



A film by KIRRILLY BRENTNALL

# ERIC SMITH:

# Not Finished Yet

*Portrait of a genuine artist*

Will this three times Archibald prize winner finally exhibit again?



*3 times Archibald Prize Winner  
20 years since his last exhibition  
92 year old artist  
and 4 years in the making...*

*Is it any wonder the film is called:*  
**ERIC SMITH: NOT FINISHED YET**

**Some Quick Facts:**

- Eric Smith will be 93 years of age in August 2012.
- Eric Smith won 3 Archibald Prizes, 6 Blake Prizes, 3 Sulman and 2 Wynne Prizes over his career, as well as an Australia Council Emeritus Award in 1995.
- Now in its 90th year, the Archibald Prize, affectionately known as 'the Archies', is one of Australia's oldest and most prestigious art awards. Since 1970, no other artist has won the Archibald Prize as often as Eric Smith.
- The Blake Prize was established in 1949 to provide art for churches and take religious art into the 20th century. Eric Smith's work hangs in the Vatican. No other artist has won as many Blake Prizes as Eric Smith.
- Eric Smith's artwork is held in collections across Australia and internationally, including the award winning portrait of Peter Sculthorpe hung in Canberra at the National Portrait Gallery.
  - Eric Smith has shown works in almost 50 exhibitions since 1950.
  - During the period of filming, he held his first exhibition in 20 years.
  - Eric Smith still paints daily in his home studio, finishing at 6pm in time for the nightly news.
- The director of the documentary is Eric's granddaughter and the co-producer is the artist's daughter.
  - Seventy tapes were shot with over 45 hours of footage including over 7 hours of interviews with Eric Smith.
  - Filming with the artist began in 2007 and concluded in 2009. The film was then edited over a further two years, in which time the director gave birth to Eric's third great grandchild.
  - Eric's dear wife of more than sixty years, Joy, sadly passed away in November 2010.
  - Eric Smith is currently working towards his next exhibition.





## The Story

*ERIC SMITH: NOT FINISHED YET* is an arts documentary film about three times Archibald prize winner and celebrated abstract artist Eric Smith and his mission to mount one final exhibition, an endeavour that has been twenty years in the making.

Filmed over a two year period, the television hour documentary traces the artist's passion, dedication and struggles and intertwines archival footage with present day artwork and interviews with John Olsen, Leonard French, Barry Pearce, Peter Sculthorpe and others.

Exploring Eric's career from his prize winning portraits to his religious works to his lost oeuvre of grand abstract canvases, the film is an intimate portrayal of an ageing artist at work. Eric Smith, the self confessed 'great destroyer', is always in the process of creating his next great masterpiece. Daughter Barbara and granddaughter Kirrilly (the filmmakers) embark on a road trip to track down long

*"I feel painting is a view of the world from the heart." - Eric Smith*

lost paintings in collections across the country. As another birthday passes by the clock is ticking fast for Eric Smith to exhibit one last time and to achieve his desire of going out with a bang rather than whimper.

This film is a heartfelt, revealing and often humorous journey into the personal struggles and innermost thoughts of an elder statesman of the Australian art world. Whilst providing a dynamic overview of Eric Smith's career weaved throughout the second half of 20th century Australian art history, *ERIC SMITH: NOT FINISHED YET* has significant broader human interest as it touches on the themes of love, passion, spirituality and mortality.

## Logline

Approaching 90 years of age, three times Archibald prize winner, Eric Smith, is on a mission to mount one final exhibition after 20 years of preparation and delays.



## Short Synopsis

Octogenarian artist, Eric Smith, is preparing for what is intended to be his final exhibition.

Or so he says. He has been 'preparing' for this next exhibition for twenty years and is still not satisfied that he is ready. He is an absolute perfectionist and even at the age of 88 he still puts in a full days' painting at his home studio. Eric is an eccentric character, bursting with enthusiasm for life with a quick mind and sharp wit to match.

Eric rose to fame in Sydney in the 1950s and 60s in the early days of the abstract art movement in Australia. His successful career saw him win the Blake prize for religious art six times, the Archibald prize three times and numerous other awards including multiple wins of the Wynne and Sulman Prizes. Over the following decades, Eric continued to be in the public eye, exhibiting regularly and continuing to win many of Australia's most prestigious art awards. More than anything, the support of his wife, Joy, and the close bond with his large extended family has been the backbone to his stability and endurance as an artist.

Over his long career, Eric has been inspired by a variety of subject matter: religion, portraiture, daily news and the Australian landscape but he has never quite found a subject to stick with and has continued to be a searcher throughout his entire life.

As the deadline for an exhibition approaches, his family begins to fear that it may in fact never happen. Will Eric's optimism and obstinacy win the day? Will one final art exhibition ensure his place in history?

*'To finish a work? To finish a picture? What nonsense! To finish it means to be through with it, to kill it, to rid it of its soul, to give it its final blow is the coup de grace for the picture, as well as for the painter.'* - Pablo Picasso

## Synopsis

*ERIC SMITH: NOT FINISHED YET* follows the story of a great Australian artist and his unending passion and optimism for his art and life. It is a story about an ageing artist's ultimate desire to defy his encroaching sense of mortality by exhibiting his work one final time.

Despite his acknowledgement of growing old and having been 'out of the game' for a number of years now, Eric paints daily with the feverish passion of youth. He optimistically believes that his current work is finally all coming together and he is



ready to mount his next exhibition. However his family has heard it all before, Eric has been talking about the 'next exhibition' for the past twenty years.

Eric was part of the influential Sydney art groups Direction 1 and the Sydney 9 along with William Rose, John Olsen, John Passmore and Robert Klippel. In 1945, at the age of 24 he began his professional career by being awarded Runner

Up for a self portrait in the Archibald Prize. He was later thrust into the limelight in the mid 1950s when he won his first Blake Prize, which he painted while working as a window cleaner at David Jones supporting his family.

A convert to Catholicism, his early reputation was for religious abstract expressionist paintings, notably with works such as 'The Scourged Christ' and the poster series 'The Apostles Creed', which now hangs in the Vatican. Known for his vibrant use of colour and thick textural paint in his work, many of his artworks are found in the collections of the national and state galleries of Australia as well as numerous private and international collections. Eric is a celebrated portrait artist and has won the Archibald prize three times and the Wynne, Sulman and Blake prizes multiple times. Despite these previous successes he feels he has 'let his public down' in recent years as he was trying to discover the best way to express himself through his art and during this time shied away from exhibiting his art publicly.







In contrast to many of his peers, Eric Smith leads a very private and calm life, waking up each morning, going to his studio and painting and practising his art every single day of the year. And he still loves every moment of it. He never tires in expressing the meaning of the world around him through paint. His relationship with his wife, Joy, and their home is critical to his creative strength as an artist and has been for many decades.

Eric is a stubborn perfectionist and acknowledges that he has been 'the great destroyer' of his own work. In a constant struggle to achieve his ideal, he would prefer to paint over his work and re-use the canvas than sell a painting that

is not quite right, much to his family's vocal frustration. Never one to yield to commercial considerations, Eric refuses to compromise his artistic integrity. As the art commentators remark - 'he is a pure artist' and 'a genuine painter' without a commercial bone in his body.

Fearing his legacy will be lost with the tossed out canvases that litter his studio, daughter Barbara and granddaughter Kirrilly embark on a road trip to track down Eric's forgotten paintings held in collections across Australia. Seeking out his winning portraits, his intense religious works and his grand abstracts, a discovery is made of a body of work that celebrates a lifetime of dedication and a love of painting.

Eric has little nostalgia for his works of the past and continues his single minded pursuit of mounting a contemporary exhibition of his recent works, despite the lack of a gallery space, no paintings he is happy with and a ticking clock with his next birthday just around the corner. Ever the eternal optimist, Eric believes it will all happen in good time.

*ERIC SMITH: NOT FINISHED YET* follows the journey of a unique artist's struggle to mount what will be his final statement through his art by interweaving present day footage (shot over a two year period) with archival footage of the artist and his work with interviews with family members, key artists John Olsen and Leonard French, curators Barry Pearce and Hendrik Kolenberg and celebrated composer Peter Sculthorpe.

In spite of the challenges and even now at the ripe age of ninety two, Eric is still able to confidently say that his best exhibition yet will be his next one – if it ever happens!

## Director's Statement

They say all storytellers have the one story they MUST tell, and this is mine.

I grew up surrounded by the rich colours and dynamic shapes of my grandfather's artwork. They have been a source of inspiration since childhood and no doubt contributed to my passion for cinema.



This film has a deep and personal resonance for me. It is a film I have hungered to make for many years and as Eric ages, the urgency to complete the film increased. I have always greatly respected (and hoped to emulate) my grandfather's great passion for his art and life. Whilst Eric's 'next exhibition' has always been a running family joke, I have never lost faith in his zeal and exuberance for his artwork and his vision of one final public showing.

Before I went to film school, ten years ago, I spent some time documenting interviews with my grandfather about his ambition to get up the next exhibition, I edited some of this footage together to create what eventually became a rough version of a film entitled 'A Stroke of Art'. I felt that I had never had the opportunity to finish this film as I had originally envisioned or to explore its full visual potential and the far reaching historical significance of Eric's career. However as an actual exhibition was finally in sight, I was thrilled to have the opportunity to revisit this project.

Eric is a passionate and highly engaging character on screen, full of self deprecating humour. And his contribution to the Australian art scene had been forgotten in recent years and thus with the great advantage of unrestricted access we were able to document Eric's journey to realize a long held ambition.

This is a timely story about a gentle man with a wry humour and passion for life and his art. There is nothing sensationalist about the approach we have taken in telling his story. Rather, the film unashamedly celebrates Eric's life and work, and the themes of his art, the grand themes of beauty, love, passion and death.

I feel Eric's struggles as an artist are sentiments that resonate with many, not just art aficionados. Eric's daily routine of painting is his way of life and his 'raison d'être', the act of creating is more important than any exhibition. And ultimately, the way he lives his life is more important than death.

I am thrilled that we were able to finish the film (despite its title) whilst Eric, at almost 93 years of age, is still around to enjoy it. Eric is not finished with life yet, so his art will continue. May Eric's work never be finished, may he continue painting and living life with dignity, humour and great humanity.

*Kirrilly Brentnall, February 2012*

## Characters



### Eric Smith - Artist

*"I want to go out with a bang,  
not a whimper!" - Eric Smith*

Eric Smith was born in Melbourne in 1919 and currently lives and works in Woollahra, Sydney. He is a multiple winner of Australia's major art awards including the Archibald Prize three times. Smith's contribution to the Visual Arts in Australia has been recognised with an Australia Council Emeritus Award in 1995.

Eric Smith is one of Australia's leading 20th century pioneers in the Australian abstract art scene, participating in the radical Direction One exhibition held in 1956, alongside his renowned contemporaries Robert Klippel, John Olsen, John Passmore and William Rose.

Smith has exhibited in over forty solo & group shows in the past sixty years and was part of the Rudy Komon stable of artists which included the likes of Fred Williams, Leonard French, John Brack and John Olsen. Famed for his vibrant use of colour and richly textured layering of paint, many of his best-known artworks are found in the collections of national and state galleries of Australia as well as numerous private and international collections.

Over the past two decades, even as a nonagenarian, Smith continues to break new ground as an innovator and experimenter, searching for new ways to express on canvas his unique perception of an ever-changing world. Smith held an acclaimed exhibition at the Global Gallery in Paddington in May 2009, his first public showing since 1989.

Eric Smith continues to paint daily in defiance of his current 92 years of age.

### Peter Sculthorpe AO OBE – Composer

Peter Sculthorpe is one of Australia's best-known composers and a fine pianist. Sculthorpe's catalogue consists of more than three hundred and fifty works and, a good part of it is regularly performed and recorded throughout the world. The composer has written in most musical forms and almost all his works are influenced by the social climate and physical characteristics of Australia.



The recipient of many awards among them many Australian Record Industry Awards (ARIA), Sculthorpe regards the most important as being chosen as one of Australia's 100 Living National Treasures (National Trust of Australia, 1997), Distinguished Artist 2001 (International Society for the Performing Arts), Honorary Foreign Life Member (American Academy of Arts and Letters, 2003) and one of the 100 Most Influential Australians (The Bulletin magazine, 2006).

Peter Sculthorpe is a good friend of Artist Eric Smith and was the subject of his last winning Archibald Prize in 1982.

### **John Olsen AO OBE - Artist**

John Olsen is one of Australia's most well regarded living artists.

John Olsen received an Order of Australia (A.O.) in 2001. In 1977 he was awarded the O.B.E. for services to the Arts and in 1993 he was awarded an Australian Creative Fellowship. He was also awarded the Wynne Prize in 1969 and 1985 and the Archibald Prize in 2005 amongst many other awards throughout his career.

John Olsen is a good friend of artist Eric Smith, a collegial relationship that has developed since their time exhibiting together in the 1950s.



### **Other Interviewees include:**

Leonard French, Artist

Barry Pearce, Former Head Curator of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Hendrik Kolenberg, Senior Curator, Art Gallery of New South Wales

Lou Klepac, Art Publisher

Rosemary Crumlin, Art Historian

Jon Dwyer, Art Dealer

David Taylor, Art Collector

Joy Smith, Wife

Barbara Smith, Daughter

Robyn Smith, Daughter

Peter Smith, Son

Pamela & Barry Brentnall,  
Daughter and Son in Law



## Crew

### **Kirrilly Brentnall, Director & Co-Producer**

Kirrilly Brentnall grew up in Sydney and moved to Melbourne where she completed postgraduate studies in documentary at the Victorian College of the Arts Film & Television School. Her graduating film *A Dance with Friends* (2001) won the Cinemedia Award for Best Documentary, the Sony Script Award and the Jury Prize at the Philadelphia Documentary & Fiction Festival.

Since then Kirrilly has worked for 360Degree Films (*Welcome 2 my Deaf World*; *Seed Hunter*; *Community Cop*; *Tibet: Murder in the Snow*; *Menzies & Churchill at War* and *Monash: the forgotten Anzac*) and for Cornerbox as an Associate Field Producer on *Surf Patrol* (Series One) and as a Field Producer on Network Seven's *The Zoo* (Series Two).

Upon moving to Perth, Kirrilly began working with Artemis International as an Assistant Producer and Researcher on the SBS Television history series *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Series Two, Four & Five).

Kirrilly's own projects have included the award winning short film, *My Green Friday* (2006) which screened at the Real Life on Film Festival at ACMI, the Hot Docs Side Screening in Toronto, the Pacific international Documentary Film Festival in Tahiti and toured internationally with the International Festival of Cinema and Technology. Kirrilly also developed the online digital documentary project *Unfu#k the World* (AFC, Film Victoria) about a Gen Y'er who took her message all the way to the United Nations in New York City.

Kirrilly is passionately dedicated to having finished a film on her celebrated artist grandfather, Eric Smith, despite the film's title - Not Finished Yet.

### **Barbara Smith, Co-Producer & Researcher**

Barbara Smith studied Visual Arts at East Sydney Technical College and Sydney College of the Arts, specialising in painting, printmaking and photography. Having studied art for over ten years, Barbara has a solid background in the history of art including Australian art history with a particular interest in abstract art.



Barbara has recently completed a course in Film Producing, focusing on documentary, and has previously completed a number of short courses in film and video techniques as well as documentary filmmaking. Barbara's credits include co-producing a Tropfest film. Barbara currently works in marketing.

Barbara is the daughter of Eric Smith and has thoroughly enjoyed the process of making a film with her niece Kirrilly Brentnall.

## **David Hawkins, Cinematographer**

David Hawkins is an award winning Cinematographer and graduate of the Australian Film, Television & Radio School. He was Director of Photography on the Academy Award (Oscar) nominated short film 'The Saviour' [2007 for Best Live Action Short Film].

David has worked as a cinematographer extensively in Australia on projects ranging from feature film, television commercials and short films to music videos and documentaries. Other credits include: *Stained Glass Heart* (90mins feature drama); *My Green Friday* (10mins short documentary); *Crucifixions* (60mins documentary) and *Living On* (26mins documentary). Other awards include the 2005 Silver NSW ACS award for Cinematography.

David's approach to cinematography is story-first; ensuring that all of the visual tools at his disposal are focused solely on the audience and their journey. His wide knowledge of creative techniques and an ability to think on his feet has led to an ever-adapting range of looks and styles, each suited to the story being told.

[www.davidhawkins.tv](http://www.davidhawkins.tv)



## **Andy Manassis, Composer**

Andy Manassis is an accomplished musician based in sunny Perth, Western Australia. With a career spanning over two decades he has written and performed his own compositions across the classical, rock, pop, jazz and country genres alongside some of Australia's premier musicians.

Andy has been fortunate enough to study under several talented mentors along the way, such as with the late Brian Michell (Director of Classical Piano at UWA) and more recently composing for film and TV with Brad Hatfield (Emmy Award winning composer at Berklee University). In 2011 three of Andy's original pieces put him into the top 30 finalists nominated for an APRA Professional Development Award.



## Crew List

Director KIRRILLY BRENTNALL

Producers KIRRILLY BRENTNALL & BARBARA SMITH

Cinematographer DAVID HAWKINS

Editor KIRRILLY BRENTNALL

Composer ANDY MANESSIS

Sound Post RICHARD MAHONY

Post Production Assistance NOAH NORTON

Online & Colour Grade FSM FILM & TV POST

Developed with the assistance of SCREEN AUSTRALIA



## Technical Information

Running Time: 52 minutes

Aspect Ratio: 16:9

Sound: Stereo

Master: HDCAM

Screening formats: HD CAM, Digi Beta

Language: English

Filmed on location in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Gold Coast and Canberra, Australia

## CONTACT

**19Films:** PO BOX 130, Fremantle, Western Australia, 6959

**Kirrilly Brentnall:** [kirrilly@19films.com.au](mailto:kirrilly@19films.com.au); tel +61 417 123 796

**Barbara Smith:** [contact.ericsmith@ericsmithartist.com.au](mailto:contact.ericsmith@ericsmithartist.com.au); tel +61 411 116 469



**19FILMS**



# Media Release

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**19FILMS**

Media Contact:  
Kirrilly Brentnall  
Tel: 0417 123 796

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 1st February 2012

## **STUNNING NEW ART DOCUMENTARY on three times ARCHIBALD PRIZE WINNER previews at the Chauvel**

Approaching 90 years of age, Sydney artist Eric Smith has been preparing for his next exhibition for the past twenty years.

Filmed over a two-year period, the filmmakers captured the passion, struggles, humour and ambition of this ageing artist who guarantees that his "next painting is his best yet." Commenting on his long anticipated final exhibition, octogenarian Eric Smith declares he wants "to go out with a bang, not a whimper."

Leonardo Da Vinci is quoted as saying "Art is never finished, only abandoned" and this rings true for this celebrated but long forgotten abstract artist **Eric Smith**. Known for destroying his artwork, the artist has been out of the spotlight for twenty years and it doesn't look like the next exhibition will ever happen.

Featuring interviews with **John Olsen** and **Peter Sculthorpe**, this new television hour documentary **ERIC SMITH: NOT FINISHED YET** follows the story of a great Australian artist and his unending passion and optimism for his art and life. It is a story about an ageing artist's ultimate desire to defy his encroaching sense of mortality and against all odds, create one final grand exhibition.

The film also follows the journey of daughter Barbara and granddaughter Kirrilly attempting to restore Eric's legacy, and embarking on a road trip to track down his forgotten paintings held in collections across Australia.

Seeking out his **Archibald Prize** winning portraits, his **Blake Prize** winning religious works and his grand abstracts, a discovery is made of a body of work that celebrates a lifetime of dedication and a love of painting.

Director (and granddaughter) Kirrilly Brentnall comments: "It has been a joyous experience making a film about my beloved artist grandfather. It has taken me four years to finally finish the film. But I still have one up on Eric. It took him 20 years to have an exhibition!"

For further information about the documentary film and the artist and to access a full press kit and production photos, please log onto: [www.ericsmithartist.com.au](http://www.ericsmithartist.com.au)

An invitation only preview screening of **ERIC SMITH: NOT FINISHED YET** is taking place on Monday 5th of March from 6pm at the Chauvel Cinema, Paddington. Media please rsvp to [contact.ericsmith@ericsmith.com.au](mailto:contact.ericsmith@ericsmith.com.au)

DVDS with extended interviews are available online at [www.ericsmithartist.com.au](http://www.ericsmithartist.com.au) (RRP\$34.95)

### **Contact Information:**

Kirrilly Brentnall  
19Films  
PO Box 130, Fremantle WA 6959  
Tel: 0417 123 796  
[Kirrilly@19films.com.au](mailto:Kirrilly@19films.com.au)

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