

# GREAT ART IDEAS FOR TEACHERS

## GRAPHIC PORTRAITS: INSPIRED BY JULIAN OPIE'S *WALKING IN THE RAIN* SERIES

LEVELS 6–10

### OVERVIEW

In this activity, students will explore the creative process and work of contemporary artist Julian Opie, considering how he uses a graphic visual language to represent the essential features of individuals. Taking inspiration from his work, they will develop and apply graphic elements to create and refine their own portraits.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify and describe how Julian Opie utilises line, colour and shape, to express ideas and communicate concepts
- Utilise art/design elements and principles to develop, enhance and resolve a concept for a portraits that captures the essential features of different individuals
- Develop and refine visual language to communicate ideas and construct meaningful messages
- Evaluate their own creative process and decision making, and reflect with a partner on how effectively their ideas or feelings have been expressed in their own artwork.

## STUDENT EXAMPLES



Student examples  
of the creative task

## RELATED ARTWORKS



### Julian OPIE

(English born 1958)  
*City walkers*. 2018  
 Adonised aluminium  
 Dimensions variable

### Julian OPIE

*Walking in the rain, Seoul* 2015  
 colour screenprint  
 132.2 x 199.3 cm (image)  
 150.0 x 219.5 cm (sheet)  
 ed. 11/50  
 National Gallery of Victoria,  
 Melbourne  
 Purchased with funds donated  
 by Ruth Houghton with the  
 assistance of NGV Foundation  
 Patrons and the Yvonne  
 Pettengell Bequest, 2015  
 2015.576  
 © Julian Opie, courtesy Alan  
 Cristea Gallery, London

## RELATED ARTWORKS



### Julian OPIE

*Walking in the rain, London 2015*  
colour screenprint

132.2 x 199.3 cm (image)

150.0 x 219.5 cm (sheet)

ed. 11/50

National Gallery of Victoria,  
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Patrons and the Yvonne  
Pettengell Bequest, 2015  
2015.575

© Julian Opie, courtesy  
Alan Cristea Gallery, London

### Julian OPIE

*Gary, popstar 1998–1999*  
screenprint

61.0 x 53.0 cm

(image and sheet)

*Cristea 8*

ed. 3/10

National Gallery of Victoria,  
Melbourne

Purchased with assistance  
from the Margaret Stones Fund  
for International Prints and  
Drawings, 2004  
2004.34.6

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Australia Sydney



## DISCUSS

Julian Opie is one of Britain's leading contemporary artists and has been making portraits since the 1990s. He is a painter, sculptor and digital artist, creating both still images and animations.

When Opie started drawing portraits, he used to look at himself in the mirror, close one eye and carefully trace his reflection using a felt-tip pen. Opie noticed that the traced lines on the mirror created a portrait which felt more real than the usual way of drawing. He liked the idea that basic visual elements could create a portrait of an individual person. Circles become symbols for eyes and heads, and oblong shapes replace shoulders and hair: his work reveals how we can recognise faces even in their simplest form.

Starting with photographs, Opie uses digital programs to trace thick outlines over figures and fills the sections of blank space with flat colour. His *Walking in the rain* series features people captured mid-stride and provides a snapshot of his subject's personality through their fashion choices, accessories, phone, or drink in hand.

For additional information on Julian Opie you might like to watch the following video <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/multimedia/julian-opie/> or read an essay from the Nov/Dec 2018 issue of NGV Magazine <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/julian-opie-time-frozen/>

Use the following discussion prompts to explore Julian Opie's work with your class:

- Compare the artworks to photographs of an individuals or crowds of people walking. How are the scenes similar? How are they different?
- Compare the artworks to other graphic images representing people such as symbols, hieroglyphs, icons or emojis. In what way are they similar? How are they different?
- Chose a figure from one of Julian Opie's works which interests you. What personality or interests do you think they have? What makes you say that? How has Opie emphasised their individuality?
- Describe the lines, shapes and colours in the work. What decisions do you think Opie made when working with these elements? Why do you think he chose these colours, shapes and details?
- Why do you think Julian Opie chose to represent people and crowds like this? How does it influence the way we engage with the subject matter? What meanings and ideas do you think he is aiming to communicate?
- What techniques and materials did Opie use to create this work? Why do you think he chose those techniques and materials? How does his choice of materials and techniques affect the look of the final artwork?



## RESOURCES & MATERIALS

- Full body images of people from magazines, newspapers, digital or printed photographs
- Black markers with varied nib sizes, bevelled and round tips to allow for variety
- OHP film acetate A4 x 5 sheets
- Coloured Posca markers or acrylic paint
- Double sided tape

## CREATE

Students design and create graphic portraits of people inspired by Julian Opie using the following steps:

### Planning and idea development

1. Choose a location or theme for your portraits. For example, an airport, beach goers, or busy commuters.
2. Source photographs of people, images from magazines, newspapers, or on digital devices to include in your chosen scene.

*Aim to put together a group of 3 or more images of people to work with. It works best if they are all either in profile or face on.*

3. Look closely at your selected images and identify the key features of each of the individuals.

*The components should create interest and communicate the individual's look and identity, such as their head, hair, upper body, lower body, clothing, accessories.*

4. Decide which features should be represented in your portraits and which can be omitted.

*Include those which best convey each character's individuality.*

5. Place an acetate sheet over your selected images
6. Test out each of the black permanent markers for suitability by drawing outlines of the key features.
7. Decide which line type suits your desired aesthetic style, paying close attention to joins and corners.

## Draft

Create a draft of your artwork to develop your technique:

8. Overlay a new acetate sheet
9. Outline the key components you have decided to capture. Start with the large more dominant features and work down to the finer details.
10. Consider the aesthetic style of your final artwork including line thickness, inclusions, eliminations, corners and edges (angled or curved), and what features each figure has in common.
11. Reflect on your draft so far: Have you captured each individual's personality, and overall style? What could you add, eliminate, or refine?

## Final

12. Place a fresh sheet of acetate over your draft image.
13. Refine your drawing and apply revisions; identify geometric shapes and aim to make them uniform for consistency.
14. Once you have completed the outline, use Posca markers or acrylic paint to create detail with colours.

*Consider your colour palette, and what mood your colour combinations create. You can draw inspiration from the reference images. Include those that best convey your character's personality and the situation they are in.*

15. Allow the paint to dry and scratch back any paint that may have bled out of the lines.

*Your final artwork will be presented on the opposite side of the acetate so that the outlines are appear clearly in front of the coloured paint or marker.*

16. Using a new sheet of acetate repeat with the additional images to create a set of three icons.
17. Flip the acetate over and layer the set of icons to create a scene or situation.

*This can be done as an individual or you can come together as a class and create a larger populated image. Consider perspective and scale when placing the individual images.*

18. Use double sided tape fasten the layers in place.

## Extension activity

19. Scan each image into the computer and use a drawing app such as Adobe Illustrator to create vector drawings of the images.

## PRESENT AND REFLECT

Students show their individual work to a partner or work as a whole class:

- What features did you consider important when creating your graphic portraits  
What were some of the aesthetic decisions you made through the planning and creation of your artwork? Would you do anything differently next time?
- How did you take inspiration from Julian Opie's work when creating your graphic portraits?
- How do your group of images work together as a composition? Do they share an overall style, tell a story or evoke a mood?
- What do you hope people think or feel when they look at your final artwork?

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