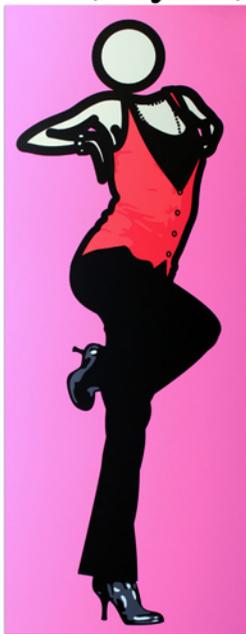


Witty experiments: Opie is engaging with themes, styles, materials



Julian Opie's "Caterina dancing in black trousers (4)" exhibit is at the Barbara Krakow Gallery.

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Julian Opie

At: Barbara Krakow Gallery,
10 Newbury St.,
through December 7th.
617-262-4490,
barbarakrakovgallery.com

Julian Opie's fun ride of a show at Barbara Krakow Gallery leaves me dizzy. The British art star is best known for his pictograph portraits, figures sporting blank circles for heads. They resemble symbols on restroom doors, yet they're identifiable as real people. Witty and engaging, they strike a balance between generic and specific.

There are several such images here — in a tapestry, in vinyl, in a computer animation, on coffee mugs. This exhibit, featuring work made in the last two years, demonstrates the range of Opie's imagination, his scrutiny of the nuances of looking, his varied means of production, and his Warholian proclivity for making fine art available to the masses. These themes would propel a fascinating retrospective. They're too much for a gallery show.

The centerpiece of the show is the gorgeous tapestry "Ed and Marlanela (8)," depicting two dancers from Britain's Royal Ballet joined in a composition of elegant lines. "Caterina dancing in black trousers (4)" a vinyl piece,

is similarly driven by the lines of the dancer's body. Opie delineates the trousers as a continuous flat black form, but he adds highlights to Caterina's red vest and shiny black shoes that give her volume.

Opie draws his images on a computer, then outsources production, so it's easy for him to generate a lot in a small amount of time. It enables him to make low-end pieces such as the coffee mugs. But when does an artist become a brand, and at what cost? Many artists do it in order to challenge society's expectations about value. Others do it to make a buck. It can work if the art remains fresh.

And Opie is still experimenting; many images here push deeper into representation. "Joo Yeon contemplates her imminent wedding," a computer animation, gives us the simple lines of the woman's face and features. Pink blossoms wave on a tree behind her. She blinks, and strokes her chin with her thumb, but is otherwise static. The piece is crystalline, and absorbing in its near stillness.

There are other pieces: lenticular prints that toy with perceptions of surface and depth, cameo-like silhouettes. They capture their subjects with distillation, rather than profusion of detail. That's what makes them so hard to walk away from.

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KRAKOW GALLERY