Nolan's studio to the public for the first time at The Rodd, Herefordshire. Visit www.sidneynolantrust.org for more information.

The exhibition has been curated by Rebecca Daniels with Simon Martin. An illustrated catalogue published by Pallant House Gallery and the Sidney Nolan Trust accompanies the exhibition.

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Pallant House Gallery spring exhibitions and displays

Victor Pasmore: Towards a New Reality

11 March – 11 June 2017

British Constructivism: The Petitgas Collection

11 March – 11 June 2017

Hughie O'Donoghue: The Crucifixion

From spring 2017

Pablo Bronstein: Wall Pomp

Until summer 2017

Lothar Götz: Composition for a Staircase Ongoing

Laura Ford: Beauty in the Beast

Until summer 2017

About Pallant House Gallery: Located in the heart of historic Chichester on the south coast, Pallant House Gallery is a unique combination of a Grade One Listed Queen-Anne townhouse and an award-winning contemporary extension, housing one of the most significant collections of Modern British art in the country. Widely acclaimed for its innovative temporary exhibitions and exemplary Learning and Community programme which has inclusion at its heart, the Gallery has won numerous awards since re-opening in 2006. www.pallant.org.uk.

The Sidney Nolan Centenary 2017 is a year-long nationwide programme of exhibitions, events and publications to celebrate the work and legacy of the artist Sir Sidney Nolan OM AC RA, and to mark the centenary of his birth. It is presented by the Sidney Nolan Trust: www.sidneynolantrust.org

