

LISSON GALLERY

The Brooklyn Rail
18 March 2023

BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

Julian Opie: OP.VR@LISSON/London

By **Charles Moore**



Installation view: Julian Opie, *OP.VR@LISSON/London*, Lisson Gallery, 2021. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

According to artist Julian Opie (b. 1958), there's a complete shift in the way people understand imagery today. Often, Opie notices viewers reaching for their pockets in search of their phones, in hopes of documenting the art they observe. Yet, with work that incorporates virtual reality (VR), photographs can't be taken because the work isn't truly there. Those who are curious about the implications of this are invited to fasten their portable headsets and immerse themselves in Opie's unique take on VR. In a show titled *OP.VR@LISSON/London* currently open at Lisson Gallery in London, the renowned artist is showcasing both virtual reality and non-VR works in a groundbreaking multiroom experience, blending the body, architecture, and space in a manner that forces the viewer to focus on the story unfolding before them. In addition, Opie has also revisited older works—repurposing drawings, sculptures, and installations to mirror the VR he's expertly crafted.

ON VIEW

Lisson Gallery

Julian Opie:

OP.VR@LISSON/London

March 3–April 15, 2023

London



Installation view: Julian Opie, *OP.VR@LISSON/London*, Lisson Gallery, 2021. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

In the gallery space, different rooms take on different meanings. One room features several flat, painted wood and aluminum works that either hang flush to the wall or stand on pedestals, and which become animated installations of people walking when viewed through the VR headset: colorful yet featureless figures choreographed in passing as they move down the street. In another room, *Dance 2 step 2*. (2022) depicts animated bodies performing moves reminiscent of those one might find on TikTok, where people record themselves for public consumption, dancing in their homes or backyards. High-energy, simple dance moves like these, documented in repetition, have helped Opie bring the VR to life. The artist animated four or five seconds of the dance, working with models (among them his daughter, who is a professional dancer) to achieve a precise aesthetic, then created a loop and incorporated sound for an encompassing effect. The resulting animation, of a featureless, four-person dance troupe moving their bodies nearly in sync in front of a vibrant, solid background, suggests a troupe comprised of the *everyperson*. The artist uses traditional paintings—moving canvases in the VR experience—and LED screens to make the works come alive, while the looped dancers create a mesmerizing effect from which viewers can hardly look away.

The public moves through the back of the gallery into a large courtyard, which houses Opie's architectural works: a VR blend of old and new buildings. The artist crafted *Bastide 2* (2021) out of steel, five meters tall, and not unlike a children's climbing area—but also evocative of a drawing in space. The black lines that comprise the work recall French architecture of the Middle Ages, which Opie has reinterpreted as spatial sculpture. Then, in the gallery basement, viewers confront a series of works suggestive of landscape painting; again, they hang on the wall so they read as paintings but are made from aluminum, nylon, and lights. Angular shapes resemble road signs, and their light boxes amplify the punchy, simplified images that are akin to

business logos. The black, blue, green, and gray color selection illustrates the country road by which the work is inspired—a scene from rural France—leaving the viewer dwelling on the stark contrast between the personal and the corporate. Linger for a moment, and you might expect a BP or Shell station to appear.

The exhibition continues through a smaller courtyard that houses an entirely new project composed of three-dimensional sculptures called *Figures* (2022). While traditionally Opie has drawn the human form as a flat image, he takes a different approach here. Inspired by traditional Indonesian sculptures—those with a similar flat-drawn quality—Opie’s bodies are bent at the knees and elbows, honing in on their resilience and flexibility. During the COVID-19 lockdown, Opie observed people gathering in parks, folding themselves into compelling shapes in order to maintain distance from each other as they browsed their phones, read books, and engaged in conversation. He photographed his observations, documented additional models in his studio, and 3D-scanned the figures before bending them into 3D tubes. The works, Opie explains, are “a bit like a fancy bike rack and a bit like a people lying on the grass in an idyllic pastoral scene.” It is up to the viewer to decide.

While VR brought ample possibilities to the exhibition, the artist stood firm in his desire to avoid the extraordinary and instead create a new experience

without sweeping viewers into an entirely new dimension. In *OP.VR@LISSON/London*, Opie has still placed his sculptures on the floor, and installed paintings and installations on the walls. He kept the entry and exit signs on the gallery doors in view, and the ceiling spotlights intact. While Lisson is showing VR for the first time in its fifty-year history, both gallery and artist seem to be in agreement—the most effective way to experience art is to walk around a space.



Installation view: Julian Opie, *OP.VR@LISSON/London*, Lisson Gallery, 2021. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

*Wallpaper**
10 March 2023

Wallpaper*

Julian Opie on VR, shuffle dancing and obsessive art collecting

We interview artist Julian Opie on life, work and his new playground of VR at Lisson gallery, and peek behind the scenes of his London studio

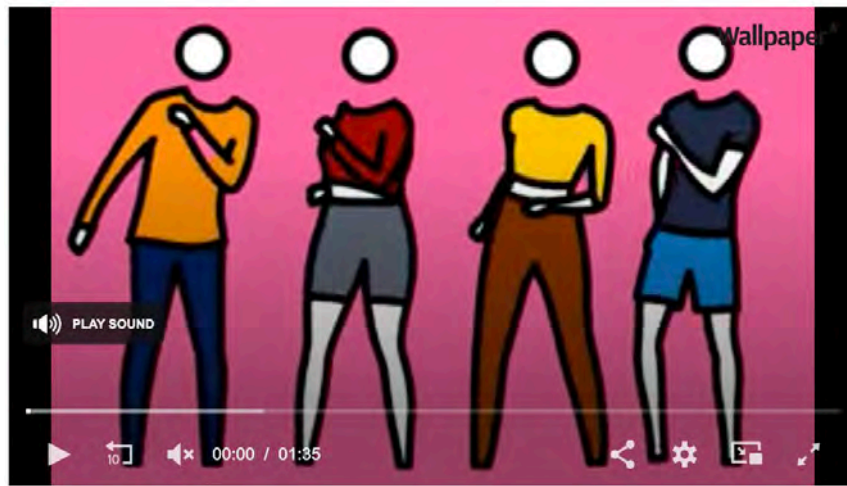


Portrait of Julian Opie wearing VR glasses, 2023
(Image credit: © Julian Opie; Courtesy Lisson Gallery)

Julian Opie's art is a language of its own. Its vocabulary is the essence of everyday human experiences; its grammar is sensation.

The acclaimed British artist's name is synonymous with Pop Art—contoured, heavily-lined figures in motion, landscapes and architecture. Boiled down to states of pure reduction, they appeal to our most fundamental capacity for perception and recognition.

Ever the embracer of technological innovation, Opie has recently been immersed in the world of virtual reality. In 'Julian Opie: OP.VR@LISSON/London', until 15 April 2023, the artist has conceived a playground of colour and movement via an ambitious new VR work and a dynamic series of animated sequences based on a high-energy, TikTok-viral dance sequence.



Julian Opie, Dance 1, (2022), Animated poster, © Julian Opie; Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Wallpaper*: Where are you right now?

Julian Opie: I'm sitting on the stairs at Lisson Gallery, London, installing a new exhibition. Many of the artworks are Wi-Fi-connected so my team and I can work on them remotely. I'm also installing a show in Changsha, China, this week, which has been done remotely. To work like this and plan complicated installations, I developed a VR system to allow me to visualise works in new spaces.

W*: Describe your studio

JO: It's a building in Shoreditch that I bought back in the 1980s when it seemed a very remote and run-down area. Now it's super lively and I'm usually the oldest person around.

I set up a 9m by 5m empty cardboard space in my studio to allow me to look at works in VR and move freely around them with goggles. I found myself enjoying just being in this alternative world and set about making an exhibition that would share this experience. The cardboard room takes up the top floor of my studio – where I work alone with a computer, a double-screen display and a digital drawing pad. The floor below has an office and a room for the technical digital team. I hang other artists' work on these two floors and battle the tide of samples and tests that covers most surfaces. The ground floor is usually full of crates and works coming in from various factories and workshops. I hang my own works here to test, judge and photograph. The basement has a workshop with a large digital printing machine.

The whole building feels like home and when I arrive on my bike each morning an hour or so before anyone else I feel a sense of calm. I have been there for so long that the space and my work seem locked together.



Julian Opie's studio in Shoreditch, London
(Image credit: © Julian Opie, Courtesy Lisson Gallery)

W*: What was the first piece of art you remember seeing, and how did it make you feel?

JO: My mother, who always painted for pleasure, had wanted to go to art school but her father felt it inappropriate for a girl, so she studied singing. But her brother went to art school and opened Cranks health food restaurant on Carnaby Street in the 1960s. Cranks was very involved in ceramics and classical music and I grew up surrounded by [20th-century] English art prints on the wall by Julian Trevelyan, Paul Nash, Kit Wood and Graham Sutherland. My father always said he couldn't draw a straight line but he was keen on furniture and had Charles Eames and Robin Day chairs in his college rooms where he taught economics.

W*: Where and when are you most productive?

JO: I'm productive in my studio but the ideas begin outside. I'm particularly aware of the world when I'm passing through it. On foot or bike, plane or car, train or boat. Perhaps the mundanity of travel opens my eyes and the movement through and around objects and places brings them to life for me. I gather images, materials and methods of fabrication in museums and temples, airports and motorways. The way the world is put together and the languages that are used become my palettes.

W*: What's the most important object you own?

JO: I like my Orbea electric bike and my now-vintage Peugeot 505 estate, and I always carry my father's penknife in my pocket. I'm not that attached to objects, but I'm obsessed with owning art by other people. I have been buying and swapping art for years now and have many more things than I have walls to hang them on. Owning art gives me ideas and a justification for my own work. It makes me feel connected to the world and history and people. If I feel challenged by other art, at least I can buy it. If you can't beat them, collect them.



Installation view: Julian Opie, 'OP.VR@LISSON/London'
(Image credit: © Julian Opie; Courtesy Lisson Gallery)

W*: What's the last thing you read, watched, or listened to?

JO: *A Short History of China* (which is not short at all). I'm working a lot in China and wanted to know more about the place. My education seemed to assume that history only happened in the West so I'm pretty ignorant. I have been looking a lot at tribal art from Borneo, Sulawesi and Vietnam, the Austronesian cultures which originated in China. My wife Aniela and I just finished the *Happy Valley* police thriller: a gritty story and great acting. We also watched all of *Doc Martin*, which my daughter appears in.

Music-wise, I'm mostly listening to dance music, such as Armin van Buuren and Paul van Dyk. I like the upbeat energy and emotional longing in techno music. I also just received Max Richter's album, *Sleep* – I love his music and we once worked together for a ballet by Wayne McGregor. I swapped an album cover image for a looped piece of his music that I used in an artwork. Hania Rani and Nils Frahm are also great in a similar ambient contemporary classical vein.

W*: How do you switch off? Do you switch off?

JO: Headphones and sci-fi books at home. Moped rides in the French countryside and walks along the coastal path in Cornwall and on Hampstead Heath.



Installation view: Julian Opie, 'OP.VR@LISSON/London'
(Image credit: © Julian Opie; Courtesy Lisson Gallery)

W*: Do you collect anything?

JO: I avidly collect art. It started with Japanese prints, then moved back in time to English and French Old Master portraits and then Roman and Greek art and Egyptian art. Then sideways to Austronesian art, wooden statues and bead work and, more recently, contemporary art. When I see something that makes sense to me, I can't resist. It's mostly images of people. I'm not sure why. I justify the expense by believing that it helps me make my work.

W*: What's your most memorable career moment to date?

JO: I go from waves of great excitement and belief in what I'm doing to a sense of rejection and a desire to move on and away. This applies to the artworks I produce and the exhibitions I make. I tend to think the next work and the next exhibition will be the best and will blow people away. Generally, I then feel it wasn't so great but the next one will be. I was lucky enough to have a one-person show at the Hayward Gallery in my mid-thirties just when I had my first child, Elena. The show seemed to define what I had done and where I was going. I have been rethinking and replaying those themes ever since. Maybe that was the moment I felt I had a solid base from which to work.



Hand-carved wooden mourning figures. Jorai people. Late 19th to early 20th century
(Image credit: © Julian Opie, Courtesy Lisson Gallery)



Tau Tau figures. Toraja people, Sulawesi. Mid-19th to mid-20th century, inside Julian Opie's London studio

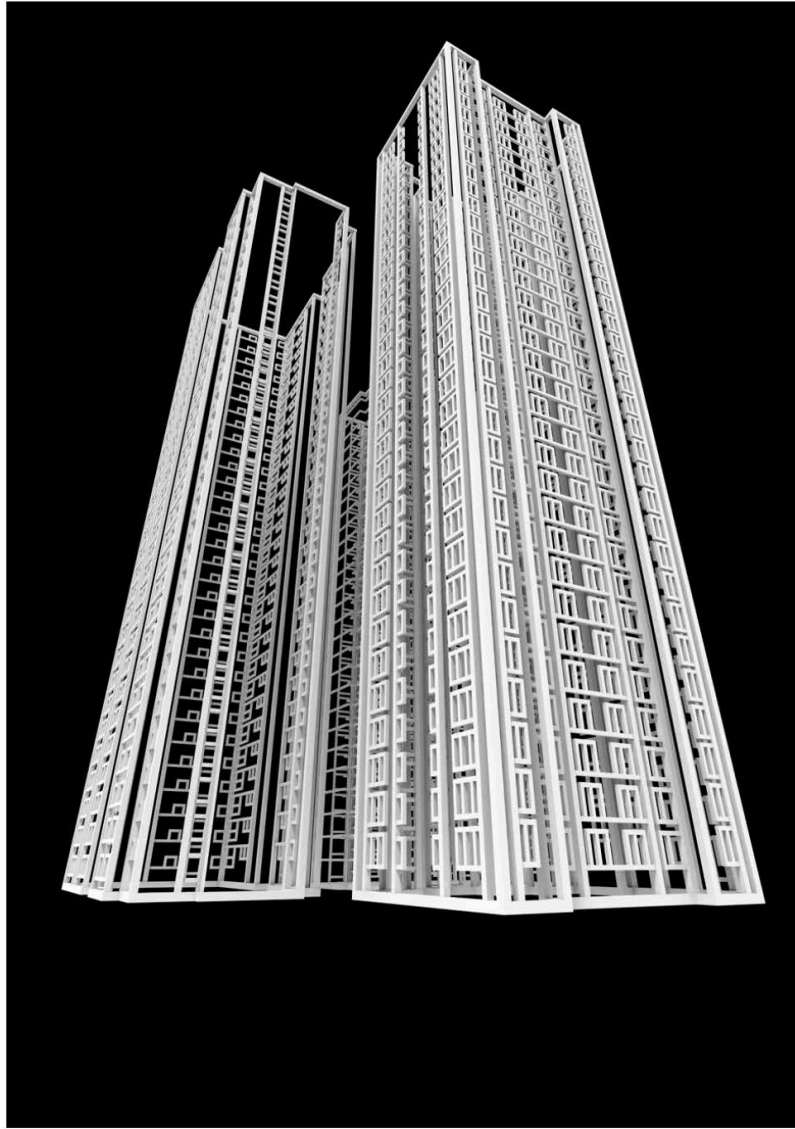
(Image credit: © Julian Opie, Courtesy Lisson Gallery)

W*: If you weren't an artist, what would you have been?

JO: An anthropologist maybe. From an early age, I have read a lot about early humans and I had a place to study anthropology at university – or a primary school teacher like my mother perhaps. I'm better with little kids than adults really but I'm not sure I have the energy for teaching. My favourite job I ever had (apart from making art) was driving a tractor collecting rubbish on a kibbutz in the Golan Heights.

W*: You've just debuted a new VR work at Lisson gallery. Why VR, and where will you transport viewers?

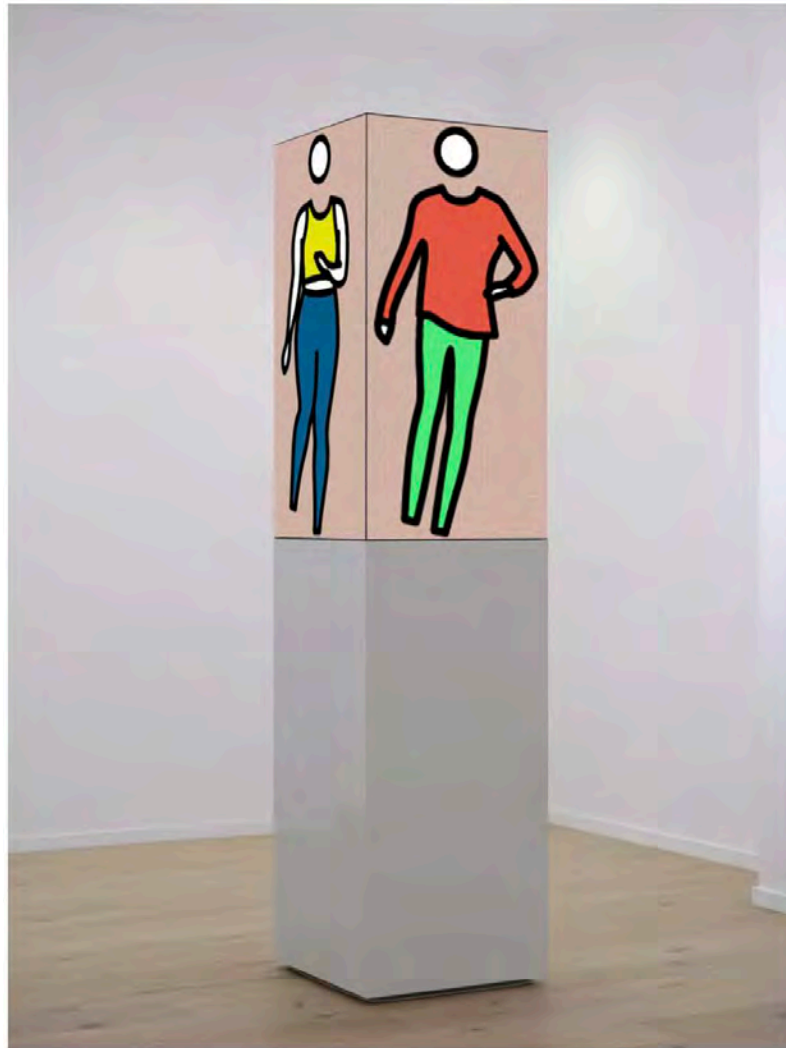
JO: The whole show is about looking, navigation and ways of reading the world. Some of the show is in VR, some [works] are in the gallery spaces and some are outside. Additionally, we have also presented work at Bond Street Tube station and created a sound and image invitation card. TVR gaming goggles use technology to allow one to wander around a space and see drawn objects and images as if they were in the space with you. It's a crude and simplified version of what we all do all day – exist as reflections of our plotted world sensing ourselves against what we perceive via sound and touch and vision. Although the goggles are a bit like snorkelling, your brain soon gives up and accepts this new reality. It allows me to make an exhibition that physics and practical limitations would not normally allow, and literally enter an imagined world. From Masaccio to Miyazaki (Studio Ghibli), this has been the dream of many artists.



Julian Opie, 'OP.VR' detail
(Image credit: © Julian Opie; Courtesy Lisson Gallery)

W*: What role does social media play in your work?

JO: I don't know anything about social media except what I see over my kids' shoulders. But like everyone, I use the internet to find things and I came across a homemade high-energy dance called 'shuffle dancing' that accompanies 2010s dance music. When I see something that I can use I feel a snap of recognition. I have drawn people walking for decades and was hungry for an alternative human movement that was easily recognisable and sufficiently short and repetitive to animate in an endless loop. With my second daughter, Imogen, an actor and dancer, we isolated five simple but fluid movements from the videos that could be danced and repeated. She taught three other dancers the moves and I filmed them at 50 frames per second to 100bpm dance music, then drew them in colours taken from nylon ski wear I photographed on a ski trip with my son, Paul. The project turned into five dances in a series of multiple films and paintings with tracks composed by a young musician, Archie Wingate.



Installation view: 'Julian Opie, OP.VR@LISSON/London'
(Image credit: © Julian Opie, Courtesy Lisson Gallery)

W*: What do you love most about exhibiting art in public spaces?

JO: I love the idea of being out in the real world. Museums and galleries are fantastic places to show and see art but it's a captive audience and a step away from the rest of the world. A public commission is a chance to be out amongst everything else, to reflect and merge into the real world where the works originated. I have a moving sculpture on Carnaby Street that depicts a walking shopper in the electronic language of traffic signals and shop signs. I wanted to bend the surrounding languages into my own drawing. In Melbourne I have 30 animated Australian birds pecking and walking along a long traffic island as if the fabric of the road merged with the wildlife. People who pass don't know what it is and only interact if they are interested. The work is not bracketed by an institution, it's just there amongst the clutter of the street. I'm aware that public art can be pretty annoying, like someone else's loud radio on the beach, but I try to ingratiate and amuse like a street juggler and disguise what I do in the pre-existing language of the environment.



Installation view: Julian Opie, 'OP.VR@LISSON/London'
(Image credit: © Julian Opie, Courtesy Lisson Gallery)

W*: What are you working on at the moment, and how's it going?

JO: It's going well thanks. At some point, I might like to slow down but not until I have to. I'm pretty busy this spring with the London show, two exhibitions in China, one in South Korea and another coming up in Rome. Exhibiting is very much a part of making the work for me – that's where I really get to see them and feel they exist. I photographed and drew 20 people in Busan for the South Korean show and I'm working on a live work that will use real people on walking machines to make living paintings. It sounds ridiculous, but it might work. I'd also like to draw some toddlers walking to make some very small sculptures based on historical Indonesian sculptures. After that, it's a bit of a blank. VR 2?

W*: What piece of advice would you give to the next generation?

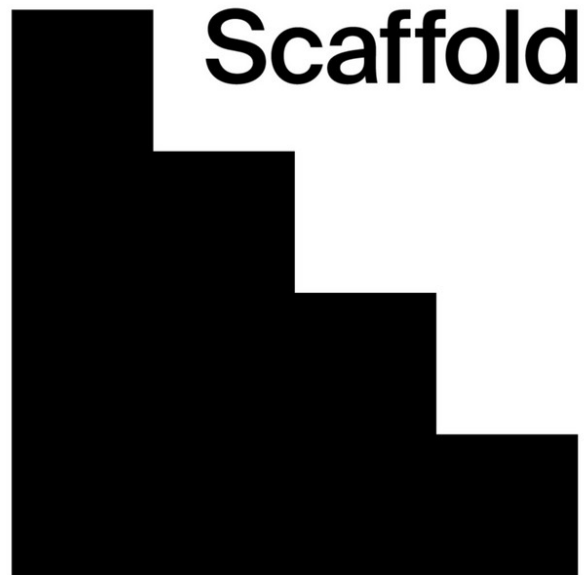
JO: I'm 64. The next generation is already nearing retirement. I'm not big on advice. I just get on with what I enjoy and throw my energy into whatever is on offer.

Julian Opie: 'OP.VR@LISSON/London', until 15 April 2023. lissongallery.com

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LISSON GALLERY

Scaffold Podcast
16 March 2023



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Julian Opie				

3/16/2023

79: Julian Opie

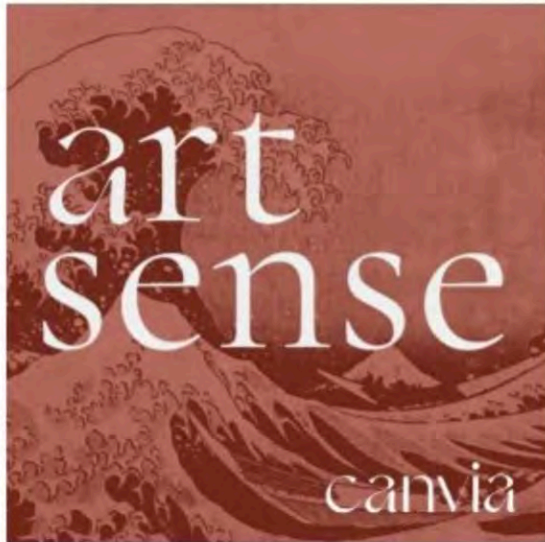
Julian Opie is an artist based in London.

We create models to deal with the world and to function in the world. It's how we perceive the world and our own life and existence, drawing from the world a language that can then be shared and used to talk about existence – JO

Scaffold is an [Architecture Foundation](#) production, hosted by Matthew Blunderfield

LISSON GALLERY

Art Sense Podcast
7 March 2023



Art Sense **Ep. 89:** **Artist Julian** **Opie**

A conversation with artist Julian Opie. Opie is an artist known for distilling the world around us into its simplest forms, reducing people, animals and architecture into shapes and lines that capture their essence instead of their details. In the conversation, we discuss his inspirations, his process and his new show at Lisson Gallery in London that includes his continued experimentation with virtual reality.

<https://www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/julian-opie-op-vr-hem-london>

<https://www.julianopie.com/>

LISSON GALLERY

The Wick
3 March 2023

THE WICK

The Wick List

Viewing Julian Opie: OP.VR@LISSON/London



Above: Installation view: Julian Opie, OP.VR@LISSON/London ©Julian Opie, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Julian Opie: OP.VR@LISSON/London
Lisson Gallery

3 March – 15 April 2023
www.lissongallery.com/exhibitions/julian-opie-op-vr-hem-london

Head to Lisson Gallery's Bell Street spaces and bear witness to an ambitious new series of works by artist Julian Opie, including the UK premiere of a groundbreaking new VR experience. Known for his distinctive distilling of imagery from everyday life into pared-back symbols – people, animals or buildings – Opie has been incorporating movement and light into art since the 1980s. "Everything you see is a trick of the light", says Opie. "This exhibition presents an expansion of Opie's practice, with the artist delving in to the different ways images are received in the world. Using portable headsets, visitors are invited to journey through a new dimension, encompassing multiple realms spanning from intimate interactions to multi-layered experiences. OP.VR@LISSON/London will be the first time Lisson presents a VR experience in its 50 year history – not one to be missed!

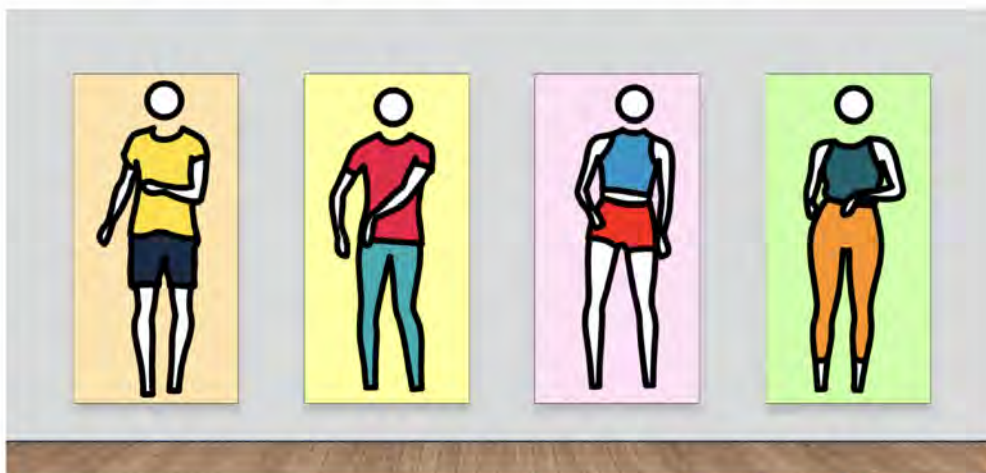
Art Plugged
March 2023

ART PLUGGED™



Hold onto your hats, folks, because we're sprinting full steam ahead into 2023 and guess what's right around the corner? That's right, Spring! So shed those winter layers and get ready to hop, skip, and jump through London's hottest galleries. We've got **five must-see exhibitions** for you this **March**, featuring everything from VR experiences to jaw-dropping sculptures and classic paint-on-canvas. So whether you're a high-brow art connoisseur or just looking for a bit of aesthetic inspiration, we've got you covered. So here are our **five exhibitions in London to see in March 2023**; it's time to get cultured!

Julian Opie: OP.VR@LISSON/London



Julian Opie introduces an ambitious new series of works across Lisson Gallery's Bell Street spaces this March. The exhibition begins with the UK premiere of a ground-breaking new virtual reality experience: the first time **Lisson Gallery** has presented a VR work in its 50+ year history. Using portable headsets, visitors are invited to journey through a new dimension, encompassing multiple realms spanning from intimate interactions to multi-layered experiences.

The presentation also includes the reveal of a new fast-paced dance sequence, life-size and large-scale portraits, as well as landscapes and architectural works, both indoors and out.

LISSON GALLERY

Bablands
March 2023



FOR TINY LONDONERS & THEIR ADULTS

Bablands / February 27, 2023 / Monthly Round-Up

20 awesome things to do with kids in London: March 2023



1. British Museum is running two Little Feet sessions for preschoolers this month. Dance underneath the colourful disco lights at *Play with Colour on the 2nd*, then join the LF teddies in a giant game of snakes and ladders in *Play Games on the 24th*. *Free*.
2. To celebrate World Book Day, London Eye is offering 150 free rides *every day between the 2nd and 5th* for children who turn up in costume. London Eye will also be donating £1 per adult ticket sold to World Book Day. *Free with the purchase of an adult ticket*.
3. Julian Opie: *OPVR@LISSON/London* opens at Lisson Gallery *from the 3rd*. The exhibition begins with a ground-breaking new virtual-reality experience where visitors are invited to journey through a new dimension, encompassing multiple realms. *Free*.

4. Museum of London Docklands is running a **Speak Cockney Day on the 3rd**. Kids of all ages are invited to drop in to learn about Cockney life, meet London's Pearly Kings and Queens, improve their Cockney rhyming slang and take part in 'The Cockney Apprentice'. *Free.*
5. **Assemble Play** will be popping up in the Garden of St Paul's Church in Covent Garden **every Sunday this month, beginning on the 5th**. Expect a relaxed environment where children are free to play with a huge selection of loose parts as they see fit. *Free.*
6. Philo is hosting its **Play Space & Supper Club every Monday afternoon throughout March, beginning on the 6th**. This amazing free event for local SE6 families with under 8s (older siblings welcome) will include free play, story time and dinner at the supper club. *Free.*
7. **We Touch, We Play, We Dance** is on at The Albany **on the 7th**. Conceived for 0-3s, this warm-hearted and playful show is filled with surprises and joy, offering children and their adults the chance to listen and watch, or to let loose and join in. *Paid.*
8. Anthony Caro: **The Inspiration of Architecture** opens at Pitzhanger Manor **from the 9th**. The earliest work on display, the Child's Tower Room, features spiral steps and hidden chambers that children will be invited to explore within the exhibition. *Paid.*
9. **Families Create** returns to Zabłudowicz Collection **on the 11th**. The workshop will be led by brilliant artist-educator Rosie Gibbens and inspired by the world of Shanghai-based multi-media artist LuYang, whose exhibition **LuYang NetiNeti** will be in its final weekend. *Free.*
10. The V&A is running two great kids' events this month. **On the 11th**, join prop maker Isobel Irwin and **build puppets** from all sorts of weird and wonderful materials; then **on the 15th**, join artist Matt Shaw for a **multisensory session** for 0-3 year olds. *Paid.*
11. Southbank Centre is hosting two **WOW Under-10s Feminist Corner for Girls** workshops this month – one for 6-7s **on the 11th** and one for 8-10s **on the 12th**. Attendees will be invited to debate a series of questions around feminism and gender equality. *Paid.*
12. **Creative Kids: William Morris' Birthday Party** is on at the Morris Gallery **on the 16th**. Under-5s and their adults are invited to use decoupage patterns and party animals to decorate party plates, before celebrating with a tea party, plus songs and games. *Free.*
13. Head to **The Beams from the 17th** for Thin Air, an immersive art exhibition bringing together work by seven artists and collectives. The exhibition will explore the boundaries between art and technology, combining light, atmospherics, sound and experimental new media. *Paid.*
14. RIBA's **Clore Learning Space** will be the setting for **RIBA Baby: Bricks and Bubbles on the 21st**. Designed to embolden babies and toddlers through play and exploration, this drop-in session will feature blocks, bubbles and a host of other props. *Free.*
15. **Peter Rabbit's Easter Adventure** opens in Covent Garden **from the 21st**. Through a magical mix of live performance and puppetry, the world of Beatrix Potter will come alive as you embark on a mission to rescue Jemima Puddle-Duck from the clutches of Mr. McGregor. *Paid.*
16. **Mosaic Rooms' Sensing our Way Launch Party** takes place **on the 25th**. Join artist-educator Sarah Marsh to launch this new sensory toolkit. Expect sensory-led play and creative activities, designed with children and suitable for all. *Free.*
17. October Gallery is hosting a **Family Day in on the 25th**. Children of all ages are invited to draw inspiration from the work of Juhkee Kwon, making paper sculptures and creating their own paper characters to journey through the exhibition with them. *Free.*
18. The **BBC Earth Experience opens in Earl's Court on the 30th**. Experience an unforgettable immersive journey through the natural world and explore the diversity of our seven unique continents on the most epic scale, with bespoke narration from David Attenborough. *Paid.*
19. Wellcome Collection's major new exhibition, **Milk, opens on the 30th**. Featuring over 100 items, including historical objects, artworks and new commissions, this will be the first museum survey to consider the complexity of this everyday substance. *Free.*
20. **Titanosaur: Life as the Biggest Dinosaur** opens at NHM **from the 31st**. In this interactive exhibition, families will be invited to size themselves up against the Patagotitan Mayorum's huge thigh bone, stare into its gigantic sauropod skull and even smell its poo. *Paid.*

Image: Beyond the Streets, Saatchi Gallery

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LISSON GALLERY

Martin Cid Magazine

January 2023

MARTIN CID®
MAGAZINE



Julian Opie, OPVR/01., 2022, Virtual reality installation © Julian Opie,
Courtesy Lisson Gallery

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ART / EVENTS

JULIAN OPIE: OP.VR@LISSON. LISSON GALLERY LONDON

3 March – 8 April 2023 27 Bell Street, London



by Art Martin Cid Magazine · January 18, 2023

Julian Opie introduces an ambitious new series of works across Lisson Gallery's Bell Street spaces this March. The exhibition begins with the UK premiere of a groundbreaking new virtual reality experience: the first time Lisson Gallery has presented a VR work in its 50+ year history. Using portable headsets, visitors are invited to journey through a new dimension, encompassing multiple realms spanning from intimate interactions to multi-layered experiences. The presentation also includes the reveal of a new fast-paced dance sequence, life-size and large-scale portraits, as well as landscapes and architectural works, both indoors and out.

Opie is known for his distinctive distilling of imagery from everyday life into pared-back symbols, be it of people, animals or buildings, focusing on depicting our experiences, observations and sensations, remembered and then recreated. While there are familiar motifs and materials, in this exhibition we see a recent expansion of Opie's practice, with the artist delving into a different way in which images are received in the world – via social media platforms. Since Opie began introducing movement into art in the 1980s, new innovations and technology have revolutionised the possibilities of doing so, developing from early computer monitors to wall-based flat screens, and onto LED public signage. Recently, Opie has expanded into capturing movement in a faster, shorter-form tempo, discovering a high-energy dance popular on TikTok and YouTube, seen as both a mark of celebration as well as an antidote to the quiet periods of lockdown. Collaborating with his daughter, a professional dancer, Opie gathered a group of performers to replicate the sequence, and commissioned a series of dance tracks to accompany it. This series can be seen as both two-dimensional vinyls and LEDs, with imprints of larger-than-life figures frozen in time on the gallery walls, as well as through four-sided computer animations.

Alongside this is a series of landscape paintings, captured by the artist initially while driving through rural France. Depicting scenic panoramas with the vibrant colours of a European summer, these images merge the sensation of being both in motion and static, embracing the evolving view of nature from the windscreen of a car, with the processed features of stop junctions, such as highway service stations.

Opie also utilises both of Lisson Gallery's outdoor courtyards. The centre courtyard houses four stainless steel tubular sculptures, inspired by observations of people in London parks during lockdown. Featuring figures lounging on the grass, reading or looking at their phones, these portraits represent not just the wide variety of ways in which we configure our body naturally, but also how the body can itself interact with space and gravity while populating and energising a landscape. In these works, the precise pose is formed by bending the metal, an idea influenced by the art of the Jorai, Toraja and Dayak (Austronesian) people, who migrated from mainland China through Taiwan and out into the Pacific area c.5,000 years ago, in particular the sculptures found in Sulawesi, Vietnam and Borneo. The carved wooden statues of this period are often portrayed bent or crouched, taking imagery that was largely flat and extending into the three-dimensional. The process, using round tubes such as those used for hand rails and bicycle stands, combines the compositions of the historic Austronesian statues with everyday urban objects.

The further courtyard houses a new architectural installation, inviting visitors to walk through the labyrinth of drawn structures based on French medieval buildings.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

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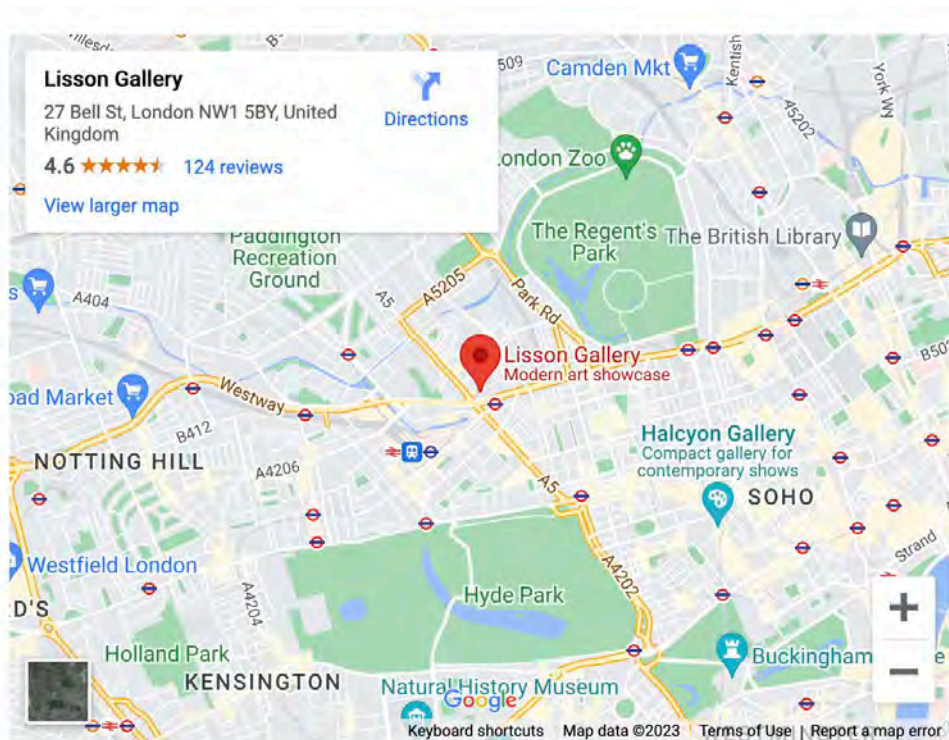
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LISSON GALLERY

27 Bell St, London NW1 5BY, United Kingdom



Julian Opie: OP.VR@LISSON. Lisson Gallery London

Event Title: Julian Opie: OP.VR@LISSON

Event Description: Julian Opie introduces an ambitious new series of works across Lisson Gallery's Bell Street spaces this March. The exhibition begins with the UK premiere of a ground-breaking new virtual reality experience: the first time Lisson Gallery has presented a VR work in its 50+ year history.

Start date: March 3, 2023

End date: April 8, 2023

Location name: Lisson Gallery

Address: 27 Bell St, London NW1 5BY, United Kingdom

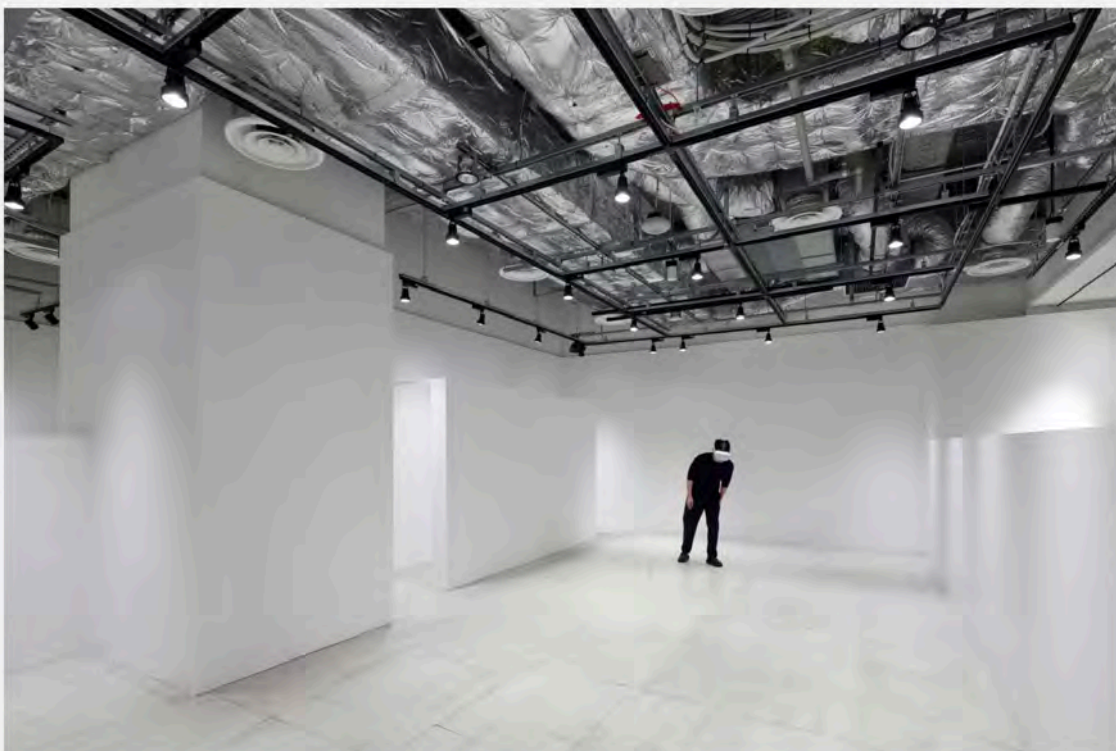


January 2023

JULIAN OPIE: OP.VR@LISSON

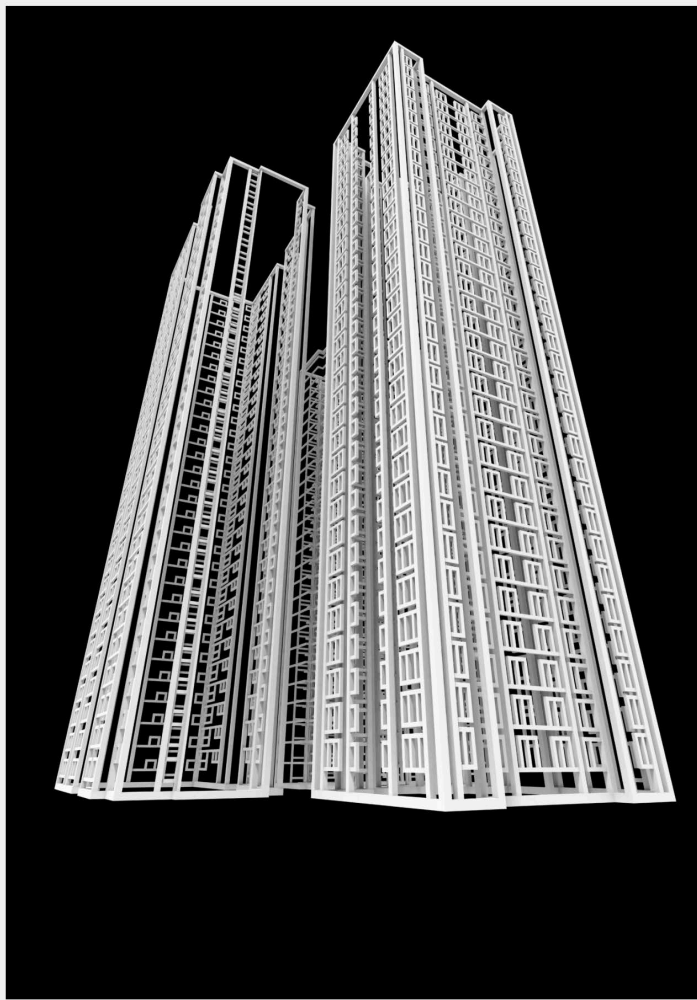
By Mark Westall • 27 February 2023

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Julian Opie OP.VR/01., 2022 Virtual reality installation, view at PARCO Museum Tokyo Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Julian Opie introduces an ambitious new series of works across Lisson Gallery's Bell Street spaces this March. The exhibition begins with the UK premiere of a ground-breaking new virtual reality experience: the first time Lisson Gallery has presented a VR work in its 50+ year history.



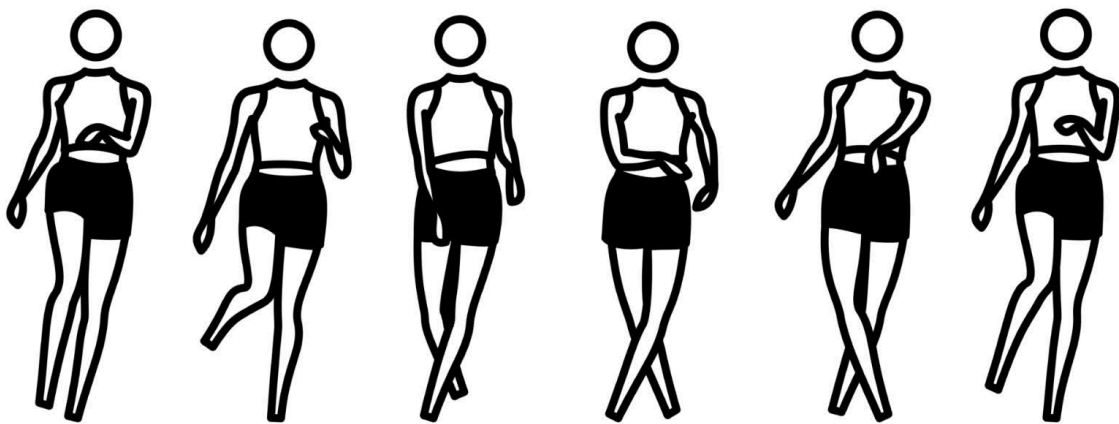
Julian Opie COVID/04 2020 Virtual reality installation Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Using portable headsets, visitors are invited to journey through a new dimension, encompassing multiple realms spanning from intimate interactions to multi-layered experiences. The presentation also includes the reveal of a new fast-paced dance sequence, life-size and large-scale portraits, as well as landscapes and architectural works, both indoors and out.



Julian Opie Dance 2 step 2, 2022 Vinyl on aluminium stretcher 230 x 381 x 3.5 cm 90 1/2 x 150 x 1 3/8 in © Julian Opie, Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Opie is known for his distinctive distilling of imagery from everyday life into pared-back symbols, be it of people, animals or buildings, focusing on depicting our experiences, observations and sensations, remembered and then recreated. While there are familiar motifs and materials, in this exhibition we see a recent expansion of Opie's practice, with the artist delving into a different way in which images are received in the world – via social media platforms. Since Opie began introducing movement into art in the 1980s, new innovations and technology have revolutionised the possibilities of doing so, developing from early computer monitors to wall-based flat screens, and onto LED public signage.



Julian Opie Figure 1 dance 4., 2022 Vinyl on wall Dimensions variable Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Recently, Opie has expanded into capturing movement in a faster, shorter-form tempo, discovering a high-energy dance popular on TikTok and YouTube, seen as both a mark of celebration as well as an antidote to the quiet periods of lockdown. Collaborating with his daughter, a professional dancer, Opie gathered a group of performers to replicate the sequence, and commissioned a series of dance tracks to accompany it. This series can be seen as both two-dimensional vinyls and LEDs, with imprints of larger-than-life figures frozen in time on the gallery walls, as well as through four-sided computer animations.



Julian Opie Landscape 22, 2022 Aluminium, nylon and lights 150 x 196 x 9 cm OPIE - 2022 - 5007/9973 Medium Courtesy Lisson Gallery

Alongside this is a series of landscape paintings, captured by the artist initially while driving through rural France. Depicting scenic panoramas with the vibrant colours of a European summer, these images merge the sensation of being both in motion and static, embracing the evolving view of nature from the windscreen of a car, with the processed features of stop junctions, such as highway service stations.

Opie also utilises both of Lisson Gallery's outdoor courtyards. The centre courtyard houses four stainless steel tubular sculptures, inspired by observations of people in London parks during lockdown. Featuring figures lounging on the grass, reading or looking at their phones, these portraits represent not just the wide variety of ways in which we configure our body naturally, but also how the body can itself interact with space and gravity while populating and energising a landscape.



Julian Opie Figure 2, position 4, 2022 Polished stainless steel 63 x 59 x 166 cm (h x w x l) OPIE - 2022 - 4807/9404 Unique Courtesy Lisson Gallery

In these works, the precise pose is formed by bending the metal, an idea influenced by the art of the Jorai, Toraja and Dayak (Austronesian) people, who migrated from mainland China through Taiwan and out into the Pacific area c.5,000 years ago, in particular the sculptures found in Sulawesi, Vietnam and Borneo. The carved wooden statues of this period are often portrayed bent or crouched, taking imagery that was largely flat and extending into the three-dimensional. The process, using round tubes such as those used for handrails and bicycle stands, combines the compositions of the historic Austronesian statues with everyday urban objects.

The further courtyard houses a new architectural installation, inviting visitors to walk through the labyrinth of drawn structures based on French medieval buildings.

Julian Opie, OP.VR@LISSON, 3rd March – 8th April 2023, Lisson Gallery, 27 Bell Street, London
Opening: 2nd March, 6 – 8pm

About the artist

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The Guardian
30 April 2021

The Guardian

Hockney beams into Piccadilly and Scots steal the limelight - the week in art

London gets high on Opie, Miró visits the countryside and legendary nightclubs fling open their virtual doors - all in your weekly dispatch



▲ Billy Connolly by John Byrne, part of the new show at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Photograph: © John Byrne. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2018.

Exhibition of the week

Julian Opie

This stylish and scientific student of perception playfully reveals how simply art can suggest the real.

● Lisson Gallery, London, 4 May to 12 June.



Jonathan Jones

Fri 30 Apr 2021 15.32 BST

LISSON GALLERY

200% Magazine
May 2021

200% THE LENGTHS TO WHICH ARTISTS GO



ART JULIAN OPIE INTERVIEW

In his distinct minimalist style, Julian Opie, created a simplified version of a chaotic cosmopolitan city. 200% discussed with the English artist how he created – in the centre of London – a city within a city.

200%: It is very clever how you created a cosmopolitan city in a gallery space. Could you share how the idea of the show came about?

Julian Opie: Last year Lisson Gallery rented this space in Cork Street. When I was starting out, Cork Street was the centre of the London art world. Most of the important galleries were located here or nearby. You find yourself down here at an opening regularly once a week, but in the last ten years the galleries all moved away. Some of them are back now which is exciting.

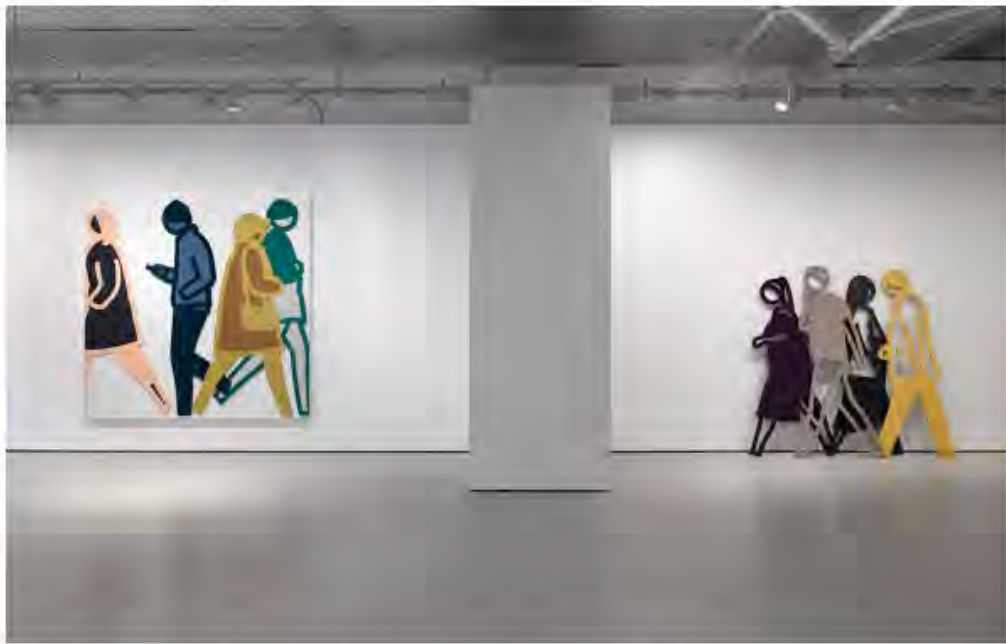
The gallery asked me what I thought about doing a show here. Over the last 30 years, I've must have done over ten shows with Lisson Gallery at their two Bell Street spaces. It is a great opportunity to do a show in Lisson's new space in London.



200%: Is it a good gallery space to work with?

JO: I really like it. It's a simple box space. You can see the entire space from the street which can be difficult for an artist because the audience might feel that they have seen the show before they even step in the gallery. There are no surprises left. I addressed that by using the front windows of the gallery as another wall. I've covered it with a depiction of urban buildings. From the street you get a glimpse of what's inside.

When you step into the gallery, the automatic doors slide open and the buildings move apart, in a filmic way. The gallery space itself is not small or big, it's like a medium size shop. What is quite unusual for me is that the four life-size group portraits and a set of skyscrapers inside the gallery are exhibited against the walls which makes me a little bit nervous. I feel that I'm first and foremost a sculptor and I usually like bits of sculpture hanging on the wall.



200%: What made you interested to depict the interconnectivity of the urban environment with commuters criss-crossing through the streets in a lockdown period when people are asked to work from home?

JO: I wouldn't say I have made a show in response to lockdown. The work for the show was conceived two years back, before lockdown. The process of drawing, planning, fabricating, re-fabricating takes about two years. Some of these works, though, like the figures, have been drawn since lockdown began. For me, art is not the most sensible language in which to comment on immediate current affairs as they move very fast. I guess I look at something that you might call the bigger picture. I don't tend to draw things that are not yet the norm.

200%: You don't comment on immediate current affairs because the work will date?

JO: Inevitably it will. If I would have drawn everybody with a face mask a few years from now that is going to look very specific. It would be difficult to look at anything else in the work – it's going to be all about the fact that people are wearing those masks. Also, face masks are too small for me. At the moment the way I'm drawing, I don't draw peoples' feet and fingers because they are too small – a face mask is also too small to fit on my level of abstraction.



200%: Which buildings in London did you draw for the show?

JO: Actually, they are Norwegian. I was working on an upcoming show in Norway and I wanted to draw buildings that no one would definitely go and see. There are some nice buildings in Oslo and beautiful buildings around Norway, but I wasn't interested in them. I wanted to draw the most unappealing and unspecific buildings I could think of. Due to lockdown I couldn't travel to Norway so I drew the buildings from Google Earth. Normally I avoid doing that because I feel there is some value in actually seeing and walking around the building and photographing it from the ground, but with Google Earth you can actually see the buildings from the air which makes it easier to draw. During the first lockdown, I spent a lot of the time in the studio circling above Oslo from Google Earth and these Norwegian buildings are actually here in the show. It seems a bit odd, but these suburban apartment buildings are so generic that I would challenge anybody to locate where they are. These 1960s and 1970s modernist post-war tower blocks are so ubiquitous. You'll see them in suburbs all across Europe.

200%: I'm a big fan of your book 'Portraits' (2003) featuring Mark, the writer on the cover, and the portraits of each member of the Britpop band, Blur, for their Best of album cover. What makes a good successful portrait for you?

JO: What I was interested in during that period was the notion of the history of portraiture and looking at someone who's looking back at you. What it feels

like to go into the museum and view portraits and know that those people were looked at by the artist and they are looking back at the artist, and now you're looking at these people and they are looking back at you. There is a triangular dynamic going on which is very powerful. When I started drawing portraits in the 1990s I looked at 17th and 18th century English and French portraiture, Kitagawa Utamaro's Japanese woodblock prints and also Hergé's Tin Tin and Japanese Manga. I was trying to figure out if I could re-engage in a new way with portraiture just like artists such as Chuck Close and Thomas Ruff have done.

200%: When I look at the portraits I'm fascinated by how you managed to capture someone's character or personality with a minimal amount of lines.

JO: I don't want to go beyond what is needed. If you start to over-embellish, you're often lost. People talk about minimalism or paring things down, but I tend to see it as building things up. My inspirations for drawing people have been lavatory signs, road signs and public signs. In that case humans are depicted pretty much as stick figures with a circle as a head and I thought that was an interesting place to start. Almost like a pictogram of a person. Rather than minimising the information, I look at what I can add to that basic circle.

In the 1990s, I started with a couple of circles, the eyes, the lines of the mouth. In 'Portraits' I was trying to find out what I could add. Add a bit of highlights in the hair, a bit of shine in the eyes, some colours in the clothes, some patterns on the shirts. I'm not sure that any of that added to the quality of the portrait, but it was an interesting experiment to see what I could add and what I could take away.

Currently, I don't do these type of portraits anymore that you will find in the book. The people that feature in my shows now are captured in digital photography and then drawn on the computer, and they don't know that they're being drawn. They are not portraits, they are heads, they are passers-by captured in public spaces, mostly seen in profile. These are not portraits, they are an image of human beings.



You mentioned Thomas Ruff who studied at the Düsseldorf Art Academy. He was taught by the artists Bernd and Hilla Becher who are known for their monumental black and white photographs of German industrial architecture. Inspired by this objective form of documentation, Ruff made a series of large-scale passports portraits of his friends and colleagues. He portrayed them with blank expressions. In 'Portraits' you depicted the people without any facial expressions as well. Is that because you wanted to create a certain ambiguity?

JO: When you first start drawing peoples' faces you tell them to hold still. The reason for that is because it takes quite a while to draw someone. If they are moving around it is difficult to draw them as you can't focus on their features properly. If you look at portraits in a museum on the whole, apart from the notable exception of Frans Hals, people are not laughing or in action. They are looking back at you and therefore you draw them as if they are an object. I think, though, Thomas Ruff's depiction of people is a little bit different. His choice of people, the camera angle and the framing [of the picture] is very specific.

With my portraits I didn't feel that I was following such a tight set of parameters. I have drawn people from the side, from a three quarter view and full frontal. I've made films of people smiling, blinking and nodding their heads for yes or no. I wanted to see what all of these things did. I think in retrospect, the still, straight gaze back at the viewer was the strongest of all of those positions for various reasons – technical and emotional. I wasn't trying to say something specific by having a lack of difference as in Ruff's portraits. My approach was "put anybody in front of me". You just have to hope that they haven't got curly hair!

200%: Why is that?

JO: Curly hair is a nightmare to draw. I have drawn people with curly hair – myself included – and it is just very hard to draw in a pared down, simple way as it doesn't have a clear form. It is too detailed.



200%: One of works of the 2018 Lumiere Festival in London was your light installation of a woman walking. It is a very playful work to watch.

JO: When I made these works of people walking, I recall when I watched the end result, that it kind of made me laugh. Just the fact that the presence of the person is now there. A bit like when you see somebody's shadow. If you look at your partner's shadow on the floor it's not just an image of them it is actually them in a sense. Your shadow is part of you.

When the sunlight is hitting the facade of the gallery you get a shadow of the buildings in the street and the shadow of buildings that I drew on the front window across the floor of the gallery. There's a kind of confusion between what is real and what is imaged, what is reflected, and I feel that is my point. Rather than talking about how cities change or the pandemic, that's not the way I approach talking about the world. I approach it more from the perspective of what it feels like to look at a shadow and feel like it's part of you.

Interview written and conducted by Thierry Somers, 200%

Installation view of Julian Opie at Lisson Gallery © Julian Opie, courtesy
Lisson Gallery, Self-Portrait by Julian Opie

Julian Opie, until 12 June, Lisson Gallery, 22 Cork Street London.

LISSON GALLERY

Apollo

10 May 2021

APOLLO

THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE

INTERVIEWS

In the studio with... Julian Opie

Apollo

10 MAY 2021



Two of Julian Opie's self-portraits, both titled 'Julian', from 2012 and 2013 (left to right). Photos: Alex Delfanne; © Julian Opie

With their distinctive linear style, Julian Opie's sculptures, paintings and films are instantly recognisable. His works explore the relationship of our bodies to the spaces we inhabit – and in particular the urban environments in which his art is frequently shown. A series of new works, made in the past year, is currently on view at Lisson Gallery in London (until 12 June) and another solo exhibition is scheduled to open at Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery next month (25 June–24 October).

Where is your studio?

In Shoreditch, just up from Liverpool Street Station. This feels like a typical place to have an art studio now but when I bought it in 1987 it seemed so remote. I love this area and have used it in numerous works, including the current show at Lisson Gallery on Cork Street. We also rent a railway arch in London Fields.

What do you like most about the space?

It's a 19th-century warehouse on four floors with steep stairs and a *Mary Poppins* roofscape above. I use the top floor, which has a high church-style ceiling and skylights. It's quiet and calm but I can trot downstairs and talk to various colleagues on the other floors when necessary.

What frustrates you about it?

Nothing really. I wish I had bought the next-door building as well.



A view of Julian Opie's studio in London. © Julian Opie

Do you work alone?

No, I work with ten others – technicians and three managers – and we regularly use a range of factories and of course a number of galleries.

How messy is your studio?

Spotless.

What's the weirdest object in there?

Define 'weird'. I collect other people's art, some of which is in my studio and - since these are from around the world and into the past - these might be thought of as the weirder objects. I have a collection of Homo erectus stone hand axes on my desk and a group of beaded baby carriers from the Dayak tribe in Borneo.

Which artistic tool could you least do without?

Eyes? I make things in so many different ways - from laser-cut aluminium to LED panels, to mosaic and acrylic - that no one tool dominates. I am pretty lost when my computer crashes.

What's the most well-thumbed book in your studio?

Pre-websites my work was best recorded in exhibition catalogues, so when researching we often go back to these. I have a book of 19th-century woodblock printed landscapes by Hiroshige on my desk that I flick through - an image a day - for enjoyment and inspiration. It was already well-thumbed when I bought it.

What's your typical studio lunch?

Pret.

What do you listen to while you're working?

Spa sounds, relaxation tapes and nature sound CDs mostly. Actual music is too distracting. I use music and sound in some of my works so then I switch to those.

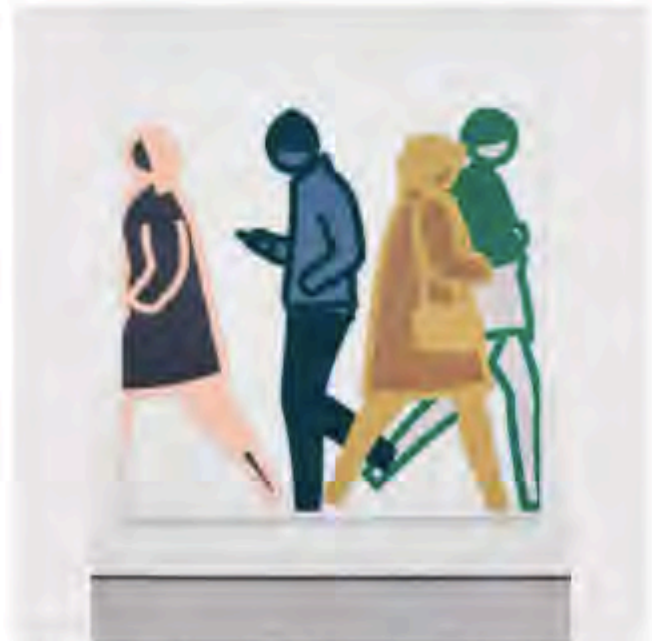
Do you ever sleep in your studio?

I did for a period of quarantine. A lot of noisy clubbers outside but nice to jog down to the Thames.

Is anything (or anyone) banned from your studio?

I ask my staff not to pass judgement on any of the works, positive or otherwise, as this confuses me. No office lingo or abbreviations and I try to keep visitors to a bare minimum.

'Julian Opie' is at Lisson Gallery, London, until 12 June.



Old Street December 11 (2021), Julian Opie. Courtesy Lisson Gallery; © Julian Opie

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The Telegraph
12 June 2021

The Telegraph

Julian Opie on cancel culture: 'It's tedious if everything gets read through the filter of the day'

On the eve of a new exhibition, Opie explains why it's every artist's right to break rules and explore 'dodgy pastures'

By Chris Harvey
12 June 2021 • 5:00am



Primary school pupils across the country are taught to create a portrait 'in the style of Julian Opie': detail from Opie's 2013 self-portrait | CREDIT: Courtesy of the artist

[Julian Opie](#) thinks we've got it all wrong about artists – and [Vincent van Gogh](#) is to blame. The image of the tormented Dutchman “not selling anything and struggling with painting after painting”, he says, has left us believing “that’s what honourable artists should be doing, and anything less is seen as some kind of corruption”.

We're in Shoreditch, east London, in the four-storey 19th-century warehouse that Opie, now 63, bought in his late 20s, and has transformed into the busy HQ of a highly successful 21st-century artist. On the ground floor are packing crates, sculptures, lightbox paintings and a walk-through model of a French village that he's making for a new exhibition this month at [Pitzhanger Manor](#) in Ealing. Up a steep staircase sits one of his three studio managers. There are artworks coming in and out, processes to be outsourced – with fabricators, 3D printers and LED makers (“I can't build LEDs. It'd slow me down”).

A technician is experimenting with an image created by arranging individually painted black and white beads to form a pixelated portrait. On a computer screen, a man in a dark raincoat can be seen walking, endlessly, with a swing in his step, across a busy road. He's on a video loop, created by another technician, soon to be immortalised via Opie's mastery of line in a further piece for the new show.

In today's multi-billion-pound art market, "there's often a lot of pressure to kind of withhold works or make it look as if you don't make as much work as you do," says Opie, sipping tea from a mug available on his website. But, he adds, "I like making a lot of work."

He also likes buying art. Behind him are displayed Roman and Egyptian treasures. On the wall hang beaded baby carriers from Borneo and a large portrait by Charles II's court artist Peter Lely. "Once you break a kind of barrier about what you're prepared to pay up for an artwork, all hell breaks loose," he says.



'There's a lot of pressure to withhold works or make it look as if you don't make as much work as you do': Julian Opie's *Deer* 2 (2020) | CREDIT: Delfanne Studios

Aspects of Opie's collection find their way into his own art (which sells at auction for tens of thousands of pounds): the beads and shells on the baby carriers inform the pixelated portraits; the fragments of Egyptian reliefs influence the slabs of carved stone depicting walking figures that more of his technicians have been painstakingly painting for the past two years. This sense of Opie's work responding to other artforms has been a constant, from pop, in his famous band portraits for The Best of Blur (2000) album cover, to video games, with new works for the Pitzhanger show influenced by the 1997 graphics of Tomb Raider II.

Opie is interested in the mental projection of reality experienced in early computer games, the boundaries between human vision, perception and space. "Is the picture in you," he asks. Or "are you looking at something and imagining yourself in that world?" When Opie talks about his work, he uncovers a complex "back end" behind pieces that appears simple and accessible on the surface. In computing, they'd call it the user interface. "It has always seemed to me that communication is key," he says. "I started work in the 1980s, and there was a general sense of art having become cut off from how people looked at the world."

The idiom he developed in response is as instantly identifiable as that of any artist working today. Primary school pupils across the country are taught to create a portrait “in the style of Julian Opie”, which, he says, “feels really exciting”, although he notes, “I don’t really draw like that now.”

I wonder if he ever reaches the outer edges of his style and discards things because they don’t look enough like his. “If anything, it’s the other way around,” he tells me. “I’m always trying to somehow get away from the smell of myself, and the look of what I do. I’d love to look more like Clint Eastwood, and I’d love to have long black hair that I could flick out of my eyes, but I don’t, and I never will. And likewise, I notice that every time I undertake a project, it always ends up looking like my work.”



‘Every time I undertake a project, it always ends up looking like my work’: Opie’s *Vic Fezensac* (2021)

Dressed in understated dark blue, with greying curls, Opie is the picture of the urbane, handsome, successful artist; one of a small group of international stars from the same generation, whose fame and financial success have been hard to replicate by the artists that followed them.

His mother was a teacher, his father an economist from Adelaide who arrived as a Rhodes scholar in the early 1950s and became an Oxford lecturer, regularly appearing on TV on *The Money Programme* in the 1970s. I wonder if his father’s profession helped Opie to make smart decisions at the beginning of his career? Not long after leaving Goldsmiths in 1982, the artist had already found a gallery to represent him, and bought the warehouse we’re sitting in five years later.

Opie laughs. “My dad was hopeless at business... They were comfortable, my parents. They kind of stumbled through life. They bought a house in the Vale of Health [a desirable enclave in Hampstead] for like, £10,000 in the 1960s, but they didn’t mean to, it was just next door to where they were staying. They were quite innocent, I think, in a lot of ways.”



'What I would find a little tedious would be if everything has to be read through the filter of the day'. Opie's Crows (2018) | CREDIT: TOBIAS_TITZ

Opie has been through the “process of parenthood” himself: he and his wife Aniela (a frequent sitter in his work) have three daughters and a son, aged from late-20s to 15. “They certainly have provided an enormous amount of subject matter and material through the activities that we do together... and maybe also the way that they are engaged with the world.”

This presumably brings him into close contact with the ideals of Generation Z, ideals that led, for example, to the signage in Tate’s current Rodin exhibition warning visitors that the relationship between the artist and his models was “starkly unequal”. Has Opie felt the pressure of this school of thought on his own work? I’m thinking of his mid-2000s portraits of pole dancers. Would he hold back from showing them now in case they got criticised as examples of a toxic “male gaze”?

“What I would find a little tedious would be if everything has to be read through the filter of the day,” Opie says. “I’ve always tried as a white, male kid from the 19-whenevers to be straightforward and to draw things as I see them. I used to draw nudes at art school... you’re in your jeans and T-shirts and then one person walks in with no clothes on at all.”

The strangeness of it stayed with him. “I draw all the time, and I draw people mostly and we’ve all got bodies. So I was thinking: how do these things exist in society? [...] And it seemed like pole dancing was an interesting way of approaching that, an honest way. It’s happening every night. I’m not saying it’s good. And I’m not saying it’s bad. That’s what’s actually out there.

“I’m not a scientist. I’m an artist. So I don’t have to follow rules but I do follow the logic that the world seems to throw at me,” he continues. “And if it leads me into pastures that are dodgy, or unresolved or unclear, for the time being, then I don’t see that as a shut door.”

Julian Opie is at [Pitzhanger Manor & Gallery](#), London W5 from Jun 25 to Oct 24. His show at [Lisson Gallery](#), London NW1, closes today

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A brush with...
A brush with... Julian Opie

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A brush with... Julian Opie

An in-depth conversation on the artist's big influences,
from Egon Schiele to Raymond Carver

Hosted by [BEN LUKE](#). Produced by [JULIA MICHALSKA](#),
[AIMEE DAWSON](#) and David Clack. With [HENRIETTA](#)
[BENTALL](#) and [KABIR JHALA](#)

23rd June 2021 11:54 BST



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Self portrait, Julian Opie (2013) Courtesy Julian Opie and Lisson Gallery

In this episode of *A brush with...*, Ben Luke talks to the British artist Julian Opie about his life and work by exploring his greatest cultural influences. Born in London in 1958, Opie graduated from Goldsmiths College in 1982 and quickly became associated with the New British Sculpture movement. From the 1980s into 1990s he transitioned from sculpture inspired by Pop art and minimalism into a simpler, graphic style, employed across a diverse range of media, from paintings to animation. He has increasingly made public works, which have appeared in cities and sculpture parks around the world. Though much of Opie's work appears to be urban in nature, his work has also depicted everything from motorways and farmed fields to rivers and coastal scenes. He has also made numerous renowned portraits, including those of the Britpop band Blur, which appeared on the cover of their 2000 album *The Best Of*.

In this interview, Opie talks about the early influence of Egon Schiele, his passion for Japanese prints by Utamaro and Hiroshige, his fascination with reading about ancient cultures and early humans, and his connection with composer Max Richter, among much else. And he answers the ultimate questions: if you could live with just one work of art, what would it be? And what is art for?

A brush with... series 4 runs from 9-30 June 2021, with episodes released on Wednesdays. You can download and subscribe to the podcast [here](#) [↗](#). This episode is sponsored by [Bloomberg Connects](#) [↗](#).

Julian Opie on... envying other artists

"I recently got a museum poster and on the cover it had a work by an Indian artist called Gauri Gill. And I was completely furious because it was so good. And it was something that, if I had thought about it first, I could have got there. I love that feeling of being outpaced and admiring something because so often one is dismissive and feels annoyed by other art. [...] She's really great. She asks people in small South Indian villages to make masks of themselves and other people in their village and photographs them going about their daily lives."



Utamaro's Somenosuke and Kiseigawa (1797)

... his love of Japanese woodcut prints by Utamaro and Hiroshige

"They're just stunning. To be able to evoke so much sense of presence and existence by this fluid line, which is cut from wood. They make sense to me given the way that I draw. I've always drawn using a line from the time that I was a teenager—it always seemed to me a very obvious, sensible and satisfying process to have my hand on a piece of paper holding a pencil or felt-tip pen and to look at the world, and to just allow that process to flow. It's something that I can do and seems to come naturally to me. I can move my hand and look at your face and when I look down on the piece of paper, you'll pretty much be there. That's always a good party trick when you're a teenager to impress people."



Julian Opie's Elena, schoolgirl (with lotus blossom) (2006)

... Raymond Carver's short stories

"They feel like memories, like a moment where he's left a hotel room and notices someone in the hall. That would be the entire short story. But somehow through the way he tells it, he evokes this sense of reality and presence. And it's that kind of feeling that I want to get to, rather than any sense of inventing a character and bringing that person to life. I have no ability to do that whatsoever, I can only really draw what I see."



Julian Opie's Landscape (1998-99)

... the type of music he likes to listen to when he's working

"There's a French motorway stop I drive past on holiday and in the lavatories the walls are wallpapered with a forest and they play some kind of music mixed with birdsong. And I could stay in there all day, though I'd probably get dragged out. That's the kind of thing that I play when I'm working."

• [Julian Opie](#) is at Pitzhanger Manor and Gallery in London from 25 June to 24 October; he has public sculptures in the Plaza del Colegio del Patriarca in Valencia, and in the [University of Valencia's La Nau Cultural Centre](#) until 19 of September; [Recent Works](#) is at the De Brock Gallery in Knokke-Heist, Belgium until 15 July; and an exhibition opens at the [Cristea Roberts Gallery](#) in London from 17 September until 23 October.

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16 April, 2019

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Lisson Gallery opens Julian Opie's first solo gallery exhibition in New York City



Installation view of Julian Opie at Lisson Gallery, New York (1 March – 20 April 2019)
© Julian Opie. Courtesy Lisson Gallery.

NEW YORK, NY.- 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 includes 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?

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Julian Opie: 'It's only when you are bored that you can see'

The artist explains how he created the crows,
Cornish vistas and 3D cityscapes of his most
recent work

by Julian Opie

Runners





▲ Running Men. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



I sent two of my assistants out to the park to film people walking and, on reviewing the films, I found that many joggers had run past the camera.

Humans are built for running. I have read they can outrun a wolf or a horse over long distances. By drawing one stride with around 30 frames I can set a drawing in motion to run smoothly forever as an animation and, by grouping a few joggers together in a painting, I can create a dynamic, complex composition with implied movement. A second later and the runners would have moved on and the composition, so carefully planned, would be changed and lost.



▲ Running Women. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



I was thinking of the striding athletes circling ancient Greek vases, and of stone-carved Roman friezes of battling warriors. The random positions of striding legs and pumping arms slice up the space, while hair and phone cables and shoelaces flick and bounce. Sporting clothes and equipment could be the modern equivalent of the armour of the past.

Walking in Melbourne



▲ Walking in Melbourne 1 of 6 Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ Walking in Melbourne 2 of 6 Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ Walking in Melbourne 3 of 6 Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ Walking in Melbourne 4 of 6 Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ Walking in Melbourne 5 of 6 Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London





▲ Walking in Melbourne 6 of 6 Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



Planning for a show in Australia I asked a local photographer to set up his camera in various places around [Melbourne](#) and record the passers-by. He sent hundreds of photographs and I set about drawing the best ones.

Some 60 drawings later, I have a palette of characters and have been using them in a range of paintings and statues. Each one throws up surprises and opportunities that I could not invent - a tattoo or a tasselled dress, a goatee or the logo on a T-shirt. I have one group from the middle of the city and one from the beach. By making groups of six walkers I get a street crowd, and a list, and a kind of fashion parade.

The photographed moment was random and fleeting but by cutting the drawing from thick, black card - by carving it permanently - it slows down and solidifies it. Random decisions such as wearing a striped top or swinging a bag or water bottle become solid decisions and material that you could run your finger over.

Modern towers



▲ Modern Towers 1 of 3. Photograph: Alex Delfanne/© Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London





▲ Modern Towers 2 of 3. Photograph: Alex Delfanne/© Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ Modern Towers 3 of 3. Photograph: Alex Delfanne/© Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London

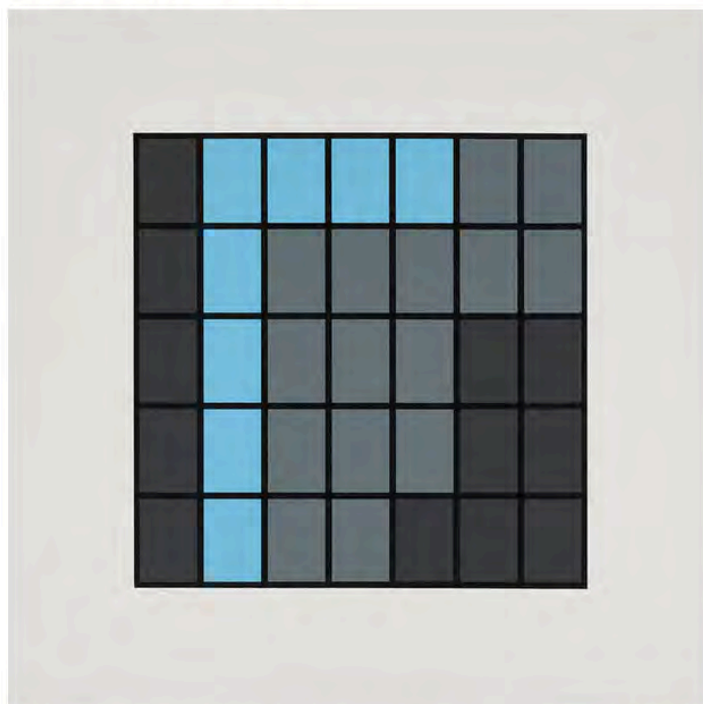


Making art is a fairly odd decision, but people have been doing it since for ever. If doodling while on the phone I'm inclined to draw a 3D cube and then another. It's the fastest way to create imaginary space, another world. I live in London and move through a labyrinth of extruded rectangles like an ant on a computer board. I understand space and see movement by the changing views on these shapes. By simply adding flat squares to the sides of my extruded rectangles I create modern buildings.

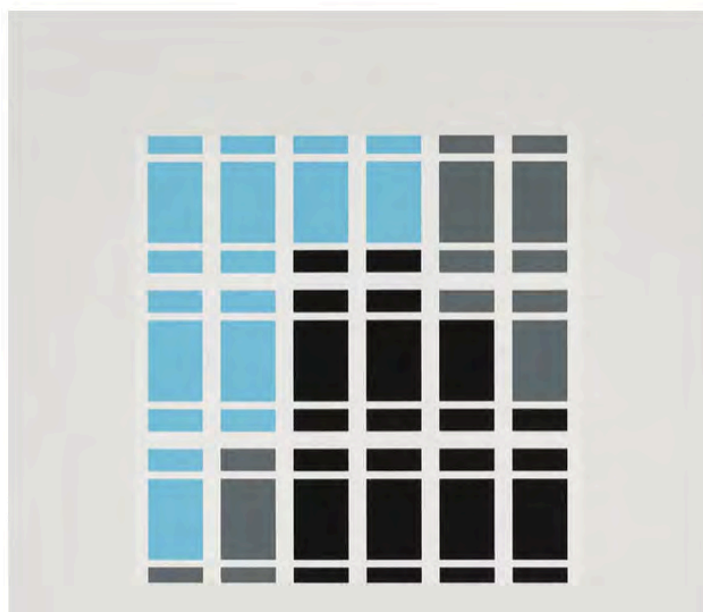
These basic building blocks of modern towns are universal and are engraved on our retinas and minds, recognisable without thought or interpretation. By colouring the windows and suggesting glassy reflections the surfaces of the blocks become pictorial and seem to shimmer a bit. My aim is to make a series of flat drawings into a real space that is also illusory.

I do photograph real buildings but in the end for these works I just juggled different shaped rectangles to get the feel of a building.

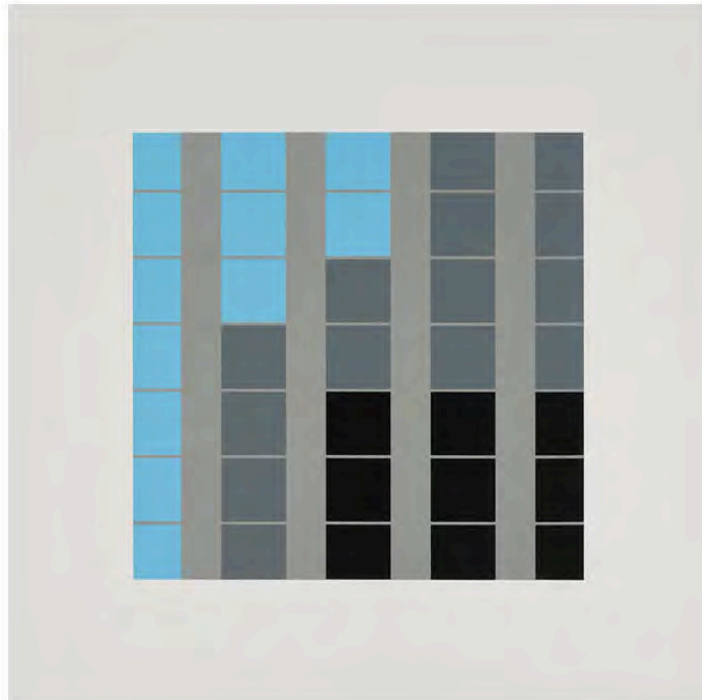
Office windows



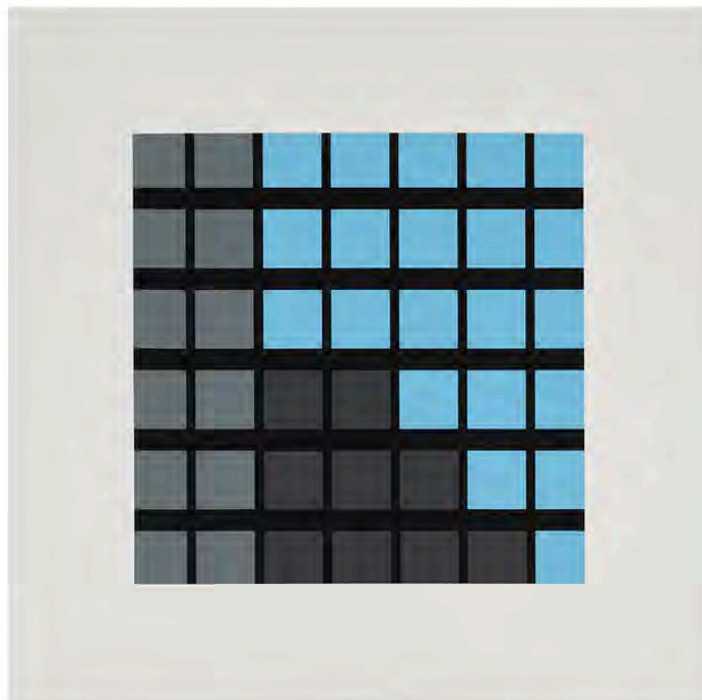
▲ D3. Office Windows Photograph: © Julian Ople. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ C3. Office Windows Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ B2. Office Windows Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ A1. Office Windows. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



While sorting out the colours of the windows for the 3D towers, I got an assistant to tape some painted squares on to the wall. Although she only painted a few windows, the result looked oddly realistic, like glass and like the surface of a building but also like modern abstract art. I set about making a small painting of the windows of each building.

Cornish coast



▲ Gribbin Head. From: Cornish Coast 1. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



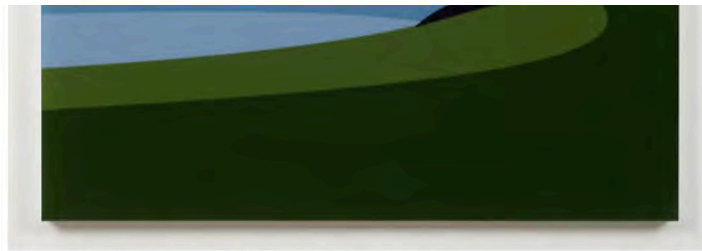
▲ Lantic Bay. From: Cornish Coast 1. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



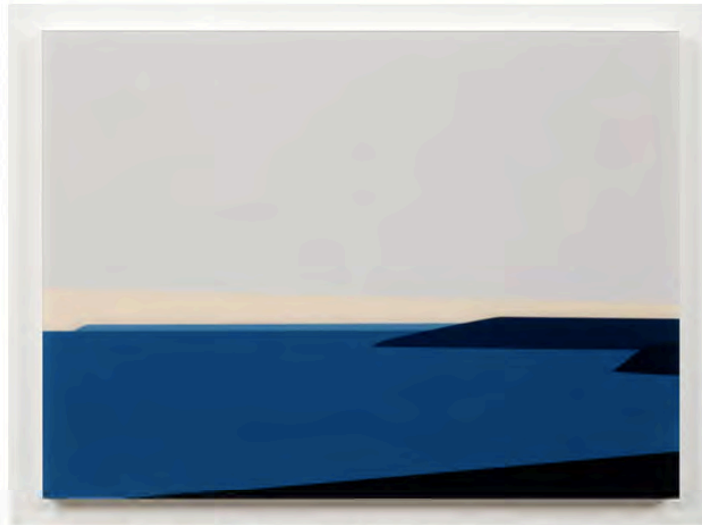
Cornwall is beautiful. You see the sky and the sea and the green fields. These colours surround you and fill your eyes, creating an environment, a space to be in that echoes the colours and shapes on your retina. Anything and anywhere is visible but beauty means that you can hold it in your eyes, make a picture of it.

I think we use picturing all the time in order to navigate and interact and it's how I know I am present. By putting that picture back out into the world, on the cave wall or website or gallery, I can extend, record and play with what I see. By looking at that picture there is a doubling up of the process, a view of a view.





▲ Lantivet Coast. From: Cornish Coast 1 Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



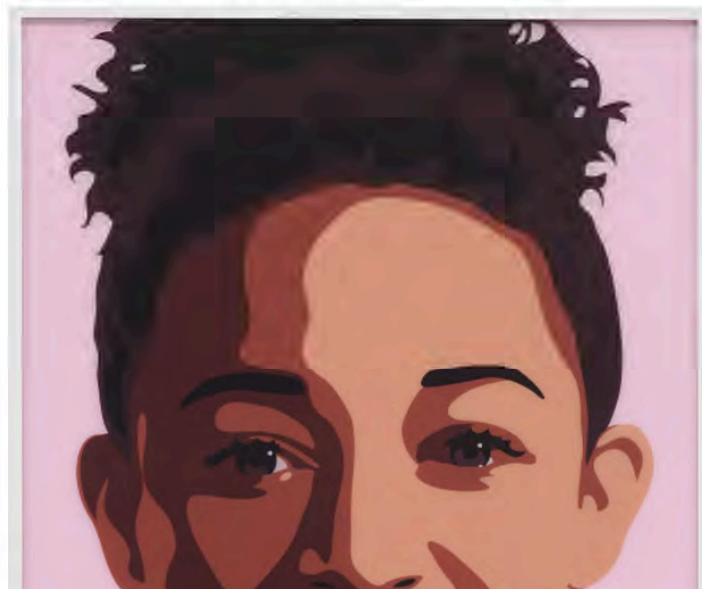
▲ Gribbin Peninsula. From: Cornish Coast 2 Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London

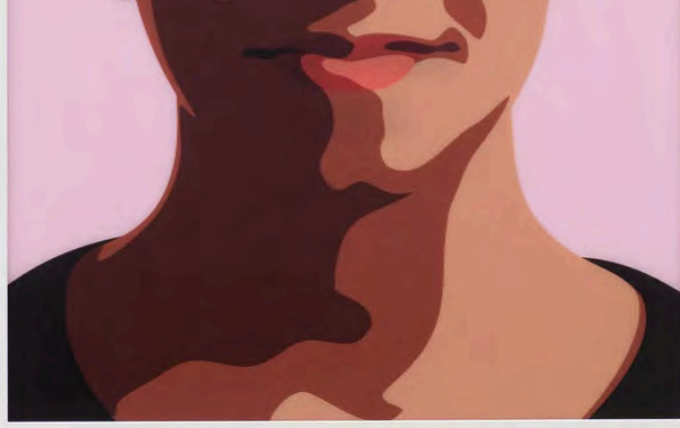


Being under two metres tall, humans are in a poor position to understand their surroundings. The world that is so clear and understandable from an aeroplane is simply a series of narrow coloured stripes from the ground. In Cornwall the stripes are dark, rich greens and aqua greys. As my holidays pass, the colours change, and as we walk along the cliffs the stripes twist and slide.

I have been drawing these stripes all my life in various materials and scales and levels of detail. My aim is always realism but not in the sense of photographic detail, more the realism of a glance or a memory or the feeling of being immersed all day in a view. Then I come back to London and draw all this in computer-sharp lines with inkjet printers on plastics and glass.

Lenticular portraits





▲ Imogen Smiling. From: 3 Portraits. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ Elena Rolling Her Eyes. From: 3 Portraits. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London





▲ Sissi Looking Upwards. From: 3 Portraits. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



In order to draw subtle movements of the face, I had to find a new way of drawing. I looked at Japanese manga and old masters to understand how shadows could be used instead of lines. I used a 19th-century invention of grooved lenticular lenses that [gives the illusion of movement](#) as you pass by a picture. Like the classic haunted house portraits whose eyes follow you, I can make my sitters respond to the viewer. It's a simple trick that fools no one, but nonetheless breaks the rules of reality. Magic is an important part of art and allows the picture to break away from normality and become communication, language, alive.

I used two of my daughters and a commissioned sitter for this project and feel the interaction with a young person is easier to deal with.

Crows



▲ Crow pecking. Photograph: Kris Emmerson/© Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London





▲ Crow turning, Photograph: Kris Emmerson/© Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



On my walk to work I pass through a small park, and there are always a bunch of rowdy, jet black crows hanging around. I know they see me but they are aloof and seldom fly off. I spent a morning filming them and identified a number of specific movements. The movement seems to be as crow-like as the drawing itself.

I don't invent or imagine things, just notice and record them. The choices about scale, style, language, materials and reference are my tools. I choose normal things because I must know them intimately and feel they are common currency so they can be turned into symbols. I don't draw parrots or flamingoes, I like the boring as it's only when you are bored that you can see.

Heads



▲ Lawyer. From Stone Heads. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



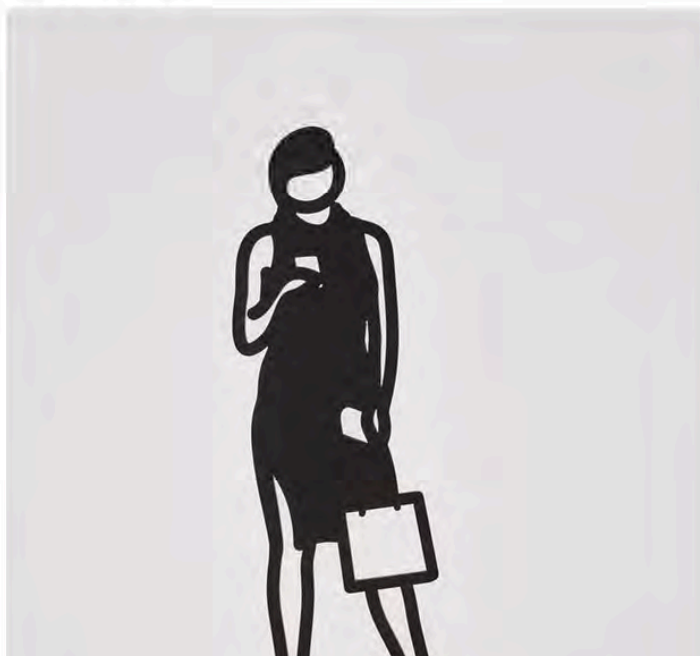


▲ Mechanic, From Stone Heads, Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London

Certain places are full of language and ways of making words from materials. Airports and shopping malls offer a huge pallet of techniques in glass and plastic and electronic screens. The mood is hard and slick and vulgar but seductive.

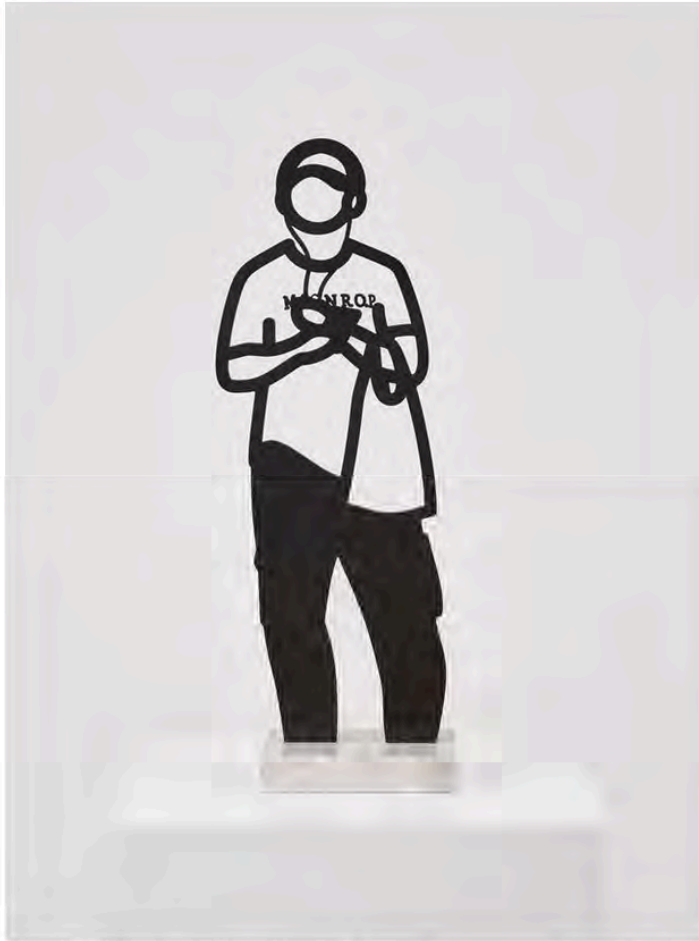
A completely different but equally useful mood and set of materials is found in graveyards and memorials. No one would make a gravestone from acrylic and LEDs. Materials create mood and suggest meaning. When I see something I see the bounced light but also read the history, recognise the value and weight, the density and age and reference. Engraved stone and inlaid bronze have a heavy, slow melancholic mood. I work near [Bunhill Fields](#), an ancient London graveyard (Bone Hill), that is a lovely calm place - I have photographed and drawn the office workers that take the short cut past the 18th-century tombs of their London predecessors. [Daniel Defoe](#) and [John Bunyan](#) are buried there, and the massed stone tombs and gravestones seem to suggest another crowded London.

Statuettes





▲ Telephone. From: Melbourne Statuettes. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



▲ Headphones. From: Melbourne Statuettes. Photograph: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



My grandfather had a walnut and leather desk in his office, and certain heavy, expensive items sat on this at my eye level. Bakelite lamps and stone pen holders, leatherbound books and glass bottles of ink.

We live in a mental construct like a computer game; we navigate through what we sense, making thousands of computations and judgments to stay safe and function. I draw the people waiting to cross a busy road checking their phones and shifting their balance and bags and turn them into models, stand-ins that can be placed and played with.

A person casts a shadow that is a flat drawing of themselves that can be seen, copied and rebuilt. A photograph is a cast-light shadow and so is a drawing but it includes the artist, the drawer, as part of that process. Anyway, there on the desk the statuettes stand and turn the surface into their surface - the desk becomes a pavement.

Seoul to Busan





▲ Seoul to Busan 1-6. Photographs: © Julian Opie. Courtesy artist and Alan Cristea Gallery, London



Looking directly at something is not always the best way to see it. Look straight at a dim star and it disappears. If you look down the centre of your train carriage and become aware of the landscape outside the windows, you can see it better, not the details but the shape and colour, the way the hills roll and the fields shift shape as you pass. You can move an object in your hands to understand its shape but you must pass through a landscape to see it properly.

My father used to say that speed is the only new experience (he did not ski or ride a horse), and as I travelled by train from Seoul to Busan in South Korea I felt that I could draw the speed, the passing time, the rice fields, mountains, rivers and cables with a series of sliding lateral images that lacked detail but gave the sense of movement. I used a flag-making company in the UK to print soft, glimpsed images that could wave or be pushed past like drapes or banners.

● [Julian Opie is at Alan Cristea Gallery, London from 26 April to 16 June.](#)

Wallpaper*
January 2018

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LINES MEN

Architects Carmody Groarke redraw artist Julian Opie's London studio

WRITER: ELLIE STATHAKI

A first glimpse inside Julian Opie's studio in Shoreditch, East London, does not reveal much about its recent architectural transformation. Its battered floorboards and hefty timber roof trusses could have been there for centuries. In fact, hardly anything in this refurbished old furniture workshop, which has served as the artist's base – and, for a while, live/work space – since 1987, screams 'new'. Yet new it is, following a complete overhaul by Carmody Groarke in a process that lasted over four years. It is testament to the London practice's masterful sleight of hand in merging old and new.

The idea for the project was born when planning permission was granted for a big new hotel in a plot just feet away from the studio's back wall. Concerned about privacy and changes in light, Opie decided to take the opportunity and start a project of his own. The plan was to extend his workspace – outgrown by his studio team – adapting it in response to the



ABOVE, JULIAN OPIE DESIGNED OUR LIMITED-EDITION COVER, AVAILABLE TO SUBSCRIBERS. SEE WALLPAPER.COM ★

construction next door. Kevin Carmody and Andy Groarke were already his go-to architects and this would be the latest in a series of collaborations with the artist, the first being Opie's London home back in 2006. 'I appreciate Carmody Groarke's straightforward approach and brilliant understanding of space, so they seemed the obvious choice of architect,' Opie explains.

It was not just their established relationship that made the young London practice the perfect partner. Groarke and Carmody met at David Chipperfield's office while – rather fittingly – working together on another artist's studio, this one for Antony Gormley. They joined forces and set up shop soon after, and their independent practice turned ten years old in 2016. Yet their portfolio shows a maturity and diversity rare in an emerging practice. Indeed, 'emerging' hardly seems an appropriate tag. While it is not uncommon »

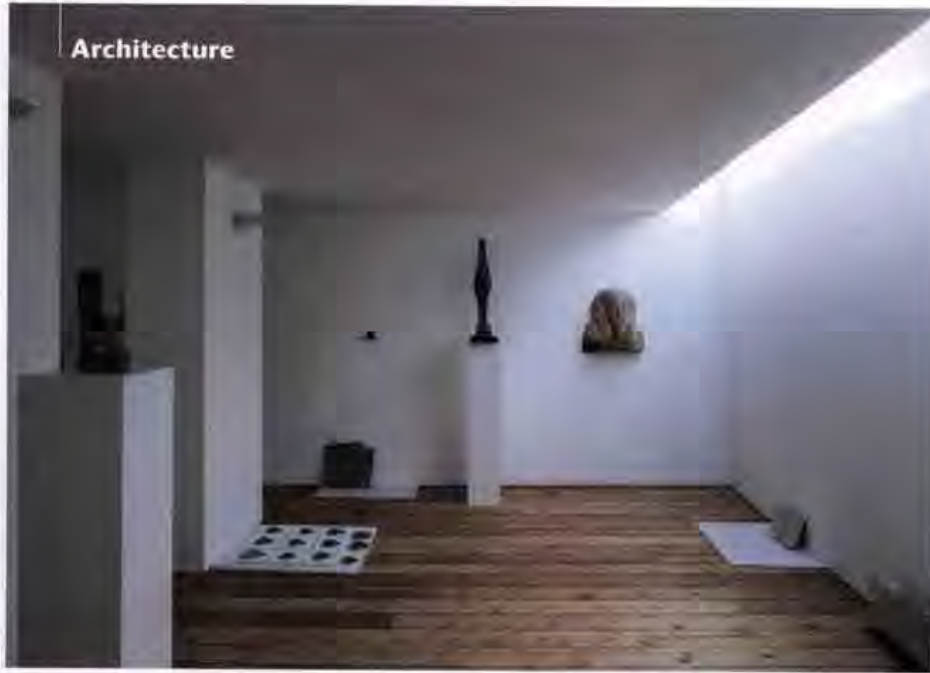


Architecture

THIS PAGE, IN OPIE'S STUDIO, HIS MODEL FOR A METAL STATUE IS SURROUNDED BY PIECES FROM HIS OWN ART COLLECTION, INCLUDING, LEFT, A PAINTED EGYPTIAN WOODEN HEAD (c. 1600-1100 BC) AND, SECOND FROM RIGHT, A TERRACOTTA BUST OF THE COMPOSER CHRISTOPH GLUCK BY JEAN-ANTOINE HOUDON (c. 1770).

OPPOSITE, CARMODY CROARKE'S STEEL-CLAD ADDITION INCREASES THE SPACE BY SOME 100 SQ M.

Architecture



'I am proud of how my building looks cared for, dynamic and ready for work' – Julian Opie

for a new practice to take the better part of ten years just to complete its first flagship project, Carmody Groarke has already had plenty of attention-grabbing commissions, including a temporary nightclub, a collaboration with Carsten Höller for Fondazione Prada, and timber pavilions for the Frieze Art Fair.

The pair have a knack for creating experiences and navigating different typologies and scales, especially when it comes to projects merging arts and architecture. Their affinity with the arts has been key since the practice's inception, their output ranging from large-scale galleries to artists' ateliers and exhibition design. 'Our first project, and the springboard to set up our practice, was a competition win, the Coney Island Parachute Pavilion,' recalls Groarke. 'It combined culture, pavilions and temporary architecture, art, and our desire to seek and create opportunities. All seem to be themes that became recurrent in our practice.'

Their work often straddles creative disciplines and they are fascinated by artists' take on the environment, built and otherwise. 'Artists have very precise ways of seeing and experiencing the world, which enriches the discussion of what an architectural project can be,' explain the architects. 'We also admire artists' ability to maintain a conceptual clarity throughout a body of work. Making exhibitions for fine art or museum collections has always been a great source of research for the studio. It forces us to think of how to make sense of our culture and our times.'

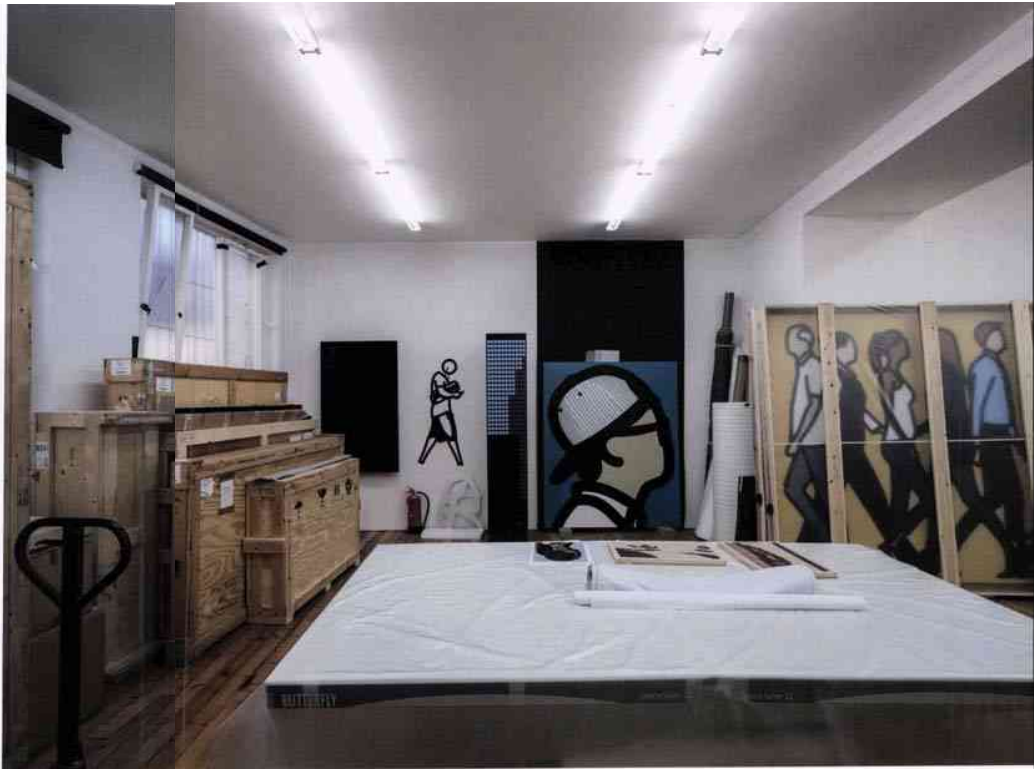
The Opie studio project called for a complete reimagining and extension of the four-level, mid-19th-century brick building, increasing space while

safeguarding privacy. The architects' solution was topping the existing industrial building with a profiled anodised aluminium sheet structure that captures and reflects daylight. The new design's skylights ensure the studio's creative operations remain out of sight from its neighbour, while light can flood in.

There is a playful contrast between brick and aluminium, a nod to the architects' ongoing interest in material experimentation. Their choices always respond to each project's needs, so there's huge variety in their work, from the structural bricks of the 2016 Highgate House, to the sculptural concrete volumes of a house and studio in Lambeth, one of their upcoming works. 'We like to manipulate materials and light in a way that increases your awareness of your surroundings,' says Groarke.

Inside, working with the building's original character was important to Opie. 'I did not want to lose the inherent mid-19th-century industrial qualities that remained; the wooden floors and beams, the steep, open staircases and tall windows,' he says. The architects obliged, employing a soft touch and some skilful architectural handling. Any new floorboards are reclaimed, the roof and external openings were maintained and, while the interior was almost completely gutted and cleared from additions and tweaks spanning decades, the current composition feels remarkably organic and natural. The steel-beam addition at the back manages discreetly to increase overall floorspace by some 100 sq m.

Each floor was opened up to create spacious studio rooms and open-plan desk areas, and circulation was



ABOVE LEFT, OPIE'S COLLECTION OF EGYPTIAN ARTEFACTS INCLUDES, FROM LEFT, A STATUETTE OF KNEELING MAN (C. 2000-1800 BC); FAIENCE BEAD MASKS FROM THE ROMAN PERIOD; A STATUETTE OF PTAH SOKAR OSIRIS (C. 660-500 BC); AND LIMESTONE RELIEF PANELS

ABOVE, IN OPIE'S STUDIO, FROM LEFT, THE ARTIST'S *BEACH TOWEL* METAL WALL DRAWING (2017); *TOWER* SCULPTURE (2017); AND *BASEBALL CAP BOY* (2016) AND *WALKING IN HACKNEY 8* (2016) VINYL PAINTINGS

streamlined. Hints to the building's past live/work use were carefully removed, and domestic areas were transformed into functional workspaces – the place is usually buzzing with up to ten employees.

Opie's studio is just coming out of a busy period with the opening last year of two major solo exhibitions – one in Suwon, South Korea, and the other at the National Portrait Gallery, London. Next up are shows at London's Alan Cristea Gallery in April, and at Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria in November. Careful planning of the layout was essential in order to boost efficacy during the most demanding times.

The architects have been just as busy. They are currently putting the finishing touches to a summer pavilion for the White Cube gallery at Glyndebourne in East Sussex and working on a spectacular new suite for the Burgh Island Hotel in Devon. One of their largest buildings to date, the Windermere Jetty

JULIAN OPIE

Minimalist portraitist Opie reduces his subjects to thick black outlines and planes of colours, a concise approach that somehow renders them absolutely alive. Born in 1958, the artist made his name with a series of steel sculptures in the 1980s; two decades later, his cover for Blur's *Best Of* album became an instant, and much imitated, classic. Opie's work also includes LED projections and 3D-printed busts, while his influences range from hieroglyphs to the work of Michael Craig-Martin, his tutor at Goldsmith College.

Museum, will open later in 2018, while future work includes the renovation and extension of the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester and the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester.

But for now, they can enjoy the appreciation of a satisfied customer. Opie, meanwhile, hopes his new studio will provide a model for other developments in his area. 'We deal with the building almost exclusively from the front and inside, and the new extension exterior is at the back in a narrow, graffiti-covered alley,' says Opie. 'I only recently went out there to take a look and I am proud of how my building looks both cared for and dynamic and ready for work. It's a good mix of 19th- and 21st-century industrial functional design with no frills but with good materials and sensible generous proportions. It looks like much of the street will soon follow suit.' ★
carmodygroarke.com; julianopie.com

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Legacy: Opie's new works will go on show with Van Dyck's self-portrait, inset

Opie in frame to welcome the return of £10m Van Dyck

Robert Dex Arts Correspondent

JULIAN OPIE has created a series of new works to welcome Van Dyck's celebrated self-portrait back to London, three years after it was saved for the nation following a high-profile fundraising campaign.

The 17th-century work will go on show at the National Portrait Gallery from October with paintings by Opie, whose trademark style is familiar to millions of music fans after he designed the cover of Blur's greatest hits compilation in 2000.

The self-portrait has been on a UK-wide tour since it was bought for £10 million in 2014, with almost £1.5 million in public donations.

Catharine MacLeod, the gallery's senior curator of 17th-century portraits, said placing the two artists' works together showed the influence of Van Dyck on Opie and the great court painter's "lasting legacy in Britain".

■ Julian Opie After Van Dyck is at the National Portrait Gallery from October 6 to January 7.

Ancient and modern: Opie creations come face to face with his own private collection

Big differences between old and the new make similarities more intriguing

Mark Brown
Arts correspondent

Julian Opie is best known for his ultra-modern portraits with thick black lines and very little detail. So it may surprise museum visitors to see he is a keen collector of grand 17th and 18th century paintings packed full of frilly and intricate fussiness.

The secret passions of Opie are explored in a fascinating exhibition opening today at the Holburne Museum in Bath in which the artist displays examples of his own work from the past 20 years with works from his private collection. That collection includes portraits by Sir Peter Lely, Joshua Reynolds and George Romney, and ancient sculpture from Egypt and Rome.

It is Opie's first show in a UK museum for 10 years and the artist said he thought long and hard about whether to do it. "I was anxious about how it could be read and what it could mean. I have seen examples of, say, a contemporary work next to a Vermeer and it's just, 'No, it doesn't really help either'. I hope it will be read generously, rather than 'that lot's better than that lot'."

The Holburne's director, Xa Sturgis, said the theme was a natural fit for his museum. "What I like is that I've never seen anything like it. I hope that is a good thing. It is slightly provocative; it provokes thought and looking, and that is always key with exhibitions."

Opie has divided the gallery space in half - his works on one side, his collection on the other. It looks and feels different to what we are used to with old master portraits hung on white walls with natural light streaming through.

Opie hopes visitors will make connections, perhaps go around and go back to different works. Yes, they are very different but perhaps they are also similar.

"With old masters there is a slight

tendency to go, 'Wow, look at that amazing craft', and it seems to be outside anybody's imagination quite how the flowers are painted. But actually it was a fairly standardised system as to how to do cloth, how to do flesh and so on. People would have learned it in workshops."

Opie has always used the latest technology so it is perhaps no surprise to see works from 2012 where he has explored 3D printing.

Two larger-than-life busts sit on plinths created using a 3D printer - hand-painted because the technology does not yet allow colour. Opie said he had not hand-painted for a long time but was helped by a 2,000 year old Egyptian funerary mask from the late Ptolomeic period that is in his collection.

"I often run out of nerve. I think, 'I can't do this', and my hand is shaking and I think I need my glasses," he said. "The idea of what I'm doing ... it makes me nervous." So it helped to

look at his mask and think some bloke in Egypt on a Wednesday afternoon sat down and did a whole load of them. "If he can do it then I can do it."

Some visitors will be able to spot more direct connections. The blue curtains in a portrait of an unknown woman by Cornelius Johnson - a court painter to Charles I before Van Dyck - inspired the blue curtains in a 2008 Opie work, Maria Teresa with sequinned dress. Opie said he often used the poses of sitters in old masters as templates for his own works.

Many of his collected works are on display in his east London converted warehouse studio. "I find myself feeding off them as I'm working. You never know what you need or will find, so I do learn a lot."

There are many wonderful and striking works in Opie's collection, not least a bust of the 18th-century composer Christoph Gluck from the studio of Jean-



Xa Sturgis studies the finish on the two larger than life 3D-printed busts that form part of the exhibition at the Holburne gallery of works created by, or collected by, Julian Opie (below)
Photograph: Adrian Sherratt for the Guardian

CANADIANART

Julian Opie: A New Calgary Stroll

EAST VILLAGE, CALGARY APRIL 26 2012

by NANCY TOUSLEY



Julian Opie *Promenade* 2012 Installation view / photo Kris Emmerson

The new kids on the block in Calgary—Jeremy, Jennifer, Rod, Tina, Verity and Kris—arrived here in the entourage of the British artist [Julian Opie](#), who is a Londoner, and stayed behind after he left a week ago for home. They are now permanent residents, out doing what city dwellers do—walking on the streets. However, they do not blend in with the crowd. They stride above it, suspended paradoxically in a state of perpetual motion.

In the urban landscape, movement, light and colour are what immediately attract the eye to their presence. Opie's animated walking figures, rendered with minimal detail in the black line drawing that is a hallmark of the artist's style, occupy a 24-foot-high, four-sided LED tower on the gritty edge of the downtown and Calgary's [East Village](#), a 49-acre district with river frontage that is now under development. The sculpture, a \$650,000 commission by the Calgary Municipal Land Development Corporation for its [Art in the Public Realm](#) program, is called *Promenade*.

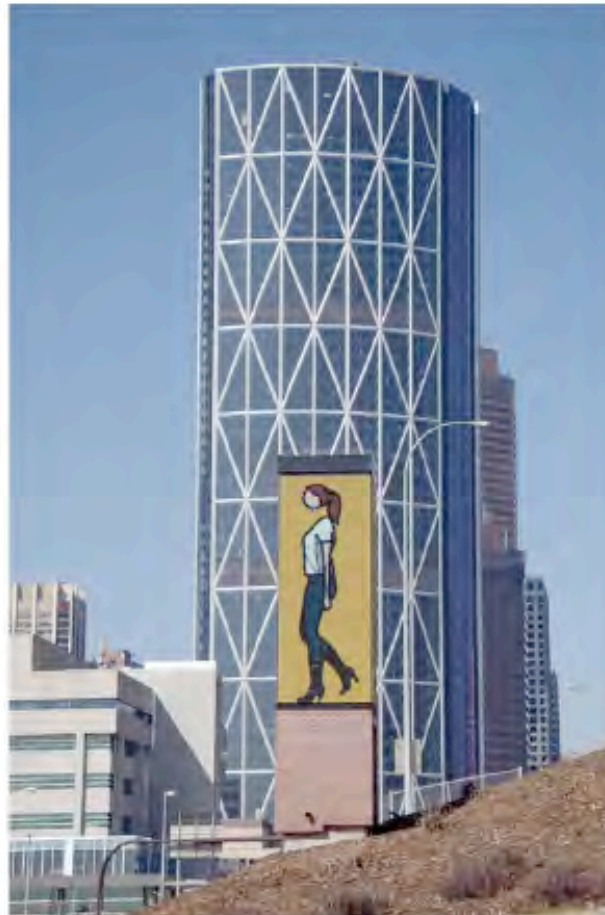
The first of two permanent artworks commissioned for the development, it's on a patch of turf that, for the moment, is populated by gophers and jackrabbits, but will soon be graded and landscaped with junipers. Opie's work was chosen from 10 proposals submitted to a competition by Canadian and international artists. Unlike most public art, *Promenade* has preceded the condos and apartment buildings that will be going up nearby. The artwork is, in fact, attracting investors to the area, says Susan Veres, CMLC vice-president of marketing communications.



Passersby on the street have clear views of the tower's LED screens from the corridor of 4th Street S.E. and the flyover at 5th Avenue S.E. and, indeed, from north, south, east or west, as they walk or drive past, in the daytime or at night. The flat screens, which are brightest when viewed head on, are oriented to the cardinal points on the compass. Their background colour is yellow, against which Opie's graphic figures are garbed in red, blue, black, white and grey. Although they constitute an urban social group—pedestrians—each faceless figure, which has a circle for a head that bobs slightly above its neckless shoulders, is an individual, walking with a characteristic gait and at a different speed. Each of them appears, almost magically, to be turning the corners and walking around the tower in a continuous flow of movement.

Opie has said that although there are more sophisticated systems for showing moving images, "LEDs allow you to see the still LEDs turn on and off while you see flowing movement at the same time. For me, this is exciting and the basis of the perception of movement."

The figures seem to turn the corners, he says, because "the computer understands it as a flat screen, with four sides. As one figure disappears off the left of the flat screen, the same figure is coming in on the right. What it then appears to be is a sort of lighthouse effect: the figures are constantly walking around [the tower]. Because they are all walking at their own pace, they slightly overtake each other. One guy is a little faster than the others, so there are periods where they are all grouped together in a bunch and then they open up again. "



Julian Opie Promenade 2012 Installation view / photo Kns Emmerson

Arts Visual art 13.06.11

'I'm not sure what art is'

Known for slick images like his portrait of Blur, Julian Opie is now the subject of a major retrospective. He takes **Stuart Jeffries** through it

One evening, Julian Opie went to a Soho strip club. He had a pole in his studio and needed a dancer. "I'd bought the pole on the internet," Opie says, as he takes me around a new retrospective of his work. "I thought I could get more dynamic poses from models."

What was he looking for? "Someone who danced well." A stripper called Shahnoza, originally from Tehran, fitted the bill and, a few days later, she arrived at Opie's east London studio with various outfits and her own music. For the next two days, Opie took more than 2,000 photographs and filmed as she danced and stripped.

Opie had been commissioned to make a series of drawings for the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto. He decided his Shahnoza pictures would appear on the walls of a room full of Henry Moore sculptures, mostly reclining nudes: "I wanted to complement and contrast with the imposing, sedate and serious white sculptures," he explains.

Opie made the pictures by drawing, with his computer, over digital images of Shahnoza. He then emailed these to a vinyl-cutter in Canada who turned them into sticky-backed plastic shapes that were stuck to the gallery walls. Moore's nudes sit on plinths, while giant images of Shahnoza now slink around the walls, pulling

off her knickers in one pose. Her head was reduced to a simple circle - a customary Opie riff that, in this context, seemed to allude to Moore's trademark holes.

Opie has often made such artistic rejoinders. As a student at Goldsmith's

in London, he copied famous artworks for a series called Eat Dirt, Art History. He'd draw an El Greco very loosely and write underneath it: "Eat Dirt El Greco." As he told an interviewer: "It was an acknowledgement of the hopeless position of the art student in light of art history, but also a rallying call not to feel overwhelmed by it."

Opie, born in London in 1958, graduated in the early 1980s, a generation before the likes of Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin arrived. He revelled in the punk sensibility of the time, the rebellion against tradition. He denies, however, any lewd intent with his This is Shahnoza series. "I don't start with an agenda - it's possible to start that way, but I don't."

Instead, he says, he sets out to strip things down, the purpose being to reflect and play on not just other art, but on the artifice that he thinks frames contemporary experience: how what is seemingly natural in human behaviour is made up of learned performance codes, how artistic conventions constrain artistic practice. But why a pole dancer doing a striptease? "I don't take responsibility for what's out there, but I use it nonetheless."

This is Shahnoza exemplifies many Opie themes: engagement with art history, use of new technology, obsession with the human body. It also shows how Opie loves to work with one idea across different media. Shahnoza has now been immortalised in painting, granite, silkscreen and LED animation (in which she dances in bra and pants or in skimpy white dress). In at least one portrait, her head is represented by something other than a

circle. But even then, she's still stripped down: the schematic image of her face in flat colours and minimal detail is poised between generic and particular. She's more Opie than Shahnoza.

The drawings appear in a new catalogue published by the Alan Cristea gallery in London, to go with the Opie retrospective it has just opened. Called Editions 1984-2011, the show charts Opie's development from early reductive landscapes and portraits, to silhouettes, animations, lenticulars, LCD and LED animations. For all this, Opie may be best known for his blandly homogenised portrait of Blur for the

cover of their 2000 The Best Of album.

Does he ever find this array of possible media discombobulating? After all, in a interview for an exhibition of Utagawa Hiroshige woodblock prints he curated in 2008, he seemed envious of the narrow range of options available to his hero, the 19th-century Japanese artist: "I think Hiroshige would have had much more of a sense of what his role was and what the job entailed. Now who knows what an artist should do?"

"I still feel that," he says now, as we stand in front of his 2009 work View of Mount Fuji with Daisies from Route 300. "For artists at art school, the freedom must be a burden. There's no tradition of bronze or oil painting, no tradition you can embed yourself in - which was what Hiroshige was able to do. At the same time, I relish the range of options available because I don't want to be tied down. I want to embrace good-looking options."

Like Shahnoza, this Japanese landscape also comes in different

media. The version we're looking at is made of lenticular panels that waver as you walk by, creating a sense of both depth and movement. But there is also a computer animation of the same scene: depending on which programme is running, either a flock of birds fly across the picture, or the daisies gently flutter. Does he write the programmes himself? "No, I used to physically construct all of my work. Now I prefer being a conductor. I go round my studio getting the inkjet printer guy or the algorithm guy to do my bidding."

We move to some silhouettes he made of himself. Before photography, silhouette profiles, cut from black card, were the cheapest way of recording a person's appearance. "It's a purportedly obsolete

and vulgar art form. It surprises me that I care about it. I used to have a stricter idea of what art was. Now I feel much less sure. I'm not really sure what art is."

Next is a 2001 marble piece called *Remember Her This Way (Lying)*. The blocks of marble are engraved with the outline of a female nude with a bubble head. It was made for Opie by Elfes, a firm of Jewish monumental masons: Opie had become entranced by some engraved stone he saw in their old showroom on Brick Lane every time he visited the Whitechapel gallery nearby. What was the appeal? "It's an ancient and permanent way of drawing. The line is cut and sandblasted out and the groove filled with hand-hammered lead."

Didn't the masons balk at such a sleazy-seeming commission? "Not at all. But plenty of other people have self-censoring compunctions about my work. Most of my problems are with public bodies, which is a shame because I am committed to making public sculptures. In Soho, I had a problem with an image of a nude woman I wanted to put up, which amazed me. You can't move in that area for nude figures. That one on the corner of Hyde Park with the very pert bottom, for instance." He may well mean Richard

Westmacott's 1822 nude sculpture of Achilles. "In America, it's a nightmare. You can't have figures smoking, and they're very uncomfortable about depicting a figure's race."

He is currently struggling to get funding for a public sculpture of 3-metre-high figures that will take an LED walk over the Thames via Hungerford Bridge. Why is he so interested in movement? "Have you ever seen a dead body? It's the most freaky thing to see the human body at rest. Movement is the fourth dimension in art. In painting, movement is implied - say, in the drapery. In my picture of a Formula One driver, it's implied, too. The road is temptingly there. It was inspired by computer-game landscapes. I'm creating the illusion of movement."

Opie finds women easier to pose than men, he says. "Men are perhaps not intrinsically easy to look at, or are less easy about being looked at and need to be doing something." That's why, when he drew Bryan Adams, he had him holding a guitar. And that's why, he suggests, Warhol's Elvis has a gun. Women don't need such accessories when Opie draws them, although he's not sure why. "Is it the viewer, or the viewed, or the artist? I don't know. I go by trial and error. If it works, I follow it up. If I see something in the world that sings, I grab it."



Julian Opie: Editions 1984-2011 is at the Alan Cristea Gallery, London W1 (020-7439 1866), until 9 July.



Opie of the masses

Pop art star Julian Opie's work sure draws the crowds, says Olivia Cole

Meeting Julian Opie is like taking a trip. While looking at a Shoreditch road he suggests pretending that the cars swirling around Old Street are a beautiful river and the crowds of people are cows. 'It's not easy, but you can do it. How nice to live in a head where in a blink, you can retreat into Technicolor.'

Julian Opie has always been an artist with a clearly mapped-out vision. As an art student at Goldsmiths, he amused everyone by drawing graffiti with slogans like 'Eat Dirt El Greco!' – a sign of his determination to grab himself a large slice of art history.

He did this straight after graduating, in true enfant-terrible style, showing in London and Europe, and had a solo exhibition at the Hayward aged 34. He's now Hoxton's answer to Warhol: a pop-y portraitist who, it seems, gets whoever he wants to sit. Rock stars from Blur to Bryan Adams queued to see cartoon versions of themselves. Blur's portraits are on the cover of their *Best of* album, while Alex James used his on the cover of his autobiography.

The National Portrait Gallery recently bought an Opie self-portrait that was

partly inspired, he says, by Lara Croft's movements in *Tomb Raider*. No wonder Damien Hirst says it was Opie who inspired him to take the art scene by storm and on his own terms. Based on traditional drawings, painstakingly developed using new technology, Opie's art reflects life as it's experienced now – at high speed on billboards, laptops, BlackBerries and camera phones. His work is instantly recognisable. Now 49, he's shown all over the world – at major museums in Japan and on the side of the Met in New York. One of his dancers is currently springing up all over the Tube in London. His work is playfully teasing in its simplicity. His sleeky films of people walking, dancing (Shahnoza, a pole dancer) and undressing have to be the sexiest animations since Jessica Rabbit.

For his latest work, he's looked at high fashion. Whereas before his pictures have been very plain, now earrings glint, sequins shimmer and doe-eyes occasionally blink. The subjects are clad in sumptuous Dolce & Gabbana couture while the settings and style echo 18th-century portraits by

Reynolds and Gainsborough (glimmering backgrounds of clouds, water and birds). For work by someone fascinated with Japan and America, these are very English in style: 'This is what culture



does – it keeps bouncing around back and forth. I always thought English art was slightly embarrassing but that was just ignorance.' In each of the portraits some elements are 3D, and the backgrounds, which initially look still, are full of tiny movements.

Yet despite this more embellished slant, normal life has been his main obsession. He claims his famous sitters were almost accidents. And though most artists would kill to have Kate Moss in their studio as a muse, Opie says it was the idea of a collector (who now owns the work) and he was too nervous to make the most of it: 'I just did my usual thing – shooting her face from every angle. She then said, "Is that it?" Then Bryan Adams was sitting for me. I was at his place and he said, "Kate Moss posed naked on that rug last week." I was, like, my God! It's the demure quality of his Moss portrait that makes it stand out.

Works for his shows are all over his studio. In pride of place is a deep-blue silkscreen of his wife swimming. 'I drew it sitting on the bottom of the pool with a rock on my lap. I'm good at holding my breath.' He and his wife – a part-time muse – have four children between them and he admits to being nervous about his teenager Elena's fondness for sleepovers at the studio. These days, it's the kind of admission to make an art insurer or the Tate's Nicholas Serota (one of Opie's biggest cheerleaders) pass out. □ Julian Opie shows at the Lisson Gallery, NW1 (tel: 020 7724 2739), 15 Oct–15 Nov, and at Alan Cristea, WI (tel: 020 7439 1866), 13 Oct–15 Nov.

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