

A painting of a man with a shaved head, wearing a blue t-shirt, a dark grey blazer, and blue jeans, sitting in a wooden chair with a cream-colored seat. He is wearing brown shoes. The background is a solid teal color, and the floor is a dark blue-grey. The painting style is visible with brushstrokes.

# RA

Royal Academy of Arts  
Exhibition in Focus

# David Hockney RA

82 Portraits and 1 Still-life

# An Introduction to the Exhibition for Teachers and Students

*Written by Susie Hodge*

For the Learning Department  
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## David Hockney RA: 82 Portraits and 1 Still-life

*The Sackler Wing of Galleries*

2 July – 2 October 2016

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FRONT COVER

Cat. 53 *David Juda, 22nd, 23rd, 25th March 2015 (detail)*

BACK COVER

Cat. 35 *Fruit on a Bench 6th, 7th, 8th March 2014 (detail)*

All artworks © David Hockney; Photo credit: Richard Schmidt

**RA** Royal  
Academy  
of Arts

*The RA is a unique organisation that remains true to its origins in 1768 as a place where art is made, exhibited and debated. Our aim is simple: to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. The RA's Learning Department fulfils this objective by engaging people in the practice of art through hands-on creative experiences and exploring the art of the past and the present.*

## Introduction

I paint what I like, when I like, and where I like, with occasional nostalgic journeys,' wrote David Hockney in 1962, at the age of 25. Already acclaimed and having only recently left the Royal College of Art, he soon went on to win the Graphics Prize at the Paris Biennale, a success that has continued for 54 years. Born in Bradford in 1937, Hockney has worked and lived in East Riding of Yorkshire, Paris, London and Los Angeles, where he moved to live permanently in 1979. Although predominantly a painter, he has experimented with print-making, costume design, photography and digital technology. Each field of creative practice and everywhere he has lived has shaped his art, reflecting his circumstances and outlook, which varies from playful and enigmatic to contemplative and perceptive. While other artists have experimented with abstraction and conceptualism, Hockney has focused on realism and the identity of people and places. Throughout his career, he has often returned to portraiture, to capturing likenesses. In the 1980s, he worked on a series of dynamic collages of his friends and family, using photographs to create multiple-viewpoint portraits. The human face has remained an object of inexhaustible fascination, and his many portraits reveal his close observation of people, whether they be family, friends, acquaintances or strangers.

In 2013, after a highly productive period of landscape painting, Hockney returned to portraiture. The studio portrait of Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima proved to be the starting point of the series. The quiet contemplation of portraiture renewed his zest for painting, and was the catalyst for a new, even more perceptive style. Thus began a new series of 82 portraits, and one still-life, which are presented for the first time in this exhibition at the Royal Academy. The sitters comprise a broad selection of his acquaintances, relatives and friends, studio workers, artists, curators and gallerists. Hockney captures with eloquence and vigour the unmistakably unique personality of each person. All the paintings in the exhibition were painted in his Los Angeles studio over a period of three years and for Hockney they constitute a single body of work. He took three days to paint each portrait, with the sitters each seated in the same yellow upholstered chair, and subjected to the same natural light and range of background colours. Hockney painted all the portraits on the same sized canvas, measuring 122 x 91.5 cm. Initially experimenting with the poses taken by his sitters, he finally established and adhered to a fixed composition, developed a formula, documented the times when he painted each one, and thus created an ambitious, comprehensive gallery of his wide circle of friends and acquaintances. Along with capturing the appearance and character of each individual, this ongoing project is also a sustained and ambitious investigation into portraiture itself. 'I wasn't planning on doing this many at first,' Hockney reflected, 'but when I got to about 15, I realised I could probably go on forever.'



## Hockney's portraits

Over the years, Hockney has repeatedly painted people he knows. For some of his portraits he made photographic studies, and gathered information about features and mannerisms, or variations in appearance over time. In this way, he developed a personal artistic vocabulary, and these new portraits reveal layers of awareness and familiarity, recollections and memories, and his own blend of objectivity and subjectivity. All his portraits can be read, in part, as a chronicle of his life, from his earliest student days to his first move to Los Angeles in 1964, and from his time in Paris during the 1970s, when he made crayon drawings of Man Ray and Andy Warhol, to his intense 1980s and 1990s series,



**'I was taught a lot about drawing in Bradford. Teaching drawing is then see. An extremely useful education as it develops the pleasure of looking, and then one notices how beautiful the world is.'**  
David Hockney

**Cat. 18**  
**John Baldessari, 13th, 16th December, 2013**  
Acrylic on canvas,  
121,9 x 91,4 cm

and his vividly coloured and moving portraits, especially those of his parents and friends.

In 1959, Hockney met R. B. Kitaj (1932–2007), a fellow student at the Royal College of Art in London, whose work and attitudes had a powerful impact on him. Kitaj was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and had travelled extensively as a sailor before becoming an artist. His bright, figurative work was complex and often autobiographical. Hockney recalls, 'I had never been abroad – and he'd sailed the seven seas, came from New York, and had seen the world – I hadn't'. Following Kitaj's advice, Hockney began to draw more on his own experiences and to 'paint about [his] own life'. Hockney later reflected that 'Kitaj opened my eyes a great deal [...] I think of my paintings beginning properly then'. And since then he has been inspired by a wide variety of artistic influences, including Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985), Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and William Hogarth (1697–1764). From 1961 to 1963, Hockney created his own, semi-autobiographical version of A Rake's Progress, a moralising series of images originally produced by Hogarth from 1732–1733.

Hockney's approach to his portraits is not only rooted in the inspiration he takes from other artists, but also in his own constantly evolving technique. Drawing, especially from life, was a primary discipline throughout his art school years. Building on that fundamental training, he began working in more imaginative ways. With consummate handling, continual reinvention and the employment of an astonishing variety of materials, including charcoal, pastel, crayon, ink, oil and acrylic paint, pencil, etching, lithography, photographs and watercolour, he has never been afraid of pushing the limits of his art. Hockney has embraced new technologies and processes, and used them to reflect his moods, interests, circumstances and skills. He has always been interested in and challenged by new mediums. As he once remarked, 'Whatever the medium is, you have to respond to it. I have always enjoyed swapping mediums about. I usually follow it, don't go against it. I like using different techniques'. And with unceasing curiosity and creativity he continues to experiment.

**Cat. 18** The influential American Conceptual artist, John Baldessari (b. 1931) began working in a gestural style during the 1960s but abandoned painting in the 1970s and started to use a range of media, with a particular focus on photography. Like Hockney, he has often engaged with portraiture. Both artists established themselves in the 1960s during the Pop era and this image of John Baldessari depicts not just a connection between artist and sitter, but also reveals a direct rapport between two artists who have remained at the forefront of their profession for over fifty years.

**Why do you think Hockney has returned so often to portraiture throughout his career? What do you think has been his greatest impetus for painting portraits?**

Throughout his career, Hockney's portraits have been recognised for their emotional perception and astuteness. His sister Margaret once said, 'He can see deeper than the skin, get to know the person and bring that out.' After some early portraits of himself, his parents and his friends, from 1968 to 1977, he produced a series of double portraits that began with *American Collectors* (Fred and Maria Weisman) and *Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy*, in 1968.

All the double portraits in the series are of people close to Hockney, all emotionally attached to and conscious of one another while looking in different directions, preoccupied with their own thoughts. All the canvases are of the same dimensions and Hockney used photographs to establish compositional elements but painted the figures directly from life. The series established an immediacy that has defined Hockney's work ever since. In 1970–71, Hockney painted his friends Celia Birtwell and her late ex-husband Ossie Clark in *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*, and in 1977, the similarly affectionate and penetrating *My Parents*, the last in his double portrait series. Of *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*, he wrote 'This is the painting that comes closest to naturalism as opposed to realism. The figures are nearly life-size; it's difficult painting figures like that. They posed for a long time; [...] my main aim was to paint the relationship of these two people.' This aim was also explored in various series of portraits from the 1970s onwards.

At the end of February 1982, Hockney began making photographic collages that he called 'Joiners', at first using Polaroid prints, then commercially processed colour prints. These complex, perceptive portraits of friends, his mother and himself present the sitters from multiple viewpoints. In the following year he had an intense period of self-examination; a response in part to his increasing maturity, the transition from young to established artist, the isolation he felt through his deathness and the untimely deaths of several friends. Every day for six weeks, he produced a candid image of himself as he appeared on that day – unguarded and uncontrived. The drawings are loose, rapidly executed and expressive. The freedom he developed pervaded much of his ensuing work, including in 1988 a series of small portraits in oil of friends, which he usually painted on canvases of the same size.

In 1999, he became inspired and fascinated by an exhibition at the National Gallery in London, of small, detailed portraits by J. A. D. Ingres (1780–1867). Hockney, convinced that Ingres must have used the *camera lucida*, an optical device that helps artists to achieve an accurate likeness, began researching how the Old Masters achieved such accurate portrayals of the world around them. Between 1999 and 2000, he himself produced about 280 portraits using a *camera lucida* with sitters that included National Gallery attendants (specifically in *12 Portraits after Ingres in a Uniform Style*, 1999–2000), actors, playwrights, authors, designers and other artists. An article about his discoveries was published in the RA Magazine and in 2001, he published what became a best-selling book, *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters*.

**Actually it isn't the camera lucida that's old, it's just the history is of an optical projection, that's what you begin to realise, meaning a mirror or a lens will give you an optical projection of the world, three dimensions into two. Any maker of images is fascinated by that!**

David Hockney to John Tusa, 2004

**Cat. 68**  
**Celia Birtwell, 31st**  
**August, 1st, 2nd**  
**September 2015**  
Acrylic on canvas,  
121.9 x 91.4 cm

**Cat. 68** British textile and fashion designer Celia Birtwell has been Hockney's close friend and muse for over 50 years. Hockney once said, 'Celia has a beautiful face, a very rare face with lots of things in it which appeal to me. It shows aspects of her, like her intuitive knowledge and her kindness, which I think is the greatest virtue. To me she's such a special person [...] Portraits aren't just made up of drawing, they are made up of other insights as well. Celia is one of the few girls I know really well. I've drawn her so many times and knowing her makes it always slightly different. I don't bother getting the likeness in her face because I know it so well. She has many faces and I think if you looked through all the drawings I've done of her, you'd see that they don't look alike.'

**Do you think that painting those you know well would be easier or more difficult than painting strangers? What makes you think this?**







**Cat. 65**  
Margaret Hockney, 14th,  
15th, 16th August 2015  
Acrylic on canvas,  
121.9 x 91.4 cm

'We see with memory. My memory is different from yours, so if we are both standing in the same place, we're not quite seeing the same thing. Different individuals have different memories; therefore other elements are playing a part. Whether you have been in a place before will affect you, and how well you know it. There's no objective vision.'

David Hockney to  
Martin Gayford, 2009

## Hockney's journey

The fourth of five children, David Hockney grew up in Bradford, West Yorkshire, in an unconventional family. Determined from childhood to be an artist, at age eleven he won a scholarship to Bradford Grammar School. Once there, he underplayed his academic abilities so that he could have art lessons, as only students in the lowest form were allowed to study art. In 1953, at the age of sixteen, his parents agreed that he could pursue a career as an artist and he went to Bradford School of Art. Four years later, he exhibited at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and in 1959, he began studying at the Royal College of Art in London. Visiting artists at the Royal College included Francis Bacon (1909–1992) and Peter Blake (b.1932), who were both working figuratively and inspired Hockney to experiment. In the early 1960s, after Bacon's example, he often smudged his paint and left large areas of his canvases exposed. Blake became a good friend and from 1981–1983, he painted *The Meeting or Have a Nice Day Mr Hockney*, a re-working of *Bonjour Monsieur Courbet*, an iconic Realist work of 1854 by Gustave Courbet. Blake's work shows a meeting between three artist friends: Blake himself, Hockney and Howard Hodgkin (b.1932).

At the Royal College of Art Hockney began keeping sketchbooks as a personal visual diary. His interest in the human figure and, more specifically, portraiture became apparent from that time – as did his growing success. He had already exhibited three times in the annual *Young Contemporaries* exhibition and attracted a London art dealer before being awarded a gold medal at his graduation from the Royal College in 1962. In 1963, his first solo exhibition, *David Hockney: Pictures with People In*, at John Kasmin's gallery, was a sell-out. He was immediately celebrated as a new and exciting young Pop artist, although he vehemently denied the connection to that movement.

In 1964, he went to southern California, where he became completely captivated by the brilliant light that was such a contrast to what he described as the 'very dark, very Gothic, industrial' Bradford. He lived in Los Angeles off and on for the next forty years. There, he began using acrylics for the first time, applying it as smooth flat and brilliant colour. By the mid-1960s, he also began drawing with coloured crayons and painting more representationally. On his return to London in 1968, he began his double portrait series in acrylics, taking a naturalistic, figurative approach.

**Cat. 65** Two years older than her famous brother, Margaret Hockney is, like him, lively and creative. Even when Hockney lived in California, the siblings remained close. A retired nurse, Margaret creates computer-generated designs and proudly remembers that it was she who first introduced Hockney to the Brushes app for iPhone and iPad, which has so enthralled him and with which he has since made many acclaimed images.

Has any person or specific location you have lived in or visited particularly inspired you? What was it about that person or place that inspired you?

Hockney often discusses how we all see with memory. When you look at this portrait of his sister, Margaret Hockney, what do you think he means by that?

After many years of living in Los Angeles, in 2005 Hockney relocated from LA to West Yorkshire, settling in Bridlington. For eight years he focused almost exclusively on landscape, culminating in his acclaimed 2012 exhibition *A Bigger Picture* at the Royal Academy. The accessible, boldly-designed *plein-air* oil paintings, large charcoal cartoons, digital prints from drawings made on the iPad, and multi-screen video installations formed an exuberant 'late style'. As the exhibition came to a close in London, and that period of intensive landscape painting was over for him, Hockney experienced some health problems, including a minor stroke in October 2012. The following spring, after a series of further difficult events, Hockney's energy and fluency diminished. For the first time in his life, he could not paint or draw. Partly for a complete change of scene, and partly to be available for the showing of *A Bigger Picture* in San Francisco, that summer he returned to the house and studio in Los Angeles where he had lived throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

In July 2013, Hockney painted a portrait of his assistant, Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima. It reflects a painting by Vincent van Gogh (1863–1890), known as *Sorrowing Old Man ('At Eternity's Gate')*, 1890, that depicts a man slumped in grief on a chair. Greatly stimulated by van Gogh's image, Hockney found his own vitality returning. He began what became this extensive series of 82 commandingly complex and intriguing portraits, which although they are all painted in a similarly uniform manner, they are surprisingly varied, intimate yet detached. This vibrant project presents Hockney's ebullience and resourcefulness, as well as his belief in the therapeutic qualities of art.

**Cat. 27** Painted on 5 and 6 February 2014, the art patron and collector Lord (Jacob) Rothschild appears thoughtful as he sits folded into the chair, which seems almost too small for him. Previously, in 2003, Lord Rothschild and his daughter Hannah, the eldest of his four children, had sat for Hockney. He related that 'David Hockney rang me and asked, "Who are you in a relationship with? I'm painting people in relationships." I said, "With my daughter, Hannah." So he painted us both.'

How can a person's personality be shown in a flat picture? In what ways does Hockney do it?

How does Hockney convey in his portraits the differences between the diverse array of personalities? In the exhibition, whose personality do you think is shown the most clearly? Why?

**Cat. 27**  
**Jacob Rothschild,**  
**5th, 6th February 2014**  
Acrylic on canvas,  
121.9 x 91.4 cm



# Selection

With renewed creative intensity, Hockney's portrait series offers an intimate snapshot of the people he has encountered over the last three years. In 2016, he explained to Edith Devaney how he selected his sitters. 'I know most of them pretty well. There are only one or two I didn't know that well, and they were the children of friends. But I got them I think, I got them.'

Hockney builds on the approach he took for his acrylic portraits of the late 1960s and early 1970s, by conveying a person's outward appearance in ways that hint at their personality. His portraits communicate the individuality of each character, and part of their charm for viewers is to discern the underlying personality, to see glimpses of sobriety, amusement, obstinacy or indecision. By emphasising such idiosyncrasies, Hockney also creates a sense of isolation. Together with his fine draughtsmanship and accomplished painting skills, Hockney uses an innate economy of line, flat areas of colour and sheer size to endow each figure with a sense of immediacy. Parallels can be drawn with artists such as Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) and Francisco Goya (1746–1828), who also chose not to flatter at the expense of truth.

Yet, despite what might seem to be a somewhat restrictive, formulaic approach, Hockney has carefully considered every aspect of each portrait and sitter. Overall, he was delighted by the diversity that emerged from within his set formula. Among the various ages, sexes, ethnicities and nationalities of his sitters, their individual posture, expression and clothing all helped to reveal their unique personality and character type. Hockney observed that 'It's a very psychological project. The 24-hour exposure is not only visual. These people are revealed.' While each sitter portrays their own individual identity, when seen together they also become defined in relation to the whole group.

In a way, the series presents a contemporary group portrait, a single body of work. For Hockney, these are simply people he knows. For the viewer, it is a diverse range of individuals, including Sir Norman Rosenthal, the former Exhibitions Secretary of the Royal Academy, wearing a yellow suit; Stephanie Barron, a Los Angeles curator with a sardonic expression, studying Hockney with a discerning eye; Larry Gagosian, the New York dealer, decisive and assured, but perhaps a little tense; the comedian Barry Humphries in pink trousers and a flamboyant tie, cunningly deflecting his other self as an astute patron and critic of art; Celia Birtwell, directing an affectionately penetrating gaze at her friend of 50 years; another close friend, the Bostonian artist and designer Bing McGilvray; members of his studio staff, including Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima, Jonathan Mills and Jonathan Wilkinson; his siblings Margaret and John Hockney; sister-in-law, Helen Hockney; and teenagers Augustus and Perry Baringer, side by side, one wearing sportswear, the other a bow tie and orange shorts.

**'None of the portraits were commissioned, they were all done for me. I wanted to do them. In a way I'm trying to find out what I've done. I mean, I've made 82 portraits and I want to know why!'**  
David Hockney to Edith Devaney, 2016

**Cat. 51** Prominent British curator and art historian Sir Norman Rosenthal has been a close friend of Hockney for many years. His soft yellow suit, pink shirt and blue tie exemplify his colourful and creative personality.

**Cat. 70** The only person painted three times for this series, Bing McGilvray sat for Hockney in August and December 2013 and in September 2015. Presented in colourful attire in each portrait, he looks relaxed, amused by his friend's company. The two men have known one another for more than 30 years. During that time, Bing has been both a studio assistant and a close confidant of Hockney, and has frequently featured in his portraits. In the 1990s, he worked closely with him on the production of opera sets. Burly and powerful looking, Bing could be in conversation with the artist who is painting him. The rich blue backgrounds seem to project him forward from the picture plane, and though obviously conscious of one another, they could equally be preoccupied with their own thoughts. Perhaps this is why Hockney chose to paint him more than once in the series: his stance, gestures and expressions capture exactly the naturalism that Hockney aims for.

**Compare and contrast the portraits of Sir Norman Rosenthal and Bing McGilvray. What do you think the effect is of portraying all the sitters in the same composition, sitting on the same chair?**

**Do you think this exhibition of 83 separate paintings should be viewed as a single body of work? Why, or why not?**

overall left

**Cat. 51**  
**Sir Norman Rosenthal,**  
**30th, 31st January,**  
**1st February 2015**  
Acrylic on canvas,  
121.9 x 91.4 cm

overall right

**Cat. 70**  
**Bing McGilvray 28th,**  
**29th, 30th September**  
**2015**  
Acrylic on canvas,  
121.9 x 91.4 cm

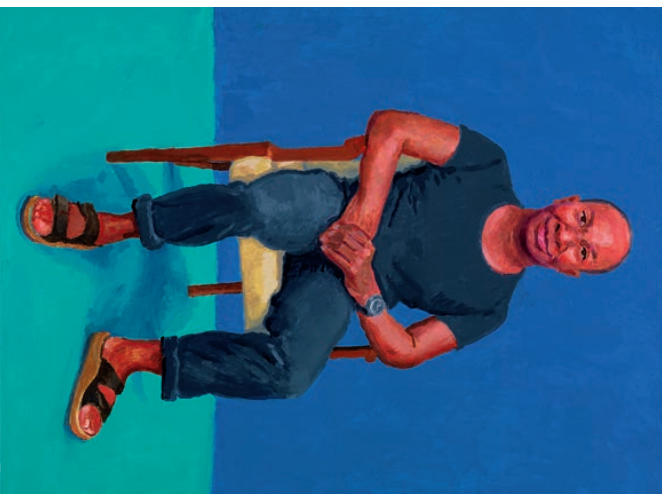








*top left*  
**Cat. 22**  
**Dagny Corcoran, 15th, 16th, 17th January 2014**  
Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm



*top right*  
**Cat. 82**  
**Ear Simms, 29th February, 1st, 2nd March 2016**  
Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm



*below left*  
**Cat. 53**  
**David Juda, 22nd, 23rd, 25th March 2015**  
Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm



*below right*  
**Cat. 33**  
**Rita Pynoo, 1st, 2nd March, 2014**  
Acrylic on canvas, 121.9 x 91.4 cm

## The process

Speaking to Martin Gayford in 2013, Hockney explained that 'it took me five attempts before I got the set-up with the chair and the platform. Now it's something I can see is endlessly fascinating. I'll just go on until I'm bored. I might do a hundred [...] I could go on for the rest of my days.' When asked by Gayford why he sat everyone in the same chair, and not, for example, in the armchair that was also in the studio, Hockney replied, 'The trouble with the armchair was that everybody sat in it in the same way. Now everyone's in the yellow chair, but they all look different.' The chair was always in the centre of the composition, on a platform in front of a blue curtain, and each sitter twisted or angled differently upon it. Hockney said, 'The platform also means I can see the model's feet properly. Feet are very expressive – and shoes. Everybody chooses their shoes. But it's unusual for portraits to have shoes in them. As this series developed, the feet became part of it.'

Hockney is used to painting sitters from life and knows most of his subjects well. Once the sitter's pose was determined, the process of capturing the portraits could commence. Working directly from the motif, Hockney painted with great speed and intensity. Also, he is used to painting sitters from life, and he knows most of his subjects well. He explained to Edith Devaney another reason why he works so fast with these portraits. 'The moment people sit down in their position I like to get that as quickly as possible because I know they won't sit in exactly that same position again [...] Once I've done it I don't alter it much. I might do a hand slightly differently, but generally I accept that drawing. When I'm looking at one of these drawings, I'm imagining it as a painting, really [...] I don't see it the way you see it because to me it's already been painted a bit, I'm painting while I'm drawing.'

Hockney draws his portraits with charcoal and once he has established accurate contours, he immediately applies colour and continues over three days, with his subjects sitting for sessions of up to seven hours a day, with a break for lunch. Only a few sitters, such as Jacob Rothschild and Larry Gagosian, could not stay for the full period, so their portraits were created in just two days. For everyone else, the three-day routine of demanding, seven-hour sessions was stringently adhered to. Within the first hour, he captures a rough outline of the figure, then he paints the clothing, and finally the background. Describing his practice as 'orderly', Hockney paints each element precisely and rhythmically, continually observing and rechecking every nuance, angle and detail, intensively studying facial features, hair, hands, feet and clothing as he works, a process that he calls 'exploring'.

Recalling the brightness of a southern Californian day, Hockney's palette of cobalt blue, turquoise, aquamarine and periwinkle backgrounds could be an extension of his swimming pool series of the 1960s, although here the paint has been applied with a thick, juicy consistency and an orderly flatness. Yet the



backgrounds vary from portrait to portrait, as the colour for each is individually mixed, which results in subtle variations of tone. As the project progressed, his colours became deeper and more intense. Similarly, the chair in the portraits varies in tone and depth of colour, though the actual chair remained the same throughout. As he began the series, Hockney felt the work to be fairly experimental as he re-familiarised himself with acrylic paint, which he had not used for 20 years. The first few portraits were created with Liquitex acrylic, which dries rapidly, but he soon changed to another type of acrylic paint that dried more slowly. This allowed him to mix and blend his tones more easily as he worked on the canvas and in particular to add subtleties to the faces. Then, because the new paint dried overnight, he could start again the next day without altering any of the previous day's work, which suited both his decisiveness and spontaneity.

Hockney works in silence, concentrating, observing, mixing and applying. The silence is partly because of his deafness, but is also essential for his intense focus and absorption as he works. Fascinated by the individuality that began emerging from this rigorous procedure, he explained, 'They're sitting, doing nothing and thinking. Each one must be thinking of all kinds of things, pondering things. After all, you're not used to sitting still for six hours a day, are you? And that's what they did!'

As a visual catalogue and *aide-memoire*, Hockney's assistant Jean-Pierre took photographs as he worked throughout the whole process. This allowed Hockney to assess his day's work and to return to it the next day. He spent each evening and the next morning studying Jean-Pierre's latest photographs of each painting in progress on his iPad. 'The next morning,' he said, 'I know exactly how to start and do it [...] At the end of a day you have to look at a painting to see what you've done and what you're still going to do [...] So the three days are really 24-hour days for me.'

**Cat. 73** In an interview with Katherine McMahon for *Art News* in February 2016, Hockney recalled, 'The last [portrait] I did was the son of Tacita Dean. Tacita came to the studio and she brought her son, I was so taken with him and she said yes because he was off all week for 'Thanksgiving break'. In 2015, the artist Tacita Dean RA (b. 1965) had visited Hockney's studio to film him as part of an exhibition called *My English Breath in Foreign Clouds*. The film shows Hockney working on the 82 *Portraits* series as he smokes five cigarettes. Dean also brought her husband, the artist Mathew Hale, and their eleven-year-old son Rufus to meet him. Fascinated by the portraits, Rufus asked articulate questions and, taken by his maturity and thoughtfulness, Hockney asked his parents if he could paint the boy. Both Rufus and his parents agreed, and Rufus was the last and youngest sitter of the 82. More than any other in the series, it overtly draws on Hockney's knowledge of the heritage of British portraiture and resembles something of late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century portraits by artists including Henry Raeburn (1756–1823) and Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769–1830).

**Fig. 1**  
David Hockney, *Los Angeles, 1st March 2016*

Photograph: Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima

'People are fascinating, they're mysterious really. When I get another person sitting there I always think, where do I end and they begin?'  
David Hockney to Edith Devaney, 2016







**Cat. 73**  
**Rufus Hale, 23rd, 24th,**  
**25th November 2015**  
 Acrylic on canvas,  
 121.9 x 91.4 cm

In the portrait of Rufus Hale, how does the way he is sitting, the angle of the chair and his outfit affect your impression of him?

Hockney has a profound knowledge of art history and draws on a wide range of influences in his work, blending it with his own experience, skills and creativity. Using your own knowledge of other artists, filmmakers and designers, what influences can you detect in at least four of Hockney's portraits in this exhibition?

## The sitter

In 2005, Sarah Howgate, Contemporary Art curator at the National Portrait Gallery, wrote about sitting for Hockney. 'In the first hour, with twenty minute breaks, a lot of information is put down fast [...] We do not speak while he is painting, but when we pause, he points out that a photographic portrait made at such close quarters would be distorted! She also observed, 'I was not expecting flattery and did not get it, but there is a truth in that layering of time through paint.'

Early in 2016, Martin Gayford wrote about his experience of sitting for this series in December 2013. Hockney preferred the vibrancy of his orange jumper to his black suit, and asked him to sit in a position that he could comfortably sustain for some time. The initial drawing process is fast. As Hockney explains, 'I do the drawing rather quickly. Half an hour and it's done, and after I've done it, I don't alter it much'. According to Gayford, 'His deep concentration was evident right from the beginning! Gayford was fascinated that Hockney worked intensely on his portrait, even when he was not sitting. 'Hockney was already in the studio when I arrived a little after nine the next morning. He had been working on the portrait, not on the actual canvas, but by sketching on his iPad. We began and he went into an extremely intense phase of working largely on my face, continuing for over an hour.' Most sitters are surprised when their likeness is captured so immediately on the canvas, but Hockney is just as concerned with capturing the hands and feet. For him it is important how the hands interact with the head, and that the 'hands make you look at the face.'

Having established the essentials, Hockney put the work-in-progress on the wall, next to the other portraits in the series. In that way, he could study each painting, both in isolation and in relationship to the others. 'By the fourth day', Gayford continued, 'the picture of me was finished, showing me staring rather hard at the artist – as I probably was – with the orange of the pullover, as he said, very rich against the blue-green behind me as well as the sky-blue floor beneath my feet! During the mostly silent painting process, Hockney does occasionally speak, but this is usually to his assistant Jean-Pierre, to ask him to squeeze a particular colour from its tube on to his palette. All his required

paint tubes for each work are laid out on trolleys next to his easel and the pigments are mixed on long metal palettes adjacent to them.

**Cat. 80** Edith Devaney, curator at the Royal Academy, also sat for the series. Hockney created two portraits of her, although only one is included in the exhibition. She recalled that he started work at around 9 a.m., and continued until late afternoon in his airy, light-filled Los Angeles studio. Its doors were open and she could hear the sound of birds in the garden. She noted that Hockney's expression when he is capturing a person's likeness is the same as the one in his self-portraits. He bends down, narrowing his eyes and looking over his glasses. He is also 'incredibly mobile.' As well as standing to paint, he moves his head rapidly when he looks at his subject, and walks back and forth to look at the whole canvas or closely at details. As for all the portraits, there were no preparatory drawings for her portrait, Hockney drew a charcoal outline straight on to the canvas. Initially, he had asked her to find a pose that felt natural, then studio assistants marked around her foot and the chair legs with charcoal. She told Hockney, 'I was really concentrating because I was so interested in understanding the whole process. You were looking at me but I was looking back at you to focus on what you were doing. Because of the cleverly positioned angle of your easel, the sitter can't see the brush or the charcoal touch the canvas.' Hockney reflected, 'I don't mind the sitter watching [...] Remember, they just saw a blank canvas first and then they see themselves beginning to appear on it, so they do get interested [...] Whenever they get up to look it will have changed, and they get quite excited [...] Portraits taking shape are always interesting, they're fascinating to everybody. People will just be looking at themselves, without a mirror.'

Think about one of your good friends. If you were to draw that person from memory, and present their personality for someone who doesn't know them, what part of their appearance would you emphasise and what would you minimise?

If this series was created from photographs rather than from life, do you think it would have the same effect? Why, or why not?  
What aspects might be different and why do you think that?

**Cat. 80**  
Edith Devaney, 11th,  
12th, 13th February  
2016

Acrylic on canvas,  
121,9 x 91,4 cm

'It felt very strange, the first time, because I had no idea what to expect. You don't know whether you are going to be talking or moving around. Then you find out that once you've got the position, you keep that position for a couple of hours, while he's squinting at you. And you get used to it [...] You think, "Good God, is that how I look?" You thought you had this nice little smile and you come out looking quite different. You realise that's what you really look like inside, the real you, not the mask.'

Margaret Hockney to  
Natalie Hanman, 2006.







**Cat. 35**  
Fruit on a Bench 6th,  
7th, 8th March 2014  
Acrylic on canvas,  
121.9 x 91.4 cm

'Landscape and  
portraiture are the two  
subjects modernists said  
you couldn't do anymore.  
But you can, everything  
is open now. Landscape  
and portraiture remain  
infinite!'

David Hockney to Martin  
Gayford, 2013

**Fig. 2**  
David Hockney, Los  
Angeles, 9th March  
2016

Photograph: Jean-Pierre  
Gonçalves de Lima

**He's an amusing person.**  
He's got a sense of irony  
and wit that appears in  
his work. And he's totally  
devoted to his art.  
Nothing comes in the  
way of David painting.  
He's no young man any  
more, but the energy and  
passion is just as strong.  
It's something that is  
within him. Never fussy,  
never cute – just right!  
Celia Birrell to Natalie  
Hamman, 2006

## Still-life

Hockney has often included still-life elements in his portraiture, or separately, on their own. He uses these still-life elements to include layers of connections and references, some art historical, others personal. He has painted works that recall the intricate details of Dutch Golden Age painting in the seventeenth century, the abandonment of traditional linear perspective by Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) and the Cubist still-lives of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque (1882–1963). A vase of lilies is a defining motif in his double portrait of *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*, as is a vase of tulips in that of *My Parents*, 1977, and in a still-life of 1970–71, *Still-life on a Glass Table*. Several of his previous still-lives have linked with his exploration of the metaphysical. *Chair and Shirt*, 1972, like Vincent van Gogh's *Chair* of 1888 in the National Gallery, represents the individual who sits in the chair and who owns the object placed upon it. Likewise, *Mirror, Casa Santini* of 1975 and *Still-Life on a Glass Table* are more personal than objective. The objects featured in both paintings have distinct autobiographical connections.

**Cat. 35** Intrigued by nature's transience, Hockney brings an immediacy to his paintings, and like his portraits, the one still-life in this exhibition has been created with the same vibrant palette, rapid execution and thick, flat paint. The flamboyant colours, depicting a pepper, a lemon, some apples, bananas, a pear and an orange are placed randomly on a blue bench, against the same backdrop as the portraits. Overall it embodies Hockney's humour, as it was painted when one of his models missed a sitting during his intense period of painting the 82 portraits.

**How do you think this still-life expresses Hockney's sense of humour?**



## Conclusion

In 1962, Hockney wrote that he paints what he likes, when he likes, and where he likes. It is clear today that he has stuck to his words. Pushing the boundaries of his art and relentlessly extending himself, he has worked almost without pause. His versatility and chameleon-like evolution continue to astonish and amaze, and his energetic scrutiny of the world, vibrant colour palette and new ways of working make his work continually surprising and compelling.

The Chinese notion that 'painting is an old man's art' has always appealed to Hockney. It implies that to be a painter, one requires a certain wisdom, an accumulation of skills and life experience, paired with an ability to look deeply at the world, and this series of portraits makes it clear that he possesses such wisdom. From the intriguing, light-hearted title, to the impact of the exhibition where all the works are seen together as one powerful, extensive work, *82 Portraits and 1 Still-life* is the result of one man's energy, enthusiasm, vision and expertise. The bright, intense and engaging works also convey Hockney's perceptive sense of humour and enjoyment of the eccentricities and individuality of others, his exploration of the range of human personality. With a sense of artistic and personal achievement, the amalgamation of people he knows and a culmination of his artistic developments over recent decades, the paintings are, collectively, a celebration of both art and life.

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Cat. 68  
Celia Birtwell, 31st  
August, 1st, 2nd  
September 2015  
(detail)

'Each one was a  
different challenge,  
but I've enjoyed doing  
them and enjoyed the  
challenge, and I think  
I've achieved something  
with them [...] The series  
is more than the sum of  
its parts, because if it  
was just one portrait  
you'd see one, but when  
you see one and then  
all the others next to it,  
you begin to see the  
differences.'  
David Hockney to  
Edith Devaney, 2016





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