



'NEW WAYS OF SEEING'

DAVID HOCKNEY AT THE HEONG GALLERY

-by Ellen Watters

Appropriately, in time for the arrival of Spring, David Hockney came to conquer Cambridge with a double bill of exhibitions at The Heong Gallery and Fitzwilliam Museum. Although the smaller of the two spaces, The Heong Gallery presents a significant portion of *Hockney's Eye: The Art and Technology of Depiction* (ends 29 August 2022).

From a charcoal drawing made shortly after starting to study at the Royal College of Art in 1959, to his recent iPad drawings, the exhibition presents Hockney as an explorer of space, and how to depict it on a flat surface, in various mediums. Two acrylic paintings from the mid-sixties, *Portrait Surrounded by Artistic Devices* (1965) and *Arizona* (1964), are prime examples of Hockney inventing space, drawing from his imagination, and contemplating the artistic mystery that arrangements of tones and colours can represent objects. In these two paintings, Hockney makes use of the potential of empty space. *Grand Canyon I* (2017), meanwhile, is a canvas full of colour and pattern. The scale and uncommon shape of the canvas itself contributes to the sense of the extreme vastness of the depicted space – the Grand Canyon. Hockney does not only capture space, but he also constructs it using 3D software in a mesmerising photographic drawing, *Viewers Looking at a Ready-made with Skulls and Mirrors* (2018).



David Hockney

"Portrait Surrounded by Artistic Devices" 1965 Acrylic on canvas

60 x 72"

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

Collection Arts Council, Southbank Centre, London

Elsewhere, in *The Scrabble Game* (1983) - a composite picture made up of polaroid photographs taken over the course of a game of scrabble with his mother and two friends ('scrabble itself is a bit like a collage') - Hockney started depicting space and time, and realized that he 'was opening up something else, that here was a marvellous narrative; what I was doing became clearer: I was using narrative for the first time, using a new dimension of time'. Hockney's photocollages are particularly interesting in terms of the art and technology of depiction. He uses the technology of photography, but the resulting artwork achieves far more than one photograph can – its composition is not constricted by the framing edges nor single viewpoint as a photograph's would be. As he says, of the photograph, it is like 'looking at the world from the point of view of a paralysed Cyclops – for a split second'. His photocollages (or 'joiners'), three of which are on display at The Heong Gallery, are, in his words, 'closer to the way things actually look, closer to the truth of experience'.



David Hockney

"The Scrabble Game, Jan. 1st 1983" Photographic collage

Edition of 20

39 x 58"

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

The idea presented by the photocolleages, that images are better off without edges or the conventional fixed-point perspective, is perfectly complemented by the 1988 film directed by Philip Haas, *A Day on the Grand Canal with the Emperor of China* (or *Surface Is Illusion But So Is Depth*), in which Hockney compares the traditional Western idea of perspective, exemplified in a Canaletto painting, to a Chinese scroll (*The Kangxi Emperor's Southern Inspection Tour*, Scroll 7, 1691-1698, by Wang Hui) which, devoid of a vanishing point, allows the viewer to see scenes from several different viewpoints; to walk down every street. This 47-minute film plays on a loop, with Hockney's voice accompanying you as you walk around the exhibition space. However, there is as much to learn from the artworks themselves as from Hockney standing at his chalkboard, explaining his diagram of perspective. The artworks are lessons in looking. They teach you to see richness in the simple sights of everyday life. His subjects are not all as grand as the Grand Canyon, they also include a game of scrabble, a glass of water, an iPhone plugged in to charge, and the view out of his window, transformed from a transparent surface to a reflective one as day turns to night. One visitor remarked, referring to one of his iPad drawings, that Hockney manages to make even a sink of washing up look good. Perhaps we should learn to see the spaces around us from a new perspective, through Hockney's eyes, to find the monumental in the mundane.



David Hockney
"Rubber Ring Floating in a Swimming Pool" 1971 Acrylic on canvas
36 x 48"
© David Hockney
Photo Credit: Fabrice Gibert

We might also learn from Hockney's seemingly tireless optimism and ambition. Despite not having grown up in the digital age, Hockney has kept up with the fast pace of the advance of technology, embracing the advantages, such as the speed and ease of swapping brushes, of drawing on the computer, then the iPhone, and the iPad, acknowledging and spurred on by each medium's limitations as well as its possibilities. This exhibition inspires us to keep our own creative minds as curious and keen. While there are plenty of academic references for those that seek them - to theories of perspective, to Cubism, to Francis Bacon's space-frames, Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades and Matisse's blocks of pure colour – the exhibition presents a playful side along with the technical. *Rubber Ring Floating in a Swimming Pool* (1971) is a fun play with abstraction and naturalism, and Hockney's wit shines throughout.

For all their radiating energy and vibrant colour, the artworks still encourage a certain slowness of looking, thinking, and feeling. One of the reasons Hockney states he was time and time again drawn to the Grand Canyon was because 'when you go to the edge there you just look. There are not many places in nature where you do that'. The gallery space itself – the fact that the artworks are all in one room - facilitates this prolonged way of really seeing – of standing (or sitting) there and just looking - that is often rushed or neglected in

the one room after another layout of larger museums. Visitors, seeing from the start what they have left to look at, notably give each artwork deeper attention.



David Hockney
"Grand Canyon I" 2017
Acrylic on canvas
48 x 96" (hexagonal)
© David Hockney
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt

With Easter term upon us, consider a walk to The Heong Gallery at Downing College, for a refreshing moment of reflection, away from revision, in a beautiful space, and leave with a new way of seeing the space we are in today, which has no edges and which we all see differently, from different perspectives: 'there is no such thing as objective vision'. Learn to look through Hockney's eyes and find joy in the colours of Spring/Summer and celebrate the multiplicity of possibilities that surround us. As David Hockney wrote in *That's the Way I See it* (1993), 'new ways of seeing mean new ways of feeling'.



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Hockney's Eye: The Art and Technology of Depiction runs until 29 August at The Heong Gallery and the Fitzwilliam Museum. Free entry. The Heong Gallery is open Tuesday-Sunday 12.00-17.00, no booking required. The Fitzwilliam Museum is open Tuesday-Saturday 10.00-17.00 and Sundays 12.00-17.00, booking essential.

Lead Image: David Hockney
"Viewers Looking at a Ready-made with Skull and Mirrors" 2018 Photographic drawing
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