

Philip Trusttum (b 1940)*Backyard with Trees and Houses*

oil on board

signed with initials and dated 'PST 74'

(lower left); inscribed with title

122 x 90cm

\$18,000 - \$36,000

Provenance

purchased directly from the artist's studio,
Berry Street, St Albans, Christchurch
Sale, Dunbar Sloane Ltd, Wellington,
27 November 1994 (lot 62) Front Cover
Illustration (catalogued as '*Red Berries*')
Private Estate, Wellington

Philip Trusttum has a robust and healthy history of nearly seven decades of painting to his name. There is a vibrancy inherent in his works made accessible to any viewer by their brightness and contrast of colour. Trusttum first began painting in 1955 when he was fifteen years old. He worked in the packing rooms of the Hays Department Store and took home the wooden packing cases as canvases.

In 1961 Trusttum enrolled at the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts where he was taught by the pioneering Rudolf Gopas. Trusttum was shy of Gopas so would paint at home until he had thirty odd works finished before bringing them into the studio for critique. Gopas, a refugee from Lithuania, is credited as a key catalyst of expressionism emerging in New Zealand in the last third of the 20th century. While Gopas' own work creates claustrophobic worlds swarming with emotion it was his astute teaching of artists such as Philip Clairmont, Tony Fomison and, the man of the hour: Philip Trusttum that has been credited as essential to the emergence and acceptance of expressionist art in New Zealand. It was Gopas who alerted Trusttum to his own uncanny and inimitable intuition for colour. Trusttum has always had a penchant for thick, brightly coloured paint. Gopas also set the young Trusttum onto the scent of artists such as Paul Klee, Pablo Picasso and Max Beckmann, all of whom had a lasting influence on Trusttum's painting.

Trusttum has always been open to the many and varied influences available to him as a painter. His approach to painting never loses a curiosity to push the boundaries of what he can show and how he can show it. Since his art school days Trusttum has included house paint, PVA, sand, dung and coal dust amongst his standard art materials. In 2011 he estimated himself to have done at least four thousand drawings, exemplifying the free and easy approach he takes to art making. Trusttum has said: 'you find something you like and you paint it' epitomising the simple truth that art can be a labour of love.

As well as the influences given to him by Gopas, Trusttum has readily absorbed the guidance of art and artists from all parts of the world. Medieval manuscripts, Australian Aboriginal art, African patterning are just some of the influences he adopts. These are abundantly clear to see in *Backyard with Trees and Houses*. The patterns and colour combinations serve to provide a decorative surface that breaks up and ultimately reveals form. This work in particular also carries the influence of Matisse's red rooms. With no clear horizon line we feel that we have been given the viewpoint of any aspect of the garden. We could just as easily be a child running through the tall grass, a bee in the wind, or even another flower observing its surroundings. There is a musicality and a humming to the leaves as they rustle together with an alacrity of depth. The thick application of paint brings a frivolity to the colour, it's very layering creates movement

in the light that catches on it. The corners of the house and chimney in the distance act less as symbols of home and instead as sensations of colour, adding to the richness of the garden's beauty.

In (*Interior/Exterior*) *Garden Series* you can more clearly see the strains of a van Gogh influence shining through. Though form is still loose and flows with broad sweeps of colour, the objects are more contained within themselves and create a busy world to be in. From inside this room we can see a larger room outside, the room of the world. The world doesn't feel open and airy but rather full and brimming, the air itself clustered with colour. There is a slight quickening of intensity of movement outside, indicating there is some peace to be found indoors. The interior flowers bring the outer world in, while the thin panes on the window do more to highlight and bring indoors the outside. Amongst all this clamour and *Joie de vivre* the smooth panels of the dresser and the floor provide a calming feeling, like coming indoors after a day in the wind and sun.

Trusttum's trusty gardens series started in the mid 1970s and made his reputation as a painter. To this day his garden paintings remain among the most sought-after of his works. Trusttum has observed that he has been able to 'Live like a peasant and think like a king' these paintings personify that sentiment, finding richness in ever the present exquisiteness of one's own garden.

Maeve Hughes