



David Hockney RA: 82 Portraits and 1 Still-life

2nd July – 2nd October 2016

Royal Academy of Arts

In July 2016, the Royal Academy of Arts will present an intimate exhibition of recent portraits by the Royal Academician David Hockney, revisiting the genre that has played such a major part across his long career. Hockney is considered to be one of the most influential British artists of the 20th century and having partnered with the Royal Academy since 1997, we are proud to be the exclusive sponsor of the David Hockney RA: 82 Portraits and 1 Still Life exhibition.

Edith Devaney, Curator at the Royal Academy of Arts, reviews his work.

David Hockney needs little introduction. From his earliest works painted as a young man in the early 1960s, he managed to capture the public's imagination. In the ensuing decades he has continued to challenge and delight with his undiminished creativity and constant inventiveness.

Born in Bradford in 1937, he attended Bradford School of Art before studying from 1957 to 1962 at the Royal College of Art in London. Hockney's reputation was established early. While still a student, his work featured in the exhibition *Young Contemporaries* in London in 1960 – an exhibition seen as marking the arrival of British Pop Art (although interestingly he has never seen himself as a pop artist). He visited Los Angeles for the first time in January 1961, settling soon after. In the public's perception he is still very much associated with the work that he produced in southern California including his iconic swimming pool painting, "A Bigger Splash".

Hockney's landscape exhibition, shown at the Royal Academy in 2012, was a landmark display for the artist and the most popular exhibition staged by the Academy since its Monet exhibition in 1991. This was inspired by his return to his home county of Yorkshire. Up until this particular moment in his career, landscape had not played a significant part in his artistic output. The *Bigger Picture* exhibition of 2012 largely comprised of differing media, all

of which had been executed over the previous five years in an intensive and sustained period of concentration. This resulted in his subsequent interrogation of the Yorkshire countryside.

Following the opening of *The Bigger Picture*, Hockney shifted his focus away from landscape and his concerns of capturing its expansiveness, to the intimacy of portraiture which had always been an important and recurring subject for him. He completed a series of detailed drawn portraits in early 2012, first in charcoal and then moving on to pencil. His subjects were his studio staff and his family, but it was not until he moved back to California that his larger portraiture series emerged.

In April 2013, Hockney left Bridlington in Yorkshire and returned to Los Angeles. Throughout this time of transition he remained in contact and sent me an image of a recently finished painting – a portrait of his studio manager, Jean-Pierre. This slowly led to a series of painted portraits. The development of this body of work became increasingly fascinating as Hockney's absorption in the subject and format increased.

With the Exhibition Committee at the Royal Academy having given their full support, he continued to focus on his portraiture series with great energy and enthusiasm. The exhibition, which will make maximum use of all available

Edith Devaney has a long history of working closely with David Hockney, not only in his works for the Summer Exhibition, but in 2012 she was the Curator of the blockbuster exhibition, *David Hockney RA: A Bigger Picture*. Edith is the Curator of Contemporary Projects and Head of the Summer Exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Edith has also worked closely with artists such as Frank Stella, Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons.

“Each portrait is a work of great thought and insight.”

wall space in the Sackler galleries, will include 82 portraits. There is a deliberate uniformity to the works. Each canvas measures 48 x 36 inches and all are painted in acrylic. The invited subjects are seated in the same chair against similar backgrounds, and all have been captured in Hockney's bright, top-lit Los Angeles studio within the same time frame – three days. Hockney was particular that this was the longest amount of time he could ask anyone to give. The subjects range ►



from studio assistants, office staff, family, friends and long-term acquaintances. There are also a number of fellow artists, curators and gallerists, including John Baldessari and Larry Gagosian.

I was invited to sit twice for a portrait, the second of which is in the exhibition. As the curator of the exhibition it was a particular honour to witness the process and to understand first-hand the experience of sitting for Hockney. The studio is very ordered with all the paints prepared on a table beside the easel which supports the canvas. The chair is on a blue carpeted dais with a blue velvet curtain hanging behind. The height of the dais puts the sitter at eye level with the artist. Hockney starts by drawing an outline in charcoal on the canvas,

with the colour applied later and detailed nuancing of the face and hands taking place on the last day. Hockney's concentration is remarkable, as is his spirit. When painting, he moves with great energy – frequently stepping back to get a longer view.

Each portrait is a work of great thought and insight. With all 82 canvases seen together as one installation, there will be a remarkable psychological intensity and an incredible range of individual personas.

In 2012 Hockney challenged our view of the landscape. Here he challenges our perception of the contemporary portrait in an impressive body of work that is among the finest of his long and successful career. [d](#)

Photo:
Artist David Hockney.
Getty Images.