THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

AUSTRALIA : LANDSCAPE : SIDNEY NOLAN

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO:

THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN & COMPLEMENTARY STUDIES

AND

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE

FACULTY OF FINE ART
DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING

BY

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APRIL 1986

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INTRODUCTION

Sidney Nolan is currently recognised as a painter of international repute and one of Australia's leading artists although he has not permanently resided there for over twenty-five years. He is best known for the manner in which he depicted the Australian bush in his paintings. He came to realise early in his career that the only way Australian painting could be distinctly Australian was through the landscape. This was due partially to a period spent in the Wimmera region during the war where he found himself confronted by the landscape. It was also due to the fact that prior to his being conscripted, he had been living in Heidelberg and had turned his concerns towards landscape and the possibility of using modernist innovations to 're-do' the Australian landscape. After the Wimmera period which showed a unique new perspective on the Australian bush landscape, Nolan went on to paint the first Ned Kelly series. This introduced a mythic element into the landscape, a narrative feature which became a hallmark of his style and led to other series based on myths and legends, e.g. the Burke and Wills series, the Mrs. Fraser and Bracefell series and the Gallipoli series.

The objectives of this thesis can be broadly stated as follows: firstly to examine Nolan's early career and the manner in which he assimilated modernist innovations into his painting. This is dealt with in Chapter I. Secondly, to discuss briefly the existing landscape tradition and its history prior to Nolan's contribution and to examine the Wimmera paintings which revolutionesed Australian landscape painting. Chapter II deals with this second objective while Chapter III deals with the third objective which is to discuss the Ned Kelly series of 1946-7 and Nolan's use of landscape and myth to create a unique narrative series.

Before describing Nolan's work and his contribution to Australian art, some knowledge of Australian art is necessary, both of the period of Nolan's early career and also prior to that time. For anyone seeking art training in Melbourne during the 1930s, there were several options open. One could attend the National

Gallery School under the guidance of W.B. McInnes, Will Rowell and Charles Wheeler. Tuition was also available under Max Meldrum or one of his followers such as A.D. Colquhoun and lastly, there was the Bell-Shore School. In Sydney the principal choice was between the highly conservative National Art School in Darlinghurst and Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School. In the 1930s, Rah Fizelle and Grace Crowley offered an alternative based on modernist principles. These represented the sum total of the alternatives available to aspiring artists except for one other option and that was to go it alone.

The National Gallery School was conservative by nature and sought to avoid any influences which would disrupt the traditional academic approach to painting. The course offered in the National Gallery School was structured so that first year students began by drawing with charcoal on paper. Ultimately entry would be gained to the painting school supervised by W.E. McInnes. Here students worked from nude models, first in charcoal and finally in oils, progressing from sepia monochrome to full palette in their final year.

Not surprisingly, during the 1930s and going back to the late 1920s, Australian artists were gradually becoming aware of the changes which had been occurring in European art with the development of Modernism, which in its broadest sense had led to a radical new way of looking at the world. Modernism involved experimenting with ways and means of depicting the world anew and a spirit of change prevailed. This was spear-headed by the 'avant-garde' which sought to instigate these changes.

The most outspoken critics of Modernism in Australia were figures such as J.S. McDonald, director of the National Gallery of Victoria and Lionel Lindsay, a trustee of the National Gallery of New South Wales. Lindsay was a practising artist and critic and he wished to preserve the traditional values of his profession from the attack of Modernist influences. Those rooted in the conservative acad-

emic tradition saw Modernism in art as symptomatic of a social and cultural decline in the wider modern world; as a decadent feature. Lindsay commented:

> ''Modernism in art is a freak, not a natural evolutional growth. Its causes lie in the spirit of the age that separates this century from all others; the age of speed, sensationalism, jazz, and the insensate adoration of money.... (Art destroys when) it revolts against all those traditions and forms images in art by which the human mind has been built, as it has done for the last twenty years under the label Modern Art. But that is only one facet that is at present turning Europe into a jungle. Europe invented modernism in art and now Europe must pay the penalty for its relapse into primitivism and moral imbecility.'' 1

J.S. Mc Donald described Modernism on another occasion to the public as :

> ''gangrened stuff which attracts the human blowflies of the world who thrive on putrid fare.'' 2

Such people believed that Modernism was responsible for undermining the painter's craft. This denied the possibility of full realization of a worthy subject which rested on an artist possessing a solid grounding in genuine craftmanship. It followed that, for them, Modernism was part of a cultural conspiracy by artists who had failed to master their medium and who had therefore become 'vindictively disgruntled'.

As previously stated, the second option open to young artists was to attend the classes given by Max Meldrum. One of the appeals of Meldrum's teaching was that it rejected the high sounding nationalism propagated by the continued worship of the Australian art of the 1880-90s. It was during this period that the landscape painting of the Heidelberg School flourished and became recognised as the first real attempt to paint the Australian bush landscape with integrity and

with a partial independence of the European landscape tradition.

Meldrum's approach to painting was that it was a scientific practice in which there was nothing that could not be rationally articulated in words. Because he saw the painter as a professional master of certain skills, he liked to use the metaphor of the surgeon. He had a very narrow and closed conception of painting and one of his beliefs was that progress in painting (apart from his own contribution) had ceased with the nineteenth century painter Corot. Meldrum stood for a rejection of mysticism and mystification, whether of a national landscape tradition or of modernist abstraction.

Just as the painting of those following the conservative tradition had been frozen in the 1890s and the formation of the Heidelberg School, Meldrum's approach was frozen in the mid-nineteenth century. The notions of art, culture and life displayed by more progressive artists and their followers were part of an attempt to push as far forward in the French and European traditions as at least the end of the nineteenth century. George Bell and Arnold Shore were two such artists who subsequently opened the Bell-Shore 'School of Creative Art' in 1932.

Shore's teaching was based on observing fundamentals of shape and local colour. From these one could develop to consideration of three dimensional problems, colour scales, study of plane surface organization and the like. However Shore's own cautious painting displayed essentially nothing more than bravura brushwork and greater freedom in a more independent use of colour. Bell was the more forceful personality and gave the school's teaching its particular character. He spent a year in Europe (1934-5) during which the greater period was spent studying under Iain McNab at the Westminster School in London. Bell's teaching laid great stress on the formal aspects of painting with concern for pictorial structure using relationships between ground and picture planes and their interaction with the more dynamic planes. The influence of the Westminster School

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was felt in the Bell-Shore School and the teaching and especially the use of life models, was far in advance of anything that students found at the Gallery School in Melbourne and Bell tended to look more towards Modigliani and Moise Kisling than to more thorough-going aesthetic revolutionaries like Braque, Picasso or Matisse.

Finally, the Crowley-Fizelle School in Sydney, founded in 1932 also, formed a nucleus for a group which became known as the George Street Painters. Their work, more abstract than that of their Melbourne counterparts, nonetheless never strayed from a tasteful semi-figurative style which was no more than an elegant derivation of Cubism far removed from its original generative impulses.

Therefore, for young artists such as Sidney Nolan and his contemporaries who were seeking to wholly absorb whatever Modernist principles had to offer them, the only option was to go it alone. In this way the experience of younger students of the 1930s and their friends determined the character of Australian Modernism, then in its infancy, which was in many ways incomprehensible to the artists mentioned thus far. Nolan and his contemporaries refused to see themselves or be seen by their literary friends as painters in a narrow sense. They themselves believed they had the potential to be both poets and painters, social critics and aestheticians, idealogues and craftsmen, literary editors and art activists. The artist's curiousity was more than intellectual, it was an inquiry into the contemporary world. For them the possibilities of art were rooted in the experience of the individual and of 20th century society.

Australian art up until this period had been bedevilled with attempts to establish a distinctively Australian sensibility. This contravened directly the spirit of Modernism which intrinsically knew no political bounderies. A key figure in the attempt to clear away the effects of this narrow-minded nationalistic approach in Australian art was Gino Nibbi. As owner of the Leonardo Bookshop in Melbourne, he provided the opportunity to buy or simply

look at, reproductions of quality and books and magazines dealing with art. A whole generation of artists, students and interested laymen quickly became avid buyers of the reproductions he imported, and a situation developed where many non-artists knew more about Modernist trends in European art than did artists. Nibbi had arrived in Australia in 1928 from Italy. He had brought with him a small but valuable collection of modern paintings which included works by de Chirico, Severino and Moise Kisling. Nibbi was receptive to a wide range of styles but he utterly rejected nationalism in art. For him, nationalism had no place in the modernist view of art because he saw the ultimate aim of art as being purely aesthetic. The visual arts dealt more with universal values stated in international terms and, for him, a belief in Australian artists and support for their experimentation in their work was more important than a belief in the quest for a definitive Australian art.

One of the biggest drawbacks to artists such as Nolan and his radical contemporaries at that time was, according to Nibbi, the difficult task of connecting with 'the atmosphere of their time'. During the inter-war years Australian culture lost contact with the central tradition in European art emanating chiefly from Paris. The central problem of the 1930s and 1940s was one of identifying the nature of the values upon which an art purporting to be part of an authentic 20th century culture might be based. Artists in Australia didn't have any contact with actual modernist works on any scale until an exhibition held in 1937 and another, the Herald exhibition of 1939. However, in retrospect, this was a good thing because it forced artists like Nolan to abandon ideas of going to Europe to study and instead induced far-reaching and radical changes in their own work. They were forced to reinterpret Modernism in Australian terms.

An important event for the advancement of Modern art in Australia

occurred in Australia towards the end of the decade, in 1938, and this was the setting up of the Contemporary Art Society. Although founded by George Bell, it included among its members the avant-garde group responsible for the most advanced form of contemporary art in Australia at that stage, including such artists as Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker and John Perceval who had been influenced by the Modernist movements such as Dada, Surrealism, Cubism, Expressionism and Abstract art. Bell represented the Post-Impressionists in the society and a third group was also identifiable, namely the social realist painters who sought to engage the society in socialist and communist issues. The painters in this third group included Noel Counihan, Josl Bergner and V.G. O'Connor.

The paintings which were shown in subsequent C.A.S. exhibitions in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide during this period testify to the fact that a major change was taking place in Australian art. It was not entirely due to overseas influences but was as distinctive as anything comparable in Britain or America during the war years. Based on a new intellectual and aesthetic awareness on the part of artists and their associates it was a product of many factors that related to the ending of Australian social, economic and cultural parochialism; the shock of the depression, the trauma of war, the return of Australian students from abroad, the arrival of immigrants and of refugees from fascism, and greater ease of communication during the 1930s. It was also helped by the enforced isolation resulting from the spread of war after 1941. Operating out of the C.A.S. and with wider social, political and cultural links, artists and their supporters now began to canvass new ideological and aesthetic possibilities for art as well as for the role of the artist in a fluctuating world. They were concerned with discovering and transplanting the European modernist tradition and at the same time there was also concern for the rediscovery and re-examination of an authentic Australian cultural tradition.

Up to this, Australia had found itself in a position similiar to that

experienced by other colonies of European empires, namely that its cultural climate had been dominated by a pseudo-British or European outlook. Australian painters had previously always looked to Europe for their influences and it was only during the war years when this was denied to them that they were forced to reconsider their position in this regard. The Contemporary Art Society provided an ideal forum for the promotion of this new Australian art as has already been mentioned. The avant-garde group which included Nolan, had as a patron John Reed and his wife Sunday. He was a law graduate of Cambridge and Melbourne and he and his wife had settled in Melbourne in 1925. The avant gardists, who consisted of mostly left wing supporters, maintained an uneasy alliance with the social realist faction against Bell, who was opposed to the intrusion of politics. The society lasted until 1947 in Melbourne but the disagreements which broke it up were due to a fundamental difference concerning the role of the artist in society. The Post-Impressionists abhorred politics in art but the Dadaists, Surrealists, Expressionists and social realists believed that artistic revolt against established values were but one part of a more general revolt that possessed psychological, social and political aspects.

Having given an outline of Australian art in the 1930s, I will conclude this introduction by stating that the importance to Sidney Nolan of the growth of Modernism in Australia was that it provided him with a means of combining elements of the landscape tradition with popular myth to produce such a series as the Kelly series of 1946-7. In the following chapters I hope to trace the development of his work up to the point where he successfully combined these factors in his work.

Footnotes

1 Richard Haese, Rebels and Precursors, p. 4.

2 Ibid. p. 5.

CHAPTER I

Sidney Nolan was born on the 22nd April 1917 in Melbourne, Victoria. He was a sixth generation Australian of Irish descent:

> ''Born into a solid affectionate working class family which has stood me in good stead.'' [1]

as he himself described it. Much of his early life was spent in St Kilda, a bayside suburb of Melbourne. From an early age he was a precocious reader and had an avid interest in literature although his formal schooling ended at the age of fourteen. He studied part-time at the Prahan Technical College, Melbourne from 1932-34 where he enrolled for an art course at night school. Painting as a full time profession was out of the question so until the age of twenty-one, he worked at making illuminated signs and then began working in the art department of a hat factory in 1934. He remained there for four years designing hats and advertisements. During this time he briefly attended night classes at the National Art School in the Victorian National Gallery, finally abandoning them in 1938. He found these uninspiring as a result of the strong academic tradition which prevailed there at that time and which not unexpectedly pervaded the teaching.

Early on Nolan became interested in the imagery and ideas of Rimbaud and Verlaine and read widely of Kierkegaard, Eliot, Faulkner, Auden, Cummings and Lawrence. He also became a member of a group of Bohemians and artists who inhabited a ramshackle Chinese owned tenement house situated behind the Museum State Library and National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker and John Perceval were also members of the circle . This group of young radicals was seldom found at the National Gallery School drawing classes. They were more likely to be found in Ginno Nibbi's 'Leonardo Bookshop', the Victorian Artists Society, Ristie's Coffee Shop and the Public Library, where books and reproductions of modernist art, literature and philosophy were to be found. They also used the libraries of wealthier friends for this purpose and the library of John Reed was a key source from the 1930s on.

Prior to the establishment of the Contemporary Art Society, Nolan had been influenced by Modern art. As early as 1936 he had begun to paint in an almost purely abstract style under the influence of reproductions of work by Klee, Picasso, Van Gogh and Miro, using books as sources. His early paintings were quite programmatic with much of the Dada sensibility about them. They were designed in their impertinent simplicity to shock the art-loving public out of its wits. From 1938-39, collage became fairly dominant in his work. It was witty and whimsical however, different from the analyses of Braque and Picasso or the classical compositions of Schwitters. He saw the landscape in terms of the reproductions of Cezanne he had encountered. He turned Cezanne's light planes and mosaics of brush strokes into loose scattered, torn paper shapes. He also used oil on blotting and tissue paper, staining it with dyes and making oil and making oil and chalk monotypes on paper. His interest in media and collage at this stage foreshadowed later developments in his work.[2] He used printed pages from books in some and one in particular, was composed of squares cut from a Victorian steel engraving.

Undoubtedly a great influence on Nolan and his colleagues' work at this point in their careers, were two exhibitions of overseas works shown in Melbourne. The first in 1937, was an exhibition of 52 works including a Picasso, Van Gogh, Utrillo and one by Christopher Wood. The primitivism of the last painter was of special interest to him at the time. The second exhibition was the Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art held in 1939 and consisted mainly of canvases by the French post-impressionists and their English counterparts. It also included work by Picasso, Cezanne, Van Gogh, Chagall, De Chirico and Max Ernst. There was one other influence on Nolan's work which must not be forgotten and that was the Russian painter Danila Vassilieff.

Vassilieff was born into a family of Cossack farmers in 1897 and at the age of twelve, he entered a military academy at St Petersburg and fought on

the Eastern Front during the First world war. During the October Revolution, he fought with the army and was captured by the Bolsheviks with the remnants of his regiment in 1921 and imprisoned but later escaped and found himself in Afghanistan and Persia. From there he made his way through India, Burma and Manchuria to China. In 1923, he decided to go to Australia. While there he began to paint as a hobby and in 1929, wishing to learn more about art, he left the country for Rio to join an old friend who had made a name for himself as an artist in Brazil. However he was dissatisfied with his friend's conventional approach to painting and began to experiment with more direct and expressive techniques. He travelled through the West Indies and part of South America and eventually returned to Australia, having had two exhibitions of his work in London based on his travels. He moved to Melbourne where he became a close friend of John Reed who became a patron of his. Incidentally, Reed also became a patron of Sidney Nolan.

Vassilieff possessed the vitality and creative energy of a natural expressionist and his work moved inevitably towards expressionism from the time he began to follow his own instincts where painting was concerned. He was passionately fond of Byzantine art and he held the work of Goya, El Greco, Turner, Rembrandt, Rubens, Soutine and Chagall in high regard. But he had little time for Constable, the Impressionists (except Renoir) and the non-objective tradition represented by Kandinsky, Mondrian and the Bauhaus School. The latter merely represented 'good taste' painting for him. His exhibitions in Sydney and Melbourne were always well attended by younger artists and students and he was without doubt, a pioneer of Expressionist painting in Australia. The freedom, verve and immediacy which he brought to his painting exercised an influence upon Australian art, especially in Melbourne, which it is difficult to quantify. The fact that avant-garde art in Melbourne developed during the war years a character more thoroughly expressionistic than Sydney, tended to be more immediate in execution, lay greater emphasis upon vitality and less upon the post-impressionist tradition, was probably due not a little to his work and example.

For artists like Nolan, Tucker and later Boyd and Perceval, Vassilieff had two lessons, first a wholly professional notion of an artist as one committed to art irrespective of financial return, since art was life; and second, a belief in painting as expression without any gesture to the idea of art as craft in an academic sense. Vassilieff often spoke contemptuously of academic skills, dismissing them as mere tradesmanship. For him, real craftsmanship lay in the use of either established or newly invented techniques which corresponded to the imaginative vision of the individual artist. In the last resort what mattered was the capacity of the individual artist to respond with immediacy to the world of social and imaginative experience.

Nolan first exhibited work in the 1939 exhibition of the Contemporary Art Society. He submitted two pieces, one was a painting of the head of Rimbaud painted from a photograph, and the other was entitled Boy and the Moon . Initially, Rimbaud was rejected by the Committee of the society but under a provision that the laymen be allowed to submit any one picture rejected by the Committee for reconsideration, it was allowed to be hung.

Boy and the Moon was influenced by a mode of surrealism widely practised in the 1920s as a more authentic way of setting down images and ideas stemming from the unconscious. Its initial impulse was a glimpse Nolan had of fellow artist, John Sinclair's head silhouetted against a full moon. The image of a yellow disc on a stalk-like neck against a deep blue-black ground is less an abstract design than a distillation of sensory illusion in this work.

Another painting made at this time led to Nolan being commissioned to devise sets and costumes for Serge Lifar's ballet 'Icare' early in 1940. [3] The painting was called The Eternals Closed the Tent and it was inspired by lines from William Blake's First Book of Urizen . As with this painting and also an earlier work Selby , the sets were stark and austere in their use of heavy

black bars.

Nolan was filled with an insatiable thirst for ideas and at this stage, his favourite authors included Blake, Nietzsche and James Joyce as well as those mentioned earlier in this chapter. As late as 1939, he seems to have been undecided whether to be a painter or poet; in the end he remained both. Max Harris wrote of Nolan at this time:

> ''Nolan was familiar with but little obsessed with the mechanics of painting. To find the Baudelarian 'illumination' for things that must be said was to him the prior necessity. He therefore read and thought. He was as if born to the poet's psychology. His love of works rivalled his dedication to the wonders of the eye. In fact he believed the process of art consisted of the operation of the one on the other''. [4]

Nolan's work of 1939-40, especially the montages, were created more in the spirit of Rimbaud in the sense that the viewer is invited to participate in the poet's disordering of the senses, whereas the early formal experiments are highly symbolic in an intensely private and personal manner. His early work can also be seen in terms of creative play with materials and modes of art; oils, ripolin, paint on slate or blotting paper, collage, elementary printmaking, a free play of media influenced both by the practices of Klee and Miro as well Masson and Ernst.

He has spoken in retrospect of this period:

> ''Between 19 and 25 I was totally involved in abstract art. I think of it as a love affair one can never return to, a faith one has lost. One understands but no longer believes''. [5]

Work from this period by Nolan such as Hidden Heart (1939) is entirely reminiscent of Klee in terms of its linear organisation and overlapping shapes

calling to mind, for example, Klee's Lady and Fasnion (1938) or Exotic Sound (1940). The influence of Braque and Picasso could also be seen in his early collages which had strong overtones of analytical cubism. Paintings such as Picasso's Portrait of Monsieur Kahnweiler (1910) or Braque's Girl with a Mandolin (1910) demonstrate a similiar concern with presenting a fragmented image, covering the whole surface of the work with almost equal intensity so that there is a dislocated focal point to the work, as does a work such as Montage (1940) by Nolan.

Rimbaud was seen by the Surrealists as an artistic anarchist who insisted on the integrity of the individual as a moral principle. Nolan was entirely in accordance with this sentiment and the influence of Rimbaud maintained a continuing presence in his approach to his work. In fact his admiration for Rimbaud was such that he and Sunday Reed worked together to produce a translation of Rimbaud's poetry andthis experience later gave rise to a painting in 1943 called Royalty which was inspired by the prose poem 'Les Illuminations'. This work depicted a man and a woman wandering with arms linked through a North African village with white houses decked with flags and bunting. It is a very one dimensional work with a static organisation of shapes. There is undoubtedly, however, a surrealistic air to it with the nude figures juxtaposed against the blocklike houses and two palm trees placed high in the left hand corner just below the horizon line which merely acts as a formal device in the painting's structure rather than giving any sense of perspective or distance within the painting.

Nolan's relationship with Surrealism is the least clear of any of his contemporaries just as his early work is the most idiosyncratic and challenging of any from the aesthetically radical artists in the early 1940s. Surrealism first became a 'tour de force' in Australia in 1940-41 after the exhibitions of European works in 1937 and 1939. In contrast to the apparent blandness of much

abstract painting it appeared to offer a way of painting that had the potential to be radical not only in style but also in content. It had also been waging a longstanding battle against the tastes of the bourgeoisie by challenging every convention in art. For this reason it appealed to Nolan and his radical contemporaries and surrealist devices began to play a considerable part in the work of Albert Tucker and Arthur Boyd and to some extent in Nolan's own work. Paintings such as the previously mentioned reflect something of this surrealist sensibility, however Nolan never came under its influence in the same way that Tucker did in his works, some of which showed strong Daliesque influences, e.g. The Futile City (1940) and Wasteland (1941).

Sidney Nolan's first exhibition opened on 11 June, 1940 in his studio which was in a condemned building above a greengrocer's shop in Russell Street, Melbourne. The work was entirely unique, unlike anything which had been seen previously in Australia. Many were monoprints with small and apparently ephemeral abstract images. Others were either drawings, collages or montages constructed from reproductions of steel engravings of classical paintings by Raphael and Poussin. These were cut into squares and rearranged to produce a disorientating juxtaposition. To add to this, all the walls of the studio were painted 'shocking pink'.

Critics were unable to understand the work fully and George Bell wrote that Nolan was experimenting with:

> ''line, colour, mass and surface texture, significant in themselves as elements of a design discarding all extraneous association of ideas.... whether or not this aim at the absolute in art will be found wanting eventually in its relation to life, these experiments in the basic elements of painting will lay a foundation for the future of this young artist'. 6

Basil Burdett described his painting as suggestive of a cross between Picasso

and Rouault but admitted that:

> ''what Mr Nolan is really after eludes me, I must confess
> I failed to find any key to his highly esoteric art'. [7]

To his friends, Nolan was apparently a completely inner-directed man. As John Sinclair recalled:

> ''From the time he became interested in art, he rejected absolutely any form of teaching that didn't seem to him to be valuable which in fact meant that he rejected all teaching.'' [8]

Between 1940 and 1942, he gradually abandoned abstraction and there were two reasons for this. One was that as a result of having worked on Lifar's ballet 'Icare' he had become more aware of the expressive symbolism of ballet which led him to consideration of what then looked like the greater potential for variety in realistic painting. Vassilieff's influence also played a part as in 1937 he had been rendering suburban streets in his paintings with very spontaneous, loose marks in watercolour of extra luminosity.

This change can be seen in The Dream of the Latrine Sitter (1942) which was his contribution to the Anti-Fascist Exhibition held by the Contemporary Art Society in 1942. The exhibition was held to express cultural solidarity among the Contemporary Art Society ranks against the evils of fascism occurring in Germany, Italy and Spain. Many of the paintings shown expressed an almost literary objection to fascism. However Nolan's painting was not intended to be propagandist and reflected no specific political ideology in terms of expressing conservative, liberal, socialist, fascist etc. viewpoints.
It depicted a daydreaming private seated on a 'privy' in the foreground of the work. In the background, soldiers wander on the hillsides engaged in shooting practice. It is an important work in that it demonstrates the beginnings of his interest in the engaging innocence of 'heroes'. The central figure is painted in naive style as are the smaller figures of soldiers. There is no

sense of perspective thus creating an overlapping of images and a somewhat timeless and dreamlike atmosphere in the painting. The painting was not well received by the extreme left members of the Contemporary Art Society such as Noel Counihan and Vic O'Connor. Thousands of Australians had been attracted into the Communist Party in the early 1940s because of its liberalized image following the invasion of Russia in 1941. Nolan, Albert Tucker, Max Harris and John Reed were of the belief that:

> ''the individualism and anarchism of radical art are needed to temper the collectivism and authoritarianism of radical politics''. 9

However, to the Communists, Dream of the Latrine Sitter appeared to ridicule their aims and it was seen as less as an affront to professionalism than his previous contributions to the Society's exhibitions had been but more as an attempt to deflate political pretensions. He was seen to promote autonomy of the individual against the authority of the people, in otherwords, an exponent of radical liberalism as opposed to communism.

Nolan had by this time been living with the Reeds in their Heidelberg home since 1941. He continued to paint while resident there and in July 1942, he held his second one-man exhibition in the window of Sheffield's newsagency in Heidelberg. He himself had,in fact,been drafted into the army at this stage and the exhibition was organized by Sunday Reed. It included work which he had completed during the period spent in Heidelberg as well as some sketches which he made while stationed in the Wimmera region in the few months prior to the exhibition. Despite being in the army, Nolan found an opportunity to continue painting and produced,during this phase of his career, the Wimmera paintings based on the bush landscape of the Wimmera plains. This work is discussed in more detail in Chapter II in relation to the already existing tradition of landscape painting in Australia. Nolan revolutionised the vision of the landscape with this work which was exhibited in 1943 in his third one-man show.

He also did a number of paintings while in the Wimmera which used imagery from his boyhood, namely the St Kilda baths. Nolan's syle changed noticeably from the earlier Klee-like linearity to a flatter, more decorative manner evident in works such as Icarus (1943) and Bathers (1943)(1). It is especially evident in the earlier 1942 version of Bathers (2). In this he was attempting to convey as directly as possible his recollections of childhood and youthful games at the baths in St Kilda. Relying on memory in such a way was intrinsic to his way of working:

> "Memory is I am sure one of the main factors in my particular way of looking at things. In some ways it seems to sharpen the magic in a way that cannot be achieved by direct means." 10

Bathers (1943) is unique, along with Lublin (1944), among his war-time works in that it conveys a sense of anxiety and fear unlike his other paintings. It deals with an event that had preoccupied Nolan for over a year. This was an incident off the coast of Celebes in the Dutch East Indies in February 1942, when an allied landing had unsuccessfully prevented a Japanese landing at Macassar. In the painting, a central figure observes two burning ships out on the sea and two figures lie sprawled to the left of the central figure. There is also a figure to the right of the central figure. The prostrate figures are ambiguously presented and could be sunbathers or alternatively corpses. The painting is a cold one in contrast to the landscapes of this period. The figures are depicted against a deep blue sea and are themselves a cold blue-grey. He has used the imagery of ships fighting at sea to express the terror and fate of men at war; in using this metaphor in a wider sense, he encapsulates the anxieties and fears of men and women at a time of war. Apart from this work and Lublin , Nolan maintained a moral detachment in his work from the events occurring in the world during the early forties and the war which had led to his being drafted in the first place.

During war-time, Nolan also became associated with the magazine Angry

Penguins . This publication originally began in 1940 as a literary magazine but by 1943, it was also a forum for intellectual debate, publishing many key statements by radicals within the Conte,porary Art Society. In the absence of any other art journal, it reproduced many of the important paintings by the artists in sympathy with its ideals : Albert Tucker, Nolan, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Danila Vassilieff and Joy Hester. Along with the short-lived Art in Australia , it became the most important cultural magazine of the early 1940s.
Its editors, John Reed and Max Harris agrued that the modern movement in Australia stood in the front rank of twentieth century progress in the arts. Angry Penguins refused to think of different aspects of the arts as distinct from one another. In speaking of the group that produced Angry Penguins, John Reed has said:

> ''We regarded art as a total phenomenon which was involved with society as a whole and that it was relevant to explore other areas as well as the areas of the fine arts.'' 11

In this sense, they followed in the footsteps of Herbert Read and Andre Breton, for whom life was a total and organic whole. The magazine was therefore equally ready to pronounce on any subject - cinema, jazz, literature, the visual arts, economics, society or politics. Sidney Nolan was involved not only as an artist, for layout and design, but also as one of the poetry editors. However, the magazine suffered a severe blow in 1944 in the form of what came to be known as the 'Ern Malley Hoax' in 1944.

The controversy first began in 1943 when Max Harris, co-editor of the magazine received a letter from 'Ethel Malley', containing some poetry which 'she' had found on going through her brother's possessions after his death and also looking for advice as to whether the poems were good enough to be published. Harris was impressed and asked to see more of Malley's work. He received a manuscript consisting of sixteen poems entitled 'The Darkening Ecliptic', which he read with growing excitement, forwarding it to his partners, John and

Sunday Reed in Melbourne and also to Nolan who was at the time stationed in the Wimmera. All agreed that the poems were good and Nolan was so impressed that he made a painting in response to them called, The Sole Arabian Tree , which was used on the cover of the 1944 Autumn Number of the magazine. The issue was to commemorate the'Australian Poet Ern Malley' and contained all of the poems together with an introduction by Max Harris.

Doubt was first raised about the authorship of the poems by Brian Elliot, lecturer in Adelaide University, who challenged Max Harris to prove that such a person existed. The truth finally came out when two former Sydney University students, James McAuley and Harold Stewart, revealed that they had concocted the :

> ''whole of Ern Malley's tragic life-work in one afternoon, with the aid of a chance collection of books.... the Concise Oxford Dictionary, a Collected Shakespeare, 'Dictionary of Quotations' etc.'' 12

They described the venture as not a hoax but, 'a serious literary experiment', a protest against the literary style represented in Australia by Angry Penguins and its lack of meaning and craftsmanship.

Nolan did not escape attention either for his cover illustration as Ern Malley became the most publicised cultural figure in Australia. In the wake of this, the South Australian police, deciding that seven poems by Ern Malley were indecent and seven other items in that issue of the magazine were either indecent, immoral or obscene, took an action against Max Harris which resulted in his being found guilty of having sold, offered or distributed certain indecent advertisements in that issue of the magazine. Looking back on the affair later, Harris commented:

> ''We (Nolan and I) looked for trouble quite consciously and we expected it when we got it.'' 13

For Nolan, the Ern Malley poems provided a source of inspiration and the poem

'Perspective Lovesong', gave rise to a group of paintings in 1964 and in 1974, the Ern Malley paintings were created for The Art Gallery of South Australia's Festival Exhibitions 1974. Angry Penguins suffered a demolishing blow as a result of the hoax even though they defended themselves on the grounds that Stewart and McAuley by their own admission, had used impeccable surrealist techniques to produce the poems. Nonetheless, the authority of Max Harris as a poet and critic was undermined and the reputations of all those associated with the magazine severely damaged.

Having discussed his early career thus far, it is clear that the young Nolan sought to experiment in his work with whatever means Modern art put at his disposal. He succeeded , during the wimmera period, in assimilating modernist principles into the landscape tradition, which hitherto had been the preserve of the academic painters with the exception, perhaps, of Russell Drysdale. In the following chapter, I will examine the landscape tradition in Australian painting and discuss Nolan's role in creating a radical new view of the bush landscape.

Footnotes

1 Charles S. Spencer. ''Sidney Nolan ¢ and A'', Studio 145,May 1953, p. 205.

2 Throughout his career, Nolan has used different media and techniques in different series of work. These include the use of Ripolin, P.V.A., dyes and oil paint.

3 Serge Lifar visited Australia in 1939 with the De Basil Ballet.

4 Richard Haese, Rebels and Precursors p. 186.

5 Charles. S. Spencer, Studio, p. 209.

6 Haese. p. 92.

7 Ibid. p. 93.

8 Ibid. p. 93.

9 Ibid. p. 133.

10 Ibid. p. 186.

11 Ibid. p. 117.

12 Sidney Nolan - the City and the Plain. p.62.

13 Ibid. p. 63.

CHAPTER II

Although Sidney Nolan has achieved notoriety worldwide as a painter of myths and narratives, his earliest work of consequence was based on landscape. This work, painted during his period in the Wimmera region while in the army, was unique in so far as it revolutionised the manner in which the Australian bush had been hitherto depicted. Australian artists had been concerned up to this point with imbuing their work with a distinctively Australian sensibility despite their heavy dependence on a European fine art tradition.

During the nineteenth century, the early landscapist Samuel Thomas Gill (1810-80) became well known both in Australia and England for his lithographs depicting the open-air life of the bushmen and Australian diggers during the goldrush. Gill had emigrated to Australia with his parents in 1839 and is credited as being the first artist whose work expresses a distinctly Australian attitude. Bernard Smith writes of him;

> ''The sardonic humour, the nonchalance and the irreverent attitude to all forms of authority, so frequently remarked upon by the students of Australian behaviour, are all present in his work.'' [1]

However, Gill used stereotyped imagery in his work such as the popular image of the frontiersman in landscapes of semi-arid country with fallen trees and stunted grass-trees, stressing the melancholy of the Australian landscape. [2]

Apart from Gill, there were a number of painters who came to be recognised as important landscape painters of the period. These included Eugene von Guerard, Nicholas Chevalier, William Charles Piguenit and Louis Buvelot. Chevalier (1828-1902) and von Guerard (1811-1901) produced 'typical' landscapes as had been generated by artists, travellers and geographers over the previous hundred years. 'Typical' landscape can perhaps be defined as a kind of landscape of which the component parts are carefully selected in order to express

the essential qualities of a particular type of geographical environment. The 'typical' landscapist introduced into his paintings rocks, plants, animals, people and so forth that he felt to be most representative of the area he was depicting. Both these painters were trained in European art schools prior to migrating to Australia and both subsequently returned to Europe at later stages in their respective careers. Von Guerard rendered details of vegetation and terrain in his work with great precision and indigenous animals were often added to further identify a scene. His great expanses of forest convey the depressing effect so frequently described by settlers despite the fact that he was not a good colourist.

Piguenit (1836-1914) was a Tasmanian of French descent who received some lessons from a Scottish painter and in 1872, retired from his work as a surveyor and devoted himself to landscape painting. He sought dramatic and exciting subjects which would be typical of the country at large. His approach was essentially romantic in a grandiose manner and similiar to the work of artists like F.E. Church, the American artist who also sought the sublime and dramatic in nature, painting plains, snow-covered erupting volcanoes and impenetrable tropical jungle. He was the first Australian-born landscape painter of any consequence and he was also the last of the colonial painters who occupied themselves with painting the Australian landscape in its primeval condition and an element of desolation and sadness pervades most of his paintings.

Louis Buvelot (1814-88) brought about a significant change in the approach to landscape painting in Australia. Swiss-born, he studied in France and worked in Brazil for a long period before deciding to migrate to Australia at the age of fifty-one. His work at this stage had a close affinity with the landscapes of the Barbizon school and the work of Theodore Rousseau and Daubigny. He was attracted by homely rural scenes usually painted in the warm light of the late afternoon or twilight. His landscapes portrayed a settled

rural countryside and not a primeval wilderness. He continued to paint the Australian landscape against a background of European landscape traditions, however his contribution to the evolution of an Australian school of painting was considerable because of his perception of colour, due to his familiarity with the plein-air methods of painting was far superior to that of his predecessors. Before his arrival, very little attempt had been made to analyse the local and atmospheric colour of Australian scenery. Buvelot has come to be known as the Father of Landscape Painting and he influenced not only a number of artists who continued to apply the plein-air tradition of the Barbizon school to the Australian landscape, but also the men who were to create the Heidelberg school of painting.

Many of the writers and artists of the 1860s and 1870s found Australia a strange melancholy place and these sentiments dominated both art and writing. This was not due to the fact that they disliked the local landscape and were rejecting it but because the best of them tended to identify themselves with the weirdness and melancholy they found in the landscape.

Four painters who were influenced by Buvelot and helped to continue the plein-air tradition which he had introduced were Julian Ashton and Walter Withers, both Englishmen, and, two Scots, John Mather and John Ford Paterson. All were trained abroad and migrated to Australia in their youth. During the early 1880s, these artists and others began to spend their week-ends sketching in the countryside around Melbourne. Favourite sketching grounds were discovered to which artists returned again and again. The habit of weekend sketching in the open air spread. Buvelot, like most of the Barbizon painters, sketched but did not paint finished canvases, in the open air. However, Daubigny began to promote the practice of completing his landscapes in the open and although it is difficult to say just when the practice began in Australia, Julian Ashton claimed that his painting Evening, Merri Creek painted in 1882, was the first.

In the first years of the 1880s, Julian Ashton, Frank P. Mahony and A.H. Fullwood spent week-ends painting in the bush around Sydney Harbour and it was here, in 1884, that Ashton painted a large water-colour entitled Sentry Box Reach, Hawkesbury River . This painting brought a new feeling for light and space to the treatment of Australian landscape and points directly towards the freshness of Solitary Ramble (1888), also a watercolour.

The period between 1885 and 1890 was an important one in the development of Australian landscape painting as it was the first time that a distinctive school of painting came into existence. This came to be known as the Heidelberg school and one of the artists principally responsible was Tom Roberts (1856-1931) who migrated from England with his mother at the age of thirteen. He attended evening classes at the National Gallery in Melbourne for six years, working by day as a photographer. He studied under Thomas Clark at the National Gallery who urged him and other promising pupils to study abroad. Roberts was advised to save in order to study at the Royal Academy, London, and at Julian's in Paris so by 1881 he was able to set sail for England. In 1883, he set off on a walking tour of Spain and in the course of this journey, he met two French artists who had studied in Paris and knew something of the aims of the French Impressionists. Some small oil paintings which Roberts painted in Spain at this time, although by no means impressionist and painted within the limits of academic naturalism, suggest that he came to acquire a keener interest in colour and light, true tones, and the importance of keeping painterly values. In 1885, he returned to Australia with his new ideas and by this time plein-air sketching was a well-established local practice. A year after his return, Roberts and Frederick McCubbin, an old fellow-student from the Gallery School, camped at Box Hill and began painting. Roberts sought to apply the new principles he had learned abroad to painting the light and colour of the Australian bush. There was no attempt to render a large expanse of countryside as there

was in the work of earlier painters such as Piguenit and Buvelot nor was there any attempt to dignify a rural theme. He tended to paint small scenes with little dramatic interest, using rich browns and greens in order to capture the colour of eucalyptus saplings in morning light. There was an avoidance of too much definition of form and colour was laid on in broad masses. Friends joined Roberts and McCubbin at Box Hill and in 1886, they came in contact with Arthur Streeton. Then, in 1887, Roberts visited Sydney and met Charles Conder (1868-1909) and discussed impressionist painting with him. Conder was also born and educated in England and knew something of plein-air painting. In 1888, Roberts Streeton and Conder moved into a house in the Yarra Valley region where they made many impressionist oil sketches, working rapidly with colour broadly applied. From these experiments came Australia's first impressionist exhibition in 1889 in which one hundred and eighty-three paintings were shown. It was known as the 9 x 5 Exhibition. Roberts, Streeton and Conder wrote in a joint statement in reply to some criticism of their work;

> ''We will not be led by any forms of composition or light or shade ... Any form of nature which moves us strongly by its beauty, whether strong or vague in its drawing, defined or indefinite in its light, rare or ordinary in its colour, is worthy of our best efforts ...we will do our best to put only the truth down and only as much as we feel sure of seeing (but) the question comes, how much do we see and how much are our ideas and judgements of works made up by comparison with those we have already known ? We believe that it is better to give our own idea than to get a merely superficial effect which... may shelter us in a safe mediocrity which... could never help towards the development of what we believe will be a great school of painting in Australia. '' [3]

In 1890, a second artists' camp was established close to the original one set up by Roberts, Streeton and Conder in 1888. This was in a house called Charterisville and Walt Withers (1854-1914) was the artist responsible for this. Many artists lived for a time at this house and many more visited it. From these two Heidelberg camps the new approach to painting spread among a widening circle of artists and students. During the years between 1888 and 1893, the members of these camps were exercising a most vital influence on Australian painting . However they were by no means cut off from a knowledge of artistic developments occurring in Paris and they were aware of the broad principles upon which French Impressionism was based. The close association between Roberts, Streeton and Conder ended shortly after the 9 x 5 Exhibition when Conder left for Europe in 1890 and Streeton went to Sydney in the same year. Roberts also went to Sydney in 1891.

The most noteworthy aspects of the art of the Heidelberg School were firstly, their interest in depicting effects of light and colour and secondly their interest in creating a distinctively Australian art. That is not to say that earlier painters failed wholly in this respect but rather that the work of the Heidelberg painters had its roots in an Australian as well as in a European tradition of painting if what existed in Australia could be correctly a 'tradition', so influenced as it was by European art. However, the work of the Heidelberg School represented the culmination of a century of colonial endeavour for the colonial painters had already done much to portray the special qualities of the Australian scenery. The great contribution which the Heidelberg School did make to the history of vision in Australian art was to produce for the first time, a naturalistic interpretation of the Australian sunlit landscape. The images of the country and of country life which they portrayed appealed to the Australian public because the greater proportion of Australians lived in the cities and they were able to identify themselves increasingly with the life and attitudes of the Australian rural worker. At that time, the frontier exercised an enormous influence on the

imagination of all Australians as they sought to create a national identity of their own.

However, the Heidelberg School has also been accused of painting picturesque landscapes which bore little resemblance to the Australian bush environment and of having an essentially bourgeois view of the bush. Their paintings contained none of the elements associated with the harshness of life in the bush - hard labour, the threat of bushfires, drought or Aborigines. Although their paintings usually contained some kind of narrative incident with one or more figures, the figures were usually people depicted as visitors to the bush, e.g. The Artist's Camp by Tom Roberts and The Lost Child (3) by Frederick Mc Cubbins. The bush, which is usually an environment associated with material hardship, was presented in such a way that it had middle class bourgeois values projected onto it. Typically the paintings were composed with very little background , close middle ground and foreground. Thick bush is used to cut off a sense of distance and only a small portion of sky appears between the treetops. The horizon is high so that the paintings consist mainly of landscape. The narrative incident is often placed slightly awkwardly to the front of the middle ground. The foreground is then delineated by the slender tree trunks of gums which break up space and frame the narrative incident. Probably the most striking feature of the Heidelberg School was the rapidity with which a definitive range of imagery was developed, the main motifs being tall slender gum trees which were often solitary, exaggerated blue sky and close tonal relationship between the sky and a distant horizon when one was present.

It has been argued that the great change brought about in Australian landscape painting by the Heidelberg School was from 'the essentially static world of the Colonial painters to a dynamic essentially changeful world'. [4]
However, in the 1930s, this dynamic vision was relocated within a new landscape

and a new sensibility. Most notably Nolan and his fellow Australian Russell Drysdale, were responsible for radical new interpretations of a previously little known Australia - that of the small towns and the bush and dry scrub of its marginal lands. Nolan's interpretation in particular, was a radical one which involved confronting the full challenge of the realities of landscape and the innovations of modernism. He brought recognition of the enormous changes that had taken place in European art at the end of the 19th and the early years of the 20th centuries. He was not alone in responding to these changes but he had a unique grasp of them which was manifested strongly in his work.

. . .

Nolan's feeling for the bush country dates back to his early childhood when he had spent holidays there. To him, the bush was the most real aspect of life;

> ''because of the smell and the light and everything else and all these other stories - things that happened to us, and which now I paint - have always been a way of showing the Australian bush, a reason for painting the bush. This feeling for the bush sticks with one for ever''. [5]

He first went into bush country to paint at the age of twenty-one in 1938. Up to the age of twenty-one, he had been working in factories but while attending night classes at the National Art School in the Victorian National Gallery in Melbourne, he became friendly with a painter called Howard Matthews who had a somewhat Bohemian outlook on life. Nolan decided to leave his job and he and Matthews moved fifty miles outside Melbourne into the bush to live in a borrowed old house. For about four months, they painted daily until they ran out of supplies. Nolan then returned to Melbourne to find part-time work as he had used up his savings by this stage.

He returned to bush country to paint in May 1942, this time as a soldier

during World War 11. Stationed in a remote town called Dimboola as part of a Supply Company, initially his work was confined to sketches and drawings of his surroundings. His first experience of such flatness of landscape posed for him the question of language and how to do something about transcribing the effect of the experience into paint or some other medium. Writing to a friend on his first night in Dimboola, he described the journey-

> ''It was alright while we (were) in sight of the Grampians and then suddenly (there) was nothing of the earth except a thin line. And while I was thinking about all these things it came simply that if you imagined the land going vertically into the sky, it would work''. [6]

Dimboola was situated in plainland known as the Wimmera. Nolan used various sources of imagery from the landscape in his work at this time. Using the top of wheat silos which were one hundred and twenty feet high, as vantage points, he was able to get a perspective on his surrounds in which the linear component all but disappeared. The horizon merely divided one plane from another, the lines of railways, roads, telegraph poles, as well as the patterns of the farmland provided the geometry of his first landscapes. The spaciousness which this approach achieved is emphasized by the recurrent pale blue strip of sky above the straight-ruled horizon line. The two-dimensional schema of the pictures (the flat blocks of colour and the decorative rhythm of shapes - whether carriages of a train, the regular punctuations of telegraph poles or the irregular smatterings of trees) suggests at once primitivist influences but overriding this is the sophistication of decorative coloured planes belonging to the Fauvism of Matisse or Marquet.

For Nolan, the wimmera plains had the look of a landscape as 'old as Genesis'. [7] In a letter at this time, he writes of the overwhelming sense of flatness and the vast stretches of golden swathes of wheat. By punctuating

this space, the grain silos looked so powerful, ''that seen from a distance standing up from the trees you could imagine them made by Aztecs for no other reason than to worship the sun''. 8

Abstract formalism was strongly evident in the early Wimmera paintings and one of the earliesr landscape paintings done within the first two months of his arrival demonstrates this. Wimmera(1942) contains some very abstracted elements with areas of dense colour counterpointed by an area of wispy colouring lightly applied. In Wimmera (4.) a horizon line near the top of the painting pulls it back from pure abstraction and defines it as a landscape. The subject of this work was Nolan's sense of the life of the land, observed during the long hours of guard duty near a railway siding. He described it ;

> ''I sat for hours just watching the birds flying around and the horses going so far up the fields as to go out of sight and a long time later coming down alongside the strip they had worked previously making it darker brown. And so the land changed color (sic) and shape right up to sunset''. 9

In this painting, he has tried to convey the steady rhythm of time, place and season and one becomes aware of the quite successful attempt to capture the changing light and colour of the countryside in the course of the day. The wisply coloured area is reminiscent of dawn and the early morning while the area immediately above the horizon line is a golden yellow intimating evening time and sunset. A darker area in alizarin to the left of the painting further suggests twilight. One other noticeable feature of this work is the feeling of energy and flux within it, there is no sense of time having been transfixed. This effort to convey the feeling of nature's flux was to reoccur frequently in his subsequent work and is perhaps one of the characteristics of all his landscape work to date.

By October 1942, Nolan had been promoted to lance-corporal in charge of a squad of men looking after rations stored in a requisitioned garage. In a front office of this garage Nolan was able to set up a studio. Mornings were occupied with the duties of maintaining stores leaving afternoons free for painting, reading and other activities. His first series of Dimboola paintings was done between October and December 1942. The first two paintings in this series were quite different to the earlier Wimmera painting. Previously Nolan's art had exploited deliberately the conventions and devices intrinsic to 'naive' or 'primitive' art. The value of its directness and spontaneity was recognised as being central to the Expressionist and Surrealist traditions of European modernism, traditions that had guided Nolan's art up to this point. It was also important to a number of other Australian artists who saw this mode of working as an alternative to the tired academic traditions so prevalent in Australian art schools.

Both Dimboola (5) and Going to School (6) show a change in Nolan's method of working. Primitivist solutions were no longer adequate for his purposes so these two paintings were his first experiments with the spatial and formal innovations of Cezanne. The regular, geometric shapes of buildings and the overlapping planes and especially the hatched brush strokes in Going to School had strong echoes of Cezanne. In Going to School Nolan was attempting to record the mixed sensations of wonder and fear at the sight and subsequent crash of an aircraft as experienced by the young girls whom he saw walking to school past the shop front window of his Dimboola studio. In that sense he was retaining 'naive' intentions if executing the paintings in a more formal manner.

Cezanne had a strong influence on Nolan's work and throughout the Wimmera years, he returned again and again to the lessons of Cezanne. In a letter to a friend, he wrote;

> ''I don't doubt for a moment that I am not great in the sense Cezanne is .. if I live to be six hundred it is only a few facets of his work I can absorb. That is because only aspects of him are practicable to me. What he does to me and that to a large degree is to provide a constant impetus that is never far from me when I am looking at the bush.'' 10

Much of his work during this period was painted with Ripolin, a synthetic enamel manufactured as a high-grade house paint. French artists had been using it for at least two decades and it was suitable for Nolan's purposes mainly because it was a fast-drying and extremely fluid medium. It was unsuitable for working with in a traditional way with an easel, requiring instead something similiar to a watercolour technique with canvas on board laid flat. He usually completed a painting in the one session and although Ripolin dried overnight, rarely reworked a painting. Unsuccessful paintings were usually abandoned as reworking was against Nolan's whole concept of the creative act.

The second version of Going to School (7) is a more successful painting than the first because he used a different approach. The flat 2-dimensional treatment of the figure of a girl in the foreground is related to a complex set of interlocking planes and grid-like structures that combine a number of time frames ; the aircraft, its crash and the subsequent burnt-out wreckage. The figure of the girl and the horizon line establish the scene within a landscape of sorts but quite a noticeable element of abstraction still remains within the area of overlapping planes. This is due principally to the fact that Nolan was strongly influenced by Analytical Cubism in resolving this work.

In the early months of 1945, Nolan completed a number of paintings based on scenes at the railway yards in Dimboola. They show influences from Matisse,

Cezanne and Picasso and contain spatial ambiguities and very little depth of field. They are of interest in so far as they chart the development of Nolan as a painter and indicate how rapidly his work was opening up at that time. Nolan himself has said;

> ''I (went into the army) as a kind of abstract painter with my thoughts on Paris but I gradually changed right over to being completely identified with what I was looking at and I forgot all about Picasso, Klee and Paris and Lifar and everything else and became attached to light ... the agitated state (in which) I went into the army gradually subsided into a relationship with the landscape.'' 11

Abstract painting had him conditioned to treating landscape as an object, a formal presence. His Dimboola scenes were squared up like his abstract collages with sheds, roads and sky arranged with clear formality. In the Wimmera, Nolan found himself confronted by the realities of landscape and in so doing, he wanted less to disturb his senses than to clarify and to order them and that demanded a purity of means and leanness of resources. The image had to be executed onto the canvas in one clear action. This is very evident in Wimmera (from Mount Arapiles) painted towards the middle of 1943. Using rich colour and virtuoso brushwork, Nolan managed to create a sense of unfolding landscape stretching out indefinitely until the horizon line was reached where it was met by rich blue sky.

The painting seems to have been infused with light. In the figure paintings set in the railway yards of early 1943, he had tended towards a flat unmodulated style but in this painting and the smaller Wimmera (1943) (8), the brushwork is freer. There is an expansive sense of limitless space created by thrusting the flat plane of the landscape vertically towards the picture plane, the almost complete elimination of linear perspective emphasising the vast space

of the landscape against the narrow strip of pale blue sky above the horizon line. Trees are formed by stabbing and twisting brush action, paint is smudged or wiped away to expose areas of underpainting. The result is a more energetic and painterly surface.

In July 1943, Nolan was transferred from Dimboola to Ballarat. The time away from the Wimmera gave him a chance to rethink his sources and the subject of landscape. During this period he painted Lagoon,Wimmera (9) which was an attempt to apply the lessons of Cezanne's late and most radical work to pure landscape. In it he tried to combine the flat foreground plane of the blue water of the lagoon and its vigorously worked pattern of the trunks of drowned trees with the narrow strip of the yellow plain and sky in the far distance. He has abolished a middle ground as well as any transitional passage from one area to the other. This painting is a good example of Nolan's philosophy towards painting then, his attempt to convey the reality of landscape by

''the juxtaposition of things as they really are.'' 12

In otherwords, an objective rendering of subjective vision and experience in the manner of Cezanne, Picasso, Rilke and Proust. In the pre-Wimmera work of 1939-41, he had explored an essentially subjective and symbolist sense of things and relationships, the painting Boy and the Moon 1940, being an example of this.

Although Nolan's work had changed much when he had arrived in bush country, he had not arrived in the Wimmera totally unprepared. He had already, in late 1941 and early 1942 been thinking seriously about the question of landscape. His early experiments in abstract and symbolic imagery had given way to images of Melbourne and Luna Park near his home and also to the area around Heidelberg. In fact it was at Heidelberg where he had been living and working for a year at the home of his friends John and Sunday Reed, that he first encountered directly the early work of the Heidelberg School and especially that of Arthur Streeton. The Reeds owned Streeton's Yarra Valley at Heidelberg,

painted by the artist at the age of twenty-one in 1888 during the first year of the artists' camp at nearby Eaglemont. It showed a dreamlike landscape suffused by the approaching twilight of a summer's evening with a group of figures bathing in a pool at the centre of the picture. Nolan was struck by Streeton's command of medium and subject and his ease of handling the details of a scene devoid of picturesque features, bringing a sense of drama through its boldness of structure. Nolan's interest in tackling landscape heightened against a background of discussion in which his friend Sunday Reed's influence was the most challenging. According to Nolan;

> ''She calculated what the chances were of re-doing Australian landscape. At that time we were heavily involved in 'abstract' painting and being avant-garde and going forward from that point; so going back to landscape was rather like treason. We did discuss it and I did start to change as a result.'' 13

Throughout his career, Nolan has cited 'sunlight' as an influence on his work. His Wimmera landscapes from 1945 were suffused with this light, however Nolan did not find it sufficiently real. In writing to his friend John Reed about his work in 1945, he stated;

> ''(The Heidelberg painters) were like children to imagine that what they saw in the bright sunlight was what they could paint. So they could in one sense but they had to make it effective in communication between men, which is another matter. If you could paint radiant sunlight in that way there would be no need for art. That picture of McCubbin's .. had some quality of the air here, but he had it because of some basis of common speech in painting ... all the things we see around (that) we sense are uniquely Australian still

have to come to grips with the cast iron logic of paint as we so far know it. And that seems now for us more like the cumulative effect of generations here rather than the blind hope that you will short circuit the process by sitting in the sun and painting it.... I am convinced that without a logic in paint capable of withstanding the errors of one's own will that it is a bit silly to call it truthful rendering. Out of all the paintings you do get so little that remains constant, and that little is the only thing that enables you to start another painting.''[14]

During 1943, Nolan produced the paintings of the Wimmera that are landmarks in the history of Australian landscape painting. One of the best is that entitled Kiata (10) now in the collection of the Australian National Gallery.

In December 1943, he returned to the Wimmera to find the familiar landscape of the plains transformed and in the middle of one of the worst droughts which Australia has ever experienced. Nolan was fascinated by the beauty and clarity of the light over the dry landscape and by the soft veiling of the landscape by duststorms and the effect of the bushfires during January 1944. After Grassfire (11), painted after a bushfire was an attempt to convey the way the landscape contained and survived the fires rather than to display the destructiveness of the event. His only interest was in the after effects of the fire, the manner in which it changed the appearance of things. As an artist he distanced himself from the event in order to see it more clearly.

Nolan finally left the Wimmera in February 1944 and found himself based with the army in Melbourne until July. He returned to it once more in 1966 for a brief visit. However, his subsequent work would have been inconceivable without the period which he spent there and the visual language and approach

to landscape painting which he first developed there. It is not surprising that Nolan identified with the ideals of Cezanne as Nolan's Wimmera paintings changed the pictorial vision of the bush country as markedly as Cezanne changed the way in which the countryside of the south of France had been previously seen in paint. This period also provided him with an experience of bush country which played an integral part in the conception of the Kelly series of 1946-47.

Footnotes.

1 Bernard Smith, Australian Painting 1788-1960, p.50.

2 Ibid, p.56.

3 Ibid, p.78.

4 Sidney Nolan- The City and the Plain. National Gallery of Victoria catalogue, p8.

5 Noel Barber, Conversations with Painters, p.90.

6 Sidney Nolan- The City and the Plain, p9.

7 Sandra McGrath and John Olsen, The Artist and the Desert, p. 58.

8 Richard Haese, Rebels and Precursors, p.195.

9 Sidney Nolan- The City and the Plain. p11.

10 Ibid, p.28.

11 Haese, p.97.

12 Sidney Nolan- The City and the Plain. p. 19.

13 Ibid, p.12.

14 Ibid, p.21.

CHAPTER III

Since Sidney Nolan first gained notoriety with the Kelly paintings of 1946-47, his reputation as a painter has always been associated with work which had either a strong narrative content or a strong mythical element. This was undoubtedly linked to the fact that Nolan had such an abiding interest in literature and was, as stated in an earlier chapter, undecided whether to be a painter or poet up to 1939. There was a general interest among artists in the early forties in myths and how they operated in society. During this time, Angry Penguins - the magazine with which Nolan became editorially associated after the war - published in 1942 an article entitled 'Art, Myth and Society'. This was written by Albert Tucker and indicated his concern at Marxist notions of the role of art in society. [1]

Interest in myths and legends and half-history and half-legends, the latter two which were so important in Nolan's development, was not confined to Australia. Similiar forces were operating in New York in the late thirties and forties. In the war years, the Americans were, like the Melbourne painters, putting myth to social and personal uses, and under the influence of refugee surrealists like Andre Breton and Max Ernst, they became more aware of unconscious forces in society and its individuals. Art was then associated with personal, ethical issues. In the late thirties, Nolan had read Kierkegaard who had once written:

> ''If anything in the world can teach a man to venture, it is the ethical, which teaches to venture everything for nothing, to risk everything''. [2]

Nolan's drawings of 1938-39 are not unlike those by Jackson Pollock of 1938, who was then using a totemic format filled with irrational symbols and was influenced by the surrealistic concept of automatism. Surrealism interested both New Yorkers and Australians alike because of its emphasis on impulse, chance and unpremeditated automatism. In America it led to an abstraction aimed at recording direct experience; in Melbourne, it led to a realism based upon

personal, ethical attitudes to myths and the prevailing ethos. The city of Sydney opted for a painterly revival of romanticism and an illustration of myths that showed evidence of skill but carried little conviction. Technique or technical virtuosity was abandoned by the Melburnians for directness of impact and they had the same approach as the New Yorkers who aimed at spontaneous brushwork.

Nolan's reputation is rooted initially in the Ned Kelly paintings which were based on a real but legendary embodiment of a typically Australian combination of masculinity and machoism, loneliness, toughness, sentimentality, and strong family connections. Subsequently he dealt with such mythical and legendary tales as Mrs Fraser and Bracefell, Burke and Wills, Leda and the Swan and The Gallipoli events. In this chapter I intend to discuss two of these series, namely the Kelly series of 1946-47 and in rather less detail, the Gallipoli series.

The Kelly series was inspired among other things, by a trip which Nolan took with his friend Max Harris, through the countryside of North East Victoria. This consisted of varied bushland with flat or gently undulating land, scrubby trees and gum trees. This region was known as Kelly country as the legendary Ned Kelly had been a bushranger there during the 1870s until his untimely death at the age of twenty-five in 1880. Another main source of inspiration for this series was a book by J.J. Kenneally entitled, 'The Complete Inner History of the Kelly Gang' and in fact the series was accompanied by quotations extracted by Nolan from the Royal Commissions report of 1881, from newspapers and from Kenneally's book.

There were other reasons too why Nolan chose to paint about Ned Kelly, an important one being the fact that Nolan's grandfather had also painted bush landscapes and had been a police officer at the time of the Kelly troubles and so had first hand accounts of the events of that time. The idea of a Ned Kelly

series had first come to him when he left the army. While stationed in the Wimmera region, he had found a way of depicting landscape simply through having been forced to live with it and for some time he had not known what to put in front of it. However after his army experiences, he recalled all the stories of Kelly that he'd heard as a child from his grandfather. Nolan recounts:

> ''For five years or so I spent a great deal of time out in the bush. Being on one's own - or being in the army which is, in a sense, being on one's own - and being forced to stay in Australia, instead of going to Paris to paint as I'd hoped to, changed many things. I began to forget Paris and modern art. More and more I began to appreciate the reality of my situation; everyday living; I was surrounded by Australian life, I was part of a very remote landscape where I was stationed and gradually I started to paint the landscape as I saw it ... Slowly the landscape in front of me, and which I kept on painting, started to push out all the other things in modern art I thought I had wanted to do. When I came out of the army in 1946, I was ready. I had worked it all out. I knew what I wanted to do - something specifically Australian. Not merely landscape but more than that. Let me explain it this way. The tension of the war years changed Australia greatly. It destroyed, I think, our dependence, with overseas in some curious way. It set us up in some way on our own. Even in art. For years I had believed no artist could really succeed without studying in Paris. But then for five years I was deprived of the chance to study in Europe so I <u>had</u> to build up something else instead. The Ned Kelly idea really came to me when I left the army. I had found my landscape, simply through being forced to live with it. I didn't <u>want</u> to but I had to. At first I didn't know what to put in

front of it. But the moment I left the army, I remembered all the stories and legends of kelly that my grandfather had told me. In a curious way, tne attitude of the soldiers I had met and lived with all tied up with Kelly. It was a real thing, not just 'make-up'. kelly may have been a bad nat, but in some odd way I found Kelly reflected in many a good Australian soldier. It just clicked into place. That's how I set off''. 3

Kelly is painted as something of a hero in the first Ned Kelly series though in later series, he becomes a more vulnerable figure and appears more as a victim than hero. Nolan has an almost obsessive need for heroes as a stimulus. He has remarked one occasion that he would be reluctant to drop the concept of a hero figure as it would be a discarding of something very Australian and without the hero, a certain anonymity results.

To him, the idea of a hero relates to a human ideal, sometning present in the mythology of all progressive societies. The loss of the ideal is a sign of our decadence. Modern heroes could only be rejected outsiders - such as Rimbaud or the American beatniks - a spiritually unhealthy paradox.

The strange and fantastic form which Nolan has given to Kelly in this series is entirely reconciled with the stiff, doll-like policeman so reminiscent of Rousseau's paintings. The way in which Kelly is identified with an inventive abstract version of his home-made armour enables Nolan to achieve so effective an interplay of spectral apparition and human presence that Kelly's invincibility and immortality are self evident. Carried to its extreme, this device is simply a black flat paper thin silhouette, without front or back and with a slot in the headpiece which invariably reveals, instead of human eyes, a view of flat, lonely, interminable landscape. It is always

the most sharply visible thing in the painting, very much alive but simultaneously untouchable and invulnerable.

The landscapes which Nolan has depicted in the twenty-seven paintings which form the 1946-47 series, are straightforward topographical landscapes which are faithful to what is seen but are viewed from a distance, rarely detailed and somewhat dreamlike in remoteness. In many the horizon line goes straight across the middle of them and on one side of it is a golden-yellow emptiness and on the other a blueness faded a little by light. 'Ned Kelly' and 'Pursuit' are good examples of this. Nolan fused two elements in these works; the plein-air colour of Tom Roberts and earlier Arthur Streeton and the shadow of melancholy. The black looming form of Kelly in his armour adds a poignancy to the work. Elwynn Lynn has written of this series;

> "The symbolic contrast of light and dark gives most of the series an aesthetic and emotional unity. Nolan deployed space for symbolically emotional effects in a way to which he was rarely to return: but his involvement with deepening the pictorial and symbolic effects of the saga should not be overemphasised because he paints always with a slightly ironic and sensuous detachment, savouring his won reactions to every stroke; this is why he can 'interrupt' the series with a naked man against a beautifully tremulous, dusky-brown landscape or the humorous puppet-like piece where Kelly dances with an unsuspecting policeman. Even when the paintings adopt a more expressionist violence with the death of Sergeant Kennedy or the battle at Glenrowan, there is no expressionist anguish, no reduction of the figures to symbols of terror, futility, injustice or revenge." 4

Before commenting on the paintings in this series, an outline of the legend

of Ned Kelly is necessary. Kelly came from Irish-Australian stock and his family had an extensive history of trouble with the Victorian and other police forces, surviving as they did by a combination of legal pastoral activities and stock-stealing. In fact, this was the normal means of existence for most free-selectors at that time, the distinction between stock that had 'strayed' and that which had been stolen being a difficult one to make. By 1871, at the age of 16, Kelly had already served one gaol sentence and was convicted that year, of receiving a stolen horse and given three years in Melbourne's tough Pentridge gaol. In September 1877, he was arrested for drunkenness and on the way to the courthouse attempted to escape, causing a brawl to ensue. Seven months after the fight, Constable Fitzpatrick, one of the officers involved in the brawl with him, visited the Kelly homestead alone and against orders, and probably drunk, to arrest Ned's younger brother, Dan, on a charge of horse-stealing. He later claimed to have been assaulted by the Kellys, including Ned and Mrs Kelly. The family claimed that Fitzpatrick had tried to molest one of the daughters and that their actions had been justified. Six months after, a judge sent Mrs Kelly to gaol for three years, saying that he would have given Ned and Dan fifteen years apiece if they could have been found. Meantime, they were hiding out in the rugged Wombat Ranges, accompanied by two other friends, Joe Byrne and Steve Hart. In October, 1878, a party of four policemen was sent in to the Ranges to hunt the Kellys down. In charge was Sergeant Kennedy, a good bushman and a crack shot. He was aided by Constables Scanlon, McIntyre and Lonigan. Lonigan had fought in the brawl with Ned the year before. All had been handpicked for their bushcraft and they intended to capture the Kellys.

On the night of October 25th, they camped along the edge of a creek known as 'Stringybark'. The following evening the four-strong Kelly gang held up Lonigan and McIntyre who were minding the camp while Kennedy and Scanlon patrolled

the bush in search of the outlaws. McIntyre surrendered immediately, saving his life; but Lonigan clutched at his revolver and Ned Kelly shot him dead. On their return to the camp, Kennedy and Scanlon were called upon to surrender, but they resisted too, and were both killed in the ensuing gunfight. During the fighting McIntyre managed to clamber onto a stray horse and ride for his life.

Less than six weeks after Stringybark Creek, the Kellys struck again. This time they robbed the bank at Euroa, a busy town about one hundred miles north of Melbourne. They escaped with around £2,000 in gold and cash. Ned also stole deeds and mortgages held in the bank safe, an action that endeared him to the struggling selectors of North East Victoria, most of whom saw the banks as 'poor-man crushers', as Ned himself was to describe them in a letter he would write to the world. Acting on false information intentionally supplied by one of the Kellys' 'bush telegraphs' or informants, the police went looking for the gang across the border in New South Wales. Meanwhile back in the Kelly country, the bushrangers divided up the Euroa loot between relatives and sympatnisers, as well as themselves. During this time, the police arrested a number of sympatnisers and jailed them without trial for three months. At the same time the reward for the Kellys was increased from £2,000 to £4,000. On February 5th, 1879, the gang appeared at Jerilderie, where they locked the two policemen in their own cells. The Kellys spent that night and most of the next day in the town masquerading as police officers in their stolen police uniforms. They robbed the local bank of £2,000 and mortgages were burned to the accompaniment of cheers from the crowd held hostage in the hotel. Ned Kelly left with one of the bank tellers, a 10,000 work statement that came to be known as the 'Jerilderie Letter'. This catalogued the complaints and grievances of Ned Kelly and his friends and also gave an insight into the motives and attitudes behind their actions. It contained complaints of discrimination against small farmers by the administration and of the injustices of the police.

On June 27th, 1880, the Kellys took over a settlement surrounding a railway station called Glenrowan. The night before, Dan Kelly and Joe Byrne had 'executed' a one-time companion named Aaron Sherritt. Sherritt was apparently playing the police off against the Kellys. His murder also had another motive, to lure the bulk of the special district police force on to a train that would have to pass through Glenrowan on its way to the scene of the murder in the Kelly country. The Kellys planned to wreck this train and pick off the survivors, particularly the Aboriginal black-trackers who had been successful in bringing the police too close to the Kellys on several occasions. Exactly what the gang planned to do after this remains unknown. It has been said that they merely aimed to rob as many unprotected banks as possible; others believe that they were going to bring about an insurrection to establish a Republic of North East Victoria.

In the months prior to the attack on Glenrowan, plough-shares and quantities of cast iron had been disappearing throughout the Kelly country. The reason for these thefts became clear when the gang herded most of Glenrowan's small population into the local hotel that Sunday. In the back room were four rough suits of armour, consisting of back and breast-plates and an adjustable metal apron to protect the groin of the wearer. Each suit weighed about eighty pounds and there was one metal helmet, with eye-slits and a visor, weighing about sixteen pounds. Ned Kelly was the only member of the gang strong enough to wear both armour and helmet and still manage to handle a gun.

About ten o'clock that night, after a round of singing, dancing and drinking with the crowd in the hotel, Ned allowed a few prisoners to go home because the police train had not arrived as early as expected. This blunder caused the failure of the gang's plot. One of the freed prisoners, the Glenrowan school-master, walked along the railway track and warned the police train just outside Glenrowan. Hearing the train stop outside the town, the bushrangers

realised what had happened, buckled on their armour and stood in front of the hotel to meet the police charge that very soon came. After a lengthy exchange of shots, Ned Kelly and Joe Byrne were both wounded and the clumsiness of their armour together with the intensely painful bruises caused whenever a bullet smashed into the metal, had become apparent. Ned lumbered into the bush to re-load his revolver and fainted from loss of blood. At about the same time, Joe Byrne was killed by a stray bullet that splintered through the wooden hotel wall. The hotel was still full of prisoners but this did not discourage the police from raking the building with gunfire. A young boy and an old man were both wounded inside the hotel and a woman with a baby in her arms and her family in tow, was stopped three times in her attempts to escape by the refusal of the police to cease firing. Eventually, however, she managed to escape. Shortly after this, Ned Kelly recovered consciousness and came crashing out of the bush, firing at the police from the safety of his armour. He was finally brought down by a shotgun blast to the legs and taken into custody. The police then sent to Melbourne for a field-gun to demolish the weatherboard hotel and the two bushrangers left inside, Dan Kelly and Steve Hart. Long before the gun arrived, the prisoners were all released and the police set the hotel on fire. The bodies of Dan Kelly and Steve Hart were later found inside.

Ned Kelly was taken to Melbourne where he rapidly recovered from his thirty wounds and stood trial in front of the same judge who had sentenced his mother two years before. Kelly was found guilty of murder and hung at ten o'clock on the morning of Thursday, November 11th, 1880.

The tale of such a colourful, legendary hero figure obviously lent itself to numerous interpretations and for a painter like Nolan who was interested in narrative, it was an ideal vehicle to use in the creation of a definitive Australian Modern art. Colin McInnes wrote:

> ''Nolan has set out to redeem the Kelly myth and restore to it in the face even of his fellow countrymen, the full glory of an Australian saga. For think what one will of bushrangers, banks and hangmen, Kelly was not only a remarkable figure in himself but even the prototype (however much they may deny him) of the Australian's own idea about himself; a noble tough, a violent champion whose example has potently helped to mould the national character''. 5

When the exhibition was first shown in 1948 and again in 1956 in Melbourne and in 1958 in Sydney, a Sydney critic described it unfavourably. According to the critic, the works possessed:

> ''a decadent inbred 'hill-billy' flavour of tenth rate German Expressionism mixed with a dash of Picasso and at times reverting to the Australian Primitive school''. 6

In this series, Nolan concentrated on iconographic detail such as Kelly's helmet. He forced the landscape into a contributory role also and subordinated it to the narrative itself. The story was as vital to Nolan as the helmet and horses and bush vegetation and stick-like figures were in giving the individual landscapes cohesion - he needed a story to give him compulsion.

Of the twenty-seven paintings which comprised the series when it was first exhibited, three were set in interiors and the remainder contained a landscape element. These three paintings were Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly, (12) The Defence of Aaron Sherritt and the last painting in the series, The Trial, (13). The painting Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly shows a domestic scene with naif style wallpapering. There is a considerable amount of spatial play in the work- the walls appear flat and one-dimensional whereas the floor is painted so that it recedes back to a stove in a recess. A vase of flowers rests on a precarious looking table which is again painted in a very flat style. The figures

of the Constable and Kate are painted in a very naif manner, with the Constable seated on a chair with his arm around Kate's neck and engaged in pulling her towards him. The stance of Kate is unsteady as she appears to be falling over towards the Constable. Her inclining figure adds a note of discord to what appears to be an innocuous scene as on closer examination it becomes clear that the Constable is pulling her towards him in an effort to seduce her. Kate's wide-eyed expression conveys a tragic sense of her inability to protect herself.

On the left side of this painting ,partially hidden by the figure of the Constable, there is a window through which a small fragment of landscape is visible. Standing to the fore of this landscape is the figure of Ned Kelly holding a gun and apparently walking towards the house. This small area in the painting conveys very strongly a sense of exterior landscape outside the claustrophobic interior of the kitchen with its intensely florid wallpaper and cluttered mantelpiece. A clear bright blue sky contrasts with the bright yellow of the landscape and this image through the window gives both an impression of depth in the work and heightens the dramatic intensity of the scene. There is also a sense of time passing with the Kelly form approaching the house and the depicted incident occurring inside the house.

This work is very strongly narrative and as with many of the works in this series, the two dominant figures are executed in a manner somewhat reminiscent of the type of figures found in work by Rousseau such as Pere Juniet's Cart (1908) or The Wedding 1905. Nolan differs very much from Rousseau however in his use of colour and the paint is also applied with much more fluidity and is more transparent. This is due to the fact that these works were painted using Ripolin, a French manufactured enamel paint.

Nolan's pictorial treatment of the legend of Ned Kelly reflects his response to :

''Kelly's own words, to Rousseau and to sunlight''. 7

In order to create an image of the police that would signify their permanent role as the Enemy, Nolan had to invent a figurative system which would go beyond appearances without altogether dispensing with them. He found the prototype for such a figuration, as his own reference to Henri Rousseau indicates, in the art of those simple, untrained painters who, in 19th century New England and 20th century France, produced stiff, solemn incorrect versions of the human figure oddly and intensely filled with human presence.

Kenneth Clark has written of Douanier Rousseau's work as paralleling that of Nolan. According to him:

> ''The importance of this parallel seems to lie in the Douanier's sketches, which are also the work of a natural painter, to whom weight of tone and disposition of mass are the first means of expression; and whose detail, amiable and decorative though it often is , would hold our attention no longer than that of any other 'Sunday painter' were it not for the solid fabric on which it is embroidered.'' 8

Elsewhere, he writes on the variety of Nolan's response:

> '' He is the reverse ofsuch a painter as Constable, who said; '' I imagine myself driving a nail; I have driven it some way, and by persevering with this nail I may drive it home''. Nolan deals with his blows all round him with any instrument that comes into his hand. Realism and fantasy, Douanier Rousseau and Giacometti, Monet and the engraved rocks of the aboriginals - all are used and sometimes combined; but there is no feeling of eclecticism, because all these varying modes or styles are seized upon, almost unconsciously as the most effective means of making an urgent communication.'' 9

Nolan's use of naive painting in this series is important because the use of this style allowed him to express feelings and sensations which could not be achieved with naturalistic painting.

The landscape which is visible through the window of Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly appears again in the paintings Ned Kelly and The Pursuit and The Encounter . In each of these works, the horizon lines divides the painting in half just as it does in the portion of it visible in Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly. Ned Kelly uses a very simple compositional device. The horizon line is counterbalanced by the upright figure of Kelly on horseback with the horse's rump only visible to the viewer. The black figure of Kelly seems to be fused with the horse and together they form a very strong vertical element in the work. The sky is painted in a somewhat surrealist manner with fluffy clouds which seem about to move off the edge of the painting. Small and very loose brushstrokes indicate the presence of vegetation along the horizon line and the landscape is a rich golden colour. There is no sense of distance in the landscape, the foreground, middleground and background are indistinguishable and together the sky and the land seem to act as a backdrop for the figure of Nolan on horseback. There is very little attempt to render detail in this work as compared to the last painting described. Yet this does not detract from the power of Kelly's image to dominate the piece. This vertical component seems to be almost collaged on to the landscape and apart from some minor shadows visible at the base of the horse, there is no attempt to locate it firmly in the landscape.

In this painting, Nolan doesn't forget the relevance of horses to the Kelly legend. Ned's trouble with the police went back to the age of fifteen when he was accused of taking a horse without permission which resulted in him being arrested and sent to prison for three months. Soon after he was released, he was again charged with stealing a horse and was sentenced to three years prison.

In The Pursuit , Kelly again appears on horseback but this time it is a side view with Kelly and horse running parallel to the horizon line which bisects the pictorial space in half. The sky is painted a blue green colour and could just as easily double as an expanse of water in the background. Kelly's armour is,unusually, not black in this work. Instead it is striped yellow, red and brown and has a carnival-like look. There is a certain gaiety and levity in the work with a distinct air of a game being played with the policeman also on horseback, on the right side of the painting. Kelly carries his gun somewhat like a jousting stick and this together with his gaily coloured armour strongly suggests a medieval jousting tournament. The golden yellow landscape is like that found in Ned Kelly and is successful in creating an impression of very bright sunlight in the landscape.

Many of the paintings in this series can be sub-divided into groups quite readily. As was pointed out earlier, there are three paintings which are set in interiors. Two paintings show small towns in the outback and these are Mansfield and The Watch Tower . The Burning Tree, Morning Camp, The Alarm, The Marriage of Aaron Sherritt, The Questioning and The Slip could be loosely grouped together as none of them show the presence of Kelly and mostly show images of the police trackers in the course of their work and events incidental to the Kelly legend. First Class Marksman, Death of Constable Scanlon, Stringybark Creek and Death of Sergeant Kennedy are all paintings relating to Kelly's deeds as a bushranger. Steve Hart and Quilting the Armour can be grouped together because the colour scheme in them is very similiar. Four more works can be put in the same category because they deal with events at Glenrowan where Kelly and his gang made their last stand. They are Mrs Reardon at Glenrowan, Siege at Glenrowan and Burning at Glenrowan. Bush Picnic showing Kelly at leisure is probably unique in the series as it cannot be placed in any of the other categories.

The very first painting in the series Landscape is quite different to

anything that follows and it is almost like a stage set against which drama will take place in the future. It shows a fragment of landscape with the edge of a lake or riverbend or some such expanse of water on the right side of the painting. Some gum trees are loosely painted near the horizon line and landscape is a rich brown colour. The sky is painted so as it curves back towards the horizon line and there is a feeling of space in the sky similiar to what one finds in countries close to the equator where the sky always seems to dominate the landscape. It is a very still work and is entirely apt as the beginning of such a series. In the quotation accompanying this painting, Nolan paid tribute to the Heidelburg painters Roberts, Streeton, McCubbin and Conder, who produced the first Australian landscapes in the bushland of colonial Victoria and he makes reference to their 'blue and gold' impressionism and their feeling for Victoria's golden, sun-drenched earth and heat-hazed blue skies. There is no doubt that Nolan was influenced by them at times in this series in his use of paint and his depiction of the landscape and sky in such yellow and blue shades.

The painting Mansfield and to some extent, The Watchtower, possess a similiar atmosphere as Landscape. Mansfield shows an outback town painted in loose brushstrokes and the viewer is looking down its main street. A few blurred figures are visible and the sky is grey and yellow/orange tinged and appears as if storm clouds are gathering. The scene is very still with an air of impending gloom like the calm before a storm and this is not surprising because it was to this place, on a Sunday afternoon, that Constable McIntyre, the only survivor of the Kelly gang attack, was brought with news of the shooting. Again this painting is like a stage set ready for the action which is about to happen. The Watchtower shows a policeman looking down over a township. Compositionally, it differs quite a lot from most of the other works in that the horizon line is placed very high and the sky is very grey and either hazy or cloudy. There is very little definition of housing and a strong diagonal

component in the form of a street breaks up the pictorial space. The figure of the policeman on the railing is however, less naif than in earlier works and there is some attempt at the rendition of detail.

Steve Hart dressed as a Girl and Quilting the Armour are two paintings in the series which are distinctive from the rest in the colouration which has been used and also in the way in which the figures have been depicted. In contrast to the burnt yellow and bright blue of the other works, a bright rich green is used in both these paintings. In the former work, a mid-horizon line is again employed but in this painting there is a great sense of distance with Hart on a horse right up in the foreground and the landscape stretching back to distant mountains with pale yellow stretches in the background also. As in Landscape , one becomes aware of an expansiveness beyond the edges of the work. The vegetation is depicted with loose brushstrokes and Hart's horse is painted in naive style however, the figure of Hart is quite different and is more like a figure painted by Nolan's English successors Blake and Hockney in the early sixties. The most striking feature of the work is the apparent vulnerability of Hart and his horse. He had the reputation of being the best horseman in N.E. Victoria which probably explains the inclusion of the horse, however there is a certain irony in the way he is dressed as a girl. It heightens the unreality of the scene and the abnormal circumstances under which all the Kelly gang were living.

'Quilting the Armour' is a more domestic scene and the only clue to its relevance to the legend is the armour which is being quilted by a woman in the foreground. Again the figure of the woman is much more defined and green predominates. The characteristic outback feature of a waterpump windmill can be seen to her left. A small hillock rises up on the horizon and is recognizable because it features in 'Glenrowan ' also like 'Mansfield', there is a sense of urgency in this piece and the sky is

a claustrophobic turbulent greenish colour. There is a great sensation of the land stretching back into the distance and there is more attention to detail in this work. The bright blue of the quilting highlights the armour and generally this is a strongly narrative scene.

So far, the paintings which have been described have been done so using adjectives such as 'still' and 'impending gloom' and 'vulnerability', however Death of Constable Scanlon , Stringybark Creek and Death of Sergeant Kennedy are all quite violent by comparison. First Class Marksman acts as a kind of prelude to these pieces. In it we see the figure of Kelly with gun aimed amid surroundings of bush vegetation and hills. The sky is bright and there is a plein-air feel in the painting. The Kelly figure is striking though in so far as quite unusually, there are arms attached to the armour and a pair of eyes can be seen in the helmet. The armour is very visibly a defence in this work and the human Kelly seems to be sheltering behind it. It is a fairly bright sort of painting though and contains none of the violence and disorder apparent in Death of Constable Scanlon. Compositionally it has an almost mid horizon line and a tree trunk traverses it vertically just off-centre. Six other tree trunks are visible and serve to stabilise the pictorial space. The figure is upside down and the reins of his horse are still in one hand while his gun is held in the other. Symbolically the butt of his gun crosses the shaft of Kelly's gun indicating the combat which has just occurred. The upper half of the Kelly, a solemn presence all in black with eyes downcast, stands in the bottom left corner of the work, almost like an impartial observer except for the downcast eyes.

According to the legend, Scanlon wheeled his horse around and fired at Ned Kelly on hearing Constable McIntyre shout out that they were surrounded. Immediately Kelly responded with a shot that hit Scanlon in the chest and sent him tumbling dead from his horse. Nolan captures this action well in the painting with Scanlon catapulted into the air and his horse reared off the ground.

In the distance, the figure of Mc Intyre can be seen jumping on what was Sergeant Kennedy's horse to make his escape.

The burnt yellow landscape appears again in this work and the horizon line is slightly below the mid line. The sky is streaked with grey in the upper left corner but a patch of blue is visible in the upper right corner which breaks the severity and oppressive nature of the rest of the sky.

The style of painting is considerably more naive than in Steve Hart Dressed as a Girl or Quilting the Armour and the figure of Scanlon is very similiar to that of Fitzpatrick in Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly though more attention is paid to detailing the face of the figure of Scanlon. Strangely, the inclusion of a puff of smoke from the barrel of Kelly's gun indicating that a shot had just been fired coupled with Scanlon being hurled through the air and McIntyre's positioning of himself in readiness to escape on horseback, all contribute a dynamicism to the work and a sense of time passing and events occurring simultaneously.

However, Death of Constable Scanlon (14) is not such a violent painting in comparison to Death of Sergeant Kennedy. Compositionally, this differs very strongly from the other works in that there are no small figures depicted in their entirety and the large figure of Kennedy dominates the pictorial space with the partial figures of Kelly and two of the gang placed around the perimeter of the work. There is definitely a more gruesome air about this piece and a patch of red on the figure of the dead Kennedy's tunic is a reminder of the manner in which he died as is the

presence of the guns crossed, again symbolising combat. The body of Kennedy lies in a contorted position with limbs awkwardly placed and head tilted parallel with the horizon line which is very close to the top edge of the painting. Kennedy's eyes stare unseeing and the figures of Kelly and two gang members are also striking in their gazes. There is a solemnity in the way in which they are arranged around Kennedy's body. The intensity of their gazes is heightened by the fact that all three figures have their faces masked in some way, the two outlaws having red scarves tied over their noses and mouths thus emphasising their eyes.

There is a resigned air about the work and this is probably due to the fact that Kelly claimed to deeply regret having to kill the police officers. In the accompanying quotation, he states:

> ''I put his cloak over him and left him as well as I could and were they my own brothers, I couldn't have been more sorry for them. This cannot be called wilful murder for I was compelled to shoot them, or lie down and let them shoot me.'' [10]

Another noticeable aspect of this piece is the manner in which daisies have been painted in naif manner over the foreground and middleground. These serve as a contrast to the unsightly body of Kennedy and could perhaps refer to the landscape in terms of simply being a scenario for unpalatable events of a human nature but ultimately, the landscape and nature itself is impossible to violate. One last feature of the painting is the combination of perspectives within it. Kelly and the outlaws seem to be viewed frontally while the prostrate body of Kennedy is viewed from an aerial perspective and then again the horizon line can be seen in the distance behind Kennedy's body.

The only painting showing Kelly at leisure and not being pursued is Bush Picnic . The quotation for this work states:

> ''On one occasion the outlaws had arranged to have a picnic some distance from Violet Town. The Kellys' friends flattered the constable and shouted freely for him. He got pretty full, and someone suggested dancing on the green. Good music was available and Ned Kelly took the merry constable as his partner in a buck set.'' [11]

Nolan has painted this using a mid-horizon line and the sky is depicted in a traditional manner very similiar to that found in the work of the Heidelberg painters. The foreground is done in a transparent yellow ochre. Two tents are visible below the horizon line and Kelly in his armour can be seen in front of a fire with the constable standing to his left. Horses can be seen grazing in the right background adding a pastoral effect to the scene and a few blurred figures and the figures of children can be seen too . Scrub vegetation is visible and in the distance hills can be seen. There is a Turner like influence on this work in Nolan's use of light.

Glenrowan was the place where Kelly and his gang finally fell prey to the police and not surprisingly the paintings dealing with this episode of the tale depict many more police and are generally quite aggressive looking works. In Burning at Glenrowan, the painting is dominated by the orange and yellows of the inferno of the burning hotel. Compositionally this work is dominated by a vertical and not a horizontal. Kelly's armour dominates the extreme left side of the painting with his half-figure stretching from close to the top edge of the work down to the bottom edge. He is apparently hiding behind the trunk of a tree while the five police officers visible view the events. The police are depicted like toy policemen in relation to the size of Kelly. Kelly had a low estimation of policemen as evidenced by the following description of them in the Jerilderie Letter:

> ''a parcel of big ugly fat-necked wombat headed big bellied magpie legged narrow hipped splay footed sons of Irish Bailiffs or

English landlords..'' 12

Surprisingly the police are not painted as 'magpie-legged' figures in these Glenrowan scenes but are in works like Constable Fitzpatrick and Kate Kelly, Death of Constable Scanlon and Death of Constable Kennedy.

In the wreckage of the burning hotel, the poles and vertical struts contribute to an aggressive combatant feel coming from the overall work and this is the case also in Glenrowan in which these are visible immediately behind the figure of Kelly in the remains of the almost burnt out hotel. In Burning at Glenrowan , two suits of armour similiar to Ned Kelly's can be half seen through the flames and beside them the bodies of Dan Kelly and Steve Hart. A smoky grey sky counterbalances the vivid yellows and oranges in this painting. No eyes are visible in Kelly's mask but instead it is painted an orange colour echoing the burning building. The tree trunk behind which Kelly is hiding acts as a complete barrier because it traverses the painting from top to bottom and adds an air of impenetrability to the left side of the painting.

Glenrowan is much different compositionally and the horizontal dominates it in two ways, near the upper edge in the form of the horizon line and near the lower edge by means of a row of police officers and an aborigine tracker. Kelly's helmet and upper body are centrally placed but for the first time , he is sitting on the ground with legs outstretched to the left and a coat thrown over his shoulders and a gun held in his right hand. This painting is like the climax in the final act of a stage drama with twenty police officers in all, one aborigine tracker, a goat and the figure of Mrs Reardon trying to escape from the hotel during the police attempt to shoot Dan Kelly and Steve Hart out. Kelly's eyes are seen against a red background which probably serves to remind Kelly both of the loss of blood in the course of the attack and of the burning hotel. One of the more noticeable things in this work is the attention to detail which it displays. This is noticeable in the decoration on the police tunics which quickly draws

attention to the police figures despite their small stature. The sky is a fiery colour above a central hillock on the horizon line which is high up in the painting. This hillock is reminiscent of that seen in Quilting the Armour, as is the fencing also present in both works. Glenrowan as a painting has a very fragmented sense of time about it. On one hand the police are arranged in rows in a very ordered manner and fixed and waiting and on the other hand, there is the figure of Mrs Reardon urgently making a bid for escape with her baby in her arms. It is certainly the most dramatic of all the paintings in the series.

The last painting of the series is The Trial and as its name implies this depicts Kelly in a courtroom far from the bush landscape. In the background of the courtroom are three large windows but no blue sky is visible, only a grey and overcast one. There is a vague attempt at a sense of distance in this work on the right hand side where the red tiled floor appears to be continuing down a corridor from the back of the courtroom. The red tiled floor is very effective in conveying a sense of the rigidity and formality of the judiciary operating in the courtroom. Kelly is again the dominant central figure just off centre in the painting although the figure of the judge on the left side is depicted with wig and gown . Kelly's arms are folded as he looks at the judge with an implacable air. His eyes are surrounded by green and yellow as if reminiscent of his life as a bushranger. The police in this work are again very small figures as is the jury, semi-visible behind Kelly. The front of the judge's bench and the jury's bench act as formal shapes which in addition to the vertical line to the left of the judge's face and the grid pattern on the floor all contribute to making this a strong contrast with the 'spaciousness' of most of the other paintings. This painting like all the others in the series was done on hardboard and is the same size as the other twenty-six works i.e. 36'' x 48''.

Elwynn Lynn has described Nolan's 'Kelly' as:

> ''a Kelly of the right proportions - neither grandiose hero figure or a proletarian outsider filled with self-righteousness and self-pity, but a kind of absurd relative, an eccentric brother, a joking saint who appears at odd moments merely to assert his eternal if subterranean existence in the Australian mind.''13

Elsewhere in his book, Lynn quotes Nolan as saying:

> '' I find that a desire to paint the landscape involves a wish to hear more of the stories that take place within the landscape. Stories which may not only be heard in country towns and read in the journals of explorers, but which also persist in the memory, to find expression in such household sayings as 'Game as Ned Kelly'. From being interested in these stories it is a simple enough stop to find that it is possible to combine two desires; to paint and to tell stories.''14

Nolan is concerned in this series with the plight of man in social and environmental isolation. His contemporaries Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker were concerned with the cultural isolation of detribalised urban man but Nolan was more attracted to dealing with heroic figures in his earlier work and with their vulnerability and frailty in later work. For instance, the Ned Kelly paintings of the 1960s are quite different to the 1946-7 series. works such as River Bank, Crossing the River, River and the nine panels making up Riverbend , all from 1964, all show Kelly alone and naked except for his gun with only the black helmet as a reminder of the 1940s series.
Kelly has become less an Australian hero and is instead a vulnerable figure in a more universal context. On Riverbend , Elwynn Lynn has written:

> ''The defiant and rumbustious and omnipresent Ned Kelly of the 1946-7 series had become a vulnerable naked figure by the mid-60s, no longer the hero and hunter, as frail and lost as his victims.

> There is little to distinguish victor and victim except for the helmet. All is still in this oppressive forest that resembles the claustrophobic array of trees that St George faces in Albrecht Aldorfer's painting in Munich which Nolan didn't see until 1970. '' 15

As stated earlier in this chapter, Nolan's work sometimes shows a Turner-like influence and this is so in more ways than his use of atmospheric effects. Both painters have been concerned with the expansiveness of nature and also its hostility and the way in which human insignificance becomes apparent in its vastness. This is especially evident in Nolan's later work based on the deserts of Central Australia and his visits to the Antartic and other subsequent paintings. Turner believed it was man's destiny to fight against overwhelming odds in a battle against nature and the elements which would end in ultimate defeat in the ever-recurring fallacies of hope. As in such paintings by Turner as Landscape with water (1835-40) and Snow Storm (1842) and Nolan's later Kelly paintings, Burke and Wills series, Gallipoli series and his African paintings, both are pursuing an attempt to convey,not only nature's vastness, but also the vastness of nature's flux.

When the 1946-7 Kelly series was first shown in Australia, it received little attention as has already been mentioned and in fact, it was not until they were exhibited in London at the 'Qantas' Gallery in 1964 that they began to receive the acclaim they deserved. Possibly the major reason for this unwillingness by Australians to accept Nolan's work prior to this overseas recognition was the fact that during the affluent 1960s in Australia, there was something of a turnabout of attitude towards the Kelly legend. Though there was still an abiding interest in bushrangers, the image of Kelly had been tarnished. The historian M.H. Ellis had written an article in December 1964 entitled,

'The Legend of Ned Kelly, a viscious bully with Dingo Eyes.' In it was discussed the 'enigma of why one of the most decent law abiding peoples in the world should make a national hero of one of the most cold-blooded egotistical and utterly self-centred criminals who ever decorated the end of a rope in an Australian jail'. Such a statement is relevant to the often stated accusations that Nolan merely used the Ned Kelly legend because he was searching for an Australian ethos. However, it is more likely that the reason why his series took so long to be recognized in Australia was because of the cultural inferiority complex prevalent there and the opinion that such a theme could only result in what would be seen in international art terms as being of an extreme parochial nature whose interpretation was completely lacking in painterly sophistication.

. . .

The other important Australian theme which Nolan did a series on is the Gallipoli theme. This had its genesis in the winter of 1955 when he went to stay on the Greek island of Hydra. He had begun to make a study of Greek myths as a possible source for a new series at the time, paying particular attention to Homer's epic of the Trojan War, the Illiad. The Australian author, George Johnston who was also resident on Hydra , showed Nolan a copy of New Yorker magazine containing an article by another Australian Alan Moorehead, who was coincidentally living on an island south of Hydra. Moorehead had written about a visit he'd made to Gallipoli and commented on the parallels which could be drawn between the Trojan War myth and the Anzac story. Johnston, in the course of many discussions on the Gallipoli campaign, convinced Nolan that as an Australian, he should embark on a series of paintings on Gallipoli rather than based on Troy as he had been contemplating. The result was to be a fusion of the two, a linking of an ancient war and a modern military campaign which had been fought on battlegrounds within sight of each other. He visited Gallipoli while

in Greece and although it was a brief one because the area was a restricted military zone, it had a deep effect on him. He returned to his London home to continue work on this series, however he still had no definite plan for the form which the series might take. He could have chosen to use a similiar narrative sequence as he had used for Ned Kelly but instead he decided to depict a number of small, often seemingly unconnected elements and developed them as themes. These included the ancient uninhabited landscape, the single drowned figure, the soldiers swimming and playing games on the beach and the instant when a shell exploded in the crowded trenches. The landscapes do not depict precisely the geographical features of the penninsula but rather attempt to capture the spirit of the land, much in the way that Nolan's central Australian landscapes so successfully captured the essential character of the outback.

In the same way that the original Kelly series was based closely on literary sources, so too the Gallipoli series had its origins in written and more particularly, pictorial sources. Nolan studied the photographs in The Anzac Book as well as the photographic archives of the Imperial War Museum in London and derived many of his images from those sources. Homer's Iliad and Moorehead's article were also important sources although less directly visible in the final works than the photographic sources. His use of photographic sources for the Gallipoli paintings is important in that it shows the artist less concerned with creating a mythic story than a visually stimulating but nevertheless realistically based series of images.

Nolan has spoken of Gallipoli as:

> ''the first great drama of modern Australia in which lads came out of the bush and went to the other side of the world and found themselves faced with a kind of cliff to climb. And it all folded up on them.... And I think these boys returned with a feeling that they had a new world and a new civilisation to be built in

Australia. I think, after reflection, the best way of treating it is as if it were a dream. The way we treat Homer now... I feel that if I could push Gallipoli back far enough into history, if I could make the mark. You need distance between you and a tragedy if you really want to show it in a dignified and truthful way, and Gallipoli is already fading even though many men who fought there are still living ... So it seems to me that I must throw it back as much as possible, and treat it as a myth or story that belongs to all the history of Australia.'' [16]

The Gallipoli work was first seen by the Australian public in the Qantas Gallery in Sydney in 1965, the fiftieth anniversary of the Anzac landing. It was a small show, although he had done a lot of work on this theme, as he was content to show just a small collection of drawings and one red oil of a Lighthorseman. These drawings of heads and torsos are smudgy and indistinct and capture well the gaunt resilience of the bushman. They are, like most of Nolan's figures, both anonymous and adrogynous. The anonymous figure, though generalised, does not lose its human particularity and it symbolises moods and feelings very successfully in Nolan's works, That these figures are often naked increases their gaunt resignation, some show headless maimed walking men. However, in some of the drawings with dyes, men leapfrog and vault with olympian grandeur and their sense of frailty and vulnerability almost disappears.

In discussing some of the Gallipoli paintings, I would like to draw reference to the influence of two painters in particular on this series, namely Turner and to a lesser extent, Rembrandt. As has earlier been stated, Turner was concerned with depicting light and conveying the physicality of the atmosphere in his paintings and Nolan has made very definite and often successful attempts to achieve such atmospheric effects in his Gallipoli paintings. Although parallels of this sort can be made, it should be taken into consideration that they involve a speculative element and that the similarity is probably best defined as a mutual

search for a suitable means of depiction of certain natural phenomena.

Such works as Gallipoli Landscape 11 (1957) (15) and Gallipoli Landscape 1V (1958) (16) are very similiar to Turner's later works and the latter painting in colouration and atmosphere and the use of transparent acrylic washes achieves an ethereal effect close to that which was achieved by Turner using glazes and impasto highlights. Turner's watercolour Storm Clouds, Looking out to Sea (1845) bears a strong resemblance to Gallipoli Landscape 11 in its use of transparent washes loosely and broadly applied with vertical brushmarks breaking up the horizontal which dominates in each of the works. Gallipoli Landscape V1(1958) also recalls the Turner painting Snow Storm (1842). The vitality and intensity in Turner's painting achieved using twisted, swirling brush strokes and the use of intense dark areas of paint immediately draws a parallel with Nolan's painting. In this work, Nolan too has used intensely dark areas to contrast with almost transparent areas and brushstrokes and wipe lines cover the lower half of the painting thus creating an effect of flux within.

Like Turner's painting, the horizontal dominates the scene with a mountain range in the background. Drowned Soldier at Anzac as Icarus (1958) (17) with its delicately painted sky of cobalt blue wash and pale yellow cloud recalls the freshness of Turner's Norham Castle, Sunrise (1835-40) in its ability to recreate an effect of morning light. The solitary animal visible in the foreground of Turner's work is echoed by the floating figure barely submerged under the water in Nolan's painting. It too is a shadowy, slightly amorphous figure placed in the foreground of the piece.

Nolan and Turner, although they worked in different mediums , have another feature in common and that is the manner in which they used their materials. Turner had a reputation for using unorthodox techniques, sometimes to ill effect where the longevity of his paintings is concerned. His paintings often suffer from

the detaching of the top layers of paint from earlier layers due to his practice of carrying out an oil sketch first and allow a period of time to elapse, during which the paint dried, before returning to finish the work. Nolan too, has not been concerned with consistency in technique. Initially he used Ripolin which satisfied his desire for immediacy and unreflective spontaneity in the work. He changed to polyvinyl acetate in 1957 for his Mrs Fraser series and the Leda and the Swan series. He needed a medium for these works which allowed him to paint still velvety areas interrupted with incision like marks and swirling strokes. He then used oils when he wanted a fluid liveliness in the African paintings and a ragged, curdled, unkempt look in the Antartic and Australian bush pieces of 1964. Elwynn Lynn claims that one of the reasons why Nolan abandoned abstraction was because it restricted his inclination towards a throw away technical casualness. [17]

Unlike Turner, Nolan makes no preliminary sketches as Turner did in his 'colour beginnings'. Instead Nolan has his own shorthand for remembering objects or scenes which he wants to paint later which he keeps a note of in written form in his diary. Nolan has described his reason for changing his mediums :

> ''Mainly to break up any automatic response that comes when you are working with the same medium all the time. You do end up with certain kinds of mannerisms... I like to change the medium every now and again so that I can work against it, so that I am not proficient in it - because, in some ways, I'm always worried by proficiency... Some painters are content to work with one medium. But I like to work against the medium. I think its partly a result of working with different mediums as a boy in factories; all kinds of commercial synthetic substances so that now I have a taste for them. It would be pretty rough if painting consisted only of skill ... so I am always really trying to ferret out in myself some kind of knowledge or some pattern that's inside me, that I can't get to any other way.'' [18]

Nolan's Gallipoli paintings show a minor influence of Rembrandt and this is not entirely surprising as Nolan's admiration of Rembrandt has led him , on one occasion,to say:

> ''He arrived at an internal synthesis, added everything up for himself and painted with serene detachment from elaborate techniques.'' 19

Again as with the Turner influence, Nolan has not sought to merely emulate such painters, instead he has involved himself with similiar concerns as they did. For this reason, in painting portraits of soldiers, it is not surprising that Nolan shows some influences of one of the most renowned portrait painters in the history of art.

Portraits such as Kenneth (1958) (18) and Soldier, Arthur Boyd (1959) (19) are very similiar in pose to such works by Rembrandt as Portrait of Saska (1663) or Self-portrait as a Young Man (1629). In the latter painting as in Soldier Arthur Boyd , the face has a very earnest yet innocent expression and the head is angled in such a way as to make it seem on the verge of turning. They are almost like snapshots in the sense that both portraits capture a frozen moment. The hat which the soldier is wearing in Soldier, Arthur Boyd is also somewhat similiar to what Saskia is wearing in Portrait of Saskia as both carry a plume and Saskia's gaze is directed outwards in the same way as the figure in Soldier, Arthur Boyd.

Kenneth demonstrates a Rembrandt influence in the way in which the figure is painted with a very detached air about it and also the use of space around the figure. It resembles Rembrandt's Self Portrait (1645) in its tranquility on one hand and its intensity of gaze on the other hand. Many of Rembrandt's portraits were painted in this way and other examples of work in which the subject is painted with similiar attitude are Portrait of Baartjen Martens (1640) and Portrait of a Man with a Hawk (1643).

Nolan's Soldiers(1959) strongly re-echoes Rembrandt in its composition and arrangement of figures and also in its use of light and darkness (chiaroscuro). Rembrandt's The Syndics of the Cloth Guild (1662) is constructed in a similiar way although Nolan's painting is not, of course, executed with the same concern for detail. There are five figures in Nolan's work and these are arranged in a group somewhat similiar to that in Rembrandt's piece although there are six figures present in his and they are seated at a table. The faces are quite blurred in Nolan's work but it is still possible to see the varied directions of their gazes. This too is evident in Rembrandt's piece so that in both paintings there is an impression of space beyond the painting and the viewer is drawn into the paintings in an effort to follow the gazes of the depicted figures.

Nolan continued to work on the series through the late 1950s and 1960s, up to the mid-70s. Up to this time, he himself was unaware as to how many works constituted the series. Despite the fact that many of the works have a basis in contemporary pictorial sources, his highly personal interpretations are very different from the images usually conjured up for Australians by the work 'Gallipoli'. Although the Gallipoli series rivals the Kelly theme as a predominant theme in Nolan's art, it has not achieved the same international notoriety for Nolan as the Kelly theme, possibly because there isn't the same narrative quality about it and because it seems to be a theme which is of major significance only for Australians due to its place in Australian history. Those other than Australians can identify more easily with the Kelly theme because it deals with a single identifiable hero or anti-hero figure, whichever one choses to feel about the legend and Kelly's motives.

Robert Hughes writes of the Gallipoli series as again dealing with heroes 'who don't quite make it' in the same vein as Kelly and Burke and Wills. For Hughes, the Gallipoli paintings generally lack heroic content. Only in isolated larger paintings does a sense of vigour or drama break through, according to

Hughes.[20]

. . .

Having considered Nolan's career thus far and the impact which he has made on both Australian and international art, it is ironic that he has never returned to live permanently in Australia, despite its very major direct influence on his work. He has said in an interview:

> "My framework is Australia, all the more powerful and supporting since I left Australia ten years ago. It's the central force in my work, whatever subject concerns me at the time, something I share with my generation ....This is not so, for instance, with Brett Whiteley, and the post-war generation . He doesn't go to bed, so to speak, thinking of Wagga Wagga." [21]

He has returned to the Kelly series several times, creating new images of Kelly, and the Ern Malley series in the early 1970s was inspired by the Ern Malley poems which caused the demise of Angry Penguins. Most recently he has been engaged in another series based on the Burke and Wills saga once again.

However, as stated in the introduction, Nolan's treatment of the myth of Ned Kelly and his search to find a way of painting the bush country combined with a modernist approach have resulted in the Kelly icon, which is now Nolan's 'trademark', being described in the same terms as Picasso's Minotaur or Henry Moore's woman-mountain. On the basis of the Kelly icon alone, discounting his subsequent important work, Nolan has established a reputation for Australian modern art which cannot be lightly equalled.

Footnotes.

1 Tucker wrote that art must be free from violence, regulation, coercion, want and moral blinkers. If in his role as a social being, an artist is to co-operate with any political movement, he must be assured of creative freedom at all times. His interpretations and beliefs will assert themselves through his work.

Bernard Smith, Australian Painting 1788-1960. p.236.

2 Elwynn Lynn, Sidney Nolan : Myth and Imagery. p.12.

3 Noel Barber, Conversations with Painters. p. 92.

4 Elwynn Lynn, p.30.

5 Ibid. p.19.

6 Ibid. p.20.

7 Sidney Nolan Retrospective R.D.S. catalogue, p. 8.

8 Ibid. p. 5.

9 Ibid. p. 7.

10 Robert Melville, Ned Kelly - 27 Paintings by Sidney Nolan. p.51.

11 Ibid. p. 56.

12 Sidney Nolan Retrospective R.D.S. catalogue, p. 8.

13 Bernard Smith, p. 28.

14 Elwynn Lynn, p. 27.

15 Ibid. p. 19.

16 Noel Barber, p. 96.

17 Elwynn Lynn, p. 18.

19 Noel Barber, p. 98.

19 Charles S. Spencer, Studio "Sidney Nolan & and A" p. 209.

20 Robert Hughes, The Art of Australia p.

21 Charles S. Spencer, Studio, p. 209.

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS.

1917 Born 22nd April, Melbourne.

1934 Studied briefly at National Gallery School night classes. Through books and reproductions he came into contact with the work of modern artists before he had any real knowledge or experience of the old masters. A parallel interest in modern literature also developed.

1938 Foundation member of the Contemporary Art Society.

1939 Exhibited one painting in inaugural exhibition of the Contemporary Art Society held in the National Gallery of Victoria.

1941 Army service and an intensive period of painting whilst stationed in the Wimmera region of Victoria. First phase of close identification with the Australian landscape.

1945 Joined the publishing firm of John Reed and Max Harris and the magazine 'Angry Penguins' and worked there until 1947, illustrating a number of books of poetry and fiction.

1946 Travelled to the Kelly country in north-east Victoria and began a series of Kelly pictures.

1947 Spent a nomadic period in Queensland and on Fraser Island. This was of great visual importance to his work and the white sand, tall straight trees and many birds created impressions which influenced work in 1957.

1948 Married Cynthia Hansen (Authoress of'Lucky Alphonse' and 'Daddy Sowed a Wind'). Exhibition of the Kelly paintings in Melbourne.

1949 The Kelly paintings also shown in Paris at UNESCO. A journey to Central Australia which inspired a series based on an aerial view of the terrain there. Also the Burke and Wills paintings emanated from the experience of flying over the interior of Australia.

1950 Exhibitions of work on Central Australian landscape and on Burke and Wills series. Left Australia for the first time for Europe. The Kelly paintings were shown in Rome.

1951 Settled in Cambridge, England. First London one-man exhibition. Left in winter to journey through France, Spain, Portugal and Italy. He was pre-occupied by the Masaccio frescoes in Florence and his first experience of a landscape that had been lived intensively in for many centuries. This was a huge contrast to many places in Australia where few white men had been before the artist saw and painted the locality. Exhibition in Sydney of small European studies, following Nolan' return to Australia.

1952 Commissioned by the Courier-Mail of Brisbane to make drawings of the devastated drought areas in central Australia. He spent long periods in the desert and saw aboriginal dancing as well as early prehistoric cave paintings.

1953 Exhibited the drought paintings in Sydney. Visited the remote Australian interior with John Heyter, director of the film 'Back of Beyond'. Returned to Europe.

1954 A group of ten paintings by Nolan exhibited in the Venice Biennale at which he was Australian Commissioner, also Delegate for Australian Documentary films at Venice. Worked in Southern Italy and became absorbed by the painted iron folk-art crucifixes and the southern landscape. Exhibited with Albert Tucker in Rome.

1955 Living in Paddington, London. A new series of Kelly paintings and pictures based upon the Italian crucifix themes was exhibited in London. Goes to Greece at end of year.

1956 Winter in Greece. Many studies derived from Greek myths. A small exhibition sent to Sydney. A stay in Rome with an Italian Government Scholarship. He had a studio in the British School at Rome, May-June 1956. Returned to London. A journey to Australia in stages, staying in Greece, Turkey, India, Cambodia , visiting many archaeological en route. First New York exhibition at Durlacher Gallery.

1957 Travelled in Japan and Mexico. A short stay in America and return to London where he moved from Paddington to Putney. A new group of pictures

commenced deriving from the story of Mrs Fraser and the convict Bracefell. Retrospective exhibition of 109 paintings 1947-57 and 44 studies at Whitechapel Gallery, London.

1958 Included in Brussels World Fair Exhibition 'Fifty Years of Modern Art'. From June 1958 - April 1960 was in the U.S. on a Harkness Fellowship. Worked in New York and Arizona. Exhibition at Durlacher Gallery.

1960 Returned to London, Leda and Swan paintings exhibited at Matthiesen Gallery, London.

1961 Retrospective Exhibition, Hatton Gallery, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Subsequently travelled around Great Britain, Bonython Gallery Adelaide and Australian Galleries, Melbourne.

1962. Exhibited at Durlacher Gallery , New York. Made sets for Stravinsky's 'Rite of Spring' at Covent Garden. Visited Africa in autumn.

1963 C.B.E. in New Year honours list. May-June 1963, exhibition ''African Journey'' at Marlborough Fine Art, London, consisting of 56 works in all. Spent some time in Greece. Included in the Dunn International Exhibition (''The world's 100 leading painters'') at the Beaverbrook Gallery, Fredericton, Canada, and at the Tate Gallery, London. Included in exhibition ''British Painting in the Sixties'' organized by the Contemporary Art Society at the Tate Gallery, London.

1964 Early in 1964 visited Australia and the Antartic with Alan Moorehead. Exhibition of African paintings at Bonython Gallery, Adelaide. Shakespeare Sonnets series at Aldeburgh Festival, and London Festival and Hatton Gallery, Newcastle. The Ned Kelly paintings of 1946-47 were shown by Qantas at their gallery in London, and at the Edinburgh Festival, and in Paris and Sydney.

1965 Went to Australia on an Australian National University Fellowship. Visited New Guinea, Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal and China and stayed six months in New York. Exhibited at the Marlborough-Gerson

Gallery, New York, and at the Arts Club of Chicago. Later exhibited at the Marlborough Gallery, London. Designed and made ''Eureka Stockade'', an enamel mural, for the Reserve Bank, Melbourne.

1966 Worked on screen prints with Chris Prater, London and on lithographs with Mourlot, of Paris. In New York worked with the poet Robert Lowell on illustrations for his book ''Near the Ocean'' published in 1967.

1967 Visited Morocco. Graphics at Macquarie Galleries, Sydney. Theatre and stage designs at Qantas Gallery, Sydney. Retrospective 1937-67 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

1968-

1972 Working on ''Paradise Garden'' and ''Snake''.

1970-

1971 Retrospective Exhibition Kunsthalle Darmstadt.

1972-

1973 Exhibition ''Paradise Garden'', Tate Gallery, London.

Retrospective Exhibition at the R.D.S., Dublin.

1974 Visited China. Exhibited in Australia. Doctorate Sydney University.

BBC film ''Nolan in Australia''.

1975 Travelling USA.

Pittsburgh exhibition.

1976 Gift of Ern Malley paintings to South Australian Government.

1977-

1978 Married Mary Percival. Travelling China, Tahiti and Australia.

Exhibitions in Australia.

1985 Working on new Burke and Wills series.

1986 Gift of fifty paintings to Irish Government.

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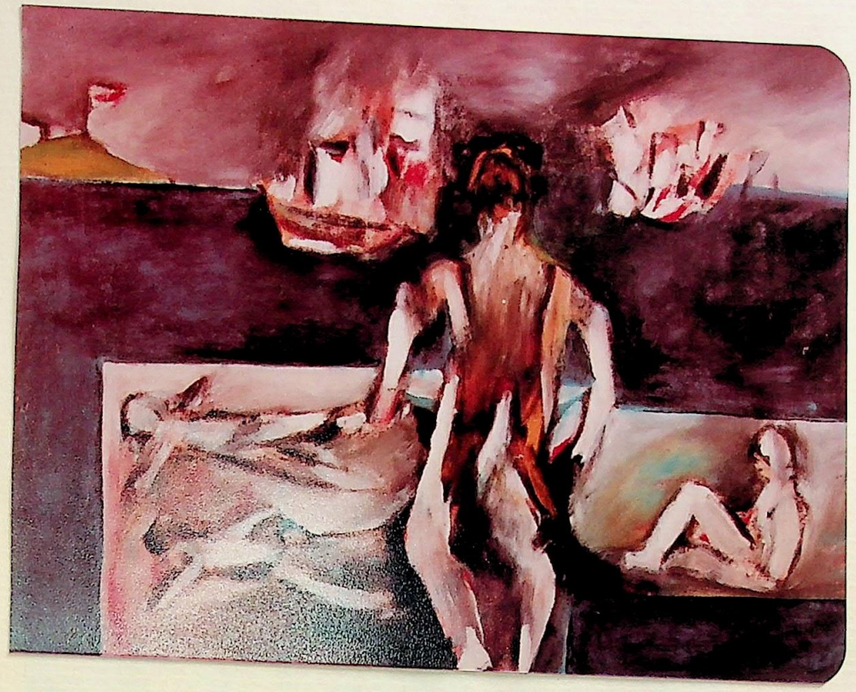

Fig. I

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

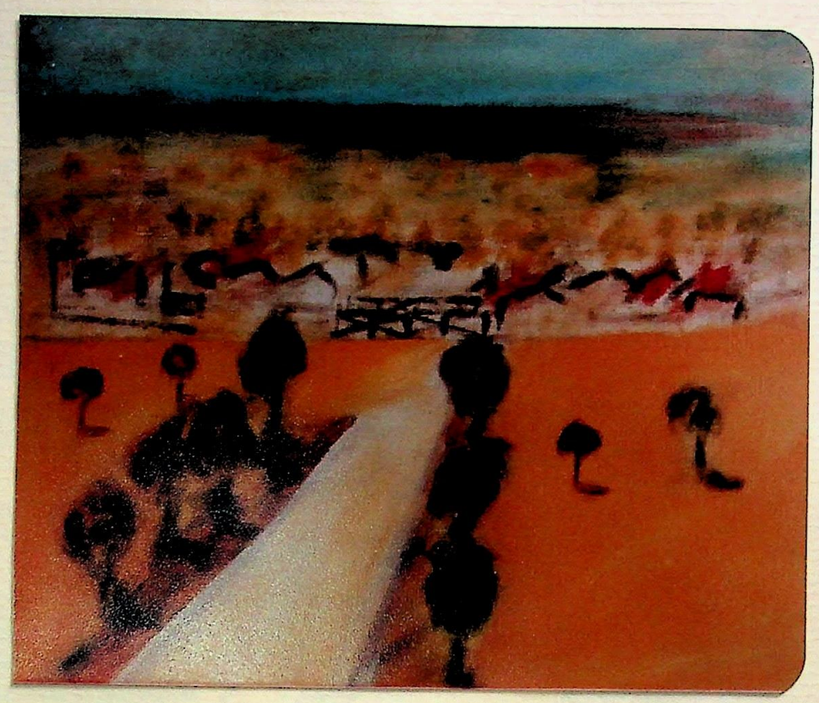

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

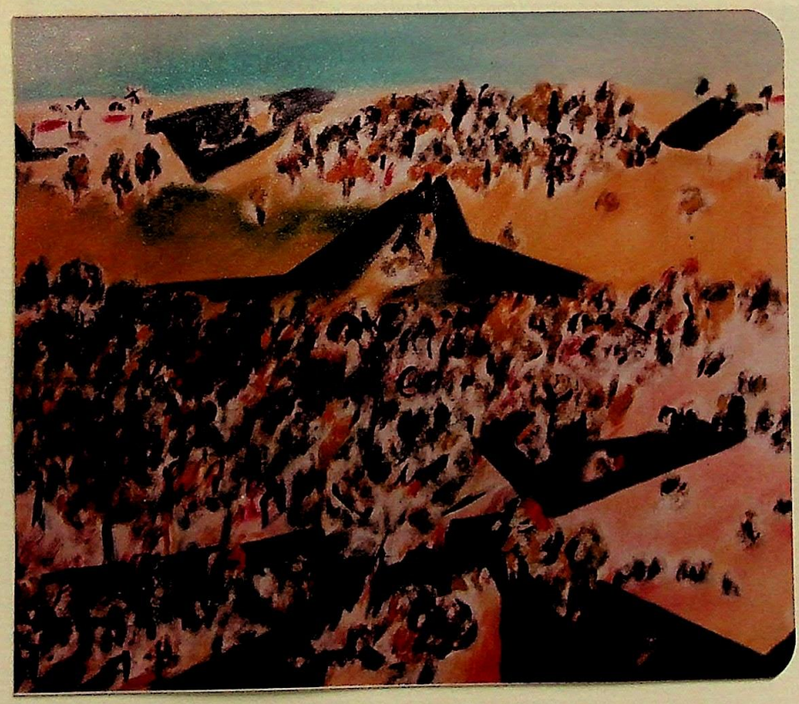

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

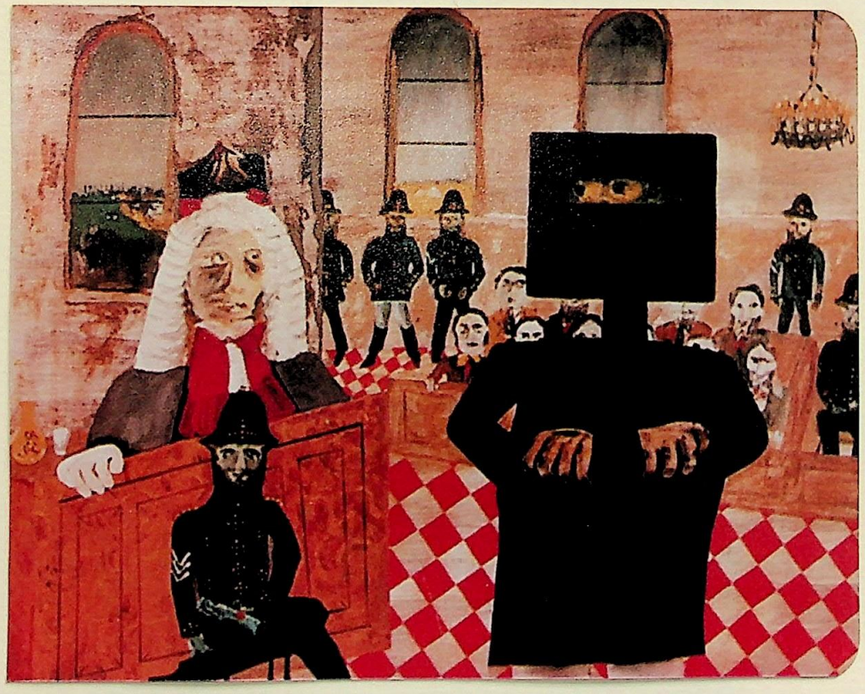

Fig. 13

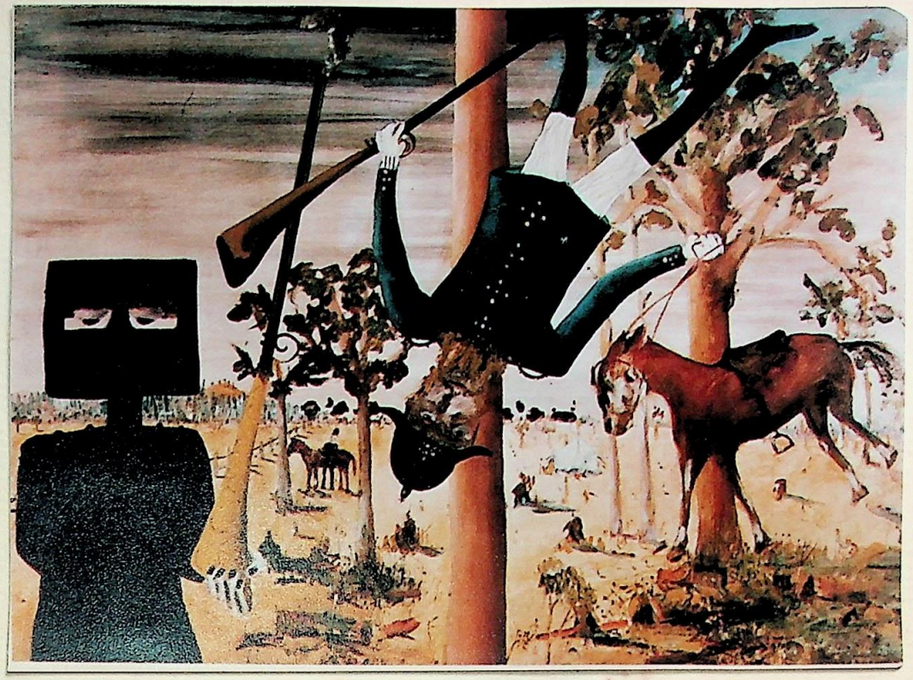

Fig. 14

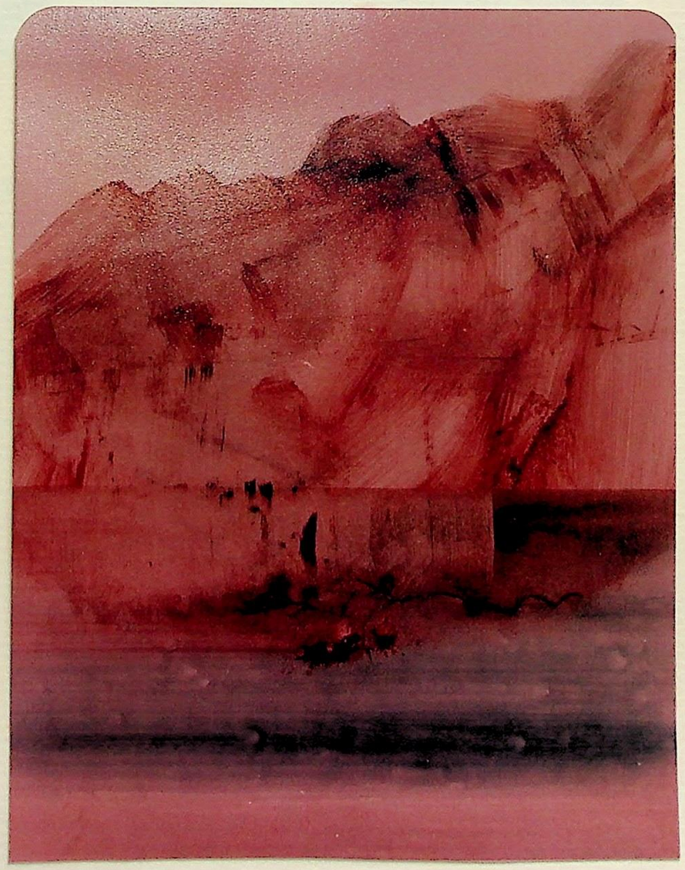

Fig. 15

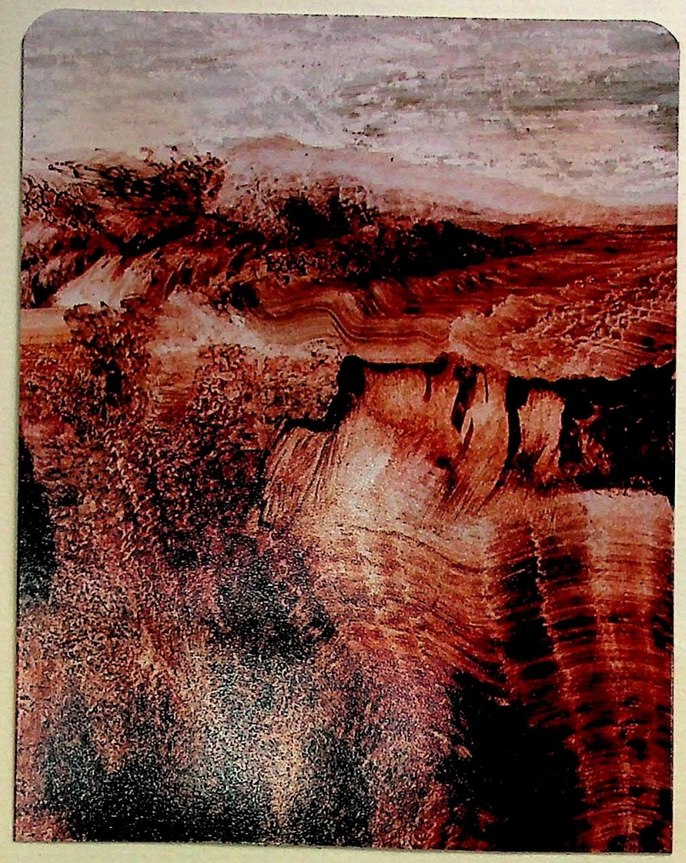

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

Fig. 18

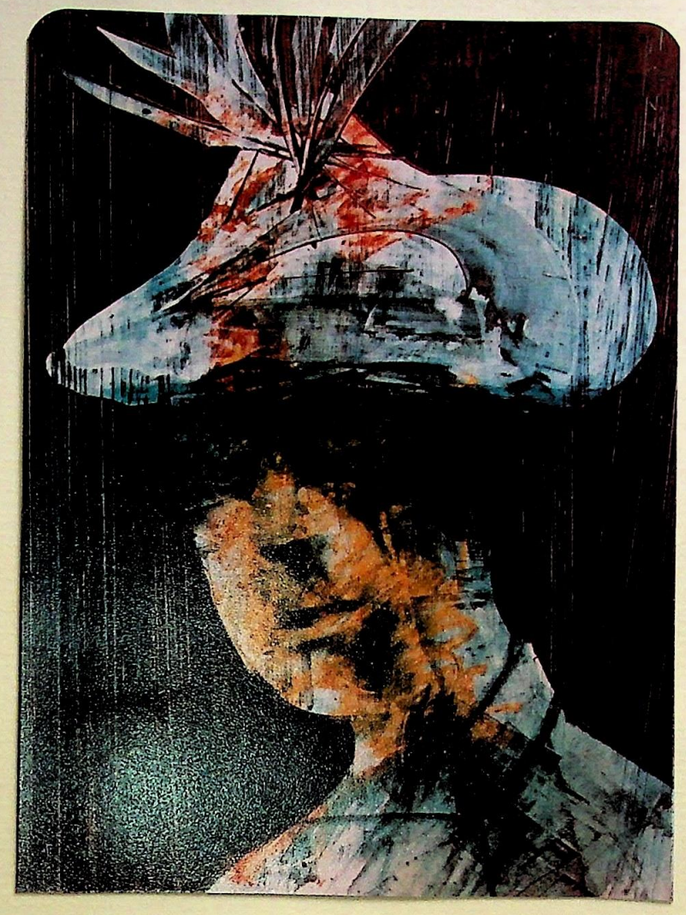

Fig. 19

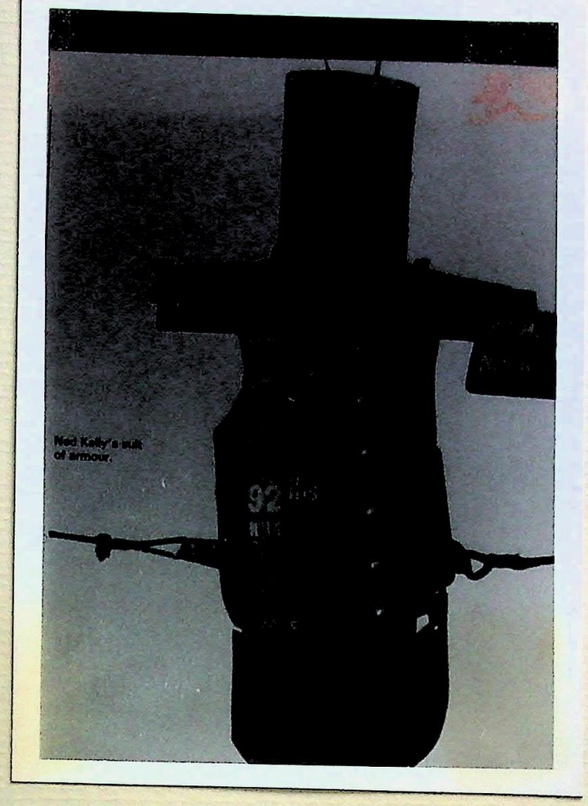

Fig. 20