

## Mr Jeffrey Smart

The degree of Doctor of the University was conferred upon Australian artist Jeffrey Smart by Chancellor Dame Leonie Kramer at a ceremony held on 2 September 1999.



Jeffrey Smart receiving his honorary degree from Chancellor Dame Leonie Kramer, *photo G77\_4, University of Sydney Archives.*



Jeffrey Smart and David Malouf at the ceremony, *photo, Karen Mork, 'The University of Sydney News', 9 September 1999, University of Sydney Archives.*

### Citation

Chancellor

I have the honour to present to you Jeffrey Smart for admission to the degree of Doctor of the University.

Jeffrey Smart is one of the leading artists of his time. In 1976, the University acquired nineteen of his paintings through a bequest from the estate of A R Renshaw.

Jeffrey Smart was born in Adelaide in 1921, and studied at the South Australian School of Arts and Crafts, in Paris with Fernand Leger at the Academie Monmartre, and at La Grande Chaumiere. During his early career, he was art critic for the *Daily Telegraph*, broadcaster for "Current Art Review" on the ABC, and Phidias, on the children's programme, "The Argonauts". He also taught drawing at the National Art School.

Fellow artist, Judy Cassab, recalls Jeffrey Smart in the 1950s as an artist who knew exactly what he wanted. On a trip to La Perouse, he admired the gasworks, while she admired the sea. When asked by him to criticise his work, she said, "'Your contours are so sharp. Can't you make them a bit blurred?' And he replied, 'I don't want them blurred.' He knew where he was going." He was creating the interplay between clearly delineated shapes, structures, space and the human figure.

The Cahill Expressway is a defining painting in his work, introducing Australians, and later the international art community, to the distinctive landscapes for which he has become famous. It also introduced the isolated figure that appears in various guises in his paintings. Smart, himself, likens this figure to T S Eliot's Prufrock:

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets  
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes  
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?

Smart's lonely men, however are not found in London fog and sooty streets, but in the clear brilliance of Australian light.

On a personal level, Jeffrey Smart is valued by his friends for his warmth, wit, kindness, love of beauty, and intolerance of injustice. He is described by one long-standing friend, who first met him in the 40s, as, "Never shy but always gregarious and always beaming. He shone, and he made a point of shining, at a dinner table with his mischievous gossip and somewhat invented accounts of remarkable things that had happened to him and of comic encounters. He seemed always sunny and happy." He was full of energy and enthusiasm for any project that took his fancy, and she remembers "his glittering, darting eyes, recording". She never heard him discuss his work or what he aimed to express in it: "He had his private world there, and no-one was invited in".

Jeffrey Smart now lives in a farmhouse in Tuscany but continues to retain his Australian citizenship and to visit Australia annually. His work has been exhibited around the world and is held in many major galleries. A retrospective of his paintings is currently being shown at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and will go on tour to the other capitals.

The University is indeed fortunate to have so many of his major paintings in its collection and greatly values its close relationship with this outstanding artist.

Chancellor, I have great pleasure in presenting to you Jeffrey Smart for admission to the degree of Doctor of the University, and I invite you to confer the degree upon him.