

THE ART OF BEER

Minimally beautiful

By **DON TSE**

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I've written about pilsners in this column before. But I saw another piece of art that had me instantly craving pilsner again. It turns out that multiple pieces of art can make me thirsty for the same thing!

Julian Opie (julianopie.com) is a London-born artist. He is famous for his minimalist portraits in which he is able to draw faces with just a few lines. The portraits are somewhat cartoonish, but they have the unmistakable air of fine art.

Although the faces he draws may be merely black outlines with uniform colors representing skin tone and hair, his portraits are representational and recognizable. In popular culture, his work is perhaps best known as the album cover to Blur's *Best Of* CD, which features four portraits of the band's members. Public outdoor examples of his work can be seen in Miami, Phoenix, London, Prague and Seoul. His art will also be featured on a British postage stamp in celebration of the 2012 summer Olympic games. In the world of contemporary art, Opie is kind of a big deal.

The particular Opie that had me thinking of pilsner is a new public piece in the city of Calgary, Alberta, a city known more for cowboys than for contemporary art (or good beer). It is a digital installation, a square tower three storeys in height



with 24-foot-tall LED screens on all four sides. The screens show a continuous, seamless animation of people walking. The people walk at differing speeds in accordance with a computer program, so, at least theoretically, the same exact image will never appear twice on the screens.

The piece is situated along a riverside walking path, but the tower is tall enough that the people can be seen from cars driving over the nearby overpass. The piece, entitled *Promenade*, in Opie's own words, "[is] all about crossroads and cars and the movement of the river and people moving down the walkways." It is also about tech-

nology and the clash between our love of cars versus the environmentalism and simplicity of walking. Even the medium, digital displays, speaks to this, by using modern technology to display a very traditional mode of transportation. A video of the piece can be seen here: <http://www.julianopie.com/#/artwork/film/2011/3032>.

With its crisp, clean lines, its bright yellow background and even its pixelated imagery, *Promenade* just screamed "pilsner" to me. As Opie is minimalist, so is pilsner. Pilsner is a simple balance of two flavors: malt sweetness and hop bitterness. Sure, there might be some grassy or vegetal hop flavors as well, but in the spectrum of beer styles, pilsner definitely favors the simple side. Indeed, pilsner is delightful in large part because of its simplicity.

Pilsner should be crystal clear and bright with heavy beading due to a high level of carbonation. Its yellow color appears to be in motion because the heavy amount of beading bubbles that constantly rise through the glass. While the pixelated images of *Promenade* move left and right rather than up, it still reminds me of the motion in a glass of pilsner.

Pilsner is the perfect beer to just sit back and enjoy, without excessive analysis. What is this beer saying? What is its meaning? All ridiculous questions. As with Opie's works, do not over-think it; just enjoy it. Beauty in simplicity. Simply beautiful. ♦♦♦♦