

SIR SIDNEY NOLAN

Sidney Nolan was born in Victoria, Australia, in 1917.

He received no early formal training but was enrolled twice, in 1934 and 1936, at the National Gallery of Victoria's School of Art. At this time he was working as a commercial artist and preferred educating himself at the public library to attending classes.

Nolan's early paintings were influenced by Dadaism and he was a prolific and experimental painter, throughout his life exploring the use of a variety of media.

In 1940 he held his first solo exhibition, in Melbourne. That same year he was commissioned by Serge Lifar to design costumes and sets for the Sydney season of the Ballet Russes' production 'Icare'.

He was conscripted into the army in 1942 and served for the next two years. In 1945 Nolan began his first paintings on the theme of Ned Kelly. This series was exhibited in Melbourne in 1948 and later in Paris and Rome.

Nolan left Melbourne in 1947, moving to Queensland where he produced another series of paintings on the theme of the shipwrecked Mrs Eliza Fraser. He married at the age of thirty, for the first of three times, and settled in Sydney.

Nolan received official recognition in 1949 when the Art Gallery of New South Wales purchased two of his paintings. In 1950 he won the Dunlop Prize for one of a series of desert scapes and in 1951 his first London exhibition contained several paintings from this series. The Tate Gallery purchased 'Inland Australia' from this exhibition.

From 1953 Nolan based himself in London and began travelling. He lived in Greece from 1955 to 1956 and America from 1958 to 1959 and again in 1966. He had successive exhibitions at major galleries in London and New York, often on new subjects, but repeatedly returning to the Ned Kelly theme. Each time he revisited this theme his paintings espoused a different technique. His later works became increasingly large in scale. Nolan also continued designing sets and costumes for the stage.

In 1981 Sidney Nolan received his knighthood. In 1987 he was made an associate of the Royal Academy and was elected as a member of the Academy in 1991. When he died in 1992, Sir Sidney Nolan was Australia's most honoured and internationally acclaimed modern painter.