

Press Release

Julian Opie
OP.VR@LISSON

3 March – 8 April 2023
27 Bell Street, London

Opening: 2 March, 6 – 8pm

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.

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

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

Julian Opie was born in London in 1958 and lives and works in London. He graduated from Goldsmith's School of Art, London in 1982. Exhibitions have been staged at Berardo Museum, Lisbon, Portugal (2020); Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, Japan (2019); Gerhardsen Gerner, Oslo, Norway (2019); The National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia (2018); National Portrait Gallery, London, UK (2017); Suwon Ipark Museum of Art, Korea (2017); Fosun Foundation, Shanghai, China (2017); Fundacion Bancaja, Valencia, Spain (2017); Kunsthalle Helsinki, Finland (2015); Museum of Contemporary Art Krakow (MoCAK), Poland (2014); National Portrait Gallery, London, UK (2011); IVAM, Valencia, Spain (2010); MAK, Vienna, Austria (2008); CAC Malaga, Spain (2006); Neues Museum, Nuremberg, Germany (2003); Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK (2001); Kunstverein Hannover, Germany (1994) and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK (1985). Major group exhibitions include 'I Want! I Want! Art & Technology' at Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Birmingham, UK (2017); 'This Is Not The Reality. What Kind Of Reality?', 57th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy (2017); the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK (2016); Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK (2014); Tate Britain, London, UK (2013); the Shanghai Biennale (2006); 11th Biennial of Sydney (1998); documenta 8, Kassel, Germany (1987); and XIIème Biennale de Paris (1985). Public projects include 'Walking in Taipei', Taipei, Taiwan and 'Walking in Hong Kong', Tower 535, Hong Kong (2016); Arendt & Medernach, Luxembourg (2016); Heathrow Terminal 1 (1998); and the prison Wormwood Scrubs, London (1994); as well as public work for hospitals, such as the Lindo Wing, St. Mary's Hospital, London (2012) and Barts & the London Hospital (2003). His design for the band Blur's album 'Best of Blur' (2000) was awarded the Music Week CADS for Best Illustration in 2001.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, three in New York, and one in Shanghai, as well as forthcoming galleries in Beijing and Los Angeles. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith.

In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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