

People

## Meeting This Artist Could Be the Best Thing to Happen to You on the Subway

He's made portraits of over 500,000 straphangers.



Orin at work on the subway. Courtesy of Christiane Paul Krenkler.

Sarah Cascone • August 5, 2016 • [Share This Article](#)

For most New Yorkers, performers on the subway must be endured as part of our daily commutes. However, imagine my surprise this past weekend as I looked up from a conversation with my Tetris-engrossed boyfriend to see that there was a man with a sketchbook across from us, quietly drawing our portrait in broad strokes with a black marker.

That man is [Orin](#), and maybe you've seen him, too. He told me he's drawn over 500,000 portraits of people on the subway, as part of a daily project he's been doing for the last 15 years.

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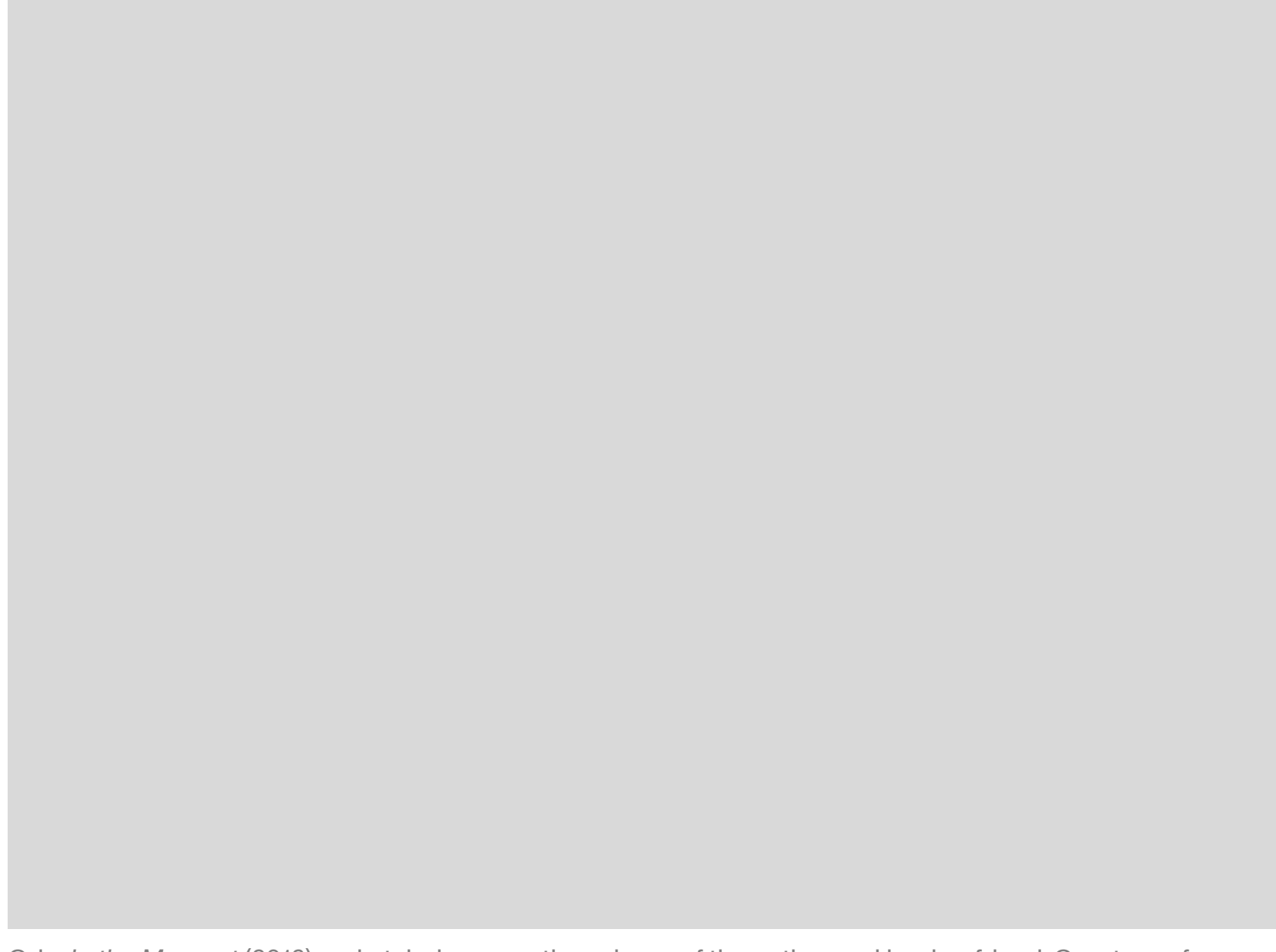
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Orin at work on the subway. Courtesy of Christiane Paul Krenkler.

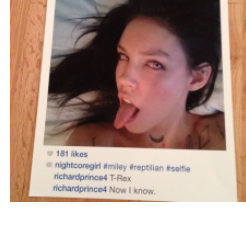
Born in Jamaica, Orin is a mainly self-taught artist who attended New York's High School of Art and Design before dropping out to get his G.E.D. Since then, he's worked a number of jobs, but nothing gets him going like drawing. "I really can't be bothered with anything else but creating," he told me in an email.

He credits Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* for inspiring his current work. "In 2000, I stopped the dead-end jobs," Orin wrote. "Since then, I have been drawing people."



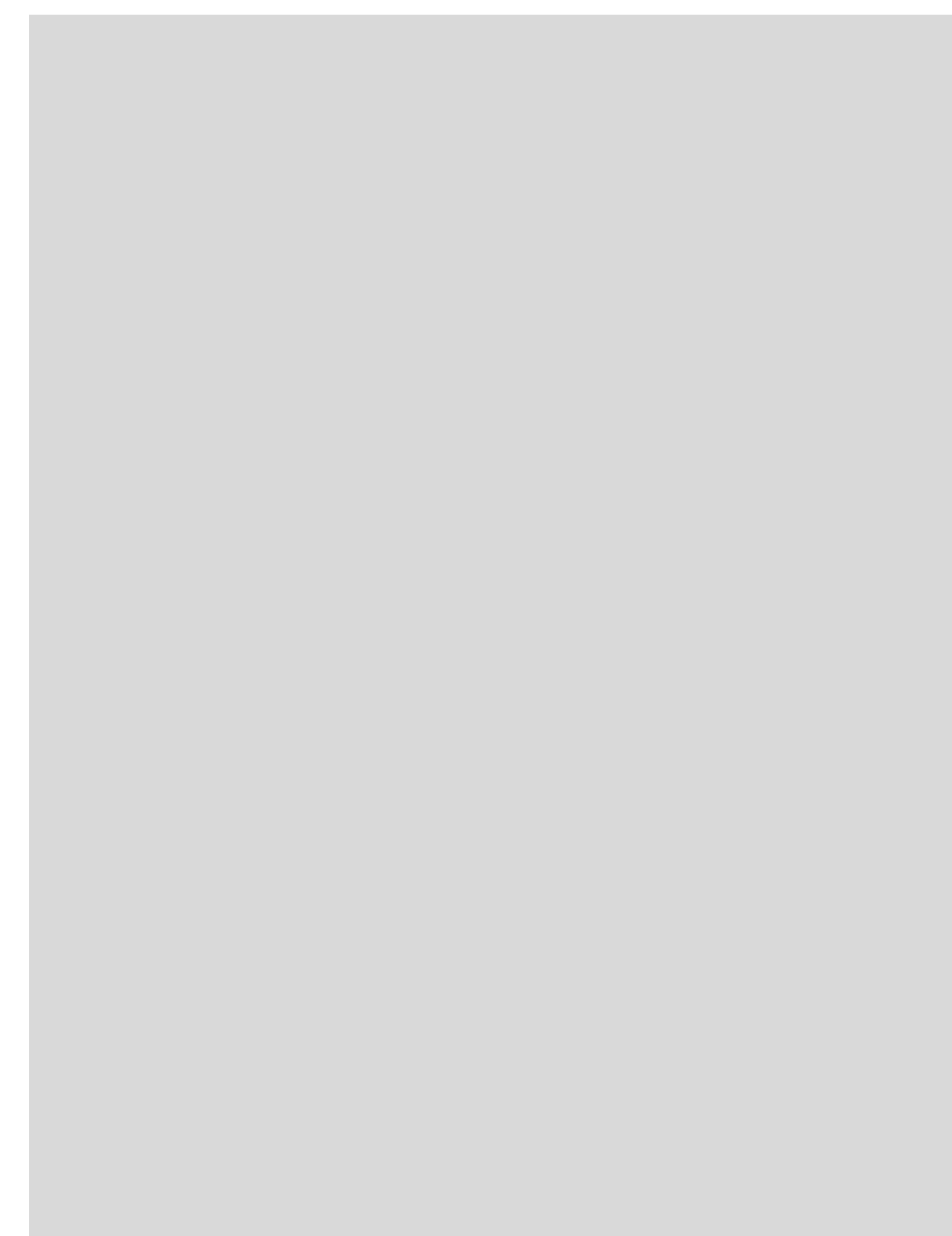
Orin, *In the Moment* (2016), a sketch drawn on the subway of the author and her boyfriend. Courtesy of Nathan Monroe-Yavneh.

Orin was almost finished sketching when I spotted him, and he smiled as I caught his eye. "Can I see it?" I asked.



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Seconds later, he had torn the completed page out of the book, and handed it over. "In the moment," read a caption along the side of the drawing, which perfectly captured our quiet exchange as we rode home.

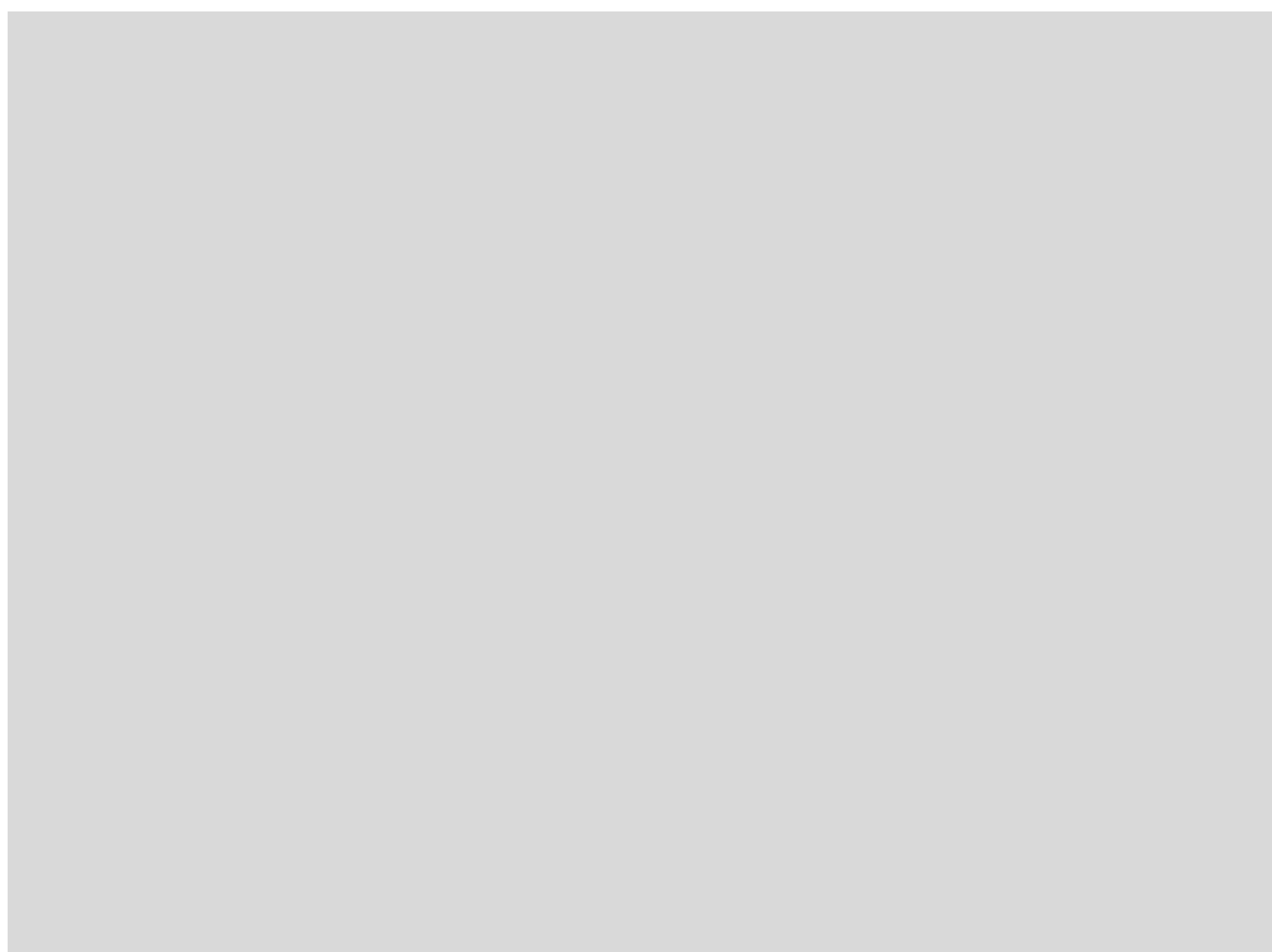


James and his portrait by Orin. Courtesy of Sarah Cascone.

"Keep it," he said. There was a note on the back, I realized, reading "Enjoy please. Tip if you like." (We did.)

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By this point, the man sitting next to Orin had hopped across the car to the empty seat next to me, eager to have his own portrait drawn. "I hate subway performers, like musicians and stuff, but this is so much cooler," he said.



A couple with their portrait by Orin. Courtesy of Sarah Cascone.

I asked Orin how long each drawing takes, on average. "Someone timed me the other day!" he exclaimed. "About two-and-a-half minutes!"

As he settled in on his third drawing of the ride, Orin's pace slowed noticeably as he chatted with us. "It's an exercise," he told a passenger of the ongoing project. "It's kind of, like, Buddhist for me."

In that, Orin's work recall the spirit of [William Anastasi's](#) meditative [subway drawings](#), abstract, free-flowing scribbles which the artist does every day while he rides the 1 line downtown.

Whatever it was, the subway could use more of it.



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