

LISSON GALLERY

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Press Release

Julian Opie

March 1 – April 20, 2019

504 W 24th Street, New York

Opening: February 28, 6 – 8pm

For Julian Opie's first solo gallery exhibition in New York City, Lisson Gallery presents a new body of work focused on the artist's portraits, presenting both individual heads and full-length groups. As Opie's first presentation in Manhattan since his major Public Art Fund commission in City Hall Park in 2004, this presentation captures the people and daily routines that make up life in communities around New York City.

Over the years Opie has quietly observed the homogenisation of the world in cities and the people around him – from friends to strangers on the street – to produce portraits of individuals and society. Whether recreating a skyscraper, a serene landscape on the Cornish coast, or a selection of runners in a city park, Opie constructs an environment, a space that echoes the colours and shapes he observes. Fascinated by the act of picturing, and how that influences our ability to navigate and interact with the world, the artist's portraits have become ubiquitous in locations across the globe.

The exhibition will include four individual portraits, all in profile, composed of auto paint on aluminium: *Pony Tail.*, *Hoodie.*, *Diamond earring.* and *Dark Glasses.* (all 2019). Despite the simplicity of the portraits, Opie's process involves building up rather than reducing, beginning with one aluminium layer and adding onto the surface to shape the form, resulting in a three-dimensional, semi-sculptural object. Each figure, oscillating between figuration and abstraction, is embodied through one singular characteristic, be it their hairstyle, jewellery or clothing. A realist painter, Opie captures not the accuracy of a photograph, but the realism of a memory, a glance, or a feeling; each character's identity determined by the artist's intangible experience or memory of the encounter.

Along the opposite wall are four group portraits, each featuring five individuals walking: *Walking in New York 1., 2., 3., and 4.* (all 2019). This body of work, based on photographs of specific scenes in neighbourhoods across New York, presents a snapshot of life in the city. Surrounded by abstracted figures, these portraits are at once distinctly individual and yet universal, recalling the anonymity omnipresent in modern city life. Opie echoes the arrangement and rhythmic movement of Greek vases and stone-carved Roman friezes, bringing these traditions into the modern-day – just as an ancient frieze mural would depict the identity of a warrior through their sword or valiant pose, Opie characterises each individual through a specific stance, adornment, attire or attitude.

The exhibition also features three life-size, patinated bronze sculptures standing in the gallery amongst the paintings. In each figure represented in *Leather Jacket.*, *Hoodie.* and *Two Bags.* (all 2019), the viewer instinctively builds a narrative around the character, recalling typical scenes from metropolitan life, from a man smoking casually, perhaps at a bus stop or waiting for a friend, to a woman travelling home with shopping bags, aimlessly checking her phone. Familiar yet unnervingly distant, these figures highlight questions about our own reality – as individuals and as a society – and prompt us to ask, what object or pose would we choose to characterise our existence?

About Julian Opie

The work of Julian Opie is known throughout the world. With public commissions from New York to Seoul, London to Zurich, and an uninterrupted flow of international museum exhibitions, Opie's distinctive formal language is instantly recognizable and reflects his artistic preoccupation with the idea of representation and the means by which images are perceived and understood. "Everything you see is a trick of the light," Opie writes. "Light bouncing into your eye, light casting shadows, creating depth, shapes, colors. Turn off the light and it's all gone. We use vision as a means of survival and it's essential to take it for granted in order to function, but awareness allows us to look at looking and by extension look at ourselves and be aware of our presence. Drawing, drawing out the way that process feels and works brings the awareness into the present and into the real world, the exterior world." Always exploring different techniques both cutting edge and ancient, Opie plays with ways of seeing through reinterpreting the vocabulary of everyday life; his reductive style evokes both a visual and spatial experience of the world around us. Drawing influence from classical portraiture, Egyptian hieroglyphs and Japanese woodblock prints, as well as public signage, information boards and traffic signs, the artist connects the clean visual language of modern life, with the fundamentals of art history.

Julian Opie was born in London in 1958 and lives and works in London. He graduated from Goldsmith's School of Art, London in 1982. Exhibitions have been staged at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2018); F1963, Busan, South Korea (2018); National Portrait Gallery, London, UK (2017); Suwon Ipark Museum of Art, Korea (2017); Fosun Foundation, Shanghai, China (2017); Kunsthalle Helsinki, Finland (2015); Museum of Contemporary Art Krakow (MoCAK), Poland (2014); National Portrait Gallery, London, UK (2011); IVAM, Valencia, Spain (2010); MAK, Vienna, Austria (2008); CAC Malaga, Spain (2006); Neues Museum, Nuremberg, Germany (2003); Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK (2001); Kunstverein Hannover, Germany (1994) and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK (1985). Major group exhibitions include Toledo Museum of Art, USA (2019); 'This Is Not The Reality. What Kind Of Reality?', 57th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2017); the ICA Boston, USA and Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK (2016); Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK (2014); Tate Britain, London, UK (2013); MoMA, New York, USA and the Shanghai Biennale (2006); 11th Biennial of Sydney (1990 and 1998); Newport Art Museum, Newport Beach, USA (1990); documenta 8, Kassel, Germany (1987); and XIIème Biennale de Paris (1985). Public projects include Fosun Foundation, Shanghai (2018); Carnaby St, London, Taipei, Taiwan and Tower 535, Hong Kong (2016); Takamatsu City, Takamatsu, Japan (2015); PKZ, Zurich, Switzerland (2014); Calgary, Canada (2012); La Jolla, San Diego, USA (2013); Seoul Square, Seoul, South Korea (2009). Indianapolis, USA, (2006); Phoenix Museum of Art, USA (2007) and MCA Chicago, USA (2004). His design for the band Blur's album 'Best of Blur' (2000) was awarded the Music Week CADS for Best Illustration in 2001.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 62 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York as well as its new space in Shanghai. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie, to the international public for the first time. The gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Liu Xiaodong, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully, as well as a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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