Lecture summary:

The tide of modernism which seeped into Australian art from the late 19th century and - though lagging behind Europe - swept all before it deep into the 20th, was typified by a growing enthusiasm for more purely formal properties of art making *sans* content. This eventually manifested itself at the shallow end with a kind of abstraction that was decorative, and at the deep end a quasi scientific-spiritual ambition either riven with theory or instinctive gesture. Whatever, it was a new-frontier reaction against the narrative high ground upheld by the official art worlds of the West. In Australia two painters in particular, rather than rejecting the narrative impulse as a stultifying academic connotation, took it by the scruff of the neck and gave it a powerful purpose within the Australian modernist canon of the 20th century: Sidney Nolan (1917-92) and Arthur Boyd (1920-99). Today’s lecture compares these two Melbourne contemporaries who finished up being brothers-in-law, illuminating their close parallels of vision with certain mutual influences, but at the same time the surprising difference of their final resolutions.

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Slide list:

All images are paintings unless otherwise described

1. Photograph of Sidney Nolan in his studio, The Rodd, United Kingdom 1980
2. Photograph of Arthur Boyd in his studio, Bundanon, New South Wales 1993
* 3. Nolan *Self portrait* 1943 AGNSW
* 4. Boyd *Self portraitt* 1945-6 NPGA
5. Nolan *Central Australia* 1950 AGNSW
6. Boyd *The waterhole with birds near Alice Springs* c1954 NGV
* 7. Nolan *Temptation of St Anthony* 1952 NGV
8. Boyd *Jacob’s dream* 1947 Wesfarmers
9. Nolan *Drought skeleton* 1953 AGNSW
10. Boyd *Horse skull under a starry sky* 1981 private collection
11. Nolan *Leda and the swan* 1958 AGNSW
* 12. Boyd *Nude with beast III (Diana and Acteon I)* 1962 NGV
14. Boyd *Daniel with bound arms and Nebuchadnezzar on fire* 1966-68 private collection
15. Nolan *Lion* 1963 private collection
16. Boyd *Nebuchadnezzar caught in a rain forest* c1968 AGSA
17. Nolan The journey 1986 AGNSW
18. Boyd Early morning Pulpit Rock 1983 private collection
19. Boyd Creek near Rosebud 1937 AGWA
20. Boyd Early morning Rosebud 1938 private collection
21. Boyd Mordialloc Creek 1939 private collection
22. Boyd Landscape (Bacchus Marsh) 1943 private collection
23. Boyd The hunter II 1944 AGNSW
24. Gustav Doré (1832-83) The vision of Ezekiel c1865 wood engraving
25. Boyd The mockers 1945 AGNSW
26. Doré Samson and the lion c1865 wood engraving
27. Boyd Two lovers (The good shepherd) 1944 MoMA, Heide
28. Doré The death of Absalom c1865 wood engraving
29. Boyd The weathercock (the tent) 1944 NGV
30. Boyd The expulsion 1947-48 AGNSW
31. Massacio 1401-28 The expulsion 1424-28 Brancacci Chapel, Florence
32. Boyd Berwick landscape 1948 QAG
33. Uccello 1397-1475 The hunt by night after 1460 Ashmolean, Oxford
34. Boyd The old stone crusher, Gaffney’s Creek 1956 private collection
35. Boyd Half-caste child 1957 private collection
36. Boyd Nebuchadnezzar on fire falling over a waterfall 1966-68 AGNSW
37. Boyd Chained figure and bent tree 1973 NGA
38. Boyd Two-ended figure with horns 1962-64 ceramic private collection
40. Nolan Boy and the moon c1939-40 NGA
41. Nolan Luna Park 1941 AGNSW
42. Nolan Wimmera (from Mt Arapiles) 1943 NGV
43. Nolan Going to school 1942 NGV
44. Nolan Wail Railway Station, Wimmera 1943 private collection
45. Nolan Fire, Palais de Danse 1945 private collection
* 46. Nolan Hare and trap 1946 AGNSW
47. Nolan First class marksman 1946 AGNSW
48. Nolan Ned Kelly 1947 NGA
49. Nolan Mrs Fraser 1948 QAG
50. Nolan Agricultural Hotel 1948 UWA
51. Nolan Burke and Wills leaving Melbourne 1950 private collection
52. Nolan detail of Temptation of St Anthony (7)
53. Pablo Picasso Man with sheep 1943 bronze private collection
54. Nolan Kelly 1956 private collection
55. Nolan Woman and billabong 1957 Tate, London
56. Nolan Rimbaud at Harar 1963 private collection
57. Nolan African landscape 1963 AGNSW
58. Nolan Rainbow over Pilbara 1982 private collection
59. Boyd The Queen’s deer (Magic Flute series) 1990 private collection
60. Nolan Self portrait in youth 1986 Royal Academy, London
Nolan *Self portrait* 1943 AGNSW
Nolan  *Temptation of St Anthony* 1952 NGV
Boyd *Nude with beast III (Diana and Acteon I)* 1962 NGV
Boyd The expulsion 1947-48 AGNSW
Nolan *Hare and trap* 1946 AGNSW