

FROM A SCRAP OF PAPER: Drawing, Watercolour, Paint, Print, Photography

15 November – 16 December 2011

A closer look at... works that surprise

In this third *A Closer Look At...* and in the final days of the exhibition, we are examining works that surprise. The surprise may be because the work is a very early one in the artist's oeuvre, or is perhaps stylistically unusual to what one would normally expect from that artist, due to the use of a different medium. In *From a Scrap of Paper: Drawing, Watercolour, Paint, Print, Photography*, early works by Jeffery Smart are almost unrecognisable as being by his hand and small watercolours by Sidney Nolan only vaguely hint at his famous style. Ellen Jose's whimsical watercolour has stylistic roots in more European styles, contrasting to her lino and wood cut prints and photography.



JEFFREY SMART 1921 -
(*Yachts and Dinghies, Port Adelaide*) 1940
watercolour on paper
24 x 31 cm

Arguably the biggest surprise in *From a Scrap of Paper: Drawing, Watercolour, Paint, Print, Photography* are the two early Jeffery Smart watercolours. Dated 1939 and 1940, these works were painted when Smart was just 19 years old, whilst he was studying at the South Australia School of Art and Crafts at evenings and Saturdays, and also studying during the day at Adelaide Teachers College and teaching art at Adelaide High School.

Those familiar with Smart's paintings will not recognise the sharp block colours and industrial themes of his more recent oil paintings, instead these earlier paintings use the gentler medium of watercolour.

Although the location of the paintings is Port Adelaide, he was also probably influenced by scenes around Seacliff in Adelaide's south, at Joan and David Dallwitz's house, which was a focus of the art community in Adelaide in the late 1930s.¹ During this period, Smart began to meet other artists who profoundly affected his painting style, including Dorrit Black, who introduced him to the "dynamic symmetry"² and the geometrics. Looking back later, Smart has said, "my attraction to urban life, factories, trucks and vacant city lots came in my early 20s when I decided I'd painted my last billabong scene forever"³.

These works have been identified by Smart's archivist, Stephen Rogers, as watercolours that were most likely painted as gifts for



JEFFREY SMART 1921 -
(*Two Yachts by Wharf port Adelaide*)
c.1939
watercolour on paper
37 x 25 cm

¹ *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Art Gallery of NSW, Pg 23

² *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Art Gallery of NSW, Pg 43

³ *Jeffrey Smart Retrospective*, Art Gallery of NSW, Pg 43

classmates of Smart's, as a thank you for signing the attendance book at Teachers College, when he was skipping out on class.⁴

Two other works that might be classed as surprising are the Sidney Nolan watercolours in this exhibition. Mostly famous for his Ned Kelly series, *Beach*, c.1943 and *Desert Fire*, 1942, are small watercolours on paper, measuring just 18 x 25cm each.



SIDNEY NOLAN 1917-1992
Beach c.1943
watercolour and ink on paper
18.1 x 24.9 cm



SIDNEY NOLAN 1917-1992
Desert Fire 1942
watercolour on paper
18 x 25 cm

During the Second World War, Nolan was stationed in the Wimmera for almost two years. Sunday Reed supplied him with materials and *Desert Fire* is an example of the type of small drawings that Nolan would make. Nolan sketched extensively in 1942, reflecting that “it does keep me honest, I think and helps bigger paintings when they come”⁵. Nolan painted many beach scenes in 1943, remembering scenes from St Kilda beach, such as *Bathers*, 1943, which is in the Heide collection and two of the same name in 1942 and 1943 in the NGV collection.

Both *Beach*, and *Desert Fire* are examples of Nolan experimenting with moving the horizon line higher on the picture plane, a feature of many of the works he created in the early 1940s. Prior to this time, many of his landscape paintings featured a low horizon line, such as in *Kiewa Valley*, 1936-7.

Another surprising work is *Flowers and Figures 1* c.1935-40 by Roger Kemp, an oil on paper measuring 54.5 x 86cm. Christopher Heathcote believes the Ballet Russes, particularly *Le Spectre de la Rose*, inspired this work. As can be seen in is this piece, the texture and brushstrokes of the flowers evoke the wonderful costumes worn by Vaslav Nijinsky.



Flowers and Figures 1 c. 1935-40
oil on paper
54.5 x 86 cm
signed lower right: Roger Kemp

This work is surprising because it is tonally different to many of Kemp's more familiar

⁴ Jeffrey Smart *Retrospective*, Art Gallery of NSW, Pg 43

⁵ Sidney Nolan: *Landscapes and Legends*, pg 42,43

paintings. In *Flowers and Figures 1*, the lines and shapes give the impression of movement across the canvas, however this painting is lighter in tone and missing the thick black lines that punctuate his later paintings, such as in the works translated to tapestry in the NGV's Great Hall.

The final surprising work for this *A Closer Look At...* is *Woman - Landscape* by Ellen Jose. Jose is an indigenous artist from the Torres Strait and in recent years has worked more in linocuts, woodcuts and photography, rather than in watercolour.

Woman - Landscape, 1989 evokes paintings by artists such as John Olsen and Joan Miro. Jose's woman is at first, viewed as part of the landscape and it not until the viewer perhaps reads the title and takes another look that the woman is visible along the top on the paper, facing down over the landscape beneath.

This piece is remarkable as it is quite different to lino and woodcut prints of Jose's other works in collections such as the NGA. The understanding that this artist has an indigenous background, gives an extra element of meaning to the work and the viewer begins to spot more traditional indigenous techniques such as the use of symbols, dots and lines.



ELLEN JOSE 1951-
Woman - Landscape 1989
watercolour on paper
76 x 105 cm