

LISSON GALLERY

LONDON

JULIAN OPIE

24 November 1990 - 5 January 1991

In his new work Julian Opie continues to develop the themes which have preoccupied him since his work was first exhibited. Yet his most recent sculptures, some of which were shown at this year's British Art Show and at Objectives, the major exhibition of contemporary sculpture at Newport Harbor Art Museum, California, also mark a significant new development for the artist¹.

The most noticeable difference in the new work is size. These works continue to evoke features of corporate and public interiors, and the fittings or accessories associated with large modern interior spaces such as offices or airports. But, they have become less suggestive of the type of containers and dispensers, for example cabinets or illuminated drinks machines which might furnish such spaces, and increasingly suggestive of aspects of the architecture itself: screens, partitions, booths and even offices themselves.

One such work, made from several units of steel and coated in brilliant white baked enamel, projects from the wall to form a series of regular planes somewhat reminiscent of a voting booth or even a urinal. As with the other works in this exhibition, Opie has adopted a 1:1 scale; the spaces in the work seem to invite human participation. Yet at the same time this invitation is illusory, the space is awkward to enter and leads nowhere.

In his most recent work, the largest in the show, Opie takes such spatial illusions and paradoxes a step further. This free standing construction, made from timber, glass and board, looks at first sight like a temporary or prefabricated office unit. The window-like apertures reveal a series of interior divisions, passages and corners which seem to be intended for human occupation or circulation. However, examination reveals this unit to be a closed rectangle with no point of entry from the outside. The viewers' expectations are again confounded.

An important feature of much of Opie's sculptural work is that it is strongly suggestive of aspects of painting. This is due in part to his employment of spatial illusionism, but it is also echoed in the consistent use of intersecting flat planes and in his exploitation of framing devices through which further interior spaces are made visible.

The materials used in this, and all of Opie's work, are carefully chosen to evoke those which might be used in the fabrication of such mass-produced objects and structures. These are typically non-art materials and mouldings, pieced together in generally

unartistic ways - ways which suggest more the world of mass production, than the discrete space of the fine art studio. Furthermore, the finished works draw attention to areas of the modern world which are rarely looked at, at least for any aesthetic reasons, but which are ever present in our urban environment. For all their apparently bland and unobtrusive character, these forms and structures usually serve to direct, separate, organise and control our movement through this environment.

The use of such materials and methods of construction, as well as the subject matter of Opie's work, serves to place it within a particular current of 20th century European and American art. In general, this is the current of work which has taken as its subject the character of modern life. The clearest and most recent precedents lie in a range of work which emerged in the United States over the last two decades. Opie has long admired the quasi-architectural work of artists such as Dan Graham and Bruce Nauman. While in another way his recent work is indebted to the pan-European constructive tradition from the 1920s. In particular the architectural drawings and models of Theo van Doesburg are suggested in Opie's use of horizontal and vertical planes, colour and projection.

However, Opie's work differs from its more or less recent antecedents in important ways. The utopian ideas which were so much a part of early constructivist work, and the critical sociology of the more recent American work, are both absent from Opie's. His is a contradictory and far more ambivalent view of modernity.

Julian Opie was born in 1958, in London. He studied at Goldsmiths' College of Art between 1979 and 1982. Since his first one person show in 1983, Opie has exhibited widely in Europe and the United States. This is his fifth one man exhibition at the Lisson Gallery.

For further information please contact Julianne Webster or Louise Flesh on 071-724 2739.

1. The Objectives exhibition included the work of Grenville Davey, Katharina Fritsch, Robert Gober, Jeff Koons, Annette Lemieux, Juan Muñoz, Julian Opie and Haim Steinbach.

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