

# Big picture T-Shirts, by Susan A Barnett

One of more striking things about these people posing in their T-shirts is how un-posey they are. Only Popeye is apeing the stance of the cartoon sailor on his back, but you have to look closely. You can almost see him smiling, too. The rest, told to "do what you want", stood up straight, arms down - no Usain Bolt shenanigans here. Girls were more likely to put their hands on their hips, says the photographer Susan A Barnett, but then she found few to shoot: slogan T-shirts, it appears, are a peculiarly male preserve.

At best, they carry a sharp political or witty message in a few well-chosen words: I'm Muslim, Don't Panik or Smile: It Pisses People Off. The latter was in his early teens, his mother standing by, rolling her eyes affectionately. At worst, they are offensive - witness I Shoot People - but most are rather sweet: Work Of Art was just nine and, Barnett says, highly aware of how cute he was.

She chose to photograph people from behind because she was intrigued by how much you can tell about someone without seeing their face. The T-shirts speak volumes, of course - the grey-haired man with the sepia woman on his back certainly seems nicer than the man sporting Vote Incumbents Out - but posture, hair, belt, trousers all convey more than you might think. However, shooting people's backs has its drawbacks. Hide The Sex Toys makes more sense when you see what's on his front: Jesus Is Coming.

**Hannah Booth**





