

Sidney Nolan 10 June - 3 September 2017



Sidney Nolan, *Seasons in Hell (Benjamin Britten)* (1983).
Spray on canvas © the Sidney Nolan Trust



Sir Sidney Nolan, *Brett Whiteley* (1982).
Spray on canvas © the Sidney Nolan Trust

Born in Australia, Sidney Nolan (1917 - 1992), is one of the most important artists of the twentieth century. This exhibition, part of a nationwide programme presented by the Sidney Nolan Trust to celebrate the centenary of Nolan's birth, brings to light a selection of extraordinary spray painted portraits dating from the 1980s. It includes a series made in 1982 for an exhibition at the Nolan Gallery at Lanyon, just outside Canberra, depicting individuals that had strong personal significance for Nolan, including his brother (tragically killed in the Second World War), close friend Benjamin Britten, Francis Bacon and fellow Australian artist Brett Whiteley.

A later series shown here, dating from May 1987, features Aboriginal subjects as Nolan was returning to a theme that was evident very early in his artistic career; namely the unresolved relationship between indigenous Australians and European settlers. Between 1987 and 1991, as a result of growing public concern, there was a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody set up to investigate the causes of deaths of Aboriginal people while held in Australian gaols. It is likely that Nolan shared

these concerns, resulting in this vivid series of works, deriving dramatic impact from their resemblance on one hand to spray-painted graffiti, with transgression implied, and on the other to Aboriginal cave paintings.

Jonathan Watkins Director of Ikon said *"The portraits made mainly with spray paint on canvas, exemplify the unflagging inventiveness of Nolan. Large and stylistically very free, they are like spontaneous breathings of colour, artistic conspiracies that conjure up likenesses mainly of people staring wide-eyed out of their pictorial space - European and Aboriginal. Like ghosts wanting to make contact they seem to interrogate us, spectrally, with their gaze."*

The 1980s was the decade of post-modernism, of Keith Haring (spray-painting) and a return to figuration in visual art, but it would be a mistake to cast Nolan simply in some trans-avant-garde light, because he never stopped painting figuratively and/or being stylistically expressionistic. During that decade he was an elderly artist increasingly unconcerned about artistic convention, very candid and more true to himself than ever. He could not have been stronger at the end of his artistic career.

The exhibition at Ikon will be accompanied by a publication with texts by Jane Clark and Ian Henderson.

This exhibition is part of the Sidney Nolan Centenary 2017, 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

For more information and high-res images please contact Sam Skillings or Emily Luxford at Ikon Gallery on 0121 248 0708 or email s.skillings@ikon-gallery.org or e.luxford@ikon-gallery.org

Nolan and Ikon by Jonathan Watkins, Director Ikon Gallery

Of Irish origin, Sidney Nolan was born in Melbourne on 22 April 1917. During his lifetime he became recognised as one of the foremost international modern artists.

In his youth Nolan painted his famous series of paintings inspired by the life of the outlaw Ned Kelly, and before setting out for England, in 1951, he travelled throughout Australia working on several remarkable sequences of paintings, the most notable of which depicts the landscape of the interior. Major retrospective exhibitions have been held in Sydney in 1967 and 2007, in Melbourne in both 1987 and 1992, at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1957 and in Dublin at the Royal Dublin Society in 1973. Nolan is widely represented in the state galleries of Australia, regional galleries in the UK as well as the Tate Gallery in London, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Pittsburgh Museum of Art and the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

It is pertinent that Nolan eventually moved to the area that borders Wales and the Midlands, given that Ikon started in 1965 at a time when he was especially influential in the UK. Ikon's founder artists, such as Robert Groves and David Prentice, have acknowledged this and certainly it is possible to detect some stylistic correspondence. As Ikon's Director Jonathan Watkins observes "*Nolan's late work, made in the Midlands, demonstrates the complexity of Nolan - the fact that he was much more than the painter of Ned Kelly - and therefore we could not be more right and privileged to be showing it.*"

Note to Editors:

About Ikon Gallery

1. Ikon exhibition opening: Wednesday 14 June 2017, 6-8pm
2. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. www.ikon-gallery.org
3. Ikon is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am - 5pm. Admission is free. Ikon Gallery is supported using public funding from Arts Council England and Birmingham City Council. For the latest news and events follow @ikongallery on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Ikon Social Media Handles:

Instagram, Twitter and Facebook: @ikongallery #IkonGallery

About the Sidney Nolan Trust

1. The visionary 20th century artist Sir Sidney Nolan OM AC KB RA rose to his considerable status from the harsh conditions of a childhood in depression ravaged Melbourne of the 1930s. Part of his immense legacy is the ambition and philanthropy he showed in creating a registered charity in his name in 1985, set in a beautiful secluded valley at his home The Rodd, on the Welsh Border, and for which he purchased a 250 acres of organic farmland. When Nolan died in 1992 the Trust was endowed with a legacy of his paintings, the property, the organic farm and the woodland of The Rodd.
2. The Trustees' ambition is for Sidney Nolan Trust to develop into an important centre for the arts and music, occupying a unique position regionally and enjoying national and international recognition. It will continue to promote Nolan's remarkable artistic legacy: its multi-disciplinary, international residency and master class programme will build into a vital support for established and emerging artists and musicians.
3. The Sidney Nolan Trust will also continue to work with partner organisations from the neighbouring West Midlands conurbation to develop its learning programme, providing a safe and secure rural environment for young people challenged by homelessness or by family, mental health or financial difficulties. www.sidneynolantrust.org

Sidney Nolan Trust Social Media Handles:

@sidneynolantrust (Instagram) @sidneynolantrust (Twitter) #SidneyNolanCentenary

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Ikon Gallery
1 Oozells Square, Brindleyplace, Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / www.ikon-gallery.org
Open Tuesday-Sunday & Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm / free entry
Registered charity no. 528892



Sidney Nolan, *I Shall Tattoo Myself* (1982).
Spray on canvas © the Sidney Nolan Trust



Sidney Nolan, *Aboriginal Girl* (1986).
Spray on canvas © the Sidney Nolan Trust



Sidney Nolan painting in his studio at The Rodd, Presteigne
(1986) Courtesy of Brian Adams



Sir Sidney Nolan *Self-portrait*, (1986)
Spray paint on canvas © the Sidney Nolan Trust

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Sir Sidney Nolan, *Young Boy Who was Good at Latin*, (1982)
Spray paint on canvas © the Sidney Nolan Trust



Sir Sidney Nolan, *Francis Bacon*, (1982)
Spray paint on canvas © the Sidney Nolan Trust



Sir Sidney Nolan, *Untitled*, (1986)
Spray paint on canvas © the Sidney Nolan Trust



Sir Sidney Nolan, *Untitled*, (1986)
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Sir Sidney Nolan Untitled, (1987)
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