

Melbourne 16 November 2017

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Suspended Animation

Sidney Nolan's *Carcase* 1953 to be offered in Sotheby's Australia's Sydney sale of Important Australian Art on 21 November 2017



SIDNEY NOLAN 1917-1992, *Carcase* 1953. Estimate \$150,000-180,000

Sotheby's Australia will offer Sidney Nolan's poignant and reverent insight into drought affected Australia at the InterContinental Sydney on 21 November, as a highlight of the Important Australian Art sale. *Carcase* 1953 was inspired by Nolan's harrowing experience of witnessing the drought first hand, and preserves the gruesome and cruel nature of drought on livestock, with the beast contorted and flattened with dehydration from the hot and dry drought conditions.

In June 1952 Sidney Nolan travelled to the Northern Territory and Queensland, under commission from Brisbane's *Courier-Mail*, to record the effects of the most severe drought on record in a series of black and white drawings that were published in two instalments in August 1952. Nolan continued to explore the ravages of drought and when he moved into a new studio in 1953, he commenced his most confronting single series to date.

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In Nolan's drought series, the carcasses provide a commentary on the decay of organic matter and subsequent regeneration – the life cycle of birth, death and re-birth. The subject of death is predominant, *Carcass* (1953, The Nolan Collection, Canberra Museum and Gallery, Canberra) and *Carcase* (the present work) record the bodies of fully-fleshed animals, contorted and petrified. It was this sculptural element of the contortion that interested Nolan. Influenced by a recent visit to Italy where, during a visit to Pompeii, he had gained a similar sense of life suddenly suspended following the eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79. Nolan was fascinated, seeing plaster casts held in the museum of the human bodies and animals that had been trapped in the flow of lava.



KENNETH REDSHAW, *Sidney Nolan and his wife Cynthia at the Opening of Nolan's Exhibition at David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney, 29 July 1953* 1953. SMH picture.

Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia commented: 'Drought continues to be a source of devastation and despair for many Australians and Nolan's images offer a timely reaffirmation of their aspect of our history. When first exhibited in 1953, none of the large paintings of carcasses sold, no doubt due to their gruesome subject matter, however critics and curators lauded acclaim and recognition of these works at the time. Subsequently works from this series have been acquired by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; and Yale Center for British Art, New Haven.'

2017 marks the centenary of the birth of Sidney Nolan, with a variety of exhibitions held internationally celebrating the artist, including Sotheby's Australia, who in March hosted a charitable fundraising exhibition of works held in private collections.

AT A GLANCE

SIDNEY NOLAN 1917-1992

Carcase 1953

oil and enamel paint on composition board

120.8 x 91.4 cm

Estimate \$150,000-180,000

Important Australian Art

Auction in Sydney, 21 November 2017, 6.30 pm

InterContinental Sydney, 117 Macquarie Street, Sydney

Total auction estimate \$9,400,000-12,123,000 | 82 lots

Exhibition in Melbourne 9-12 November, 10 am to 5 pm, 41 Exhibition Street, Melbourne

Exhibition in Sydney 16-21 November, 10 am to 5 pm, 30 & 34 Queen Street, Woollahra

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