



Media release



Artists' revenge: friendship & feud of Patrick White & Sidney Nolan

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Two extraordinary new exhibitions will shine the spotlight on Australian cultural giants Patrick White and Sidney Nolan together for the first time when *The Life of Patrick White* and *Sidney Nolan: Illuminations* are officially launched at the State Library of NSW on 14 August.

As friends, the artistic collaboration between author White and artist Nolan was creative and inspiring. Yet, their close relationship soured and, as enemies, their spite took the artistic form of cruel words and offensive artworks.

The Life of Patrick White portrays the great writer's life and legacy through a diverse collection of items such as his Nobel Prize for Literature, childhood possessions, manuscripts, photographs and artworks, including original designs created by Nolan for the covers of White's novels *Voss*, *The Aunt's Story* and *Riders in the Chariot*.

"White felt as though he and Nolan were covering some of the same ground in their work and so their relationship began in 1957 when White asked Nolan to design the cover for his novel, *Voss*," says Louise Anemaat, Pictures Curator at the State Library of NSW.

"They were close friends until Nolan's marriage to Mary Perceval (nee Boyd) in 1978. White thought Nolan had remarried too soon after the suicide of his second wife, Cynthia Reed, in 1976. White's autobiographical work, *Flaws in the Glass*, published in 1981, contained a stinging attack on Nolan's swift re-marriage," says Ms Anemaat.

"I'm a good hater," said Nolan to press at the time, and a bitter public stoush ensued. In 1982 the artist painted several unflattering portraits of White and his partner Manoly Lascaris, and commented further on the feud through a selection of paintings within his *Illuminations* series.

Sidney Nolan: Illuminations contains 20 original artworks inspired by the artist's extraordinary fascination with the radical 19th century French poet Arthur Rimbaud. A few of Nolan's paintings within the series – *Boy falls on the cannon* and *Rimbaud on Verlaine* – relate to Rimbaud's intimate relationship with the older, married poet Paul Verlaine, but also include hidden swipes at White.

[continued ...](#)

SIDNEY NOLAN
ILLUMINATIONS
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THE LIFE OF PATRICK WHITE SPONSORS



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IMAGE: AXEL POIGNANT (1906-1986) PORTRAIT OF PATRICK WHITE AND SIDNEY NOLAN IN FRONT OF THE GALAXY (DETAIL), NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA



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“These works contain overt public statements on the homosexual relationship of White and Lascaris whilst veiling these comments through Rimbaud’s poetry and life,” says Peter Haynes, University of Canberra Art Curator and author of the *Illuminations* catalogue.

Nolan created his *Illuminations* series of abstract paintings in 1982 using blended spray paint to achieve a striking and fluid multilayer effect. The 20 artworks on show have been selected from the Nolan Collection, managed by Canberra Museum and Gallery.

Just prior to Nolan’s death in 1992, he attempted to end the feud with Patrick White. However, the author rejected the reconciliation.

The Life of Patrick White and *Sidney Nolan: Illuminations* are free exhibitions on show at the State Library of NSW until 28 October 2012. **Patrick White’s biographer David Marr will officially launch *The Life of Patrick White* on Tuesday 14 August at 6pm.**

The Life of Patrick White is a National Library of Australia exhibition in collaboration with the State Library of NSW. It is supported by the National Collecting Institutions Touring and Outreach Program, an Australian Government program aiming to improve access to the national collections for all Australians.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact:

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