

EDUCATION KIT

TARRAWARRA
MUSEUM
OF ART



SIDNEY NOLAN: MYTH RIDER and HEATHER B. SWANN: LEDA AND THE SWAN

How to use this kit

This Education Kit has been developed to support learning alongside the exhibitions *Sidney Nolan: Myth Rider* and *Heather B. Swann: Leda and the Swan* at TarraWarra Museum of Art. The content of this Education Kit is created for Year 10 students through to VCE and tertiary students, and for primary and secondary school teachers to select and adapt the questions and support materials provided within the resource for learning experiences in the classroom.

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Front Cover: Sidney Nolan
Floating ANZAC 1959
polyvinyl acetate on composition board
121.6 x 152.4 cm
Museum of Old and New Art (Mona), Hobart
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Heather B. Swann
The Staggering Girl 2019
synthetic polymer paint on wood
9 panels, each 76 x 76 cm;
overall 228 x 228 cm
Photo: Andrew Curtis
Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney

Acknowledgement of Country

This exhibition is presented on the lands and waters of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. TarraWarra Museum of Art acknowledges the Wurundjeri as the original custodians of this land, and we extend our respect to their community, their Ancestors, and their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Exhibition Introduction

SIDNEY NOLAN: MYTH RIDER

Combining compelling subject matter and a highly inventive approach to a wide range of media, the rich array of works in this exhibition reveal Sidney Nolan's innate understanding of and facility for mythopoesis—the making of myth. As the artist understood, myths are forms of knowledge and feats of imagination by which the most contradictory, complex and challenging experiences and ideas can be expressed and realised—and this is what he sought to transmit through his art.

Sidney Nolan: Myth Rider brings together over 100 works from the period 1955–1966, to chart the artist's decade long engagement with the epic subject of the Trojan War, its parallels with the Gallipoli campaign, and its origins in the myth of Leda and the Swan. Throughout these three interconnected series, Nolan employs his remarkable visual and mental acuity to meld classical allusions, literary sources, historical references, and his own personal experience of war, to create works in which the past and present, ancient and modern, legend and history are conflated and vividly reimagined.

What emerges during this period is a deepening sense of the tragic which came to inform the artist's vision of warfare as a predestined and overwhelming force. Through his long consideration of human conflict, its historical constancy and its contemporary immediacy, Nolan's understanding of the inevitability of war and its sorrow-filled aftermath, instilled in him an overarching sense of the precarity of life.

HEATHER B. SWANN: LEDA AND THE SWAN

Heather B. Swann's work resonates with the stories and symbols, forms and materials of the past. This is the direct result of a rich experience of and delight in historical museum-culture, art and artefacts. At the same time, her work responds to intimate sensations, emotions and contemplation while also being attuned to the crises of our troubled times. Her project is to translate these fleeting experiences and observations into form, into sculpture and painting.

This new work is conceived as an installation, a singular spatial construct in which the arrangement of forms shapes the empty air of a room, creating delicate and invisible pressure. This tension frames Swann's contemporary reading of the ancient myth of Leda and the Swan. Enriched by the recent experiences of residencies in Rome and Athens and informed by close observation of Archaic and Classical antiquities, she retells the story through a grammar of fragmentation, repetition and mismatched scale.

The artist creates a place of stillness with room for reflection. Reimagining the Leda story in three configurations, she reaffirms the fundamental enigma of myth as well as its cumulative cultural layers and variations. Swann explores the actions, emotions and social-moral codes of this ancient, ambiguous and chilling narrative, and more broadly the fraught coexistence of chaos and order, barbarity and civilisation. From Leda's predicament Swann distils an encounter and a language of force and resistance: tooth and nail.

About the artist: Sidney Nolan



Sidney Nolan in front of the Parthenon, February 1972

Photograph: Cynthia Nolan

Papers of Sidney Nolan,

National Library of Australia, MS 10245,

Black and white photographic prints of artworks, 1940s–1960s/File 300, Album 255

Reproduced with permission of Jinx Nolan

Sir Sidney Nolan (1917–1992) is one of Australia's most celebrated artists of the 20th century. Combining compelling subject matter and a highly inventive approach to a wide range of media, the rich array and vast number of works he painted during his lifetime, were underpinned by his innate understanding of and facility for mythopoesis—the making of myth. As the artist understood, myths, like poems, are forms of knowledge and feats of imagination by which the most contradictory, complex and challenging experiences and ideas can be expressed and realised—and this is what he sought to transmit through his art.

A committed autodidact throughout his life, he was a voracious and attentive reader of literature, philosophy, history, mythology, and, above all, poetry. However, merely reading about a subject, idea or theme was not enough. He had to go to the place where it originated, to absorb its atmosphere and experience its culture, its art, and its landscape—a process which perhaps saw him travel further and more broadly than any other artist of his generation. It was this combination of

in depth reading, immersion in place, and the immediacy of looking, that informed many of Nolan's 'mythopoetic' works in which the past and present, legend and history, the personal and the universal, are conflated and vividly reimaged.

Although Nolan attended Brighton Technical School, Prahran Technical College and drawing classes at the National Gallery School of Design, he was a largely self-taught artist, holding his first solo exhibition in Melbourne in 1940. That same year, he received his first commission to design the backdrop for the Australian production of *Icare* by the Ballet Russes in Sydney. Conscripted into the Army in April 1942, Nolan spent most of the next two years stationed in western Victoria, where, when not undertaking official duties, he found himself with concentrated periods of time during which he responded to his immediate environment in a series of highly lyrical and inventive drawings and paintings.

During the 1940s, Nolan emerged as a highly influential member of the 'Heide Circle', a group of artists, including Albert Tucker, Joy Hester and Danila Vassilieff, who all worked in the residence of John and Sunday Reed (now Heide Museum of Modern Art). Together, these artists forged an Australian modernism that liberated the image from realism, producing a semi-surreal Australian mythology. Nolan's iconic series of Ned Kelly paintings, completed at Heide in 1946–47, have since become some of the most recognised and celebrated paintings in the history of Australian art. In 1947, Nolan left Heide and over the next few years travelled widely throughout Queensland and Central Australia out of which emerged powerful bodies of work on the tale of shipwreck survivor Eliza Fraser, his confronting response to the effects of prolonged drought, and his powerful aerial visions of the outback.

Following his first forays into Europe in 1950–51, Nolan returned in 1953 and, following extensive travels over the next two years, he finally settled in London in 1955, where he would base his career from then on. From these experiences, new series emerged on the subject of Greek mythology, Australia's involvement in the Gallipoli campaign, and a new series of Mrs Fraser paintings. Although he was based overseas, his work

continually returned to the Australian landscape and its epic narratives including—in particular, an ongoing engagement with the legend of Ned Kelly and the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition. A significant retrospective of his work was presented at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in 1957 and his international reputation was further solidified by the successes of his 1960 exhibition *Leda and the Swan and Other Recent Work*—the culmination of a two year Harkness fellowship in the America—followed by *Sidney Nolan: African Journey* in 1963 based on his extensive travels there. Subsequent trips to Antarctica in 1964 and China in 1965, inspired him to explore new materials and processes in responding to these environments and landscapes.

From the mid-1960s, Nolan embarked on a number of major multi-panel compositions, including a return to the Kelly theme in his *Riverbend* series (1964–65 and 1965–66) and the confronting imagery of *Inferno* (1966). These works were highlights of his first Australian retrospective at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1967. Nolan later went on to produce even vaster installations comprised of dozens of small compositions, including the immense *Oceania triptych: Paradise Garden* (1968–70), *Snake* (1970–72), and *Shark* (1972–73). In 1983, Nolan purchased The Rodd, a large property on the Welsh border, where he began working in spray paint, creating both figurative works but also large-scale abstract paintings—a return to his origins as a predominantly abstract painter early in his career. In 1985, the Sidney Nolan Trust was established to manage The Rodd as a farm and a creative space. To coincide with his 70th birthday, in 1987 the National Gallery of Victoria opened its *Sidney Nolan, Landscapes & Legends: A Retrospective Exhibition: 1937–1987*, which subsequently toured to Sydney, Perth, and Adelaide.

Since his death in 1992, many major exhibitions of Nolan's work have been exhibited and several monographs have been published on his work, including T.G. Rosenthal's *Sidney Nolan* published by Thames and Hudson in 2002. Nolan's works are held in all major art gallery collections in Australia as well as in the collections of the Tate in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

About the artist: Heather B. Swann



Heather B. Swann
Photo by Andrew Curtis

Heather B. Swann works outwards from the poetics of intimate sensation, emotion and thought. Her work resonates with the stories and symbols, forms and materials of the past, the product of a rich experience of and delight in historical, museum-culture art and artefacts. At the same time, she is closely engaged with both the eternal present of perception and her own world of feeling, as well as making allusion to the particular crises of our troubled times. Her project is the translation of such fleeting phenomenological observations into form, into sculpture.

Born in Hobart, Swann lived in Sydney, Brisbane and Austinmer as a student and a bookseller before returning to Tasmania in her late twenties, where she studied at the Tasmanian School of Art. Completing an MFA in 1999, she has since established a formidable reputation as a maker of sculptural objects and ink drawings of dark, sensual and oneiric presence. Her figurative reflexes often produce images of human or animal bodies, semblances of life kinked by surrealist convulsion and an instinct for abstraction, the works on paper often enlivened by stammering, ambiguous texts. In more recent years her practice has expanded to incorporate painting, video and performance; her musical-dramatic production *Nervous* was presented at the National Gallery of Australia in 2017, *I let my body fall into a rhythm* at the BUoY Arts Center, Tokyo and *Sad Mouse* at C A V E S, Melbourne in 2018.

In addition to presenting more than 20 solo shows since 1993, Heather has had work included in numerous curated group exhibitions, including *A Room Inside* (Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, 2007), *Louise Bourgeois and Australian Artists* (Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2012), *Solitaire* (TarraWarra Museum of Art, 2014), *Streetwise: contemporary print culture* (National Gallery of Australia, 2015) and *Magic Object: Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2016).

Artists & Key Artworks: Sidney Nolan

Sidney Nolan
Pale Figure on a Horse 1956
oil and enamel paint on composition board
91.5 x 122.0 cm
Collection of Frederick and Jennifer McMurray
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The motif for *Pale Figure on a Horse* originated in a series of experimental works on paper that Nolan produced on Hydra in which he playfully reconfigures the fragments of a sculpture of a horse and rider. Another likely reference is the marble frieze from the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, c. 350 BC., which depicts the fearsome mythical battles fought between the Greeks and the Amazons. For Nolan—who had probably seen these relief sculptures firsthand at the British Museum—the striking scene of a figure mounted backwards on her horse as it lunges forward, seems to have made a deep impression. However, as always, Nolan transmutes his sources into his own distinctive vision whereby the Amazon is transformed into an eerie, wraith-like character, the horse invokes many of the hallmarks of the dehydrated and skeletal carcasses he painted in 1952–53, and the action is transposed to the rocky terrain of an inhospitable landscape. Informed by his close reading of the French philosopher Simone Weil’s essay ‘The Iliad, or the Poem of Force’, the sense of disquiet invoked by the pale rider—who is powerless to control the speed or direction of the horse’s forward trajectory—becomes a metaphor for the destructive and uncontrollable force of war as it carries away all before it.



Student Questions

- What messages about war is Nolan communicating in *Pale Figure on a Horse*?
- Why has Nolan painted the pale figure without arms and riding a horse facing backwards?

Artists & Key Artworks: Sidney Nolan

Sidney Nolan
Warrior 1957
ANZAC 'Walking Wounded' 1957
crayon on coated paper
Collection of the Estate of Lady Nolan

Soon after arriving in Paris in November 1957 for a winter residency at Stanley Hayter's influential print-making studio Atelier 17, Nolan produced a confronting sequence of crayon drawings depicting mutilated and disfigured soldiers/warriors. These works, whose inscriptions clearly identify the figures as Anzac soldiers who have been horrifically maimed, were perhaps triggered by reading 'Return to a Legend', the Australian writer Alan Moorehead's 1955 article in *The New Yorker* in which he recalls seeing his Uncle Harry following his return from Gallipoli, 'his right arm, and his right leg, too, had been carried away by a shell'. However, as the inscriptions on the backs of two of these works reveal, they also draw upon Nolan's encounter with an ancient sculpture in the Museum of Olympia. Identified simply as *Clay Warrior*, early 5th c. BCE., the nude figure's striding stance and missing head and limbs clearly informed his *Warrior*, 1957. Although he exaggerates the prop supporting the missing section of the sculpture's left leg—extending it into a crutch—the ancient and more recent past become fused in these stark images of the 'walking wounded'.

For Nolan, his Gallipoli series also represented a deeply personal tragedy. In 1945, his younger brother Raymond drowned in Cooktown while on leave from service in the Pacific. Reading accounts of troops being shot down or drowning before they even made landfall at Gallipoli, inevitably brought back Nolan's painful memories of this sudden loss and its impact on his family.



Sidney Nolan
Warrior 1957
crayon on coated paper
30.5 x 20.4 cm
Collection of the Estate of Lady Nolan
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Sidney Nolan
ANZAC 'Walking Wounded' 1957
crayon on coated paper
30.5 x 25.4 cm
Collection of the Estate of Lady Nolan
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Student Questions

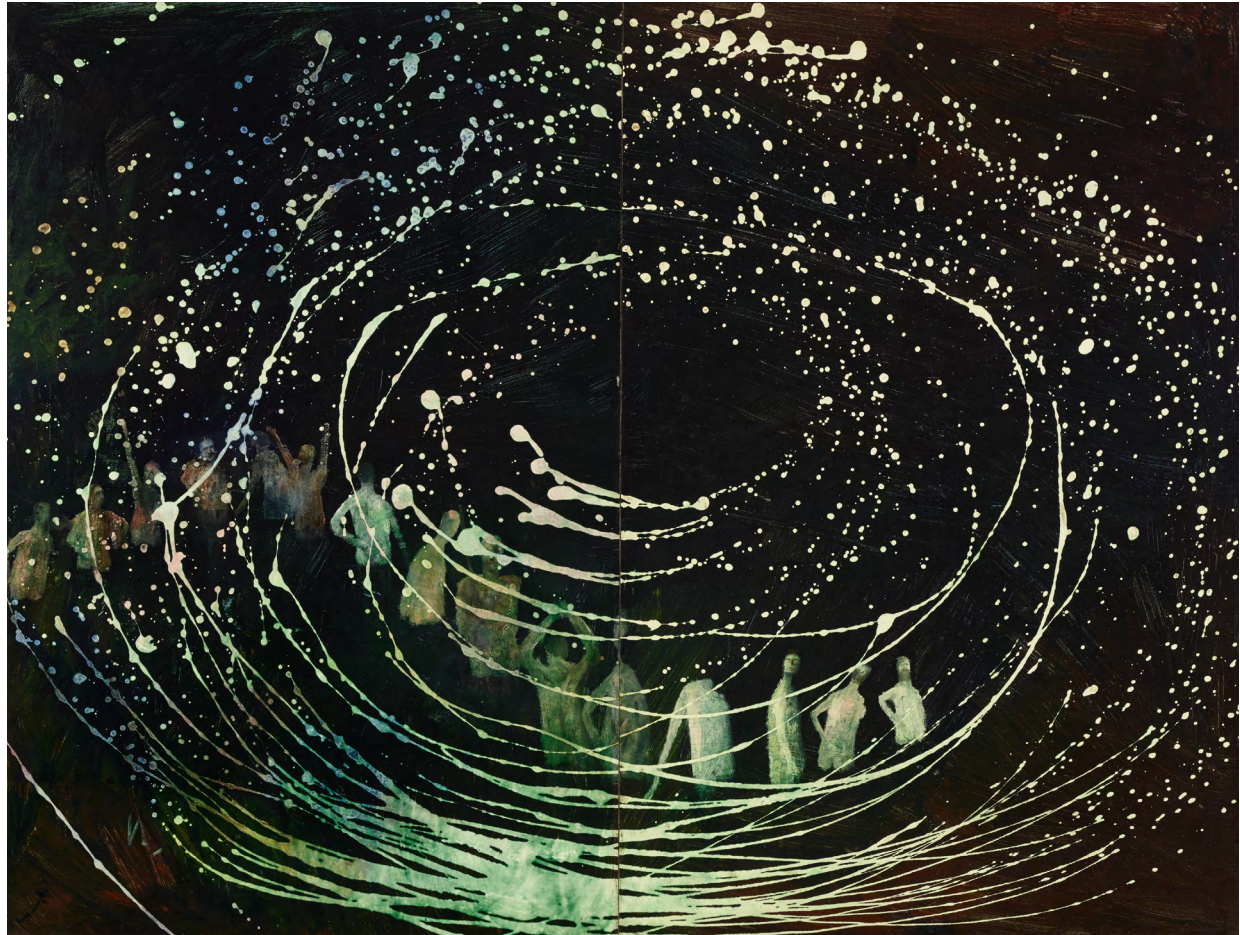
- Nolan has referenced the sculpture of an ancient warrior in the Museum of Olympia for the drawings of wounded soldiers above. Why do you think Nolan is referencing both a figure from ancient Greece and maimed Australian soldiers returning from Gallipoli in the same drawings?
- Why do you think Nolan would have created these drawings using crayon? Do you think this choice of art material and technique enhances the meaning of the artwork?

Artists & Key Artworks: Sidney Nolan

Sidney Nolan
The Galaxy (1957–1958)
polyvinyl acetate on canvas on composition board
193.0 x 256.0 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Gift of Patrick White, 1974
© The Trustees of the Sidney Nolan Trust / Bridgeman Images.
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In early 1957, Nolan began to work in the new medium of polyvinyl acetate (PVA)—a plastic emulsion binder which Nolan would turn into a thin paint layer by mixing in dark but semi-transparent pigments which he then applied over a white priming layer or coloured backgrounds, before quickly scraping it back to reveal the image. The leading British poet Stephen Spender observed how, through this method: 'He allows his figures to realise themselves within the medium. Sometimes they seem to linger on the threshold of appearances and to haunt a landscape like gleam or ghost ...' In this large two-panel PVA painting, originally exhibited as *Soldiers Shelled While Bathing*, a procession of pale nude figures—whose postures directly echo the soldiers in a 1915 Gallipoli photograph by Lt Ernest Brooks—appear as faint emanations emerging amidst a sea of darkness.

As the original title suggests, Nolan must have read Alan Moorehead's historical account *Gallipoli* (1956), in which he writes about the morbid humour that the Anzacs adopted in the face of their perilous circumstances: 'By now death had become familiar, and they often talked about it in a half-derisive deprecating slang ... it became a huge joke when the men bathing off the beach were caught in a burst of shrapnel ...' To highlight the precarity of the situation, Nolan dragged and dripped white PVA in a circular motion over the entire surface, generating not only the tracery of the exploding shell fragments, but a sense of these vulnerable figures being ineluctably caught in a giant cosmic vortex beyond their control.



Student Questions

- An inspirational source for this painting references ANZAC soldiers swimming in the sea after a day fighting in the trenches. Why do you think Nolan has created a visual vortex in this painting that evokes both the darkness of the sea and the dark night sky?
- What types of forces are affecting these soldiers that Nolan is referencing in this painting?

Artists & Key Artworks: Sidney Nolan

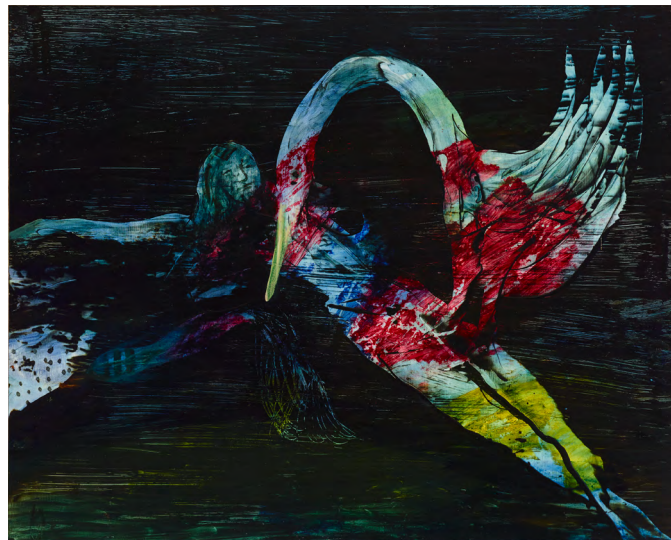
Sidney Nolan
The Myth Rider 1958–1959
polyvinyl acetate on composition board
122.0 x 152.0 cm
Private Collection
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The Myth Rider had its origins in a Gallipoli photograph by the official British war photographer Lt Ernest Brooks—a scene of four naked soldiers riding their horses bareback into the sea. However, in translating the image into the medium of PVA, the dream-like figures appear to emerge from the darkness and obscurity of a much more distant past. Although the addition of the iconic plumed slouch hat clearly identifies the horseman as an Anzac, as the title suggests, Nolan sought to convey the broader mythic connotations of the Gallipoli experience: 'I feel that if I could push Gallipoli back far enough into history, if I could make Australians into dream figures, then I would be getting somewhere near my mark. You need distance between you and a tragedy if you really want to show it in a dignified and truthful way ... So it seems to me that I must throw it back as much as possible, and treat it as a myth or story ...'

This intention is made clear in a hasty crayon sketch which reveals that his conception for this painting had arisen from his study of Greek antiquities. Beneath the highly schematic outline of a soldier on horseback the artist's inscription reads: 'Wounded horse (Parthenon sculptor) & rider coming out of sea at Anzac'. The positioning of the rider facing backwards in this sketch also links the composition to his earlier *Pale Figure on a Horse*. Like the figure in that painting, *The Myth Rider* is being carried along, rather than actively steering his course, and it appears as if horse and rider have grown into a strange hybrid, fused together in their common destiny.

Sidney Nolan
Leda and Swan 1958
polyvinyl acetate on composition board
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased, 1960
© The Trustees of the Sidney Nolan Trust / Bridgeman Images.



The first of Nolan's large series in PVA, *Leda and Swan*, painted in December 1958, shares the same scale and primary colour palette as *The Myth Rider*. Similarly, Leda's elongated figure also appears to be sans arms, accentuating her vulnerability as she lies prone beneath the weight of the swan's dominating form with its cold, menacing eye and phallic beak. As in *The Myth Rider*, the presence of the vivid red unambiguously connotes the violence and bloodshed associated with both narratives and this is further reinforced by the bird's sharp, blade-like feathers. Over the next two years, Nolan's Leda and Swan and Gallipoli imagery would continue to flow into each other and, predominantly working in New York, his experimental processes in PVA would increasingly exhibit the influence of Abstract Expressionist painting which was then on the rise internationally.

Unlike many previous portrayals by da Vinci, Michelangelo, Tintoretto, Correggio, and Cézanne, which eroticised the story, Nolan represents the rape of Leda by Zeus in the guise of a swan as a wilful and unnatural transgression of the established bounds, a supreme act of hubris that would unleash an uncontrollable cycle of conflict and bloodshed.

Student Questions

- Why do you think Nolan and many other contemporary artists after the Second World War were influenced by Abstract Expressionism and were compelled to create with emotive expressions of abstract form, gesture, composition and colour?
- How does contemporary culture affect your understandings of the themes, ideas and histories that are being expressed in Nolan's artworks?
- Why has Nolan painted *The Myth Rider* and *Leda and Swan* in the same technique and colour palette? What else do these paintings have in common?

Artists & Key Artworks: Sidney Nolan

Sidney Nolan

Leda and Swan 1960

polyvinyl acetate on composition board

91.5 x 122.0 cm

Courtesy of Gould Creative, Melbourne

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The following passage from Cynthia Nolan's highly perceptive account, *Open Negative: An American Memoir*, offers great insights into her husband's painting process during their time in New York:

'During the day he painted on the floor, first placing areas of colour on the prepared board, next sweeping on polyvinyl acetate until the whole 4 x 5 feet area was thick with paint, then seizing a short handled squeegee and slashing and wiping, cornering and circling like a skater, until another painting was completed ... Now, over and over again, he was painting Leda and the Swan. Sometimes the woman was bloody, the swan very savage. Often the figure was ambiguous, incidental, unidentified, the swan was not. At night he would usually continue on the large boards, or works on paper, for he was having a run'.

This chancier, more performative approach to painting, which bears a striking similarity to the processes of the New York action painters, is clearly visible in the dynamic collisions of background colours revealed within visceral surface layers produced through a myriad of scraping, sweeping, dragging and swirling gestures.



Student Questions and Prompts

Whilst painting Nolan had to work very quickly rubbing and scraping back the layer of dark polyvinyl acetate (PVA) to reveal the forms and colours beneath before it dried. You can see a lot of raw expression and dynamic energy in the unpredictable nature of the marks and gestures that Nolan has made using this technique in this painting.

- Describe the visual and emotional effect Nolan has created by using these painting techniques in this artwork?
- Describe the different ways that Nolan makes strong connections between Gallipoli, the Trojan War, and the Greek myth of Leda and the Swan in this exhibition. Reflect on the techniques, palette, gestures, figures and landscape structures that Nolan has used in his artworks.

Artists & Key Artworks: Sidney Nolan

Sidney Nolan

Inferno 1966

oil on canvas (9 panels)

152.5 x 122.0 cm (each);

152.5 x 1098.0 cm (overall)

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Inspired by the American poet Robert Lowell's translation of Aeschylus's tragic play 'Agamemnon', this monumental work was originally titled *Trojan Women*. However, as Nolan later explained: 'The women ... started to float, and in the end I felt they were like Dante's souls in hell, all wheeling around like birds, so I changed the title to "Inferno"'.

Since it was first exhibited, the harrowing imagery of these vulnerable, suffering bodies haplessly revolving through a sea of flames, has provoked a range of strong reactions which reveal the painting's emotive power and remarkable allusiveness. Charmian Clift evocatively described how 'their dead white flesh, blooming with wounds like flowers, spiralled and floated

as a flock of white birds might, loosed into eternity'. The Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Hal Missingham, reflected: 'The whole has the feeling of terror allied to compassion which recalls the remarkable Hiroshima Panels widely exhibited last year'. And in 1983, the then Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, Patrick McCaughey, wrote: "'Inferno" has the terribilita of the holocaust as the whitened bodies rise and wheel through sulphurous flames ... a powerful antecedent and exemplar of the new expressive painting'. Painting this work in New York amidst the turbulence of the ever-present conflict in Vietnam, Nolan transmuted Lowell's imagery of the *Trojan Women* into an expanded vision of the appalling and catastrophic aftermath of contemporary warfare.

Student Questions

- What is Nolan referencing with the red and blue marks on the floating, wheeling, vulnerable suffering bodies?
- Which people in the community is Nolan specifically referencing in this painting?
- The majority of the figures are armless in this painting, similar to other armless figures of Leda and Gallipoli soldiers in Nolan's paintings. Why do you think Nolan has painted the recurring armless figures in each of these thematic paintings?

Artists & Key Artworks: Heather B. Swann

The Leda and the Swan myth has been represented very differently throughout history as both an act of seduction or form of eroticism and as an act of sexual violence and the violation of Leda by the Olympian god Zeus in the guise of a swan.

To consider the connotations of this fateful encounter today and as a contemporary response to Nolan's paintings on the theme, TarraWarra Museum of Art invited Heather B. Swann to make a new body of work on the myth of Leda and the Swan. Emerging from artist residencies in Rome and Athens and her close reading of the Italian mythographer Roberto Calasso's illuminating texts, Swann's immersive installation of sculptures, paintings and works on paper provides a space to reconsider the familiar narrative of the rape of Leda by Zeus in the form of a swan and the tragic repercussions of this violation. Retelling the story three times, the artist poetically acknowledges the rich ambiguities inherent in this myth while hinting at modes of resistance against the hubris and patriarchal worldview it embodies. The stark beauty of her highly distilled and incredibly potent forms invites deep contemplation of the subject of force and consent.

Mythology enables myths to be retold and reinterpreted from the culture and times in which they are contextualised. The dual presentation of these two bodies of work by Nolan and Swann, created six decades apart, provides an opportunity to consider the mutability and adaptability of Greek mythology and its capacity to resonate across time. Like countless authors and artists before them, they have both reinvented these ancient stories – bearing witness to their endless metaphoric possibilities – to create art that is of its moment.

In her exhibition Heather B. Swann, a contemporary female artist, has reinterpreted this mythology with an enigmatic response which calls on the viewer to consider and interpret the work. In this current context, the viewer cannot avoid reflecting on contemporary political and social voices that are protesting against ongoing acts of sexual violation and violence. Heather B. Swann's interpretation of the Leda and the Swan myth reminds her audience that one needs to assert a stance and by reframing the narrative, changes the way we understand the myth.

Student Questions and Prompts

- Carefully observe the three different interpretations and representations of the Leda and Swan myth documented in this Education Kit. Describe these three different relationships. Reflect on the forms, proximity, scale, positioning, media and techniques used in these sculptures of Leda and the Swan.

(Note that Leda is not apparently visible in the installation image of *Leda and the Rock and the Swan* as she is behind the rock in front of the prickly pear ink painting. However, her partial head and torso is documented in the *Leda and the Rock and the Swan* (detail) 2021.)



Leda and the Swan and Nemesis 2021

Leda
plywood, paper, glass eyes,
epoxy modelling clay, pigment,
glue, marble dust, varnish
270 x 52 x 40 cm

Nemesis
silk, 19th century glass eyes
dimensions variable

Swan
plywood, glass eyes, pigment,
glue, marble dust, wax
285 x 332 x 80 cm

Photo: Andrew Curtis
Courtesy of the artist and STATION,
Melbourne and Sydney



Nemesis
silk, 19th century glass eyes
dimensions variable
Photo: Andrew Curtis
Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney

Student Questions

- What do you think Swann might be referencing with the hollowed form of the swan in *Leda and the Swan* and *Nemesis* 2021?
- Research the myth of Nemesis. Why is *Nemesis* positioned inside the body of the hollow swan and created from 100 glass eyes sewn into silk fabric?



Leda and the Swan 2021

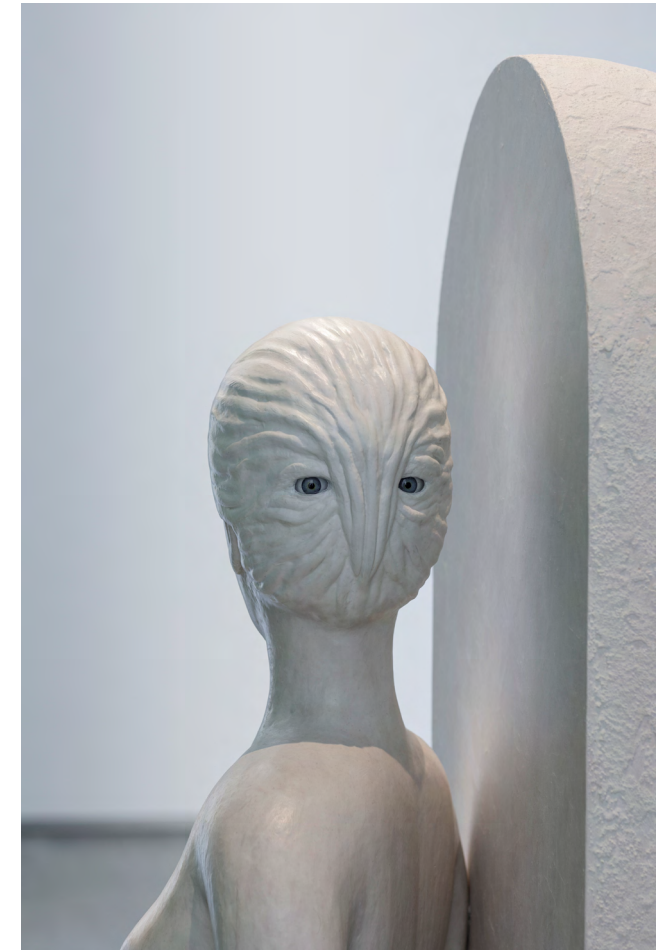
Leda
bronze
107 x 23 x 15 cm

Swan
stained old wood, wax, buttons
104 x 107 x 40 cm

Photo: Andrew Curtis
Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney

Student Questions

- Why do you think Swann has created the small figure in *Leda and the Swan*, 2021, from bronze, when the other two Leda sculptures are created from very different sculptural processes using plywood, paper, glass eyes, epoxy modelling clay, pigment, glue, marble dust, varnish?



Leda and the Rock and the Swan (detail) 2021

Photo: Andrew Curtis
Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney

Student Questions

- In Roman mythology, Janus is the god or goddess of beginnings, gateways, transitions and duality. In Greek mythology the goddess Athena has been a symbol of wisdom, independent strength and has been associated with birds, in particular the owl.
- Why has Swann created the figure in *Leda and the Rock and the Swan* with two different faces?



Artists & Key Artworks: Heather B. Swann

Heather B. Swann

Leda and the Rock and the Swan 2021

Leda

plywood, paper, glass eyes, epoxy modelling clay, pigment, glue, marble dust, varnish
178 x 42 x 30 cm

Rock

plywood, synthetic polymer paint
200 x 62 x 70 cm

Swan

plywood, fibreglass, silk, leather, waxed cotton, tacks
210 x 200 x 70 cm

Ouroboros 2018

wood, modelling compound, stain, wax polish
128 x 116 x 12 cm

Swan Hook and Waterfall 2021

Swan Hook

plywood, steel, glass eyes, pigment, glue, marble dust, wax
143 x 84 x 20 cm

Waterfall

rayon thread, silk, glass
dimensions variable

Prickly Pear 2021

ink and wash on paper
12 sheets, each 153-155 x 105 cm;
overall 459 x 420 cm

Photo: Andrew Curtis

Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney

(installation view, TarraWarra Museum of Art, previous page)

Student Questions

The prickly pear is an introduced succulent that has invaded and thrived in many Greek island landscapes whilst displacing the island's indigenous flora.

- Why do you think Swann has chosen to reference the prickly pear in her landscape installation?
- Why has Swann created a 4.5 metre, ink wash, prickly pear created with thousands of repeating lines towering over this installation rather than creating a sculptural prickly pear?
- What types of emotional sensation does *Prickly Pear* evoke?



Ouroboros 2018

wood, modelling compound, stain, wax polish
128 x 116 x 12 cm

Swan Hook and Waterfall 2021

Swan Hook

plywood, steel, glass eyes, pigment, glue, marble dust, wax
143 x 84 x 20 cm

Waterfall

rayon thread, silk, glass
dimensions variable

Photo: Andrew Curtis

Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney

Student Questions and Prompts

Research what the symbol of the *Ouroboros* means.

- Why has Swann created a sculpture of the *Ouroboros* resting beneath the *Swan, Hook and Waterfall* in her installation?



Tooth and Nail 2021

Tooth

glass, thread
9 x 4 x 4 cm

Nail

paulownia (kiri) wood, nails
23 x 11 x 8 cm
overall size on metal hook
60 x 25 x 25 cm

Photo: Andrew Curtis

Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney

Student Questions and Prompts

- List the abstract, figurative and symbolic forms Swann has used in her exhibition and describe your own interpretation of their meanings. Examples of some of these symbols are the hook of the swan's neck, the nail, and the rock.



Heather B. Swann
Your Equal Measure 2019
ink on paper
58 x 76 cm
Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Melbourne and Sydney

Student Questions

Please read the following extract of a review of the exhibition written by Beatrice Gralton, 'HEATHER B. SWANN: POISED CONTAINMENT', *Vault* magazine: Issue 36, November 2021 – January 2022.

'Indeed, threaded through *Leda and the Swan* is a reckoning with the sexual violence at the heart of the myth. *Your Equal Measure* (2019) perhaps most acutely conveys Swann's experience of grappling with this story's dimension of sexual violence, so often suppressed or ignored by artists in favour of the sensuous-erotic. Since the time of that drawing, we have seen mass action in the fight against sexual abuse, a new wave in the long continuum of feminist protest and resistance. Here, Swann deals directly with the ongoing struggle to stand one's ground'.

- In your own words describe what Swann means by the words inscribed in this drawing *Your Equal Measure* 2019.

Support Materials

Sidney Nolan

<https://www.twma.com.au/exhibitions/sidney-nolan-myth-rider/>

Heather B. Swann

<https://www.twma.com.au/exhibitions/heather-b-swann-leda-and-the-swan/>

Curriculum Links

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM

Visual Arts

Years 5 and 6

Explore and Express Ideas – Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to create artworks that express different ideas and beliefs (VCAVAE029)

- exploring how artists select and manipulate materials and techniques and use these in their own art making
- analysing the materials used by artists in artworks to enhance the meaning of the work, for example, the choice of material to enhance the viewer’s understanding of the artist’s intention
- exploring the ways in which artists communicate their views, beliefs and opinions in artworks and use these in their own art making

Visual Arts Practices – Select and apply visual conventions, materials, techniques, technologies and processes specific to different art forms when making artworks (VCAVAV030)

- explaining influences of other artists on their own artmaking

Present and Perform – Create and display artwork considering how ideas can be expressed to an audience (VCAVAP031)

- analysing and interpreting an exhibition of artworks, investigating the intentions of the artist, for example, what did the artist want the audience to see and understand?
- recognising and evaluating how culture, gender, age, time and place impact on how an audience reads an artwork.

Respond and Interpret – Identify and describe how ideas are expressed in artworks by comparing artworks from different contemporary, historical and cultural contexts (VCAVAR032)

- explaining the artistic vision of artists from different contexts, particularly referencing the meaning the artworks convey, for example, what the artwork is about, what visual conventions are used to convey meaning, how the artist has expressed their subject matter

- expressing an opinion about the way numerous artists communicate their viewpoints through their artwork

Years 7 and 8

Explore and Express Ideas – Explore visual arts practices as inspiration to explore and develop themes, concepts or ideas in artworks (VCAVAE033)

- discussing how artists have applied materials and techniques to express emotions and consider this in their own art practice, for example, why and how artworks make them feel emotional, and can they apply a similar technique to their artworks?
- observing and investigating how artists select and apply different visual arts techniques to express themes, concepts and ideas and considering how they could use these in their own art making

– Explore how artists use materials, techniques, technologies and processes to realise their intentions in artworks (VCAVAE034)

- investigating the viewpoints of several artists and how they express a theme, concept or subject matter in different contexts by using different styles with different materials and technologies
- applying critical theories to the analysis and interpretation of artworks, for example, identifying explicit and implicit meanings in artworks

Respond and Interpret – Analyse how ideas and viewpoints are expressed in art works and how they are viewed by audiences (VCAVAR038)

- critiquing a physical or virtual exhibition of art, craft or design, and review how artists have expressed viewpoints in their artworks
- critically analysing an artist’s intention for an artwork and their use of visual conventions
- presenting an informed opinion about a display of artworks as a written review

- Identify and connect specific features of visual artworks from

different cultures, historical and contemporary times (VCAVAR039)

- researching, analysing and examining the way an artist’s cultural experiences have influenced the expression of ideas and concepts in their artworks
- recognising how different factors contribute to the ways in which visual artworks are judged to be meaningful by an audience
- analysing how artists have expressed historical and social value and influences in their artworks

Years 9 and 10

Respond and Interpret – Analyse and interpret artworks to explore the different forms of expression, intentions and viewpoints of artists and how they are viewed by audiences (VCAVAR045)

- discussing artists’ use of metaphors in artworks to express ideas and influence the viewer, for example, the artist’s use of visual metaphors to express meaning and persuasion

– Analyse, interpret and evaluate a range of visual artworks from different cultures, historical and contemporary contexts to explore differing viewpoints. (VCAVAR046)

- identifying how visual arts professionals embed their values and beliefs, and how audiences react and interpret the meaning and intent of their artworks differently
- discussing the range of viewpoints expressed about an artwork or art issue
- considering the practices of visual arts practitioners when making commentaries about social, environmental and sustainability issues
- interrogating the cultural and social roles and responsibilities of arts industries, recognising the power of the visual arts in advocating for, and being a catalyst for, change

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Sidney Nolan
Soldier and Butterfly 1957
crayon on coated paper
30.5 x 25.5 cm
Collection of the Estate of Lady Nolan
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