

Press Release

2 December 1996

Christmas Forest by Julian Opie

Supported by the Patrons of New Art

11 December 1996 – 2 January 1997

In a break with tradition, the Tate Gallery will display a number of Christmas trees in the rotunda, rather than one as in previous years. **Julian Opie**, the artist creating this year's Christmas display, has decided not to simply decorate a tree, but to create a whole forest by constructing a number of model trees. Opie has fabricated trees for his shows over the past year, so the theme was already present in his work.

The Christmas trees are constructed from two intersecting planes of wood; they are highly stylised yet their serrated outline makes them instantly recognisable as fir trees. Viewed individually, they resemble oversized children's toys. As a group they are more mysterious, drawing the viewer into an interior space, evoking the idea of a forest. If Opie thus creates a 'forest', it is of artificial trees, whose originals furthermore are cultivated as a crop and are thus to an extent unnatural themselves. In this way he makes more complex the relationship in this installation between reality and art - a central theme of his art.

Julian Opie was born in London in 1958 and educated at Goldsmith's College. Since his first solo show in 1983 he has exhibited widely in Britain and abroad, with a one-person exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London in 1994. Opie's subject-matter encompasses the objects and scenes of everyday life. He focuses on a few essential elements and produces images which, although still familiar, are no longer specific. With the assistance of computer graphics these objects, standardised images of vehicles, buildings, hills and trees, become elements in landscapes of an anonymous, seemingly homogeneous contemporary world.

This is the ninth year that a tree has been commissioned by the Gallery from an artist, but the first time a live tree has not been used in the display. Artists previously involved have been Bill Woodrow, Tim Head, Lisa Milroy, Boyd Webb, Craigie Aitchison, Shirazeh Houshiary, Cathy de Monchaux and Cornelia Parker.

The 1996 Christmas Tree and card by Julian Opie are supported by the Patrons of New Art. Established in 1982, the Patrons of New Art provide financial support towards acquisitions for the Tate Gallery's collection of contemporary art.

**For further information please contact Kate Burvill or Tiffany Vignoles at the
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