

# Strange Heart Beating

17 September to 24 October 2025

An exhibition of works by Sidney Nolan & Daniel McCarthy.

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Sidney Nolan, *Untitled I*, 1959, dye on kaolin-primed paper 30.5cm x 25.5cm. Image courtesy of the Sidney Nolan Trust.

**LONDON, 17 September, 2025** – In partnership with the Sidney Nolan Trust, JGM Gallery presents *Strange Heart Beating*, an exhibition of recent paintings by Daniel McCarthy and hitherto unseen works by the pioneering Australian Modernist, Sir Sidney Nolan (1917 – 1992).

In 2021, McCarthy was the artist in residence at The Rodd, a 17th century Jacobean manor in Herefordshire where Nolan lived for the last decade of his life, and where the Trust he founded operates. During the course of this residency, McCarthy was inspired by Nolan's innovative handling of paint and his fearlessness in addressing confronting subject matter. McCarthy began to investigate Nolan's techniques, making monoprints with the same kaolin-primed paper that the Australian Master used for his paintings of *Leda and the Swan* (1959). The paper's glossiness, and the translucency of marks made on it, appealed to McCarthy and prompted him to make a comparable series. These works on paper by McCarthy and by Nolan are exhibited alongside one another in *Strange Heart Beating*.

While undertaking his Sidney Nolan Trust residency, McCarthy was also able to salvage and paint on some of Nolan's unused canvases. While partly a matter of economy – a trait Nolan shared – McCarthy's use of this material suggests a kind of reverent appropriation. It reflects a desire to feel closer to Nolan, to inhabit his working space, and to absorb some lingering trace of the creative force that once moved there.

The exhibition takes its title from W.B. Yeats' sonnet, *Leda and the Swan* (1923), in which Zeus, disguised as a swan, rapes Leda, leading to the birth of Helen and subsequently to the Trojan War. This fable is the centrifugal point around which many of the exhibited works revolve, either depicting the story explicitly, or drawing on its themes and moral concerns. Nolan and McCarthy's interpretations of the myth offer modern and contemporary reinterpretations of its subject matter. By exhibiting their work together, *Strange Heart Beating* explores a cross-generational dialogue on violence, beauty and the enduring power of myth.

It was during the 1950s, whilst living on the island of Hydra, that Nolan first engaged with the myths of Ancient Greece. Following a reading of *The Iliad* and Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths*, he started to incorporate the contents of those texts into his own work. Years later while undertaking a Harkness Fellowship in New York, he would return to these tales, executing many of the pieces shown in *Strange Heart Beating* as preparatory work for a series of much larger paintings on board. Nolan's *Untitled I* depicts a desertified landscape, its reddish tones reflecting the violence taking place on it. The bland, grey sky, and absence of geographical markers, creates a liminal space, referring to the ambiguity of when and where the scene is taking place. It is like Nolan is staging the act in a timeless space, the backdrop acting almost as a mirage. In all of his works on paper, the figures and landscapes are ethereal, suggesting their mythical status and the subconsciousness of their symbolism.

Inevitably, McCarthy's immersion in Nolan's practice led to the transmission of the Australian's thematic concerns into his own work. A bird which was once a heron in McCarthy's *Leda In Marble*, for instance, was later reworked as a black swan. In particular, the themes of exploitation and expropriation in the Ancient Greek tale resonated with McCarthy's own ecological concerns. By example, and in the same painting, the spotlight, reclining body of Leda immersed in a watery landscape suggests a post-apocalyptic scene in which the only remnant of humanity is its degrading monuments.

Compared to McCarthy's sculptural renderings of Leda, Nolan's paintings are marked by a raw immediacy that reflect the myth's

intense psychological charge. For him, Leda is not an emblem, but a complex and multifaceted character – at once exposed and defiant, sensual and disturbed. In dialogue with Nolan’s works, MacCarthy’s paintings are sculptural, yet fragmented, rendered with a visceral physicality that captures moments of metamorphosis. Together, these works offer a perspective on myth as a site of living tensions, rather than static narratives – a space where enduring archetypes are destabilised and reimagined.

During Nolan’s years at The Rodd, the house and barns became a hub for visiting artists and composers, echoing the spirit of creative communities like Charleston, East Sussex, where experimentation and collaboration flourished. *Strange Heart Beating* highlights the importance of sites such as these for dialogue between contemporary artists and the art-historical figures who have preceded and inspired them.

## About Sidney Nolan

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Sir Sidney Nolan OM AC CBE RA Hon. RE was born in 1917 and died in 1992. He was a leading artist of the 20th century and one of the most influential pioneers of Australian Modernism. He is especially celebrated for his iconic paintings of the bushranger outlaw, Ned Kelly. Nolan settled permanently in the UK from 1953, becoming a major name in British art. Known for his experimental style and unusual use of materials, he explored global themes of place, culture and the human experience.

The Sidney Nolan Trust is a rural centre for the arts founded in 1985 by Nolan that enables inspiring encounters with creativity in the context of landscape through exhibitions, events, learning programmes and artist residencies. The Trust cares for and enables access to an internationally significant collection of Nolan’s art, his extensive archive, book, and photography collection, and his former home and estate, The Rodd. In June 2025 the Trust launched a new open call art competition, The Sidney Nolan Art Prize, open for entries until 10 December.

## About Daniel MacCarthy

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Daniel MacCarthy (1986) was born in Oxford and raised in Herefordshire on the Welsh border. He studied History at the University of Sussex (2005-8) and then received his post-graduate diploma from the Royal Drawing School in 2011. He completed the Turps Studio Programme in 2019 after which he returned to live on the border of Wales. His work addresses the perennial yet urgent theme of our relationship with, and estrangement from, the natural world. He works primarily in oils and distemper and printmaking. Recent shows include *Full House* (Canopy Collections, Cromwell Place, London) *Keep on Trucking* (Ben Parsons Gallery, Oxford), *The Peace of Wild Things* (Sidney Nolan Trust, Wales), and *Things are in the Saddle* (Galera, Milan).

## About JGM Gallery

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JGM Gallery was founded in 2017 by Jennifer Guerrini Maraldi, one of the United Kingdom’s leading specialists in Indigenous contemporary art from Australia. For more than 20 years, she has collected, dealt, and promoted the work of First Nations artists and, in addition to this, her gallery represents a diverse roster of both established and emerging British contemporary artists.

Through its exhibition programme, JGM Gallery seeks to amplify the enduring significance of Indigenous art and culture, with a focus on the use of sacred processes, traditional techniques, and contemporary innovation. In the words of Guerrini Maraldi, “The styles of this movement’s leading figures are as varied, complex and sophisticated as any in the Western canon.” Since its inception, JGM Gallery has placed the work of its Indigenous and British contemporary artists in significant private and institutional collections.

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For further information and press enquiries, please contact the gallery at [info@jmgmgallery.com](mailto:info@jmgmgallery.com) or + 44 (0) 20 7228 6027.

### Opening Reception:

Wednesday, 17 September, 6:30pm - 8:30pm  
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