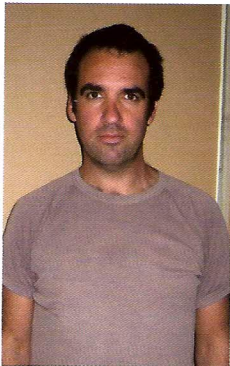


# 25. matt ellwood

Born Wellington 1973  
MFA (Hons) Elam 2003  
PDT ACE 1997  
Lives in Auckland

Matt Ellwood has a love/hate relationship with the 1970s, the first decade of his life. On the one hand, he feels nostalgia for pictorial ephemera aimed at adults from a time before he reached his teens. On the other, he abhors the manipulation of the 'me generation' by advertisers, particularly the cigarette industry. He is interested in the parallels that can be drawn between the 1970s and the present. AIDS and cancer warnings have put paid to free sex and associated social smoking, yet desire and self-indulgent consumption have not gone away, and are still being catered to by advertisers and providers of 'services'. Ellwood ponders whether the advertising of today will be seen in 30 years as being as banal, cynical and exploitative as that of the 1970s. Do we really have control over our reaction/response to advertising? Will the cult of the he-man, bursting out of his open-neck shirt, surrounded by admiring women, or riding his palomino in the clean, green, great outdoors, ever come again? Similarly, he muses on the ironies of health warnings on cigarette packets when our health system appears to be breaking down.

Ellwood's media are sculpture, charcoal and pastel (for drawing, at which he excels), and the digitally scanned and manipulated image. His sources are childhood toys and family photographs, contemporary packaging and adverts torn from magazines such as *Playboy* and *Viva*. Almost all his imagery is appropriated, and is either presented unaltered in carefully selected conjunctions, edited, or digitally altered. His black-and-white drawings are often greatly (and laboriously) enlarged from the original coloured adverts. Some portions of the originals are omitted, leaving narratives inconclusive (cf. McMillan, 64). Where he is working





You've  
got what  
it takes.

Menthol Fresh



from family photographs, Ellwood overlays wording from 'sophisticated' hedonistic 1970s adverts to produce a 'slippage between stated intention and recorded reality, intended to nag the viewer in its refusal to make complete sense'.

Many of Ellwood's sculptures have been inspired by the transformations wrought by merchandisers upon his treasured childhood Lego set. By the addition of *Star Wars* and other pop-culture brands, the classic blocks have been stripped of their capacity to stimulate young imaginations. Trying to salvage something, the artist scales up these new instant toys in resin-coated polystyrene, turning them into art. Other models for sculpture have been as diverse as the packing inside a shaver box and the images on the old Camel cigarette packs.

Not to be overlooked in Ellwood's oeuvre is an important group of sculptures made in the late 1990s from found materials and carved wood. These parodied attempts to decorate the trappings of Western civilisation in a Maori manner with ludicrous consequences. There are subtle connections with his later work to be found here.



Above top: *Out of the Frying Pan and into the Fire*, 2007. Digital print, 83.5 x 135 mm.

Above bottom: *Two Stormtroopers*, 2003. MDF, resin, lacquer, vinyl, 240 x 120 x 60 mm.

Right top: *Trying to Get to You*, 2006. Digital print, 880 x 1200 mm.

Right bottom: *Ladies Be Cool*, 2005. Digital print, 690 x 1300 mm.

