

## SIR SIDNEY NOLAN - POLAROIDS

Exhibition Dates: June 17th - July 31st 2021

Sir Sidney Robert Nolan OM, AC, CBE. 1917 – 1992

The polaroid photographs in this exhibition represent just a tiny fragment of Sidney Nolan's extensive photographic archive, which is estimated to contain some 25,000 images. The archive vividly documents almost every aspect of Nolan's life and artistic practice, from his childhood in suburban Melbourne, through to The Rodd, Nolan's former home in the Welsh marches where he lived for the last ten years of his life and where today, his archive is cared for by the Sidney Nolan Trust.

Until recently, very little was known about the photographic archive, its extent, or its contents, but thanks to a Scoping Grant from The National Archives to support an expert overview, both the scale and true significance of the archive are becoming clear. What is perhaps rare is its seeming completeness. Whilst Nolan's artworks are spread around the world, both in public museums, private galleries and collections, and much of his personal archive is dispersed between the National Library of Australia and the Sidney Nolan Trust, the photographic archive would appear at this early stage of investigations to be almost complete, providing an invaluable and untapped resource for further understanding and enjoyment of his life and work.

The photographs in the archive comprise a wide variety of formats including film prints, digital prints, polaroids, transparencies, negatives, and glass plate slides. Several of these formats emerged during Nolan's career and began to reveal how central photography was to his creative process. He employed photography as source material - the archive contains hundreds of photographs that provided the foundation for Nolan's most well-known body of work, the Ned Kelly series. He used photography as a form of artistic documentation, recording thousands of his paintings, creating a record of works that may no longer exist or whose location is unknown and might play a crucial role in any future attempts at creating a catalogue raisonné of Nolan's works. Further, his travel photographs, often from remote places in Australia, Europe, the Middle East, China, USA and Antarctica capture their landscapes, cities, people and culture.

In the archive we see polaroids employed in all these modes, however it is the polaroids, which perhaps also best demonstrate the artistic and technically sophisticated ways in which Nolan used photography. In this exhibition we witness Nolan exploring new, immediate, and playful forms of portrait, self-portrait and still life. Whilst his polaroids span a wide time frame, there are several examples from the mid-1970s when he turned to the format, day after day, month after month, creating surreal layered images through exposing film multiple times; almost working against the instant image that the polaroid was intended for. In the 1980s Nolan would continue these composite experiments, firstly with the advent of the Quantel Paintbox, an early precursor to photoshop and with photocopying technology.

The ephemera that exists as part of the archive, in the form of labelled and annotated envelopes and other enclosures, are an invaluable extension of the images themselves and help to reveal much about Nolan's thinking during periods of research, discovery, planning and documentation. They suggest thoughts that came to Nolan during his travels, whilst painting and in retrospect, acting as an extension of notebooks, journals, and diaries - quick thoughts and connections, potentially leading on to further exploration within artworks, ideas and themes.

Many of these polaroids and many of the photographs in the archive could certainly be considered artworks, such is Nolan's unique and creative method of production and composition. The Trust hopes that through continued conservation and archiving, it will be possible to conduct a more extensive evaluation of Nolan's photographic output.

Antony Mottershead, June 2021  
Sidney Nolan Trust  
Creative Producer