

JEFFREY SMART MASTER OF STILLNESS

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A STUDY GUIDE BY MARGUERITE O'HARA



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If a good painting comes off, it has a stillness, it has a perfection, and that's as great as anything that a musician or a poet can do.

— Jeffrey Smart

Introduction

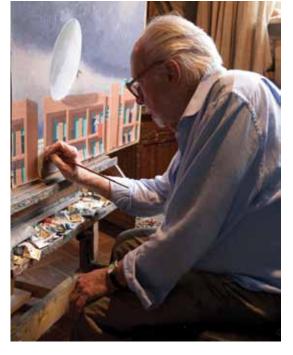
Jeffrey Smart: Master of Stillness (Catherine Hunter, 2012) sheds light on the early influences of one of our greatest painters. Born in Adelaide in 1921, Smart's early years were spent discovering the back lanes of the city's inner suburbs. Now retired from painting, his last work Labyrinth (2011) evokes those memories.

It is also a kind of arrival at the painting he was always chasing, never satisfied, hoping the next one on the easel would be the elusive masterpiece, the one that said it all. In this sense, Labyrinth brings a full stop to his career, and at the same time makes for a full, perpetual circle within his life.

- Barry Pearce, Emeritus Curator. Art Gallery of NSW

In 2011, the University of South Australia conferred an honorary doctorate on Jeffrey Smart, the South Australian School of Art's greatest alumnus. And in October 2012, a retrospective exhibition of Smart's work opened in South Australia across two venues and later travelled to the TarraWarra Museum of Art in Victoria.

A one-time teacher in Adelaide, Jeffrey Smart was always drawn to the idea of living in Italy. In 1951, he left Adelaide for Sydney where he became famous as Phidias in the ABC's Argonauts Club and art critic on the Children's Hour. He moved to Italy in the early 1960s and has lived there ever since.



It was in Italy that the colours and shapes and designs of a country rebuilding itself after the war inspired a new vernacular of modern painting for Smart. Street signs, apartment blocks, and construction sites became his subject matter.

He confronted this universe of technology and architecture anywhere his travels took him, declaring it was beautiful, and became its most passionate poet ... – Barry Pearce.

The director of this film, Catherine Hunter, visited Jeffrey Smart at his farmhouse in Tuscany where he was still hoping to paint the elusive great picture. Smart also took the crew to some of the

I find it funny that perhaps in 100 years time, if people look at paintings done by the artists of this century, of our century, that the most ubiquitous things, like motor cars and television sets and telephones, don't appear in any of the pictures. We should paint the things around us. Motor cars are very beautiful. I'm a great admirer of Giorgio Morandi; we all love Morandi, and he had all his props, his different bottles and his things. See, my props are petrol stations and trucks and it's just the same thing. It's a different range of things.

Jeffrey Smart

Jeffrey Smart, sketching in Woolloomooloo, NSW, 1946 Jeffrey Smart, 2006, © The Artist's Lunch/ Sarah Rhodes

EXHIBITION DETAILS

Master of Stillness: Jeffrey Smart Paintings 1940-2011: CARRICK HILL, ADELAIDE, 10 Oct 2012 to 24 Feb 2013. This part of the exhibition showcases Smart's Adelaide work from 1940–1950.

SAMSTAG MUSEUM OF ART University of South Australia.

from 12 October to 14 December 2012 Featuring Smart's iconic paintings from the 1950s to 2011

TARRAWARRA MUSEUM OF ART, Healesville, Victoria from 21 December to 31 March 2013

places near Arezzo that have long inspired him – the concrete streetscapes and urban wastelands that have come to define his vision, and to nearby Borgo Sansepolcro, birthplace of the great Early Renaissance painter Piero della Franscesca.

Smart tells the story of first visiting the museum where Piero's Resurrection hangs: '... and I found by luck this ladder and I was able to put it by the fresco and see the face of Jesus close up which was revelatory to see how he worked. Wasn't I lucky? And indefatigable', he says.

Jeffrey Smart: Master of Stillness screened on Artscape, ABC television, on November 27. It runs for approximately 28 minutes.

Curriculum Guidelines

Jeffrey Smart: Master of Stillness would be an excellent film to show to secondary and tertiary students of Visual Arts, Studio Arts, Art and Design and/or Fine Arts. It would also be valuable for students of Culture and Society and Biography. At the same time, Media Studies students could study the



You might think it's ugly but it's all part of the industrial revolution. It's still beautiful in its own way. You just have to look at the shapes made by the light, the diagonals, the lines... so in the end you get this sense of Jeffrey saying—'it's not really the object in the end that matters, it's the revelation of the object that matters'.

Barry Pearce – curator of the *Master of*Stillness exhibition

structure and editing of the film as a model of clarity and conciseness. In less than half an hour we learn a great deal about this now 91-year-old artist, his work and the places, people and experiences that have shaped his art.

The documentary presents a complex picture of this important Australian artist at work. It offers insights into the meticulous processes of Smart's paintings, not just in technical terms but by exploring how his art intimately reflects different stages, places and experiences in his life. How do Smart's brightly coloured paintings of buildings, signs, shapes, containers and figures in urban landscapes challenge many conventional views about landscape painting and notions of 'beauty'? Are his industrial scenes landscapes in any sense or are they something more complex and mysterious? What do they reveal to us about the urban landscape?

The information and questions in this guide are designed to encourage students to observe, reflect, discuss, debate and enjoy Smart's work as it is shown in the film. 'Responding' may lead them to 'Making', encouraging them to incorporating aspects of Smart's approach to his art in their own work. They may also choose to further explore his paintings by looking at images online, or wherever possible, by seeing his work in galleries such as at the galleries in South Australia and Victoria listed above where his work is being exhibited. Smart's work is represented in the National Gallery of Australia and in all state galleries. There is nothing quite like seeing pictures on gallery walls to fully appreciate their scale, colour, light and emotional impact, but this is not always possible.

Smart's distinctive but often quite varied and sometimes playful approach to his subjects may well inspire students to experiment with their own processes and approaches to creating artworks. One of the key questions about Smart's work is – how does he create the almost unnerving sense of stillness in his paintings? Who are these figures



Jeffrey Smart and curator Barry Pearce, Tuscany, 2012

Images of a range of Smart's work can be viewed online at http://www.google.com.au/ images?hl=en-AU&q=jeffrey+smart+paintings> and at http://www.etchinghouse.com.au/pages/ artist_archive.php?artist_id=76>

About Jeffrey Smart

Born in Adelaide in 1921, Smart attended Pulteney Grammar and Unley High schools. He studied at Adelaide Teachers College and the South Australian School of Arts and Crafts, while teaching at Goodwood Boys Technical School, then parttime at the School of Arts and Crafts.

He travelled in Europe between 1948 and 1950 and moved from Adelaide to Sydney in 1951. Smart was variously employed as an art critic at the Daily Telegraph, an arts presenter on the Argonauts Club, ABC children's radio and TV and as a life drawing teacher at East Sydney Technical College.



He moved to Italy in 1964. In 1971 he bought 'Posticcia Nuova', in Pieve a Presciano, near Arezzo in Tuscany, where he has since lived and worked.

Since 1944 Smart has shown in solo exhibitions in Australia and regularly in London. In 1999 a major retrospective of his work was held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Jeffrey Smart is represented in the collections of the National Gallery of Australia, all state galleries and internationally in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

'Making the film' notes

He was painting the future, the country we live in now. And somebody once said, eventually everyone will live in the Smart country, in Smart Land. Well that was a good guess and the world now looks like what Jeffrey was painting back in the mid '60s in Italy. — Clive James



Words move, music moves

Only in time; but that which is only living

Can only die. Words, after speech, reach

Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,

Can words or music reach

The stillness, as a Chinese jar still

Moves perpetually in its stillness.

(excerpt from T.S. Eliot's poem Four Quartets from Burnt Norton, Verse 5, first published in 1936)





Top: Jeffrey Smart with his parents and cousin, c.1931-32 Middle: Smart at the age of 11, 1932

Bottom: The Morning Shift, 2006-2007





8. How important do you think training and skills development, such as practising drawing, is for a visual artist?

This exhibition is the last survey of Smart's work that will happen in his lifetime. It's like a full circle, bringing him right back to where it started. Everything about his art was hard-wired into him in this city of Adelaide. Here at last we can now see in the place where it began, look at those paintings and work out the meaning of his time, his cycle. It's very important symbolically.

Barry Pearce – curator of Master of Stillness

Filming in Italy, you become only too aware of the truth of Clive James' statement. So many visual moments become Smart moments – shipping containers, street signs and arrows, apartment blocks. And something else happens. However ordinary, they become transformed into beautiful objects of the industrialized world.

Driving around the industrial areas outside Arezzo, near where Smart lives, we witnessed the transformation first-hand. We stopped to film the SAICO building at the behest of Smart and later gave him our photographs. Jeffrey subsequently exhibited a painting from cinematographer Bruce Inglis' photographs.

- Catherine Hunter, director.

PRE-VIEWING QUESTIONS

- What does the word 'landscape' mean to you in relation to paintings?
- 2. What do you think many people would consider to be a beautiful landscape painting or photograph?
- 3. What are the essential differences between a natural and a man-made landscape? How do these two frequently intersect?
- 4. Can aspects of urban and industrial areas and artefacts be beautiful, e.g. the line of a freeway, petrol stations, industrial buildings, cityscapes, shipping containers?
- 5. When you take photographs of places, perhaps as travel photos or other scenes, do you usually include figures in these compositions? What do figures often add to a scene?
- 6. How has photography inevitably changed how artists see the world and choose to represent it in their artworks?
- 7. What are some of the skills an artist needs to develop in order to express their response to their environment visually?

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Responding to the film

After watching *Master of Stillness*, share your responses to the following sets of questions:

1. Constructing a film about an artist

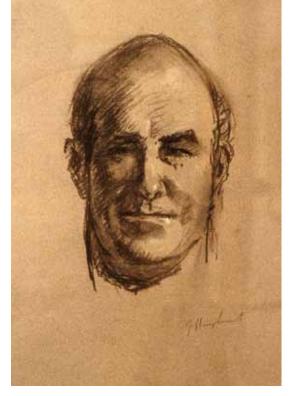
A number of visual elements are used in this film to create a picture of Jeffrey Smart and his work. They include:

- 1. Archival film footage of Adelaide in the 1940s and 1950s where Smart grew up,
- 2. Images of several of Smart's paintings from the 1940s to 2011,
- 3. Smart at work in his house in Italy.
- Footage of the Italian countryside and industrial landscapes that reference many of his central motifs,
- 5. The exhibitions being hung in Adelaide,
- 6. The work of Piero della Francesca



Holiday Resort, 1946 @ Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide Oil sketch of Clive James, 1991 Jeffrey Smart, 1947, Photograph by Colin Ballantyne





Accompanying these images are the views of a number of people talking about Smart's work. They include:

- 1. Smart himself
- 2. Barry Pearce, the curator of this 2011 exhibition in Adelaide; Erica Green, Director Samstag Museum of Art at University of South Australia; Richard Heathcote, Director Of Carrick Hill
- 3. Friends and fellow artists such as writer Clive James, author David Malouf (who also lives in Italy), painters Judith-Anne Barraclough and Geoff Wilson
- How well do you think the filmmakers integrate the visual material and the accompanying commentary of a number of people in the film?
- What part does music play in this documentary?

2. Early influences on Smart's work

- What did you learn about how Jeffrey Smart's life in Adelaide set his artistic course and developed his key themes? What kind of city was Adelaide in the 1940s? Were there many opportunities to see works of European art?
- When the Smart family moved to South Terrace in Adelaide, what did the young Jeffrey Smart like about this inner-city address?
- What was the importance to Smart in being able to see contemporary European paintings and having access to a magnificent library at Carrick Hill in the 1940s? (see quote on page 7)
- Why do you think it was important for many Australian artists and writers such as Clive James, Germaine Greer, Barry Humphries, Robert Hughes and Margaret Olley to spend time in Europe and London?
- What do Smart's early works painted on a road trip in outback South Australia reveal about the influence of other artists, including poet TS Eliot and painter Russell Drysdale?

There were French doors looking out over the parkland at the front. The back view overlooked the slums. That was the bit that always fascinated me, much more than the gum trees over the park and the distant hills. I always liked the view of that confusion of chimneys and temporary erections and things going across and pipes and telegraph poles. All that nest of things going on fascinated me.

Jeffrey Smart (from the small apartment on South Terrace in Adelaide)

> Charcoal sketch of Clive James, 1991 Portrait of Clive James, 1991-1992 Bottom right: Selfportrait at Papini's, 1984-85 @ Jeffrey **Smart**



3. Perspectives and insights

- What insights are writers Clive James and David Malouf able to offer about Smart's approach to his work? (see 'Making the Film' notes and quote on page 9)
- What do you understand by the 'stillness' Smart refers to in relation to painting and its connection with TS Eliot's poetry? (see quote on page 4)
- Barry Pearce believes that Smart's interest in geometric shapes and patterns and the shadows they create was developed during his time in Adelaide where light is particularly strong. He says, 'to someone who's got a sort of mathematical, geometrical sensibility and a sense of the metaphysical world that's implied by all that, it's like heaven on earth'. How is this geometric sensibility reflected in Smart's paintings?
- Pearce suggests there is 'a sense of emptiness' and 'bleakness' in much of Smart's work. Do you agree? Does Smart also create paintings where this sense of bleakness does not predominate?

Some people see playfulness and wit in many







of Smart's works, in his capacity for making the mundane look extraordinary through design, colour, light, line and composition. Select two of Smart's paintings, either those shown in the film or from the website where you can scroll through and select images at: http://www.google.com.au/images?hl=en-AU&q=jeffrey+smart+paintings> and at How do they demonstrate these qualities?

4. Why Italy?

Just as Australia was becoming an attractive place for some Italians to move to in the late 1940s and 1950s, so too there were Australians wanting to move to Europe. They were often artists, designers and writers and included the young Jeffrey Smart.

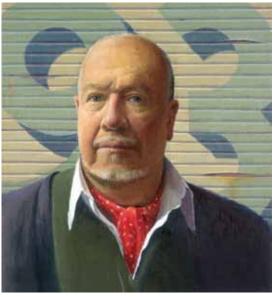
- What was it about Italy and Italian life that was so attractive to Jeffrey Smart? Was it predominantly the visual culture going back centuries and literally visible all over Italy the artworks and architecture? Was it the climate, the proximity to all the major centres of European art? Was it what is now described as 'the lifestyle'? Was it that living in Italy at this time was still relatively cheap? How might his sexuality have been a factor in him seeking a less narrow world than that of Australia in the 1950s and 1960s? Identify some of the 'push and pull factors' that caused artists such as Smart, James and Greer to leave Australia during this period.
- Name any other eminent Australians who have also made Italy home.
- Clive James suggests that one of Smart's reasons for moving to Italy was that he wanted to avoid 'the persistent idea that the arts are somehow a tool or weapon in a process of national discovery and of defining the Australian national identity'. Do you think this is a pressure felt by Australian artists? Is it reasonable to expect them to focus on a perceived 'Australianness'?
- What factors prompted Smart to leave Rome in 1971 and move to an old farmhouse—Posticcia Nuova—near Arezzo. Describe what we see of

The realization of visiting the collection at Carrick Hill was that the world was outside Adelaide and that ... you've got to plan your way out ... to go towards the bigger things that are really going to inform who you are as an artist ... how you think ... what you feel ... what it is that you want to be. Richard Heathcote, Director of Carrick

Top left & bottom: Near Smart's home in Tuscany, © The Artist's Lunch/Sarah Rhodes

Hill

Jeffrey Smart, Self Portrait 1993, © <u>Jeffrey Sma</u>rt



this region in the film. What are the most attractive elements of this life for Smart? Investigate the paintings of Piero della Francesca, a native of Arezzo in Italy where Smart lives and works. He is an artist whose work Jeffrey Smart greatly admires and is often described as a sublime classicist and master of spatial order. For an image of his Resurrection see http://www.casasantapia.com/art/ pierodellafrancesca/resurrection.htm> At http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/ piero/> you can also view a range of images that you can enlarge. What are some of their most striking qualities? What are some of the qualities common to Piero's work and Smart's paintings?

Director Catherine Hunter's statement

I have been to many exhibitions of Jeffrey Smart's work over the years. But the idea of a retrospective exhibition in his home town of Adelaide was, I felt, an opportunity to look at his work anew. As a young artist, Smart couldn't wait to leave and he was always determined to make his home in Italy.



SCREEN EDUCATION © ATOM 2012

The story of those Italian years has been oft-told. Not so the story of Adelaide where Jeffrey Smart lived until 1951, 'a city set out on a grid, long straight lines and vanishing points, couched by hills that appear as in a painting by Piero della Francesca is where Jeffrey Smart was born in 1921 and substantially formed as a painter.' (Barry Pearce, curator)

In my interview with Smart, he talks about the significance of moving from the suburbs to a small flat in the city. It was here he became interested in the view over the back lanes and alleyways of the city.

'I always liked the look of that confusion of chimneys and temporary erections and things going across and pipes and telegraph poles and all that nest of things going on there, it fascinated me and I did drawings of them of course,' explained Jeffrey.

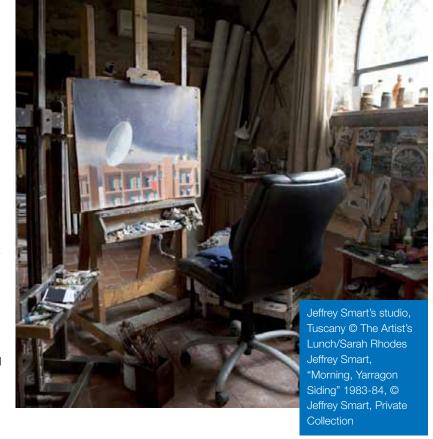
A statement that resonates with the revelation that his last painting (forced by ill-health to retire from working) *Labyrinth* is an evocation of that child-hood memory of inner-city Adelaide.

The Filmmaking Team

As you can see from the information given here about the filmmakers, they have worked together on many projects about significant Australian artists.

Director: Catherine Hunter

Long-time arts producer on the Nine Network's Sunday program (1985–2006), her most recent productions as director include A Law Unto Himself (Artscape, ABC, 2012), Margaret Olley: A Life in Paint, Jenny Sages: Paths to Portraiture and Inland Heart: The Photography of Jeff Carter.



In these landscapes of abandoned buildings, he found the transience of human presence ... of a waste land.
There is a bleakness in his work ... a sense of emptiness, a hint of alienness in the landscape.

Barry Pearce

Other productions include Sidney Nolan: Mask and Memory (2009), Australian Story: All in Your Mind (2009), Unfinished Business (2009), China Avant Garde (ABC Artscape, 2008), Duxford Street: The Home of Margaret Olley and Sidney Nolan: In His Words.

Cinematographer: Bruce Inglis

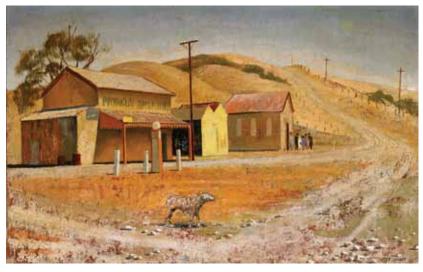
Specialising in arts and architecture documentaries, Bruce Inglis filmed A Law Unto Himself (Artscape, ABC, 2012), Margaret Olley: A Life in Paint, Jenny Sages: Paths to Portraiture and Inland Heart: The Photography of Jeff Carter with Catherine Hunter.

Other productions include Sidney Nolan: Mask and Memory (2009), China Avant Garde (2008), Scene by Scene (CNN International, 2008) and Deadly Women (Discovery Channel USA, 2009) following many years with the Nine Network's Sunday program (1998-2007).

Editor: Paolo Febbo

After seventeen years editing on current affairs programs (Insight, Dateline, Imagine, Sunday), Paolo Febbo has worked on documentaries including: Margaret Olley: A Life in Paint, Jenny Sages: Paths to Portraiture and Inland Heart: The Photography of Jeff Carter. Other productions include Sidney Nolan: Mask and Memory, Duxford Street: The Home of Margaret Olley and Sidney Nolan: In His Words.







STUDENT ACTIVITY

Looking closely at Jeffrey Smart's work

Select two of the paintings shown in this documentary and comment on their compositional elements. What part do colours and light play in the picture? How are the geometric quality of the objects and the juxtaposing of curves with rectangles and straight lines able to set up tension? Is there a human figure and what is the scale of this figure? You can check the images for a more detailed view at http://www.google.com.au/images?hl=en-AU&q=jeffrey+smart+paintings> where you can find an archive of Smart's works and enlarge the chosen paintings.

What do we see of Smart's technical processes in this documentary when he is shown at work in his studio in Italy – materials and preparation and approach? How do other artists describe his working method?

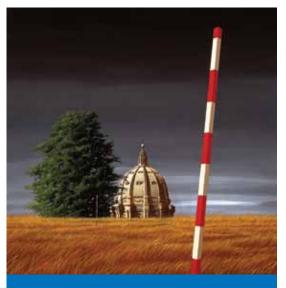
In Italy, the landscape is almost too beautiful for a painter, so it might drive you to look for beauty somewhere else — in a kind of industrial world ... a world that looks almost like a blot on the perfect beauty of that Italian landscape.

David Malouf, friend and writer

Jeffrey Smart, "Paringa", 1951, © Jeffrey Smart, Private Collection Jeffrey Smart, Second Study, Portrait of Clive James, 1991 Jeffrey Smart, "Labyrinth" 2011, © Jeffrey Smart, Private Collection Jeffrey Smart,

- How does Labyrinth represent Smart's approach to landscape and perhaps reference
 his memories of Adelaide? (See second quote on page 9 for curator Barry Pearce's view)
 What are the most striking qualities of this composition?
- Is Smart's statement (see first quote on page 9)
 where he claims to be attracted to Italian mess
 in any way inconsistent with his insistence that
 he is a formal painter who likes clean lines and
 geometric shapes? (See third quote on page 9)
- Apart from his sheer technical skill plus sense of composition and light, I was stunned, at that exhibition in 1959, by Jeffrey's subject matter just as I am in this current exhibition (1999); added to which I continue to marvel at his inventiveness his inexhaustible variations on his vision. I had always thought of painters in terms of rural scenes, historical scenes, or portraits. Now I was confronted by someone who painted the world around him. He saw beauty in highways, buildings, road signs, factories and so on just as the Heidelberg school had seen it in the rustic Australia of their time, or the Impressionists, who painted the France which was a part of their everyday lives. I never much





The Dome, 1977, Collection Tarrawarra Museum of Art. Healesville



cared for interpretations of Jeffrey's paintings which characterised the few human figures in them as lonely, alienated. It seemed to me they were included to give scale to the compositions. Why, I thought, if someone is alone on the balcony of a tower block is he necessarily unhappy? He's probably just admiring the view for a few minutes before going back inside to a G and T — Bruce Beresford, film director, friend and admirer of Smart's work¹

Discuss Beresford's response to Smart's work.

- Compile a list of words that most clearly express your responses to Jeffrey Smart's work.
- How do you think Smart fits in to the history of Australian art? Is his work essentially independent of any particular place, style or genre? What do you see as his originality and strengths?

References and Resources

Jeffrey Smart, Not Quite Straight, a Memoir, Random House, 1996

Read a review of this memoir at: http://www.grafico-qld.com/content/not-quite-straight-memoir>

Janet Hawley, *Artists in Conversation*, the Slattery Media Group, November, 2012

The book is a collection of essays examining the creative output of some of the greatest Australian artists over the last century and includes Hawley's extended interview with Smart about his life and work. An edited extract of the piece about Smart can be read at: http://www.artguide.com.au/features/ interview/artists-in-conversation/>

Peter Quartermaine, Jeffrey Smart, Gryphon



Books, 1983

John McDonald, *Jeffrey Smart: Paintings of the* '70s and '80s, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1990 Edmund Capon, Barry Pearce, Peter Quartermaine, *Jeffrey Smart retrospective*, published in conjunction with the 'Jeffrey Smart Retrospective Exhibition', Art Gallery of New South Wales,

Barry Pearce, *Jeffrey Smart*, Beagle Press, 2005 Barry Pearce, *Jeffrey Smart*, Beagle Press, 2011 Barry Pearce, *Master of Stillness, Jeffrey Smart's* paintings 1940-2011, Wakefield Press, 2012

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeffrey_Smart

This Jeffrey Smart entry in Wikipedia has one of those interesting statements at the start of the article that reads: 'This article is written like a personal reflection or essay rather than an encyclopaedic description of the subject. Please help improve it by rewriting it in an encyclopaedic style.' (December 2007) After reading this 'personal reflection' you might like to discuss whether there is any other way to write about an artist and his work than as 'a personal reflection'.

http://www.abc.net.au/tv/talkingheads/txt/s2275731.htm

Transcript of an interview Jeffrey Smart gave on ABC television in 2008 where he talked about his life and work.

(Endnotes)

1 http://bruceberesford.org/?page_id=184

Left: Jeffrey Smart, "Jacob Descending" 1979, Collection Tarrawarra Museum of Art, Healesville Right: Jeffrey Smart, Self Portrait, 1940, Private Collection, courtesy of Australian Galleries I always liked the slightly disarranged look of things in Italy – the Italian mess.

Jeffrey Smart

Through the stone labyrinth is a geometric landscape that stretches as far as the eye can see. It evokes a memory of childhood in Adelaide where he fell in love with all those back lanes and alleyways ... it was a kind of child's heaven.

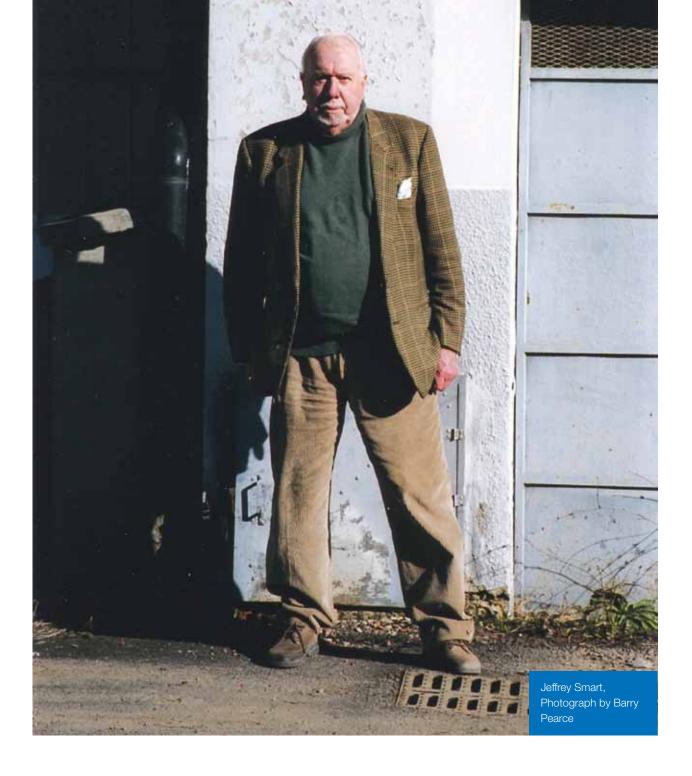
 Barry Pearce talking about Labyrinth,
 Smart's 2011 and possibly final painting.

I really am a formal painter. I paint the visual world as I see it, the things I consider exciting and beautiful in our contemporary times. An artist should record his own time, in his own style, and I am recording today's environment ... I take pleasure and excitement in modern things I see around me. Perhaps I'm trying to help people see the beauty in a gas tank, a road divider, a yellow truck. I paint buildings, factories, freeways, satellite dishes, because I like the definite forms and clean shapes.

Jeffrey Smart

(This is an edited extract from Janet Hawley's 2012 book, Artists in Conversation, The Slattery Media Group, November 2012)





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