

HEAD GAME

British artist Julian Opie's giant sculpture is captivating



BARBARA

The first thing you notice when you walk into the Julian Opie show at Barbara Krakow Gallery is the giant head of a boy. He gazes heroically from a side gallery. The size isn't the only thing that startles. Rendered in the bold, cartoonish simplicity that has made this British artist a major player; the boy appears to flip-flop from flat to supercharged volume. It's like looking at a sculpture—or a painting?—through 3-D glasses

It is indeed a sculpture, a monumental bust at more than 6 feet tall. "Daniel" is cast resin made with a 3-D printer. Opie has placed it in front of wallpaper printed with the craggy lines of a black-and-white forest. The scale of the trees makes "Daniel" look all the larger. There's delicious dissonance in elevating an unassuming schoolboy to monumental proportions.

Opie painted the face with the same pools of shadow he would apply to a painting. From straight on, that's what

"Daniel" looks like: a big, flat cutout. Circle round a bit, though, and those shadows play tricks. They addle and entice. They exaggerate the volume, but continue to insist that you're viewing a painting.

This artist is known for paring his portraits down to the barest bones. How to capture shape in a few lines, in two or three swaths of color? The faces are all neutral. Working in three dimensions, as he does with "Daniel" and several smaller busts, Opie seems to spike the recipe.

For this show, he also went to Rome and worked with an artist of traditional Byzantine mosaics, which convey volume through the arrangement of tiles. In "Imogen," the tiles dovetail over the young woman's cheeks and hook sharply along the lines of her nose.

Opie restlessly experiments in a variety of media, even as he sticks to his basic facial formula. The smallest gesture takes on canny meaning. Leaping through centuries in one gallery, he depicts Imogen

again on an LCD screen. She looks unnervingly still; on a screen like this, we expect animation. Then she smiles. Shadows gather beneath one cheekbone and reshape around an eye.

I smile back.

By Cate McQuaid
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Left image: Julian Opie's "Daniel," is a bust of a boy that is more than 6 feet tall

Right image: Installation views of Julian Opie's Mosaics and small bust

Julian Opie

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

KRAKOW GALLERY