

# Stephen Wiltshire, Artist Extraordinaire



Gillian J. Furniss

Stephen Wiltshire is a celebrated British artist who was diagnosed with autism at age three and drew spontaneously at age two. By age five, Wiltshire was preoccupied with drawing cars, animals, and people. By age ten, he was drawing incredibly detailed cars and landmark buildings from memory.

In his book, *An Anthropologist on Mars* (Knopf Doubleday, 1996), Oliver Sacks states

that Wiltshire's early drawings demonstrated a "prodigious visual memory, which seemed able to take in the most complex buildings, or cityscapes, in a few seconds, and to hold them in mind, in the minutest detail—indefinitely, it seemed—with the least apparent effort."

## Vision & Interpretation

It's important to stress that Wiltshire can interpret—not merely copy—what

he sees to make masterly, highly detailed drawings. BBC's QED has produced a number of television specials about his unusual talent and skill as a young visual artist. The first, called *The Foolish Wise Ones*, shows how the then eleven-year-old Wiltshire was inspired to draw. He is shown pointing

to a church in London from a bus window and saying, "Look, a church." Later that day, in school, Wiltshire

confidently draws the church with a pencil on white paper.

The second film, called *The Boy Who Draws Buildings*, is about the adolescent Wiltshire's tour of Venice and Moscow. His former teacher turned agent, Margaret Hewson, traveled with Wiltshire through Europe to execute commissioned drawings for one of his illustrated books, *Floating Cities* (Michael Joseph Ltd., 1991). In one scene, you can view Wiltshire

studying for a few minutes, then drawing an ornate and complex building in detail while sitting with his back to the actual structure.

There are many individuals who have supported Wiltshire as an artist. His family encouraged him to do things he enjoyed, and Sir Hugh Casson, former president of the Royal Academy, is responsible for helping Wiltshire gain admittance to City & Guilds Art College, a prestigious art school in England. Casson gave Wiltshire the distinguished title of "the most talented child artist in the history of England." He described Wiltshire's ability to draw as resembling "embroidery."

## The Stephen Wiltshire Gallery

Wiltshire's Gallery is located at 5 Royal Opera Arcade near Trafalgar Square in London. His family manages the sales of his artwork to many eager London residents and tourists from around the world. The first time

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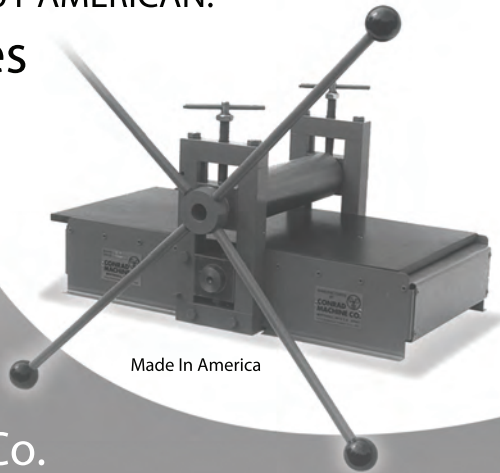
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### MEETING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

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**S**tephen Wiltshire is a world-famous British artist who can draw anything he sees from memory. He has drawn over 100,000 buildings and structures from memory. He is also a skilled pianist and has composed several pieces of music. Wiltshire was born in 1974 in London, England. He is the youngest of four children. He has a degree in Architecture from the University of London. He has been featured in several documentaries and books about his unique talent. He has also been named one of the world's most talented young people. Wiltshire's art is a combination of his architectural training and his natural ability to draw from memory. He has been able to draw buildings and structures that he has never seen before. He has also been able to draw buildings and structures that he has seen from a different perspective. Wiltshire's art is a testament to his incredible memory and his ability to draw from memory. He has been able to draw buildings and structures that he has never seen before. He has also been able to draw buildings and structures that he has seen from a different perspective. Wiltshire's art is a testament to his incredible memory and his ability to draw from memory.

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I visited in 2006, the first floor was crowded with Wiltshire's admirers. Wiltshire agreed to give me a tour of his art gallery starting on the second floor. He was gentle, charming, and so at ease with himself. His sister cautioned me earlier that he was not able to answer questions such as how long it took him to complete a drawing or painting, or the duration of his art process for a specific work of art, so I asked him concrete questions. He knew the exact year when he made each of his works of art on display. When I asked what he liked to draw best, he said cars and boats. I asked why, and he said because of their shapes. "And because they move?" I asked. "Yes," he said, "they can go fast."

The second time I visited his art gallery, a year later, I was able to watch Wiltshire do a sketch while he was seated in a chair near a window. The act of his drawing seemed so casual and pleasurable. I watched in wonder as he moved his pencil across the paper with calculating precision.

Wiltshire's website ([stephenwiltshire.co.uk](http://stephenwiltshire.co.uk)) is an excellent resource for teachers and students to learn about the artist. There are several links where you can view his artwork and find out how to purchase books of his drawings. You can also purchase his original artwork or prints, and sign-up to receive his monthly newsletter. The website also features several videos that capture his extraordinary art process.

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### WEB LINK

[www.stephenwiltshire.co.uk](http://www.stephenwiltshire.co.uk)