

From the Collection



Denys Watkins, *Encounter of the Third Kind* 2008, acrylic on linen, 1825 x 1525mm, The University of Auckland Art Collection

Recalling Stephen Spielberg's 1977 science fiction blockbuster *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* with its title, this large acrylic painting in ice-cream colours seems spookily familiar

Maybe it is the vapid expression of the neatly coiffed fellow at centre? Resplendent in his walk

shorts, sweatshirt and oversized sneakers, he seems proud to show off his hosing styles in the foreground. With his oversized head and tiny arms, he seems an earthly manifestation of something weird and otherworldly. He is way too alien to belong to the same species as the legions of smiling Dads who deploy garden equipment in the hardware store catalogues that populate the mailbox around Father's Day. Despite his attempt to win us over with a grin, we can only pity him his lack of water pressure, as the thick sinuous snake of green that he grips overpromises and underdelivers.

This funny blue chap is clearly no fireman, turning his back on the several ominous clouds of black smoke issuing forth from holes in the suburban miniature which tilts up behind his stolid legs. Nor does he relate to the urban reality of the apartment building behind, which seems to have lost its façade in some apocalyptic bomb blast. Instead the little man stands isolated and dislocated, smiling bravely in the face of his redundancy.

Ultimately, despite inviting some kind of narrative reading with its human element, the stacked layers of imagery remain enigmatic,

like the title of the exhibition from whence the painting comes: "Outside In". According to the gallerist who sold this work to the University's collection, "It appears to comment on some of the large issues in life, war, regeneration and the eternal struggle of man to create order out of chaos", while reviewer John Hurrell was reminded of a lyric by Bonnie "Prince" Billy, "Death to everyone is gonna come, and it makes hosing much more fun".

With lots of interesting relationships between areas of colour and positive and negative space, this painting is one of seven works by the artist owned by the University, and is testament to the artist's technical mastery. Originally trained as a graphic artist at the Wellington Polytechnic School of Design before travelling to London to study first at the Central School of Art and Design and then at the Royal College of Art, Denys Watkins has had a career in art spanning four decades.

An exhibition of drawings by Elam Senior Lecturer Denys Watkins will be the inaugural event at the Elam School of Fine Arts gallery Projectspace in Building 431 until 13 March. The drawings, completed over the last two decades, range from ideas jotted in sketchbooks to activities expanded on through the process of drawing. *Encounter of the Third Kind* is currently available for loan and can be requested by emailing a.clifford@auckland.ac.nz

Linda Tyler