



19 | VIEW GALLERY

## JACKY TSAI'S COLOURFUL CULTURE CLASH

BY [HATTIE CRISELL](#)

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Type 'Jacky Tsai' into Google and you'll find page after page about the artist – but no

amount of information on a screen can give an accurate impression of his work itself. It's so intricate and technical that when I visit the London gallery [Scream](#) to see Tsai's solo show *Eastern Orbit*, I find myself leaning in to peer at each piece from millimetres away. Using traditional Chinese lacquer carving, embroidery, cloisonné and hand-painted porcelain, the work is highly detailed and expertly produced.

DETAIL FROM POW! POW! POW!



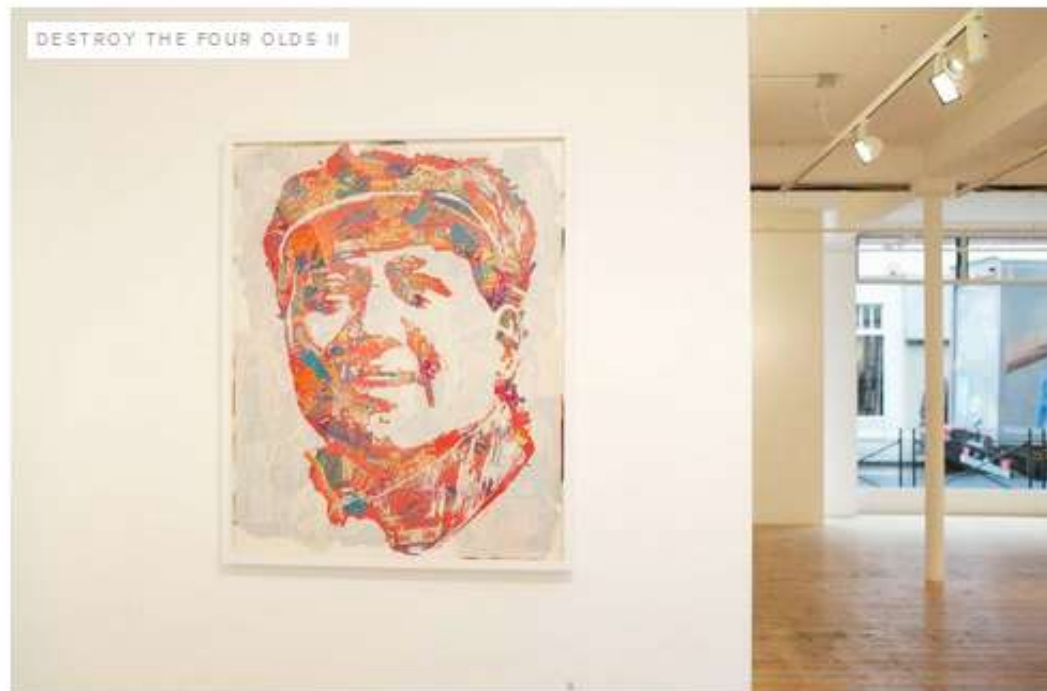
Tsai designs these pieces, but doesn't make them himself – that part of the process is handled by his team of craftsmen back in China. 'I could do it but I'd never achieve that high level,' he explains. 'All the lacquer carvings are made by old masters. They train their whole lives to make beautiful art – I could only find four or five people in China who were able to deliver that quality.'

Tsai was born in Shanghai and started his art education with a BA at the China Academy of Art, but came to London in 2006 to study at Central Saint Martins. His work is a celebration of the two parts of himself: his Chinese upbringing, and his life in London, where he has developed his voice as a successful artist. He brings together ancient skills with pop-art inspired imagery: 'All my art is about the fusion between eastern culture and western culture,' he says. 'I want to bring them together – sometimes in conflict, and sometimes in harmony. It reflects the culture shock I have experienced in my life.'



While at St Martins, he did a placement at Alexander McQueen, where he famously drew a skull made of flowers. 'I was lucky. Someone else had failed to produce the floral skull, and I came in and they thought "Let's give this guy a chance," he remembers. 'The next year when they released it on a T-shirt, everyone just loved it. That's probably part of the reason I decided to be an artist.'

Tsai describes art as his 'biggest passion', and is clearly highly creative. But he has a head for business, and talks openly about his desire to sustain a commercially successful career. Alongside his artwork, he has his own fashion line – a collection of illustrated T-shirts sold at Harvey Nichols in the UK and Hong Kong. He also plans to keep producing affordable screen-printed work alongside the more expensive techniques, because his screen prints sell well internationally.



Above all though, he's determined to keep moving forward, without ever becoming predictable. When I start to wrap up the interview, he stops me. "There's one more thing I would like to say," he says. "I never keep techniques for a long time. I will always want to change and change, so my next show is going to be something different. I will bring in something you'll never expect."

*Eastern Orbit by Jecky Tsal is at Scream London until 20 June.*

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# MY WORK: JACKY TSAI

BY [HATTIE CRISELL](#)

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'The whole idea for this show is to try to revive beautiful Chinese crafts and techniques, so I spent a lot of time looking for the right people – very high quality, master craftsmen. Then I spent some time researching how I can make the art beautiful – what kind of art they can and can't deliver. The outcome is that I used four or five different techniques, including lacquer carving (pictured), cloisonné, embroidery and Chinese hand-painted blue and white porcelain.'

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SCREAM LONDON AND THE ARTIST



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## MY WORK: JACKY TSAI

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'There's not a lot of work for these craftsmen today. Before me, their main work was being sent occasionally to Beijing to fix old treasures. I felt that it was the perfect opportunity to deliver those traditional techniques with a modern twist.'

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SCREAM LONDON AND THE ARTIST



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# MY WORK: JACKY TSAI

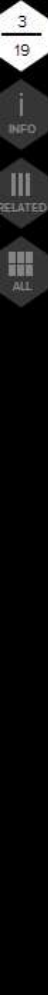
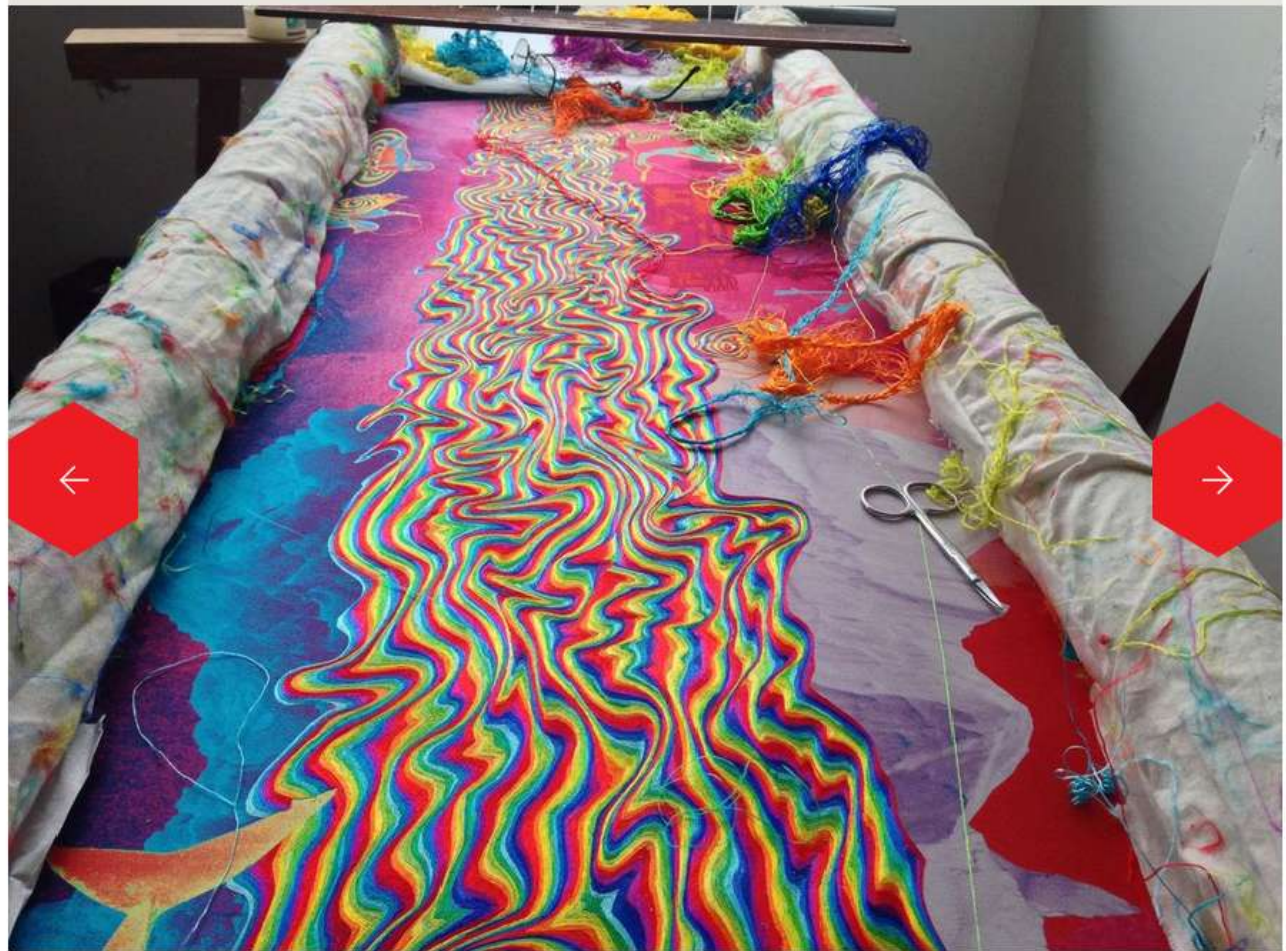
BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'At the beginning, they refused to change anything. But I said, if you want young people to remember and love these techniques, and if you want more people to learn them in the future, you have to change. You have to listen to me and trust me.'

You can see now that we used very vibrant colours, almost like pop art. I feel proud of what we've achieved.'

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SCREAM LONDON AND THE ARTIST



# MY WORK: JACKY TSAI

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'In China we don't have any real contemporary art, in my opinion. The art is quite old-school – oil painting and sculpture. To me it's old-fashioned. I want to inspire the younger generation and be innovative.'

PHOTO: COURTESY OF SCREAM LONDON AND THE ARTIST



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5  
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# MY WORK: JACKY TSAI

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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PHOTO: KASIA BOBULA

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# MY WORK: JACKY TSAI

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- 6 / 19
- INFO
- RELATED
- ALL



▶ PLAY



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# MY WORK: JACKY TSAI

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF SCREAM LONDON AND THE ARTIST

- 7/19
- INFO
- RELATED
- ALL



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- Thumbnail 2
- Thumbnail 3
- Thumbnail 4
- Thumbnail 5
- Thumbnail 6
- Thumbnail 7
- Thumbnail 8
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- Thumbnail 12
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- Thumbnail 15
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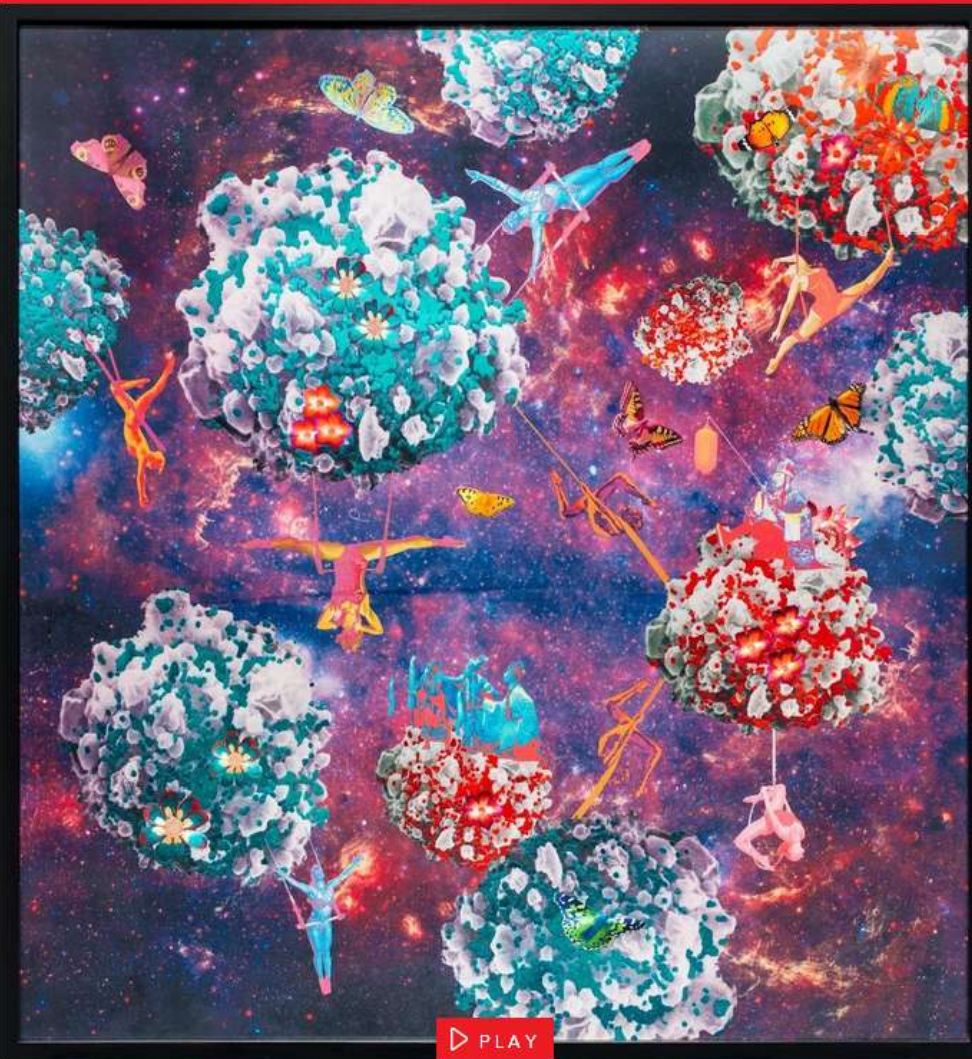
8  
19  
MY WORK: JACKY TSAI

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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PHOTO: COURTESY OF SCREAM LONDON AND THE ARTIST

- 8  
19
- INFO
- RELATED
- ALL



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- 9/19
- INFO
- RELATED
- ALL

# MY SPACE: JACKY TSAI

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'I've just left one studio, because it was too cold, and I'm waiting for another space in Shoreditch that will open in December. It's a factory conversion with high ceilings. It's perfect for the next phase of Jacky Tsai artwork, which might be big canvas work.'

PHOTO: KASIA BOBULA



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- 10/19
- INFO
- RELATED
- ALL

# MY SPACE: JACKY TSAI

BY [HATTIE CRISELL](#)

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'Until then, I'm working at home – which is only possible because I live in Wapping. It's a very quiet, peaceful place.'



11  
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MY INSPIRATION:  
JACKY TSAI

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'I don't go to many exhibitions, because if you see too much of other people's artwork, it will influence you. I want to do something unique, so I isolate myself when I'm working. My background is quite interesting – I'm Chinese but I work here. Every day I find inspiration from my daily life.'

PHOTO: KASIA BOBULA



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- 12 / 19
- INFO
- RELATED
- ALL

# MY INSPIRATION: MUSIC

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'I always have headphones and I listen to a lot of different music. Sometimes it's quite hard rock, sometimes it's Chinese pop music. In terms of British bands, I like The Cure and Radiohead.'



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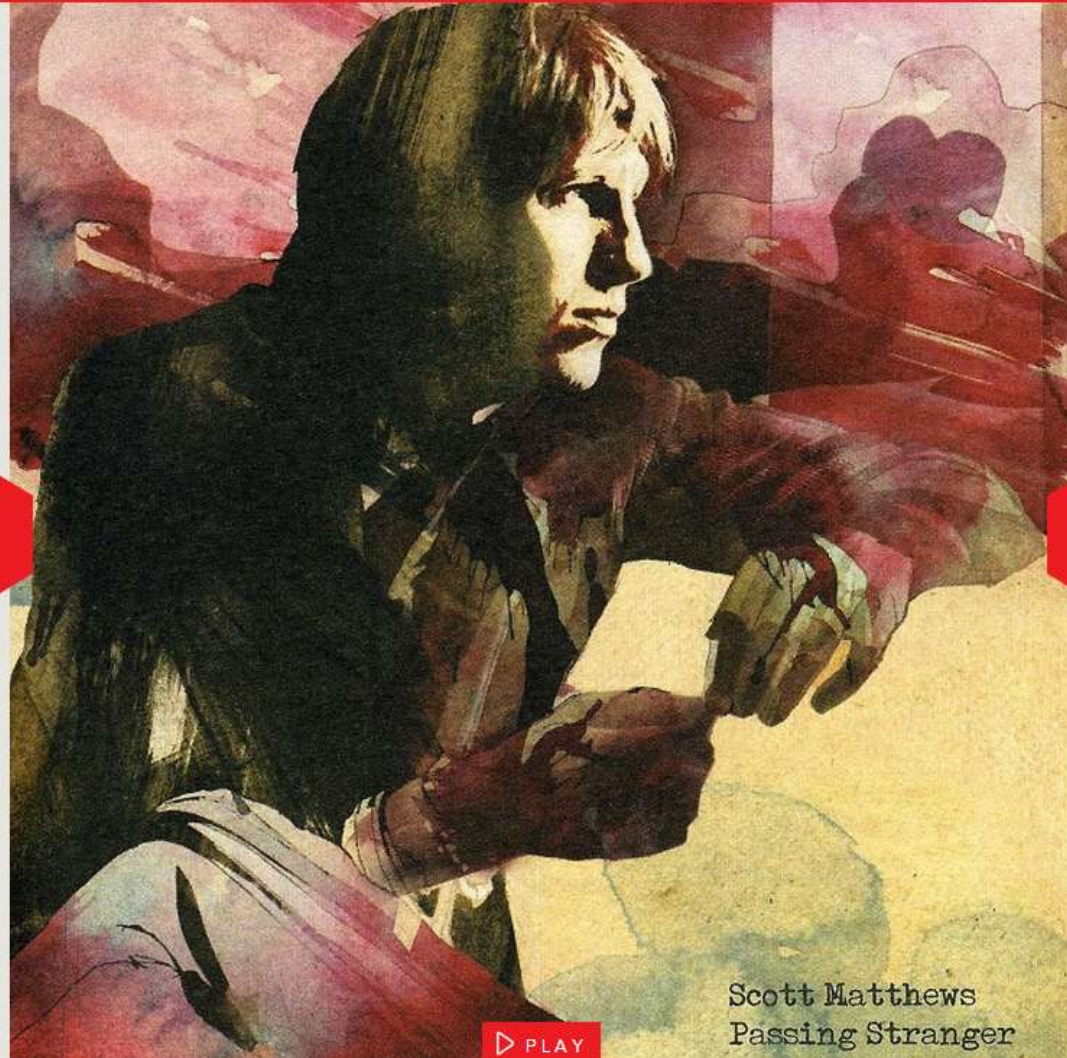


13  
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MY INSPIRATION:  
MUSIC

BY [HATTIE CRISELL](#)

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'This year I've been listening to more folk music. I think I'm getting more mature and I don't need anything very dramatic, just something very light. I love a singer called Scott Matthews.'



Scott Matthews  
Passing Stranger

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- 13
- 19
- INFO
- RELATED
- ALL



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# MY INSPIRATION: ROY LICHTENSTEIN

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'My art aesthetic is influenced by Roy Lichtenstein and his use of vibrant, flat colour – he's my hero. I think everything he produced was wonderful!'



15  
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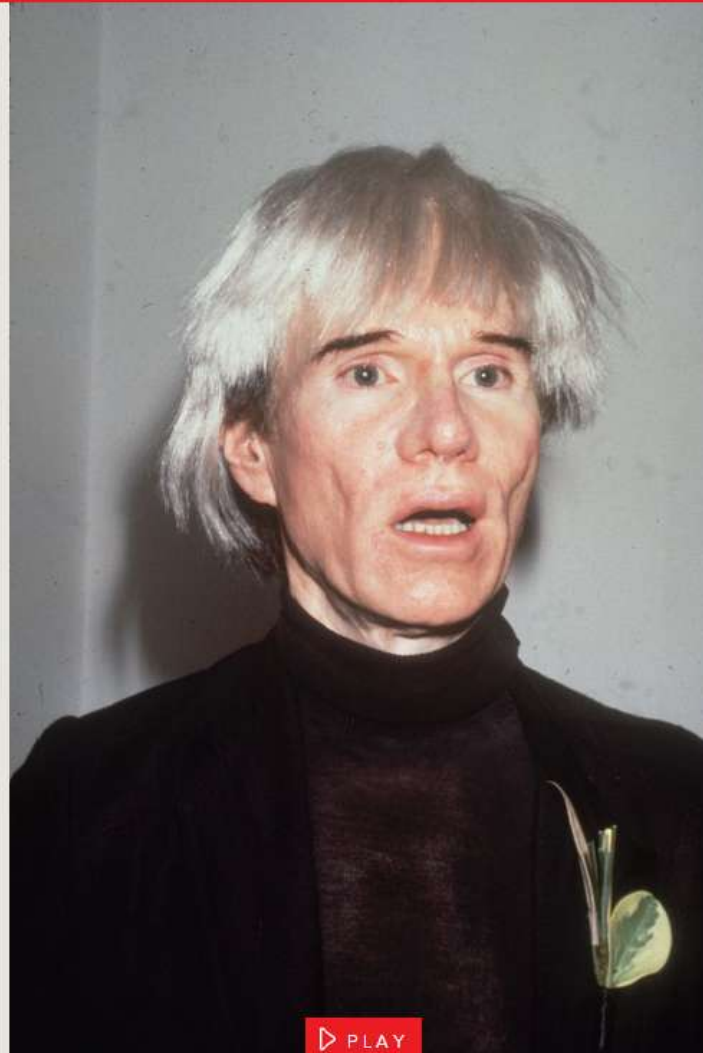
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# MY INSPIRATION: ANDY WARHOL

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'In terms of how I handle my business, Andy Warhol and Takashi Murakami have inspired me to be a successful artist in a commercial way.'



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16  
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# MY PLACES: WAPPING

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'When I'm working late at night, I like to go out and have a run for 30 minutes, and then I feel quite refreshed. I run from Wapping High Street to St Katharine Docks, then to Tower Hill, then I turn around.'



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17 / 19

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# MY PLACES: BRICK LANE

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'Every weekend you'll see me in Brick Lane to discover some new food. Everything there is delicious, especially the Japanese food. It's my favourite place in east London.'



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18  
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# MY PLACES: SHANGHAI

BY HATTIE CRISELL

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'I'm from Shanghai but I don't go back often.  
My Shanghai dialect is getting very weak – I  
should practise more.'

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