

DAVID
HOCKNEY

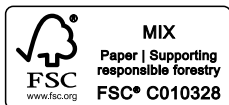
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DAVID HOCKNEY

A Graphic Novel



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David Hockney: the last painter



David Hockney is an English painter, graphic artist and set designer who is considered one of the most influential British artists of the 20th century. He was born on 9 July 1937 in Bradford, Yorkshire. His parents encouraged his artistic inclinations, and so he became interested in literature and art from an early age and later developed a deep admiration for the Greek poet Kavafis and the artists Picasso, Matisse and Fragonard. Hockney attended the Bradford School of Art from 1953 to 1958. In 1959, he enrolled at the Royal College of Art's postgraduate school in London and experimented with various forms, including abstract expressionism. As a conscientious objector, he did his community service as a medical orderly in a hospital. Later, on the advice of his friend



R. B. Kitaj, he decided not to follow the path of abstraction, but instead created his first works in the genre of English Pop Art. Hockney's early paintings were imbued with his literary passion, and indeed he used fragments of poems and quotations from Walt Whitman in some of his works. In works from this period – such as *We Two Boys Together Clinging* (1961) – Hockney began to reveal his own homosexuality, although this was still considered a criminal offence in Britain at the time. The choice of colours in his works, including pink, purple, yellow and green, supported this theme.

In 1963, the artist visited California, and in 1964 he lived in Los Angeles for some time. This experience was so enlightening for him that he moved there in 1966, but not permanently. One of his favourite subjects were the swimming pools of the Californian city, mainly because they allowed him to depict a world of wealth and pleasure with a detached and disillusioned gaze.

Hockney also painted interior and exterior views of Californian houses, and soon achieved a certain fame thanks to his numerous double portraits of friends and relatives, in which he masterfully captured not only the idiosyncrasies of his models, but above all the relationship between the people depicted. The main characteristic of the paintings created during this period is undoubtedly the use of bright colours and the depiction of subjects imbued with an aura of decadence and sensuality. Among the double portraits, the most famous is *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy* (1970-1971). The painting shows one of the most famous couples of Swinging London, the fashion designer Ossie Clark and the textile designer Celia Birtwell, with their cat Percy in the minimalist and intimate atmosphere of their flat. The double portrait of the couple represents the pinnacle of realism in Hockney's artistic oeuvre.

David Hockney is also a talented photographer. In the 1970s, he began experimenting with new forms of artistic expression through photography. At the end of 1976, he exhibited the photographs he had taken since 1970 at the Sonnabend Gallery under the title *Twenty Photographic Pictures*. The works from 1976 in particular can be seen as precursors to the famous *Joiners*, photographic assemblages that the British artist created from 1982 onwards. By the mid-1970s, he had almost given up painting in favour of projects in the fields of photography, lithography and stage and costume design for ballet, opera and theatre.

At the end of the 1980s, the artist returned to painting, focussing on seascapes, flowers and portraits of loved ones, and took his first steps in a then unexplored field: artistic production using modern technology. His first self-produced prints were made in 1986 on a photocopier. To this day, his entire artistic oeuvre is permeated by the figurative element, albeit freed from a rather orthodox naturalism. Hockney's strength lies in his undeniable powers of observation – which he himself describes as “eyeballing” – with which he conveys the results

of his exploration of the world around him and creates works in which he succeeds in translating the slow flow of time into images. One of his most experimental works in this respect is *The Four Seasons* (2011). The work is a video installation in the form of a moving collage that shows the same section of a country road from different angles and through the changing seasons. The viewer visually experiences the slow transition from spring, summer, autumn and winter through the combination of poetry and colour. A similar effect is achieved in many of his paintings on the iPad, which are inspired by the poetry of Impressionism, and attempt to transfer the power of nature into the picture. The repetitive narrative created by the succession of similar but not identical images forces the viewer to literally become part of the artwork by staying in the centre of the room and spinning in circles. The result is a sense of vertigo comparable to that experienced when reading *El Aleph* by Jorge Luis Borges.

On 9 February 2017, Tate Britain opened a retrospective of David Hockney's work in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum in New York. On 22 February 2023, a major exhibition dedicated to the British artist opened at the Lightroom in King's Cross, London, where it was possible to trace the course of his work from his most famous paintings to his most recent works, by means of a multimedia and immersive installation designed to offer visitors a multi-sensory experience. The exhibition made it clear that Hockney is still experimenting and utilising new technologies in his artistic practice today.

David Hockney's personal life was full of great successes, but also painful experiences that he was able to overcome thanks to his love of art, which served as a compass to help him find his way through the labyrinthine complexity of life. In 2011, the artist published his autobiography *A Bigger Message*, and in 2016 *A History of Pictures*, a dialogue with the critic Martin Gayford, in which David Hockney's view of the history of painting is presented.



The following fictional biography traces the private life and artistic career of David Hockney and honours one of the most representative personalities of the art scene at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. The strong autobiographical reference and the complexity of his work distinguish Hockney from his contemporaries and make him unique. The starting point of the narrative is the opening of the retrospective at Tate Britain in 2017. As it has always been the great artist's aim to make the viewer an active part of his works, with the intention of creating art that involves everyone, we thought it right to have the painter's story told by a fictional character who embodies, as far as possible, the recipient of David Hockney's artistic work.