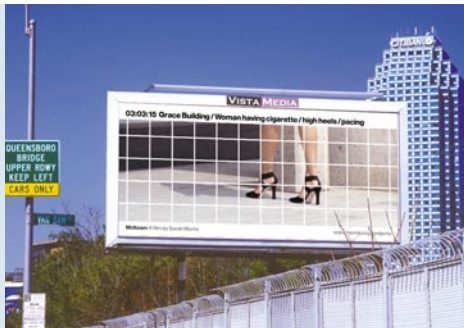


projects **77** billboards  
 sarah morris  
 julian opie  
 lisa ruyter



Sarah Morris. *Midtown (Grace Building Billboard)*. 2002. Digitally printed billboard, 9' 7" x 21' 7" (292.1 x 657.9 cm). Printer: MetroMedia Technologies, New York. Skillman Avenue at Van Dam Street, Long Island City



Julian Opie. *I Dreamt I Was Driving My Car*. 2002. Digitally printed billboard, 9' 7" x 21' 7" (292.1 x 657.9 cm). Printer: MetroMedia Technologies, New York. 11 Street at 48 Road, Long Island City



Lisa Ruyter. *The Gate*. 2002. Digitally printed billboard, 9' 7" x 21' 7" (292.1 x 657.9 cm). Printer: MetroMedia Technologies, New York. 19 Street at Tenth Avenue, Chelsea

**Art, Advertising, and the Accidental Viewer**

In the contemporary period, the billboard has been a fertile canvas for artistic experimentation. Its scale, impermanence, capacity for mass communication, and relationship to its immediate environment make it an unusual and dynamic platform for creative output. Because the billboard is conventionally a commercial format located outdoors, it is often used by artists who want to blur the boundary between art and advertising, explore commercial techniques, or respond to urban surroundings. Its audience is typically the accidental viewer—someone who happens upon an image inadvertently. This encounter between the artwork, its context, and the viewer can spark unanticipated and intriguing associations.

*Projects 77* brings together three artists—Sarah Morris, Julian Opie, and Lisa Ruyter—who have each created five newly commissioned images that have been installed on billboards throughout New York City. The artists share an interest in capturing the modern urban experience—how people relate to the city's environment, as well as how they relate to each other. The ways in which these artists work—choices of style, scale, method of production, and conceptual strategy—make their images particularly suited to the billboard format. Morris has produced photographic posters that identify her work as a filmmaker and look at home against the city's advertising backdrop; using commercial graphics techniques, Opie has created images of open roadscapes with a visual immediacy that invites the passerby into his art; and Ruyter has transformed snapshots of everyday life into eye-popping scenes that depict our surroundings and activities.

This project follows The Museum of Modern Art's recent temporary move to Long Island City. The billboards are meant to underscore the changes that are happening to the Museum, its visitors, and its new neighborhood by placing unexpected images along routinely trafficked thoroughfares, thereby disturbing the familiar. Twelve

billboards have been dispersed throughout Long Island City, and travelers who take the elevated 7 train or the Q32 bus, the M60 bus, or other transit over the Queensboro Bridge can see billboard art to either side; traffic entering the Long Island Expressway and the Pulaski Bridge to Brooklyn will also encounter billboards from the project; and still other billboards can be seen at Hunters Point and at MoMA affiliate P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, among other locations (see maps below). Linking the project to Manhattan, three billboards are located along Tenth Avenue in Chelsea, which is home to many of New York's contemporary art galleries and is also a busy Westside thoroughfare. The billboards, installed from October 7 through December 1, emerge as visual blips along the cluttered arteries of the city—blips that may be altogether missed, absorbed quickly just once, or examined repeatedly during daily routines.

**Sarah Morris**

Sarah Morris approaches image-making in a multifaceted way: she is a filmmaker, painter, and printmaker, whose work in each medium loosely informs the others. Morris's interest in the modern metropolis focuses on sites of authority and on the architecture, people, and industries that define a particular city. Her intoxicating film sequences, with their accompanying electronic soundtracks, move through cities with pulsating speed and energy. She has produced four major cycles of work in recent years: *Midtown* (1998), shot in New York City; *AM/PM* (1999), shot in Las Vegas; *Capital* (2000), shot in Washington, D.C.; and, most recently, *Miami* (2002). The films are accompanied by series of dynamic abstract paintings inspired by the gridded patterns and colors common to the modern design of each city.

For *Projects 77*, Morris has designed five "film posters." Isolating and cropping stills from her films, she then digitally overlaid them with a hard-edged white

grid—a nod to her painted geometric abstractions, and a means of deconstructing the straightforward appearance of the photographic images. The artist has identified each scene at the top with text taken from logs in which she meticulously recorded the time, place, subject, and action of the hundreds of frames from her films. At the bottom, she has identified the film's title, and herself as its maker. Morris's project exploits the compelling relationship between art and advertising by creating images that fit in with the city's commercial life. But these posters are not conventional advertisements promoting the release dates of her films; rather, they are visual teasers meant to capture her films' fast-paced style with one simple image.

There is also an element of voyeurism to many of Morris's images, a sense that we are looking at something unknowingly caught on film. Enlarged to billboard scale, and thus installed for mass consumption, the images create tension between private, or unforeseen, moments and public display. Overlaying her images, the grid becomes a visual fence, like peering at a scene through a window: we see President Clinton whistling on the South Lawn after deplaning Marine One; a woman from the knees down in high heels, pacing on a cigarette break outside Manhattan's Grace building; a formally dressed woman descending a staircase in the lobby of Miami's renowned Fontainebleau Hotel; a race car in the pit lane of the Homestead-Miami Speedway; and a shiny silver car, valet-parked at the Las Vegas Hilton. Although Morris provides a loose identification of her images, we are left to wonder about the context and meaning of these candid, captured moments.

**Julian Opie**

Julian Opie likes fast, single readings of images. Since 1995 he has worked via computer—outputting images from his ever-increasing digital repertoire onto various

formats, from vinyl wall paintings and painted metal sculptures to T-shirts and CD covers. Using the tools available to commercial designers, Opie achieves a purity of color and form that looks consistently vivid whether the image be large or small, up close or at a distance, or reproduced over and over again. These qualities make his work ideal for the billboard.

Opie's art is full of images relating to travel and speed, as experienced in a variety of spaces—rural or urban, indoor or outdoor. As with previous series, Opie presents his images as propositions: imagined scenarios with poetic titles. For *Projects 77*, Opie has created five images based on photographs he took while driving through England's countryside—north from London along the M1 (Britain's first motorway), and back into London on A and B roads. The images, titled *I Dreamt I Was Driving My Car*, are set against the backdrop of New York City, each one offering a momentary interruption—a cinematic window into an imaginary world apart from everyday city living. Pedestrians and motor traffic may suddenly encounter a crisp vista of a curvy, four-lane highway amid green pastures; a rapidly approaching bend in a roadscape saturated with stunning, twilight hues; a long road winding through a hilly brown countryside; a road with a lone signpost placed near a farmhouse; and a six-lane highway with lampposts and a blank road sign against the glow of a blue early-morning sky. Considered together, the five images have a narrative, dreamlike quality that takes us to a different space and time—a sort of virtual tourism. Opie's sharp, one-point perspective and color schemes derive straight from academic landscape painting; his angles of entry, though, are exaggerated, and his roadscape are pristine and cartoonlike, creating a sense of immediacy, speed, and control.

Opie's empty, peopleless roads can be lonely places, but they can also be places of possibility and escape. The mystique of the open vista has resonated with artists over the decades, particularly in the Pop period, with Ed Ruscha and Allan D'Arcangelo. Opie, however, working digitally, brings a new freedom and efficiency to this theme. Placed on billboards within the city, the images offer a virtual escape from the everyday, while also redirecting us back to the real world from which they came.

### Lisa Ruyter

While Morris's billboards interact with the city's advertising and Opie's provide momentary windows of escape, Lisa Ruyter's billboards arrest our visual sensibilities. Ruyter is a painter who creates large-scale, vivid narrative scenes based on everyday settings and situations. Her subjects include parks, cemeteries, and suburbs; urban street life; industrial vistas; and, most recently, scenes relating to religion. Like Morris and Opie, Ruyter uses her camera to capture ordinary moments in and around cities. To make a painting, she projects a slide onto a canvas and traces the outlines in pen. She then fills in the shapes with seemingly incompatible hues until all the forms are ablaze. To complete her paint-

ings, Ruyter redefines her outlines, making each shape distinct.

A cacophony of color dominates Ruyter's work, and the results are attention-grabbing. As with Fauvism in the early twentieth century, color here loses its natural descriptive quality and becomes, instead, an expressive force. The dissonance in Ruyter's work also harks back to the color experiments of Pop artists like Andy Warhol and Robert Stanley, who brought radiant energy to their everyday subjects. For *Projects 77*, Ruyter has created a series of horizontal paintings reproduced as billboards. The series relates to ideas of spectatorship, and includes a variety of subjects: An awkwardly angled aerial snapshot shows two pedestrians at the edge of a patchwork sidewalk, teetering above a void of green; two other billboards are based on photographs taken at the U.S. Open, one depicting stadium seating dotted with multicolored onlookers, and the other, the backs of the heads of two spectators peering onto a bright blue tennis court; there is a stunningly colorized Coney Island scene, with blazing, isolated figures on a flattened strip of neon beach; and an abstract crowd of people with electrifying, masklike faces, seated on the steps of P.S.1 at a summer Warm Up music performance.

The names of these mesmerizing compositions were taken arbitrarily from film titles in a movie guide, and they all suggest going places: *The Gate*, *Light Years Away*, *School for Scoundrels*, *Botany Bay*, and *Let's Get Lost*. While Ruyter's titles encourage random associations, her subjects serendipitously relate to the geography of *Projects 77*. While crossing an intersection in Chelsea, you can see a billboard depicting figures about to cross the street, derived from an old snapshot taken just blocks away. In Long Island City—at P.S.1 and en route to the U.S. Open—you can find billboards based on photographs Ruyter took two summers ago at both those locations. These unplanned connections demonstrate the fortuitousness and spontaneity that can occur when bringing imagery outside the gallery into its contextual surroundings, inviting different audiences and unforeseen associations.

Judy Hecker  
Assistant Curator  
Department of Prints and Illustrated Books

### biographies and exhibitions

#### Sarah Morris

American. Born 1967, Great Britain. Lives in New York

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions

2002: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Site Santa Fe. 2001: Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof, Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin.\* 2000: Kunsthalle Zürich.\* Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig.\* Philadelphia Museum of Art. 1999: Museum of Modern Art, Oxford.\* 1998: Le Consortium, centre d'art contemporain, Dijon.\* 1996: White Cube, London

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

2002: *Painting on the Move*, Kunsthalle Basel.\* São Paulo Biennial; *Urgent Painting*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.\* 2001: *Comfort: Reclaiming Place in a Virtual World*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art, Ohio.\* 2000: *Twisted: Urban and Visionary Landscapes in Contemporary Painting*, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, The Netherlands.\* *What If: Art on the Verge of Archi-tecture and Design*, Moderna Museet, Stockholm.\* 1999: *Frieze*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.\* 1998: *Young Americans 2*, Saatchi Collection Gallery, London.\* 1997: *Hospital*, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin\*

#### Julian Opie

British, born 1958. Lives in London

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions

2002: *The Wall at WAM*, Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts; Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston. 2001: Lisson Gallery, London.\* Ikon Gallery, Birmingham.\* 2000: Scai The Bathhouse, Tokyo; Abbaye Saint-André, Meymac, France.\* 1999: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.\* Galerie Bob van Orsouw, Zurich. 1997: Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin.\* 1994: Kunstverein Hannover.\* 1993: Hayward Gallery, London.\* 1992: Wiener Secession, Vienna.\* 1985: Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.\* 1983: Lisson Gallery, London

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

2002: *Continuity/Departure*, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.\* 2000: *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*, Tate Modern, London.\* *Intelligence*, Tate Britain, London.\* 1998: Biennial of Sydney.\* 1997: Ninth Delhi Triennial, New Delhi.\* Venice Biennale.\* 1990: *Objectives: The New Sculpture*, Newport Art Museum, Newport Beach, California.\* 1987: *Documenta 8*, Kassel.\* 1986: *Correspondentie Europa*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam\*

#### Lisa Ruyter

American, born 1968. Lives in New York

#### Selected Solo Exhibitions

2002: Arndt & Partner, Berlin; Leo Koenig, New York; Mario Diacono, Boston. 2001: Georg Kargl, Vienna; Leo Koenig, New York.\* 2000: Art + Public, Geneva. 1999: Dorothee DePauw Gallery, Brussels; Ace Gallery, Los Angeles. 1998: Rove/Kenny Schachter and Mitchell Albus Gallery, New York. 1996: One Great Jones, New York. 1993: Friedrich Petzel, New York; Wooster Gardens, New York

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

2002: *Shopping: Art and Consumer Culture*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt; *Stations of the Cross*, Art Unlimited, Basel.\* 2000: *Pastoral Pop*, Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, New York; *Greater New York, P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center*, New York.\* 1999: *The Bastard Kids of Drella*, Le Consortium, Dijon; *Looking at Ourselves: Works by Women Artists from the Loagan Collection*, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art\*

\*Exhibition accompanied by catalogue

### acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgment is due to Laurence Kardish, Senior Curator, Film and Media, who organizes the *Projects* series; the artists, for their imagination and adaptability; and Claire Corey, for her exacting production work on the billboards, and Peter Foley, for his invaluable guidance. I also thank Laura Beiles, Cassandra Heliczler, Maggie Lyko, Kara Moore, Ed Pusz, Bonnie Ralston, Carol Ann Schuster, Deborah Schwartz, Gary Stoppelman, Pat Whitman, and Carlos Yepes, as well as Vista Media and Quality House of Graphics/Experimental Print Center.

The *projects* series is sponsored by Peter Norton.

Additional funding is provided by The Contemporary Arts Council, The Junior Associates, and The Young Print Collectors of The Museum of Modern Art.

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Editor: Cassandra Heliczler; Designer: Bonnie Ralston; Production: Claire Corey;  
Street photos: Eric Van Den Brulle