David Hockney
MATRIX/BERKELEY 92

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A Visit with Christopher and Don, Santa Monica Canyon, 1984 (detail)



In the twenty years since he burst upon the international art scene, British artist David Hockney has moved through many styles and media--from his Pop-related paintings of the early and middle sixties, to the austere and refined portraits of the late sixties, to the more intuitive and hedonistic works of the 1970s. He has worked masterfully in painting, drawing, lithograpy, etching, stage and costume design, and, most recently, in photographic collage, a medium he virtually has made his own.

The common denominator in Hockney's varied work is its basis in recognizable form -in the human figure, in domestic objects and interiors, and in the Southern California landscape, particularly the ubiquitous swimming pool. A consummate draftsman (like Matisse, drawing is a passion for Hockney), he considers himself first and foremost an illustrator, citing as mentors some of the greatest artist-illustrators of their day--Hogarth, Goya and Daumier.

Hockney's present obsession with Cubism in all its phases and, in particular, its elaboration in Picasso's late paintings (all but ignored by most historians and critics until recently) has resulted in a prodigious body of work. Beginning in 1982 with the photographic collages and continuing into his most recent paintings, Hockney has expanded and personalized Cubist representation of space.

Cubists Picasso and Braque broke the stranglehold onepoint perspective had on Western art since the

Renaissance. Taking into account that in reality the body, or at least the eye, is in constant motion, a Cubist work presents time and motion through overlapping and shifting planes and various perspectives. As the viewer lingers over the surface of such a work to explore its many aspects and subtleties, he finds himself drawn into the work as an active participant. According to Hockney, the dominance and accepted reality of the photographic image in the 20th century which perpetuates the static Renaissance single point of view is to blame for Cubism's not becoming the modern way of seeing.

Hockney turned photography on its head, so to speak, in his photocollages of 1982-1984 of which Desk, London, June 1984 and Nude, London, June 1984 are the final and most elaborate. Both are made up of dozens of individual photographs, each taken from a slightly different angle. The desk is portrayed as if the viewer were walking past it, so that one side, then the front and finally the second side are seen in the time it takes for the eye to travel across the surface (the conventional photograph, on the contrary, is comprehended in a single glance). The top of the desk is tipped forward (a standard Cubist device) so that the objects upon it can be seen as well (notice the opened book on Cubism). Rather than space receding into some distant vanishing point as in one-point perspective, the perspective here is reversed, thrusting the subject forward into the spectator's space.

In a 1968 double portrait that typified Hockney's straightforward, cool

paintings of the period, he depic ted Isherwood and Bachardy seated in a pair of wicker chairs before a large coffee table. In the 1984 version, symmetry and precision have given way to an intricate system of Cubist perspective shifts that carry the viewer from the road, down the steps, into the living room (note the same wicker chairs) and wind him through the respective studios of the artists as well as into the dining and bedrooms. Throughout, views of the cliff with a house atop, and the ocean, are repeated. In this monumental work, Cubist spatial devices are joined with Matisse-like decorative form and color resulting in what one critic dubbed "crazy-quilt Cubism."

A similar, somewhat earlier gouache, A Visit with Mo & Lisa, Echo Park, Los Angeles, again portrays the interior and exterior of a Los Angeles home set in a lush garden, a subject which for Hockney has become the equivalent of Matisse's open-windowed rooms in the South of France. Again, the constantly shifting focus carries the eye from point to point, through the rooms and in and out of the patio, in a more or less horizontal path, somewhat akin to the way in which one reads a Chinese handscroll painting. Hockney sees a relationship between Cubist and Chinese painting in their treatment of time and space. As in Cubist painting, Chinese handscrolls unfold in time (they are literally meant to be unrolled bit by bit) as horizon lines and points of view shift, much as they might in a walk through the countryside.

Hockney's newest paintings borrow from Cubism, Fauvism

and Chinese handscroll painting, as well as from Hockney's own past work to reinvigorate and extend Cubism's perceptual revolution. Ambitious and joyful, they express Hockney's belief that painting can alter the way we perceive the reality. His new paintings teach us to see ourselves as part of the world, rather than as, according to Hockney, dispassionate observers. If we recognize and feel the interconnectedness of all things we might be able to avoid the destructive forces of alienation.

Born in Bradford in
Yorkshire, England, in 1937
and educated at Bradford
School of Art (1953-57) and
the Royal College of Art,
London (1959-62), along with
the American painter Ron
Kitaj and other founders of
the British Pop school,
Hockney now makes his home in
Los Angeles. Drawn to the
light and horizontality of
that city, he lives in a
house (with a pool) in the
Hollywood hills.

We wish to thank the Andre Emmerich Gallery, Inc., New York, and Mr. and Mrs. Harry Anderson, Atherton, California, for lending works to the exhibition; Daniel and Hilary Goldstine, Gordon Regan, David and Mary Robinson and Paul Templeton for their support of the exhibition and lecture; Mrs. Phyllis L. Wattis for her generous support of the MATRIX program.

Much of the information contained in this essay was derived from a video taped interview of David Hockney by Lawrence Weschler, September 3, 1984, Los Angeles, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. We

wish to thank Paul J. Karlstrom, West Coast Regional Director of the Archives, for lending us an edited version of that tape for inclusion in the current exhibition.

Constance Lewallen

Works in MATRIX (unless otherwise stated, all works are lent by André Emmerich Gallery, Inc., NY.

- 1. Desk, London, June 1984, photographic collage, #6 of an edition of 20, 44 x 54".
- 2. Nude, London, June 1984, photographic collage, #9 of an edition of 20, 67 x 49".
- 3. A Visit with Christopher and Don, Santa Monica Canyon, 1984, oil on two canvases, 72 x 120".
- 4. A Visit with Mo & Lisa, Echo Park, Los Angeles, 1984, gouache (2 panels), 60 x 201". Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Anderson, Atherton, CA.

David Hockney's works have been exhibited extensively throughout the world. Complete biographical and bibliographical information is contained in the book accompanying his 1983 traveling exhibition, Hockney Paints the Stage, organized by the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and published with them by Abbeville Press, New York. A brief selection of subsequent exhibitions and articles are listed below.

Selected one-person exhibitions since 1983:

André Emmerich Gallery, NY, '84 (catalogue), '85; Fraenkel Gallery, S.F., '84; Knoedler Gallery, London, '85.

Selected group exhibitions since 1983:

National Gallery of Art,
Washington, DC, The Folding
Image: Screens by Western
Artists of the Nineteenth and
Twentieth Centuries, '84
(traveled; catalogue);
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture
Garden, Washington, DC,
Representations Abroad—
Diversity, '85 (catalogue);
Paris, Paris Biennale, '85.

Selected bibliography about the artist since 1983 (see also catalogues under exhibitions):

Weschler, Lawrence.

Cameraworks, David Hockney

(Alfred A. Knopf, NY, and
Thames and Hudson, London,
1984).

Brenson, Michael.

"Fresh Visions Based on a Grand Tradition," The New York Times, July 7, 1985.

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