

Philip Trusttum

b.1940

Diploma of Fine Arts: Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury

"I paint because when I'm painting I learn more about myself. I am private; there are no rules. It's what I enjoy doing". Philip Trusttum

This painting was inspired by Trusttum's grandson's toy collection. Throughout his career Trusttum has been alert to the possibilities for art-making that are under his nose or in his own backyard. Numerous big canvases owe their initial inspiration to a simple domestic activity: playing tennis, feeding horses, sewing clothes, home renovating, gardening, lawn mowing, even lovemaking! And now there is his grandson's miniature toy collection.

The title of this work is *Fireman*, but things are not quite that straightforward. Look more closely and you will see something familiar 'disguised' by the magnified scale and abstract patterning that the artist has used. Look at the shape of the head, hands and feet, and you will recognise this figure as a Lego toy. It's from a series of paintings called *Let's Go Lego*.

One of the fireman's feet is larger than the other, suggesting forward movement. The beard and uniform are indicated by little more than stylised patterns. The figure holds a yellow fire extinguisher in one hand and a fire axe in the other. But even then, all is not right. Look at the bulging black alien eyes, the mouth full of bared teeth that seem to be flecked with blood – is that a fire extinguisher or a flame-thrower? The axe in his hand suddenly seems like it could be a weapon. A plastic toy depicting a familiar and trusted figure abruptly comes to life and turns into a psycho-killer.

For Trusttum, it is not important that an image be realistic or symbolic or tell a story. He wants it to convey feeling and visual energy and he wants it to be truthful to his experience. Trusttum's reliance on art to understand and express experience recently led him to make a series of paintings,

5.30am... What I Saw, dealing with his disturbing discovery of a murder victim in a vacant lot next to his Christchurch home.

However, the darkness of that series was not typical, for Trusttum's paintings are usually upbeat and energetic. Music is very important to him and he often listens to it as he paints. There are strong visual rhythms in his work. Line, pattern, pulse, repetition, variation – all strong elements in his art – have analogous roles in music. Trusttum 'dances' on canvas with endlessly inventive drawing and audacious distortion of scale – he loves to blow things up, sometimes until they are almost unrecognisable. He also uses vivid colours in surprising combinations, often incorporating patterns that he invents himself, or borrows from a wide range of sources including other cultures and ancient civilisations. Inspiration may begin at home, but before the image is completed Trusttum's mind and eye have travelled far.

Andrew Paul Wood

Artist website:

www.trusttum.co.nz

Galleries and websites:

www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz

www.bettgallery.com.au

www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz

www.dunedin.art.museum/collection.asp

www.govettbrewster.com

www.tepapa.govt.nz

Articles:

www.art-newzealand.com/Issue113/trusttum.htm

