

JUNE 27, 2010

THE SUN-HERALD SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2010

\$976,000

paid for Jeffrey Smart's 1971 *Holiday*, including buyer's premium, at Menzies Sydney auction last week. The artist's 1968-69 *Approach to a City III* fetched \$854,000.

CULTURE

A stint under the stars inspires artist



Photo: Anthony Johnson

AGE might have slowed down Elisabeth Cummings's painting, but the 76-year-old artist (pictured) had no qualms about sleeping rough for a week in the West MacDonnell Ranges in Central Australia.

"I enjoy it. If you can keep warm at night, it's very cosy in the swag," she said. "It's wonderful to be under that big sky. The stars are so bright. It's fantastic."

Eight artists, including Cummings, Euan Macleod and Amanda Penrose Hart, recently ventured into terrain made famous by Albert Namatjira, discovering a normally arid region transformed by some of the heaviest rains in years.

Setting off from Alice Springs, they followed the Larapinta Trail, setting up camp at two "very special places" off the beaten track: Birthday Waterhole and the Finke River.

Cummings said they were "good long painting days. Everyone got stuck into these fantastic landscapes. The water, the sand, grasses and big red river gums. It was a very beautiful place, so much material to work with."

Rather than create replicas of the terrain, Cummings records its colours, shapes and the feelings they evoke. "While I'm there, I certainly paint what I'm seeing," she said. "But it's not always a completely meticulous representation."

When she's not under the stars, Cummings lives with her blue heeler, Bess, at Wedderburn, near Campbelltown.

An exhibition of Cummings' prints, painting and drawings, *Paper Trail: 30 Years*, opens this week at King Street Gallery on William in Darlinghurst.

The gallery's Randi Linnegar said Cummings was one of Australia's most underrated artists, largely ignored by public galleries despite her popularity among collectors.

The Art Gallery of NSW holds just three of her works, while the National Gallery of Australia plans to double its holding with the purchase of a large recent work.

While she was always serious about her art, Cummings said she never expected to make a living out of it. Instead she taught part-time at various colleges to help pay the bills. "I thought it would be a struggle, which it was," she said. "I didn't expect to have wild success in the early days or ever. That's the life of a painter."

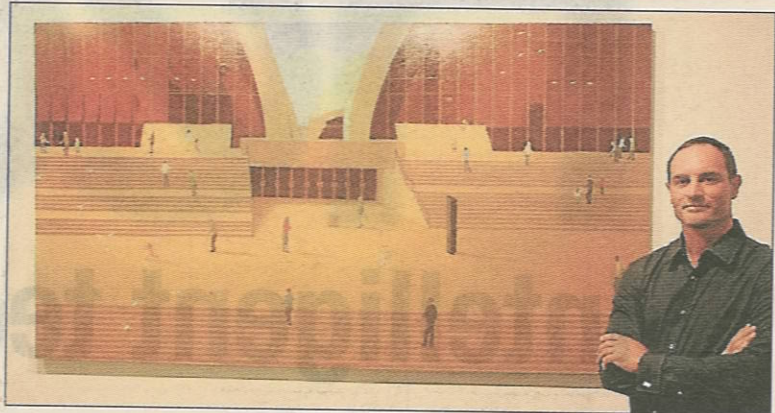


Photo: James Alcock

Outsider captures city in different light

A CURSORY glance at Robert Brownhall's *Sydney Paintings* suggests the Brisbane artist sees our city in a rather grim light.

Several paintings depict the harbour city at night or awash with rain, including the \$27,000 *Sydney Harbour at Night*, which sold to a German collector before last Thursday's opening night at Martin Browne Fine Art in Potts Point.

Yet Brownhall (pictured) said he was not trying to cast aspersions on the city or its tempestuous weather.

"No, no. I like the way rain looks," he said. "It's always been a favourite subject of mine."

As for his nocturnal vistas, the artist, 41, said he did not believe nights were gloomy. "I think they're absolutely fascinating. They can be spectacular. A city always looks more beautiful at night."

One of Brownhall's famous collect-

ors is the author Jeffrey Archer, who in 2008 paid \$6000 for his *Man and Woman Waiting in the City*.

Brownhall's Brisbane dealer, Philip Bacon, is a friend of Archer, and visited him during his two-year imprisonment for perjury.

Brownhall is renowned for urban and night landscapes, and this show is his first attempt at Sydney.

He said a horror plane landing in London almost two decades ago put him off travelling by air for 15 years. "The damn thing went sideways. The hostess screamed."

It took the funeral of his grandmother in Melbourne to convince him to give flying another go.

"I just thought enough's enough," he said. "So I did it and look, it was fine. I quite enjoyed it actually. I'm not completely over [my fear of flying]. I still get sweaty palms, you know."