

Thomas Smith:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Smith, Thomas G. (Thomas Graham), 1938-
- Title:** Thomas Smith Papers
- Dates:** 1977-2002
- Extent:** 20 document boxes, 2 oversize boxes (osb) (8.82 linear feet)
- Abstract:** The Thomas Smith Papers consist of the professional papers of visual effects producer Thomas Smith. The papers document Smith's professional work through the 1980s and 1990s and include film scripts, special effects storyboards, and pre-production research.
- Call Number:** Film Collection No. FI-058
- Language:** English
- Access:** Open for research; please see redactions and restrictions notes below. **Redactions Note:** The production and research materials contain a number of items from which personal information has been redacted or restricted to protect an individual's privacy. Examples are salaries, telephone numbers, and addresses. **Restrictions Note:** Per the donor agreement, storyboards for the film project Jamboree (later released as the *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*) are closed to researchers for ten years.
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Administrative Information

- Acquisition:** Gift, 2011 (11-10-003-G)
- Processed by:** Carly Dearborn, 2011
- Repository:** [Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin](#)
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Biographical Sketch

Thomas G. Smith was born in Canton, Illinois, in 1938. He attended Northwestern University, and following his graduation in 1960, he studied film in Paris at the Institute of Higher Studies in Film (IDHEC) on a Fulbright Scholarship. After three years' service in the U.S. Air Force, Smith began his career in film as a writer and producer-director for Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation (EB), where he directed more than fifty educational films. *Solar System* (1977), one of his last projects for EB, changed the trajectory of his career to special effects. The film not only allowed Smith to experiment with special effects, but it also caught the eye of George Lucas.

Smith began working for George Lucas's Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) in 1980. He oversaw the visual effects facility from 1980 to 1986 and, among other films, worked on the productions of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *E.T.* (1982), *Star Trek: The Search for Spock* (1983), *Star Wars: Episode VI-Return of the Jedi* (1983), and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). In 1985, Smith moved from ILM to film production. In 1986, he began working for Walt Disney on the 3D attraction *Captain EO*, which starred Michael Jackson and was produced and directed by George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola. Following his work on *Capitan EO*, Smith continued to work for Disney as a producer and visual effects consultant.

In addition to his work with Disney, Smith also worked on projects for Jim Henson Productions (*Muppet Treasure Island* [1996] and *Muppets from Space* [1999]) and Turner Pictures (*Gods and Generals* [2003]). He won a British Academy Award for outstanding visual effects on *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (1989). Smith worked for Disney until 1992; since then he has worked on several projects, including his own feature film, *The Arrival* (1996).

Sources:

In addition to material found within the Thomas Smith Papers, the following sources were used:

Keeler, Amanda. (2010). "Interview with Thomas G. Smith, educational filmmaker." *The Moving Image* 10 (2): 124-137.

"Thomas G. Smith." Retrieved from <http://www.afana.org/smitht.htm> (accessed 11/15/2011).

Scope and Contents

The Thomas Smith Papers consist of special effects storyboards, screenplays, pre-production research, production materials, newspaper clippings, photographs, and published materials such as fan magazines and cinematography periodicals. The papers also contain material relating to Smith's time at Industrial Light and Magic (ILM) and Lucasfilm. The papers are organized into two series: I. Films and Attractions, 1977-2002 and II. Lucasfilm, 1982-1991.

Series I. Films and Attractions makes up the bulk of the papers and includes materials associated with Smith's major projects. It is arranged into two subseries: A. Films, 1977-2002 and B. Special Attractions, 1989-1997. Materials in these subseries are arranged in alphabetical order by title. Within each title, items are arranged chronologically and follow the order of storyboards, screenplays and scripts, and supporting materials. Supporting materials include production research, cast and crew information, premiere and publicity packets, and published reviews. There are also two oversize boxes containing soft-sided, personalized three ring binders, one of which contained much of Smith's materials dealing with *Muppet Treasure Island* (1996).

Much of Smith's material arrived at the Ransom Center grouped by film but not arranged in chronological order. Some material was included in folders and envelopes with labels made by Smith, and these labels and groupings are maintained in the new folders. Smith placed some material associated with large projects such as *Gods and Generals* (2003) and the unproduced film *Joan of Arc* in "miscellaneous" categories. These materials are roughly arranged in the order of storyboards, scripts, and supporting materials. *Joan of Arc* never advanced to the production phase, but pre-production costs reached over \$1 million. The materials associated with the film reflect the pre-production process and include site research, vendor searches in France, and budget estimates.

Subseries A. Films represents much of Smith's work throughout the 1980s and 1990s; however, the collection does not represent his early career as a writer and director for Encyclopedia Britannica Education Corporation. Many of the films included in this series appear with their working titles. Films are arranged alphabetically by their official title, followed in parentheses by alternative working titles. These titles include: *The Arrival* (Shockwave), *E.T.* (A Boy's Life), *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* (Grounded, Teenie-Weenies, Teeny-Weenies), and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (The Temple of Death).

Subseries B. Special Attractions represents Smith's work on 3D attractions for Disney and Jim Henson Productions. Attractions are arranged alphabetically. Supporting material is limited, but may include storyboards, scripts, cast and crew lists, press kits, and newspaper clippings.

Series II. Lucasfilm contains documents related to Smith's time with Lucasfilm and Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), a division of Lucasfilm. The series contains materials related to Smith's book, *Industrial Light and Magic: The Art of Special Effects*, and magazine articles on ILM. The series also contains Lucasfilm yearbooks spanning ten years (1982-1991).

Index Terms

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Subjects

Cinematography—Special effects
Lucasfilm Animation (Firm)
Motion Pictures, American
Producers and Directors, American

Document Types

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