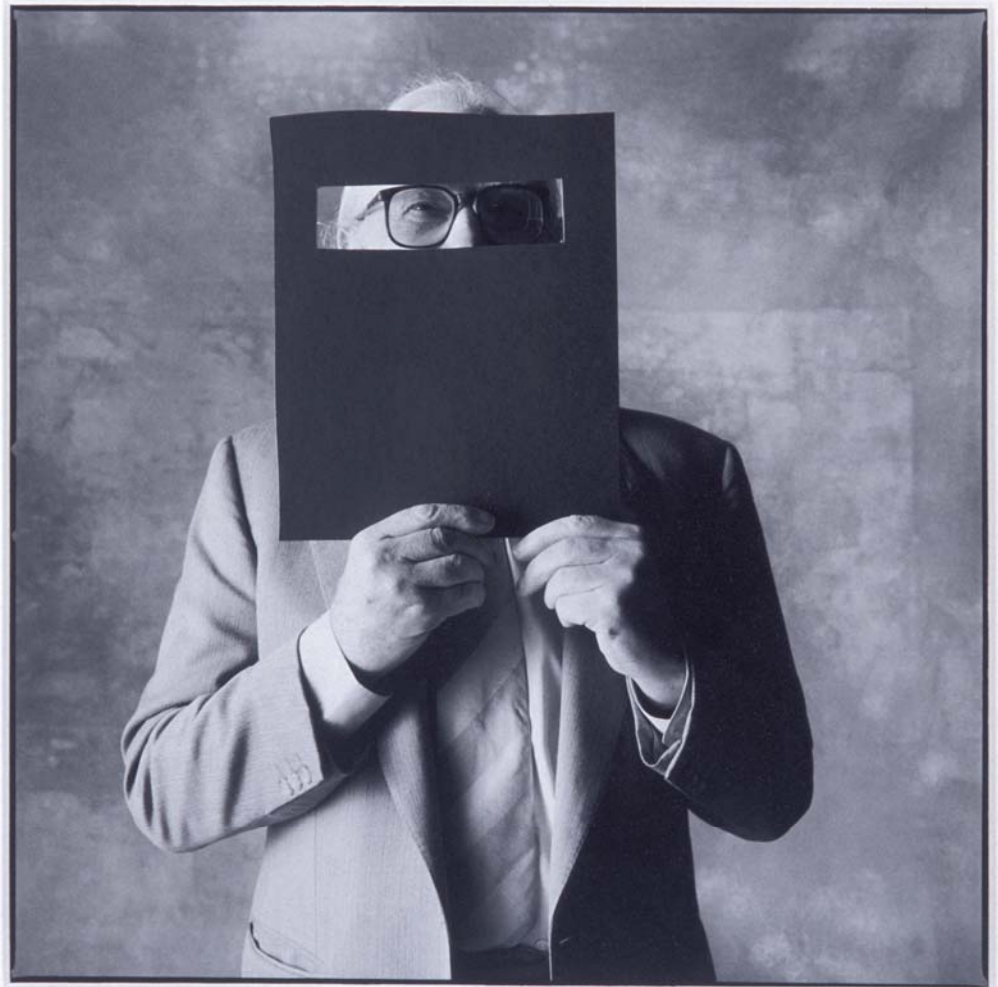

EDUCATION KIT

Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Sidney Nolan



Michel Lawrence

Sidney Nolan 1987

black and white silver print

44.0 x 44.0 cm

Heide Museum of Modern Art Collection

Gift of Susan Lawrence

© the artist

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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Sidney Nolan - A Selected Chronology

* denotes excerpts from a Chronology referencing Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly oeuvre by Damian Smith, co-curator of the *Unmasked* exhibition.

- 1917** Sidney Nolan born 22 April, in the inner Melbourne suburb of Carlton; the eldest of four children.
- 1917–31** Family moves to bayside Melbourne suburb of St Kilda; Nolan attends the Brighton Road State School and then Brighton Technical School.
- 1932** Nolan leaves school, aged 14; enrolls at Prahran Technical College, Department of design and crafts, in a course already begun part time by correspondence.
- 1933** Begins almost six years of work for Fayrefield Hats, Abbotsford, producing advertising and display stands with spray paints and dyes.
- 1934** Nolan attends night classes sporadically at the National Gallery of Victoria Art School.
- 1937** Nolan produces *plein air* landscapes, on painting expedition to Mount Hotham with Sinclair.
- 1938** Meets John and Sunday Reed; becomes a foundation member of the Contemporary Art Society; marries Elizabeth Patterson, (fellow Gallery School student), moves to Ocean Grove.
- 1939** Visits epoch-making *Herald Exhibition of English and European Contemporary Art* including paintings by Picasso, Cezanne, Bonnard, Ernst, Redon, Dali, Chagall, de Chirico, Braque and Dufy. Returns to live in Melbourne.
- 1940** First solo exhibition, *Exhibition of paintings and drawings by Sidney Nolan at his studio*, opened by John Reed. Nolan's daughter born. Nolan meets John Reed's sister Cynthia Hansen (nee Reed).
- 1941** Nolan separates from his wife and moves to Heide, the Reed's farm at Heidelberg. (Nolan romantically involved with Sunday Reed until 1947).
- 1942** Nolan conscripted into army, stationed in the Wimmera.
- 1944** Faced with the possibility of frontline duty in New Guinea, Nolan deserts, commenting 'My conduct as an artist and as a soldier have finally proved incompatible'. Lives mainly at Heide and shares a studio in Parkville.

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- 1945** Nolan's first Kelly paintings emerge in 1945. After many experiments with abstraction Nolan acknowledges the artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy as a source of inspiration for the black square of Kelly's armoured helmet.
- 1946–47** Nolan and Max Harris travel through the 'Kelly country' of northeast Victoria. Paints first Kelly series.
- *Nolan is most widely acclaimed for the paintings produced during this period, principally the twenty-seven paintings known as The Kelly Series. A full chronology of Nolan's 1945–47 Kelly images can be found in *The Ned Kelly Paintings. Nolan at Heide 1946-47*, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne, 1997.
- 1947** Leaves Heide; travels in Queensland for six months.
- 1948** Obtains a dishonourable discharge from the army; marries John Reed's sister Cynthia Hansen; travels extensively through outback Australia; paints his first aerial landscapes.
- 1950** Nolan and family travel in central, far north and Western Australia.
- 1951–52** Travels in central Australia; commissioned to record devastating drought in Queensland; then travels overseas for the first time.
- 1953** Nolan leaves Australia and settles permanently in London.
- 1954** Nolan serves as Australian Commissioner to the Venice Biennale, exhibiting ten paintings.
- 1955–56** Some months in Greece; travels to Gallipoli, Turkey, India and Cambodia.
- 1957** Retrospective exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery, London.
- *Nolan returned to painting the Kelly saga between 1954 and 1957. Nineteen of the fifty-nine paintings exhibited at the 1955 Redfern Gallery exhibition *Sidney Nolan Paintings and Drawings* focused on Kelly. No less than twelve of the 153 paintings in the 1957 Whitechapel Art Gallery exhibition *Sidney Nolan* focused on the Kelly theme.
- Completes set designs for Douglas Stewart's play *Ned Kelly*.
- Studied etching at SW Hayter's Paris studio Atelier 17.

*produced two Kelly etchings.

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- 1959–60** Nolan is awarded a Harkness Scholarship, spending two years in the United States.
- *A distinctive series of Kelly works, using a scrape technique and polyvinyl acetate, were produced and subsequently exhibited at the Durlacher Bros., New York, 1962.
- 1961** Visits Egypt.
- 1962** Travels to Africa: Kenya and Ethiopia.
- *Kelly appears in oil on hardboard paintings *Kelly I – VI*.
- 1963** Awarded O.B.E. in New Years Honours List.
- 1964** Visits Antarctica with writer Alan Moorehead.
- *Based in London, Nolan produced approximately twenty-five Kelly paintings inspired by the landscape around the Goulbourn River near Shepparton, Victoria. Describing these works as a means of preparing for the polyptych, *Riverbend* (1964–65), the artist also painted *Riverbend II* (1965–66) at a small studio at the Chelsea Hotel, New York.
- 1965** Awarded Creative Arts Fellowship in Canberra; travels to New Guinea, Pakistan and Nepal; first of several visits to China.
- 1966** Lives and works in New York for six months.
- *Nolan produces a series of ten works on paper on the theme of Ned Kelly's 'Jerilderie Letter', inscribing various works with excerpts from the Letter.
- 1967** Retrospective exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. Visits Morocco.
- 1971** **Ned Kelly*, a series of sixteen screenprints based on the 1946–47 series is published by Marlborough Graphics, London.
- **Dust*, a series of twenty-five etchings, including five Kelly images, is published in an edition of sixty.
- 1972** Second visit to China; travels to Germany, France, Africa and Australia.
- 1973** Travels to Ireland, Holland, Sweden, Japan, China and Australia.
- *Nolan experiments with the first computer graphics program, Qantel's 'Paintbox', resulting in a number of images incorporating a photograph of Kelly and his original helmet. These include *Kelly I – III* (1972), Tate Gallery, London.
- A film, *Kelly Country: A journey across Australia through the paintings of Sidney Nolan*, is directed by Stuart Cooper with narration by Orson Welles and produced by Nolan and Cooper. Copyright Sidney Nolan and Sawbuck Productions Ltd, 1972.

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- 1973** Sidney Nolan Retrospective exhibition in Dublin.
- *Five woven wool tapestries produced at Portalegre Tapestry Workshop, Portugal featuring reproductions of paintings in the first Kelly series were exhibited at David Jones Art Gallery, Sydney, 6–24 November 1973 and later in 1975. Paintings reproduced as tapestries included *The death of Constable Scanlon*, *The trial*, *Constable Fitzpatrick* and *Kate Kelly and Glenrowan*.
- 1974** *Nolan produced a series of paintings and drawings for the publication *The Darkening Ecliptic*, centering on the poems of Ern Malley. Various works position Kelly within a pantheon of mythic figures. The series was exhibited in *Ern Malley and Paradise Garden*, *The Art Gallery of South Australia Festival Exhibition*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, March 1974 and subsequently acquired by the Gallery.
- 1975** Nolan visits Australia; travels in America and Africa.
- 1976** Travel destinations: Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Australia. Death of Cynthia Nolan, 23 November 1976.
- 1977** John and Sunday Reed donate the original Kelly series of 1946–47 to the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.
- 1978** Marries Mary Perceval (Boyd) in London, they visit Mexico, America, Tahiti and Australia.
- 1979** *Nolan's exhibition at the Rudy Komon Gallery, Sydney in 1980, includes twenty-three Kelly paintings executed in 1979, painted for the centenary of Kelly's death.
- **Ned Kelly II*, 1978–79, a set of ten screenprints, is published by Marlborough Fine Art and printed by Kelpra Studio Ltd., London, in an edition of seventy-five on Velin Arches 300 gsm paper. The images incorporate reproductions of the original Kelly series with overdrawn figures.
- 1980** *While throughout this decade Nolan continued to paint occasional Kelly images, in 1980 he completed his final series of Kelly paintings. Compared with the psychologically charged 1979 series, this later group is both decidedly lyrical and moreover concerned with the poetics of the Victorian landscape. Recalling the Kelly paintings of 1945 and executed in enamel on hardboard, the outlaw's black armour and helmet appear as a puppet form, floating through the Australian bush.
- 1981** Awarded Knight Bachelor for Service to Art.
- 1983** Order of Merit awarded by the Queen; travel in Spain and China.
- 1985** Elected Honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York.
- 1986** Nolan announces his gift of approximately fifty paintings to the people of Ireland.



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- 1987** Major retrospective exhibition in Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria; then Sydney, Adelaide, Perth.
- 1988** Companion Member of the Order of Australia.
- 1992** Sidney Nolan dies 28 November 1992.

Timeline Information Sourced From:

TG Rosenthal, *Sidney Nolan*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2002, p. 282–297.

EDUCATION KIT

Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Behind the mask: Nolan or Kelly?

Sidney Nolan is well known for his iconic depictions of the saga of notorious nineteenth century outlaw Ned Kelly. He has become one of Australia's most recognisable and celebrated artists via his development of the Kelly image as a symbol for Australian history, identity and character.

This popularity is evident in the Nolan-inspired image of the Kelly bushranger used as part of the 2004 Sydney Olympics ceremony, broadcast to millions of television viewers around the world.



Sidney Nolan
Ned Kelly – Outlaw 1955
oil and enamel paint on composition board
91.5 x 71.0 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
Courtesy Gould Galleries, Melbourne
Image courtesy Gould Galleries, Melbourne
© The Sidney Nolan Trust



Sidney Nolan
Kelly 1955
oil and enamel paint on composition board
81.5 x 100.0 cm
Private collection, Sydney
Photographer: Jenni Carter
© The Sidney Nolan Trust

By virtue of their popularity alone, the first series of Kelly paintings (1946–47) has overshadowed Nolan's later Kelly works, however the ***Unmasked*** exhibition showcases several paintings and drawings in which Nolan's personality is directly intertwined with the Kelly saga. Nolan sought to make Kelly a universal symbol, applying the masked bandit as the protagonist in images. Historically Kelly was an anti-hero, someone with whom we can identify and associate, and someone who Nolan could use as a vehicle to express complex personal and political narratives over a sustained period of creative output.



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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Nolan produced the bulk of his Kelly suites between 1945 and 1980. Each shows evidence of distinctly different styles, the trialling new content and ways of art making. The theme that recurs with many of the Kelly images is the question of identity.

For Nolan, Kelly was an intensely compelling figure who, like Nolan, came from working class Irish stock. Nolan's interest in Kelly stretches back to his boyhood, where he was entranced by yarns about the Kelly gang told by his grandfather, a member of the police force deployed to hunt for the Kelly Gang.

Let's look into some of the events preceding the emergence of Kelly as a symbol for identity that may be relevant to Nolan's own experience:

- Nolan was encouraged by Sunday Reed, Nolan's patron and lover (1938–47) to develop a modernist view of the Australian landscape as an alternative to the prevailing view of the Australian bush championed by the Heidelberg school.
- Nolan had been exploring the relationship between identity and its concealment in other works of the mid-1940s, most notably *Rosa Mutabilis* (1945), where Nolan's lover Sunday Reed is concealed in a rose bush, which in turn masks its own identity through its chameleonic blooms.
- In 1942 Nolan was conscripted into the Australian army, then stationed in the Wimmera, shifting regularly but returning to Heide when leave allowed. Faced with the possibility of frontline duty in 1944, Nolan went absent without leave; spending some time in hiding, eventually assuming the false identity of Robin Murray with the help of John Reed. It was not until 1948 that Nolan received a dishonourable discharge from the army when the opportunity arose under a Government amnesty.

Is it coincidental that only a few months after deserting the army and after travelling through the 'Kelly country' of northeast Victoria with Angry Penguins poet and close friend Max Harris, Nolan begins his first paintings and drawings of Ned Kelly, a notorious fugitive who had previously run from a system from which he had fallen foul?

We can assume Nolan would have been dealing with issues of identity and at the same time wanting to further the cause of Australian modernism,



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experimenting with narrative in his painting combined with the trialling of new materials and techniques.

Nolan came to use the image of Kelly as an everyman adaptable to a myriad of situations. Nolan described Kelly as a rebel reformer but the image could be transmutable to any circumstance, in situations as diverse as symbols for a national hero to being a vehicle for political commentary, as in *Hungary* (1956).

In many of the paintings, both early and late, it is uncertain whether there is anyone behind the mask at all. Max Harris has commented:

*What's behind the Kelly mask of course is nobody, it's a blank... It's the story of Sid and his loss of identity... [The paintings] are nothing to do with poor old Ned, except within the framework of the story.*¹

This is especially significant in light of Nolan's admission that the first Kelly series contained an autobiographical subtext. Discussing the personal elements of the 1946–47 works with Elwynn Lyn, he explained:

*Really the Kelly paintings are secretly about myself. You would be surprised if I told you. From 1945 to 1947 there were emotional and complicated events in my own life. It's an inner history of my own emotions, but I am not going to tell you about them.*²

Let's look closely at who the person is inside the helmet. The treatment of the face is curious, given that sometimes the helmet is empty and the viewer can see through to the distant horizon, and other times it is populated by intense staring or closed contemplative eyes. And yet again it is inhabited by a mysterious golden glow. What do these various characters or lack of character tell us about the wearer of the mask?

This leads us to the questions who is Sidney Nolan and why did he choose to continue to align himself with the Kelly image throughout his entire career? What clues can we gain about Nolan the person given that he states the original series was about his emotions? Do we interpret any imagery made by Nolan incorporating the Kelly image as a self portrait in disguise?

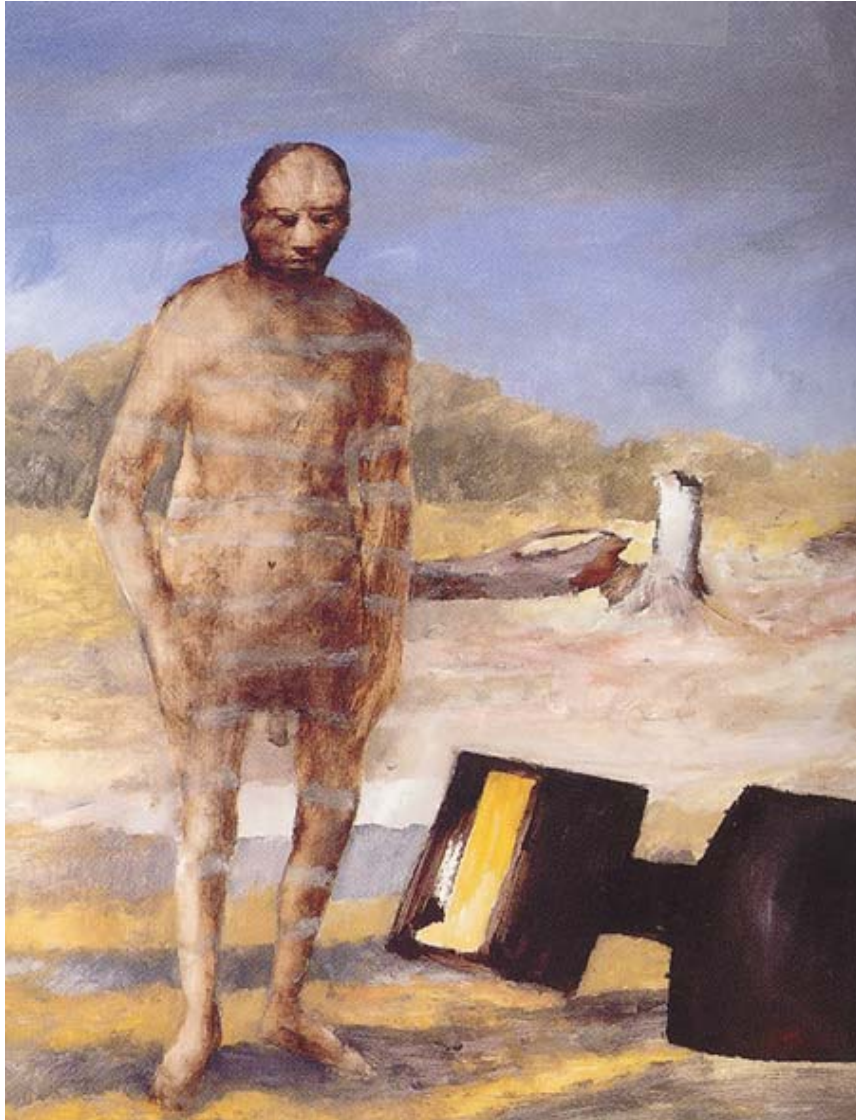
¹ Max Harris, interviewed by James Murdoch, archival film series, Australia Council, Redfern, 1990.

² Quoted in Elwynn Lynn, James Mollison and Sidney Nolan, *Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly*, exh. cat., Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1989, p. 8.

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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Identity



Sidney Nolan

Kelly and armour 1962

oil and enamel paint on composition board

152.5 x 122.0 cm

Courtesy Gould Galleries, Melbourne

Image courtesy Gould Galleries, Melbourne

© The Sidney Nolan Trust



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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Who is this man? Write a character analysis; describe his age, height, features and what he would be like as a person:

Write a description of what you see in the artwork and briefly summarise what you think it means:

What might the symbology of Kelly's discarded armour mean? (Consider the glow inside the helmet)

What might the fallen tree symbolise?

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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Look at the figure; what might Nolan be trying to say by having a naked figure standing next to the discarded armour? What might the stripes across the body symbolise?



*see Footnotes regarding this image

This is a photograph of the death mask of Ned Kelly made in 1880. Are there any similarities between this image of Ned Kelly and the face in the painting?

Ned Kelly was hanged when he was 25, yet the man in the painting appears older, use the Nolan chronology to determine how Nolan was when he made this painting.

Nolan's Age: _____

Who is closer to the estimate in your character analysis?

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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Ned Kelly was a feared and powerful bushranger yet in this painting he appears vulnerable. Do you think this painting is about Ned Kelly or Sidney Nolan? Why? (Provide 2 justifications)

Is it possible this painting is about Nolan attempting to rid himself of the Kelly identity? Discuss this with reference to the symbols used in the painting:

Below the painting *Kelly armour in flames at Glenrowan Hotel* is a graph showing the individual importance of the art elements in the overall composition.

The scale: 1= low importance and 10 = high importance.



Sidney Nolan
Kelly armour in flames at Glenrowan Hotel c. 1950
oil on paper
35.0 x 25.0 cm
Private collection, Sydney
Courtesy Eva Breuer Art Dealer, Sydney
Image courtesy Eva Breuer Art Dealer, Sydney
© The Sidney Nolan Trust

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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Example for the above art work:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Tone										
Line										
Shape										
Colour										

Using this same formula shade the art elements graph for the painting *Kelly and armour* (1962) pictured above.

Art Elements

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Line										
Tone										
Shape										
Colour										
Form										
Texture										
Pattern										
Space										
Scale										

EDUCATION KIT

Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Historical Contexts



Sidney Nolan
Hungary 1956
oil and enamel paint on composition board
122.0 x 91.5 cm
Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart
Image courtesy Gould Galleries, Melbourne
© The Sidney Nolan Trust



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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Describe what you see in this painting. Include comments about symbols, colour, style and mood.

Read this commentary on the Hungarian Revolution

The **Hungarian Revolution of 1956** (23 October – 10 November) was a spontaneous nationwide revolt against the Communist dictatorship and Soviet domination. It began as a student demonstration with many thousands joining the marchers as they progressed through central Budapest to the Parliament building, a student delegation who had entered the Radio Building attempting to broadcast their demands were detained. When their release was demanded by the demonstrators, they were fired upon by the State Security Police (ÁVH) from within the building. The news spread quickly and disorder and violence erupted throughout the capital.

The revolt spread quickly across Hungary, causing the fall of the government. Thousands organised into militias, battling the ÁVH and Soviet troops. Pro-Soviet communists and ÁVH members were often executed or imprisoned and former prisoners were released and armed. Impromptu councils wrested local government control from the communist party, and demanded political changes. The new government formally disbanded the ÁVH, declared its intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact and pledged to re-establish free elections. By the end of October, fighting had almost stopped and a sense of normality began to return.

Despite agreeing to a ceasefire, the Politburo moved to quash the revolution. On November 4, a large Soviet force invaded Budapest using artillery and air strikes. Thousands of civilians were killed and organised resistance ceased by 10 November, 1956. As mass arrests began, an estimated 200,000 Hungarians fled as refugees. By January 1957 the new Soviet-sponsored government had suppressed all public opposition. ¹

¹Sourced From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Revolution,_1956

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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Having read the commentary, look back over **your** interpretation of the painting and list any similarities between your view of the imagery and the events of the Hungarian revolution. List the similarities in the chart below:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Use as many adjectives as you can think of to describe the personality of the Ned Kelly character in this image.

Could the same adjectives be used to describe the Soviet dictatorship described in the above commentary?

What similarities can you draw between Ned Kelly's life and the events in Hungary of 1956? List the similarities in the chart below:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

What are the colours of the Hungarian Flag?



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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

What symbol did Nolan use to signify what was happening in Hungary, and what relationship does it have to the colours in the Hungarian Flag?

In almost all of Nolan's paintings incorporating Ned Kelly, he is portrayed as the hero, but in *Hungary* (1956) he appears to be an oppressor, why do you think Nolan chose to use the Kelly image in this way?

(Provide your interpretation of what the Kelly image symbolises).

Do you think this painting is about Ned Kelly or Sidney Nolan's response to the events in Hungary of 1956?

Why did Nolan incorporate the Kelly motif into the painting? What place does it have in relation to the title *Hungary* (1956)?



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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Using the same formula as you used in worksheet on Identity, shade the graph for the art elements used in *Figure and bird: Hungary 1956*:

Art Elements

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Line										
Tone										
Shape										
Colour										
Form										
Texture										
Pattern										
Space										
Scale										

EDUCATION KIT

Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Personal Identity



Sidney Nolan

Myself 1988

oil and spray enamel on composition board

122.0 x 92.0 cm

Private collection, Sydney

Image courtesy National Portrait Gallery, Canberra

© The Sidney Nolan Trust



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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Who is this man? Write a character analysis; describe his age, height, features and what he would be like as a person:

Describe what you see in this painting. Include comments about symbols, colour, style and mood.

Look back at the chronology of Nolan's life, how old was Nolan when he painted this painting?

Look back at your character analysis; does your estimate of age match Nolan's age when he painted this painting?



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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Which aspect of the painting do you see first? Is it the person or the mask?
What is the focal point of the image?

Why the tie? If Nolan saw Kelly as a rebel reformer why would he include the tie in a painting with the mask?

Myself (1988) is obviously a self portrait but Nolan has chosen to paint himself without clothes and with a strange smirk behind the mask. What might the symbology be in this?

Nolan's early employment was producing advertising and display stands with spray paints. In the painting *Myself* (1988) we see him experiment with the medium again. Suggest why he might use two vastly different mediums in the one work and describe the contrast it creates between the face and the mask.

EDUCATION KIT

Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Using the same formula as you used in the worksheets on identity and historical contexts, shade the graph for the art elements used in *Myself* (1988):

Art Elements

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Line										
Tone										
Shape										
Colour										
Form										
Texture										
Pattern										
Space										
Scale										

Look at the reproduction on the cover of this Education kit, and compare the photograph with the painting *Myself* (1988). List similarities you can find between the two images:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

Is it possible Nolan used the photograph as a starting point for this painting?



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Unmasked: Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950 – 1990

Extension Activity

Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the paintings:
Kelly and armour (1962) and *Myself* (1988).

Research the Kelly paintings of Sidney Nolan 1946–47. (See resource materials below)

References

Unmasked, Sidney Nolan and Ned Kelly 1950–1990, Heide Museum of Modern Art, exh. cat., Melbourne, 2006.

TG Rosenthal, *Sidney Nolan*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2002, p. 282–297.

Other related resources

Warwick Reeder (ed.), *The Ned Kelly Paintings: Nolan at Heide 1946–47*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 1997.

<http://www.evabreuerartdealer.com.au>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ned_Kelly

*footnote

Every effort has been made to source copyright for the image of the Ned Kelly Death Mask. As no details can be obtained about the image please contact Heide Museum of Modern Art with any information helpful in appropriately crediting this image.

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Written by Clayton Tremlett, Education Officer, Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2006.