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# THE ARTIST'S TULLE

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Benjamin Shine creates artworks through innovation.  
Juliet Cullinan discovers the light behind the genius.

*Creative explorer Benjamin Shine's unique effects, fashioned from tulle, captivate critics and collectors worldwide. He creates wall-sized portraits from a single veil of tulle that cascades down the canvas with all the fragility of rising smoke or a cloud patterned by the wind. Captured within these ethereal airy swirls, delicate facial features display the visual sparkle and thickness of a freshly painted oil or varnished masterpiece, while maintaining a natural glow.*

Shine uses his hot iron – as a conductor might use a baton – to crimp, tweak and adjust the fabric to capture his sitter's facial likeness through shadow, depth and dimension. That Shine can achieve such spine-chilling accuracy from the random scrunching of netting is an artistic breakthrough. Achieving a great likeness with a pencil or paintbrush is difficult enough but creating it while balancing on a ladder and using a hot iron to melt the shape beneath his hand, is sheer genius.

Shine is an inventor, a true artist. He speaks of his work modestly, unravelling his successes in an unpretentious manner that belies all his global awards and designer commissions.

“Having studied fashion, fabric has continued to influence and inspire me, especially ideas of construction, craftsmanship and material manipulation. In my tulle work, I try to work respectfully in harmony with the material through >>



portraits, installations and my new 'tulle flows'. Where my portraits are focused on accuracy and true likeness, these flows centre on the more emotive qualities inherent in this delicate material. In my new series, Slow Motion, the work explores quiet contemplation and those true moments of calm and introspection." he explains.

Talking to Shine, I discover a designer with an eye for clarity. He breaks rules and inspires the masses with his pioneering pieces that combine realism and revolutionary craft. His art is unlimited, undefined, flowing and timeless; his talent, inspiring. His projects span furniture, clothing, children's games and household décor.

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The most prestigious recognition for his tulle portraits has been in the invitation from Givenchy to collaborate on an exclusive Haute Couture series. Their Creative Director Riccardo Tisci, asked Shine to unite art, sportswear and Haute Couture in a creation of hand-made sweatshirts featuring iconographic prints of the Madonna and Child fashioned from a single piece of tulle for Givenchy's Spring/Summer collection. Wanting to capture features while still retaining the abstract quality that Givenchy required, Shine discovered that by eliminating detail he could still contain the image.

He created his 'upcycled' portrait of Prince Albert of Monaco from recycled plastic bottles – supporting the Prince's sustainable projects and highlighting ecological issues.

His deconstructed flag portrait of President Obama was unveiled at the Museum of Art and Design at the 2009 Inauguration Day and replicated on coffee mugs, puzzles and T-shirts across the US. His patented drawing game Cordz, is an ingenious way to draw without mess or paint and has proved to be very popular in playschools.

Shine's exhibits for British Telecom's ArtBox Exhibition can be found in London. 'Long Distance' in >>





Leicester Square displays a giraffe bursting through the classic phone booth, its neck reaching through the top to the leafy tree above. He also transformed London phone boxes into sofas – his purple Box Lounger was prominently featured during the London Olympics. His red sofa reclines at Harvey Nichols.

A traditional British red post-box with a play on The Royal crown formed his London Egg Hunt display presented by Fabergé. The unique egg was stolen, hunted, stalked, and retrieved. It fetched £42,000 at a London auction alongside eggs designed by Zaha Hadid and the other signed by Prince Charles.

Shine's taxi elephant, a glossy black sculpture with chrome accents, headlamps as eyes, and a taxi sign on its head, was prompted by London's quintessential black cab. Powered by solar light, it's a wondrous sight in front of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square.

Shine's work sparkles with creativity, his impression of the world captured with delight and curiosity. He is tracking texture, colour and fabric and leading us on a unique and original path. He is truly contributing to global art. ♦♦♦

