Transcript

Speaker 1

David Hockney is one of the world's most renowned and popular artists. In a career spanning more than 60 years, Hockney has had over 400 solo exhibitions seen by millions of people. His originality and versatility have ensured his ongoing relevance and appeal. He's never been afraid to experiment or change direction as an artist, always exploring different technologies, mediums, and genres. A number of his works are now among the most iconic paintings of the 20th century, and have reached record figures when sold at auction. David Ogden's current exhibition, Bigger and Closer, Not Smaller and Further Away, at the Lightroom in London's King's Cross is a personal journey through his career to date, from his time in California in the '60s to Normandy in France, where he lives and paints today.

Speaker 2

This is 50 years from my work. I'll be in '91 and another five years. Well, Not many painters live that old.

Speaker 1

Seeing his work presented in this new and immersive way is a powerful reminder of how innovative Hockney has always been. He's constantly evolving as an artist and always looking for new ways to share his view of the world.

Speaker 2

I hope some young people will come and see this and then figure out what we're doing and then make something of it. That's what I'd like to happen. Yeah, I would.

Speaker 1

I've interviewed David Hockney many times over the past 50 years or so. This film is the result of a series of conversations we've had over the last 12 months. Now in his mid-80s, Hockney is showing no signs of slowing down, and his work continues to excite and enthrall. This is a portrait of Britain's greatest living artist. David Hockney grew up in Eckleshill, the suburb of Bradford, in the 1940s and '50s. The back streets and alleyways which surrounded his home proved to be an early hunting ground for a young and already determined artist.

Speaker 2

From about eight years old, I wanted to be an artist. I knew this. I just wanted to draw and make pictures.

Speaker 3

The Hockney family moved into this house in 1943 when David was five. His father had a business in the basement downstairs where he reconstructed prams. A teenage David Hockney became a familiar sight on these streets, pushing one of his father's prams, laden with brushes and canvases and everything he needed to paint the place itself, which he did.

Speaker 2

One time, two old ladies, or elderly ladies, I said, Watch them go by, and they shook their heads, and they said, And his brother did so well. The pram was very good, because you could, you know, you put your paints in it. You had a box of paints, an easel. I had a little chair as well. I could sit on a chair and paint. I did this in the summer. holidays.

Speaker 4

I can only ever remember him drawing and painting on little bits of newspaper. I remember it was in the war days, we were all brought up. When we went to Grammar School, it was absolutely obvious that he was going to be an artist. He used to do caricatures, cartoons, make fun of everything. And I believe the teacher said, Well, he's a figure of fun, but we like him very much. But he does need to realize that enthusiasm in art alone will not get him a career. He needs to learn other things.

Speaker 3

You made your mark with an oil painting of your father, a portrait of your father. You not only did the portrait of your father, it got sold.

Speaker 2

Yes, I sent it to an exhibition in Leeds, and they told me, this man would like to buy the painting of your father. I thought, well, maybe I'd better ring him up to ask if it's okay. And he said... Your father? Oh, yes. He said, oh, oh, yes, you can do another. And I thought, yes, I can do another. And so... I sold it for 10 pounds, which in 1954 was quite a lot of money. That was the first one I'd ever sold.

Speaker 3

Your father, to stay with him for a moment, seems to me, from just from what I've read and what you've said down there, he had a big influence. He said words to effect, you haven't to worry what anybody else thinks of whatever you do, you have to do it. You've taken that as one of your mottos, haven't you?

Speaker 2

Don't worry what the neighbours think, yes?

Speaker 3

Yeah.

Speaker 2

I didn't, actually.

Speaker 3

He was very much encouraging and on your side in practical ways, wasn't he?

Speaker 2

Oh, yes. I mean, yes. I mean, I think... He would have liked to have been an artist.

Speaker 3

Really.

Speaker 2

I mean, he was always doing posters, making posters for people and things like that. I think he'd like to have been, but my mother, my father, they both knew I wanted to be an artist. They did encourage me, yes. I mean, they certainly never said, Well, artists can't make a living. I went to the art school in Bradford. I was 16 years old. Once I'd got my foot through the door, that was it. I was there from nine in the morning to nine at night. I learned to draw very quickly because I had a talent. I would do anything because I knew I was learning something about picture making.

Speaker 3

David studied at the Bradford School of Art from 53 to 57, not in this building but on this site. It's part of the Bradford School of Art. Can you take us through some of the archive you've got which mentions him?

Speaker 5

Yes, certainly. So here we are on page 9, student number 256. Hockney, David, age 15 from Bradford, studying the commercial design course.

Speaker 3

He's 15 rather young for entrance at that time.

Speaker 5

He sounds young now, but school age was a bit lower then.

Speaker 3

Yeah. This says what he did and what he achieved, doesn't it, this book.

Speaker 5

Yeah. So here we are. David Hockney got a certificate in lithography.

Speaker 3

Was your national diploma graded in any way? Did you just get it or was it?

Speaker 5

Absolutely. Hockney, it is recorded there, got first class honours. Actually, it is recorded that he got a scholarship for everything.

Speaker 3

Yeah. He was obviously a very hard worker from the start. Yes.

Speaker 5

A contemporary of his came to visit a few years ago and she said Hockney outshone the rest of them.

Speaker 3

Yeah. Yes, it was good as outshawning people.

Speaker 1

After four years at the Bradford School of Art, David Hongley graduated in 1957. He went on to do his national service as a conscientious objector and spent two years working as a hospital orderly before taking up a place at the Royal College of Art in London.

Speaker 3

When you left Bradford, you came to London. It was a big turning point. What did you see there? What did you experience there that sort of set you on a course for that next period of time?

Speaker 2

Before, I'd thought, well, people in London will draw a lot better, because they have been to all these museums and things, so they've learned more. So when I got there, On the weekends, I'd always go to a museum and see things, because I felt I had to catch up. I knew after about two weeks that I could draw as good as anybody from London.

Speaker 3

From that time, there's two paintings I'd like to talk about. Can we talk about Dollboy, first of all?

Speaker 2

Well, I had a little thing pinned up on my wall that said somebody had clung to Cliff all night, and then he was rescued. But I thought it meant Cliff Richard. And then I made the painting, We Two Boys Together Clinging. I mean, I just think work come out because some boy had said he'd seen me in a pub in Earl's Court with my arm around somebody. And I just said, So what? I thought, Oh, ******* hell, so what? And that was it.

Speaker 3

What was the reaction to this, David? I mean, it was, in its time, a bold thing to do. People were being sent to prison and all that sort of thing was still going on for a few more years until 1967, I think.

Speaker 2

Well, I did think, well, nobody... I went to bed with would report on me. Nobody'd do that. I thought, Why would they do that? I mean, it didn't seem to me to be such a big thing. I thought I was going to live in Bohemia all my life. And that's what I intended to do. And in Bohemia, you could be anything. So I didn't really care about the law.

Speaker 6

Hockney said from the very beginning, when he was a student, that he was going to paint what he liked, when he liked, and where he liked. And the autobiographical element in his work was very strong at that time. The courage that he showed in his work there was hugely inspiring to a lot of gay men in my generation and later. He was very brave, and although he's moved away from those subjects, that aspect of his work, I think, still communicates to people who feel marginalized or excluded.

Speaker 1

During a trip to New York in the summer of 1961, Hockney came across an advert with the slogan, Blondes have more fun. Fully embracing the concept, Hockney entered his final year at the Royal College of Art with a new bleached blonde signature look and a growing awareness of his public image.

Speaker 6

He knew how to play the media. That was one of the things he was very clever about. So when he got the big round glasses and dyed his hair blonde, all of that was to present a public image that people could process and that would help draw attention to the art.

Speaker 1

In his final year at the Royal College of Art, Hockney was approached by the art dealer John Kasmin and agreed to be represented by a major West End gallery, a remarkable achievement for someone still at art school. At the Young Contemporaries exhibition

that year, Hongney exhibited 4 works from his time at the college, calling the group Demonstrations of Versatility, a clear message to the art world that he would not be pigeonholed.

Speaker 2

When I was leaving the Royal College of Art, they said, Well, you haven't attended enough of these lectures. And they were about nuclear physics or something like that, and I thought, I'm here for painting. And so when they said this, I said, Well, that's okay. I can leave quietly by the BNA exit. It doesn't matter. I didn't care. I knew I'd learned a lot there, and that was it. And they said, Well, if you stay another year, you can get the diploma. And I thought, Well, nobody's going to ask to see a diploma in painting. They're going to ask you to show them the paintings, aren't they? What use is a diploma in painting? I knew it was nothing. It meant nothing.

Speaker 3

Didn't you make, didn't you draw your own diploma?

Speaker 2

Yes, I did. I did draw my own diploma, yes. I had it with the Royal College of Art at the top and everything. It was the same shape as the diploma. I thought, why worry about diplomas? I mean, it seemed ridiculous to me.

Speaker 1

The college eventually backed down and awarded Hockney not only his diploma, but a gold medal distinction.

Speaker 2

One, two, three, four.

Speaker 1

Having graduated from the Royal College of Art in London, David Hockney moved to California in 1964.

Speaker 7

The first thing that hits you is this very intense light here, and you can see everything's in focus. Everything seemed clear. Within a week of arriving there, I'd got a driving licence, I'd bought a car, I'd found a studio, and I thought, things move here. The city seemed to me to be very sexy because it's a nice warm climate. People don't wear that many clothes. 'Cause I've used my talents as I could I've done some bad, I've done some good I've made a whole lot better than they thought I was So come on and treat me like you should.

Speaker 3

You write at the time when you realized that really Los Angeles hadn't been painted. It needed a Piranese and you were gonna be that Piranese.

Speaker 2

Well, um... Yeah, I mean, many people had painted London. Many people had painted Paris. Paris was well covered. LA was not. So I thought, well, this is rather good. I can paint a real place. I mean, I was living in a place with a swimming pool. And I haven't done that many paintings of swimming pools, but I've done maybe, maybe 20, I don't know.

Speaker 3

Can we talk about the splash and the bigger splash, which became very famous indeed, and what attracted you to doing that?

Speaker 2

I'd painted a splash. from the cover of a magazine.

Speaker 1

How did you tackle the extra splash itself?

Speaker 2

Well...

Speaker 3

Did you think it was going to be a serious problem of paint?

Speaker 2

Yes, but the third one, which was the biggest one, I used quite small brushes. I'm sure I took two weeks to paint this thing the last... fraction of a second. But I was amused by that. I liked that idea. You can see it's done with quite small brushes, yes.

Speaker 1

In the summer of 1966, Hockney met Peter Schlesinger while teaching drawing at the University of California, Los Angeles. They began a relationship. and Peter became a major subject in Hockney's work.

Speaker 7

I like to draw the same people over and over again, or anyway, that's the way it's working out in my life, because I don't really always want to struggle for a likeness. And if you're

drawing people you know well, you don't do that. You can draw in another interesting way. The likeness just seems to come.

Speaker 1

In the late 60s, Hockney and Peter began to spend more and more time in Europe. Based at Hockney's flat in Powish Terrace in Notting Hill, they were at the heart of the bohemian lifestyle of 1960s London.

Speaker 8

I used to go for tea on a Saturday. We used to have high teas and lovely things like that. Every Saturday morning, we'd parade up and down King's Road in our latest gear. We were outrageous. Colour was it. and everybody showed off.

Speaker 9

When I first met David, I first saw him in Portobello Road wearing a purple maroon velvet corduroy jacket. And I asked who he was because he sort of stood out. There was just something about him that you thought, who is this guy? Ozzie, of course, knew him, but David was rather a shy man. He'd come round to the flat and he'd say hello to Ozzie and take Ozzie off somewhere. And I was just, hello, and that was it. But it was Peter Schlesinger who introduced me properly to him.

Speaker 1

In 1970, Hockney began work on a double portrait of Celia and her husband, Ozzie, otherwise known as Mr. and Mrs. Clarke.

Speaker 7

The painting was done, painted in Notting Hill. I painted it with acrylic paints. I was making drawings, taking photographs of them then. And in the end, I decided the composition I liked was this. Now, That must have meant, well, maybe I realized that Aussie wasn't quite the normal husband. I don't know, but their relationship did rather fascinate me, actually.

Speaker 9

For some reason, people always ask me why I'm standing and Aussie sitting. I don't know the answer to that. We had a rather sort of fractious relationship. Our relationship was probably falling apart, actually, and I think that's what David noticed, and people do see that, because he was obviously sitting there looking rather awkward, and I looked sort of stoical in a way. I don't really feel it's me in the picture, but of course it is. I don't feel as though I'm quite as heavy as that. I seem to have quite a heavy presence, possibly you can see that we were rather tormenting each other, That might be there, but I've always thought I looked quite sort of just heavy.

Speaker 7

Maybe I shouldn't say this, but Celia told me that isn't Percy in the picture. Actually, she had two cats. One was called Blanche and one was called Percy. And she said, I painted Blanche, actually.

Speaker 9

And he said, Ah, yes, but it doesn't have the right ring, does it? I think Percy's a much better title. So it's fat old Percy in the picture and darling little Blanche, who it really was, who was my favorite cat. So hey-ho.

Speaker 2

I'm still amazed at how pictures can become memorable. Mr. and Mrs. Clarke and Percy became very memorable. Well, that seemed to me... very odd that these double portraits became memorable. I mean, I didn't think about it then. I only thought about this a lot later on in my life. But nobody knows why they're memorable. You can't make one and say this is going to be memorable because it might not be. I mean, it takes time to develop it as a memorable picture, doesn't it? It might take 10 years.

Speaker 7

Now, how are you going to look down a bit, man?

Speaker 2

Just keep your eyes still for a bit.

Speaker 1

Celia Birchwell would become one of Hockney's favorite and best-known subjects. Having first met her in the mid-'60s, Hockney's made countless portraits of her over the years.

Speaker 9

It's always a very quiet, serious experience, and you have to be comfortable in the chair. You have to pose for quite a long time in one position. Sometimes you think, wow, I wonder what this one's like. Sometimes you're really delighted and think, my goodness, I look marvelous. And then other times you think, Oh, dear. And then he'll say, I don't flatter people, Celia. That's not what I'm about. I'm not a society portrait artist. And I know that to be true, but how you imagine yourself in your head can often be very different to what you see. I'm very flattered that he wanted to choose me as his female model. I've embraced it because it's a very nice position to be in. I think he had a big soft spot for me. But she's always nice.

Speaker 1

By the early '70s, Hockner's relationship with Peter Schlesinger had begun to deteriorate. The breakup was captured in the film A Bigger Splash and reflected in what was to become one of Hockner's most renowned paintings.

Speaker 7

That's one of the quickest paintings I've ever done. It was painted in just over two weeks. So we worked 18 hours a day on it. And I like the idea, you see, of as a realistic painting, essentially, of a real figure looking at another figure, but the other figure is distorted naturally by the water.

Speaker 1

The image of Peter standing by the pool was drawn from a series of close-up photographs Hockley had taken of him in order to capture as much detail as possible.

Speaker 7

I took one photograph of his head and then one photograph of part of the jacket with clearly defined shoulder and so on. Then you move down the jacket and the folds of the jacket are clear in the picture. So I could see more. Therefore, I could paint more from it, you see. That was the purpose of doing the picture.

Speaker 1

Fifty years after it was made, Portrait of an Artist, Poole with two figures, is now considered one of the most important paintings of the 20th century. It set an auction record for a work by a living artist when it was sold in 2018 for over $90 million. From a very young age, one of David Hockney's greatest inspirations has been Pablo Picasso. His style, his career, and his influence have had a profound effect on Hockney's work.

Speaker 2

Picasso is the greatest artist. I mean, he got me.

Speaker 3

Why do you think that was? Because he not only got you, then he stayed with you for the rest of your life.

Speaker 2

Picasso was always doing new things, wasn't he? And... I think he said, when people said, It doesn't look like a Picasso, he said, But it will, it will. And I took that, and in my career, some people said, No, that doesn't look like a... David Hockney, but he did quickly afterwards.

Speaker 3

Why do you think that is?

Speaker 2

They had thought that getting a style was perhaps the be-all and end-all of painting, but I knew it wasn't.

Speaker 3

How do you think you knew it wasn't?

Speaker 2

Because of Picasso, he was always really looking for something new. And that's... what I have done, I think, in my life, yeah.

Speaker 1

Over the course of his career, David Hockley has never stood still, always exploring new approaches and mediums. He's invariably found inspiration from his immediate environment. landscapes, places, people, and other companions. Throughout his professional life, Hong Ni has continually been in the public eye. The constant interest in him, from the media, critics, collectors, and the general public alike, has seen him acquire a level of fame quite unusual for an artist.

Speaker 10

I think David has followed an idiosyncratic and individual path, more or less, from the beginning. He has been helped by the fact that he's an instinctive communicator. He's always been of interest, for example, to journalists, because journalists like artists who don't say boring things.

Speaker 7

In a way, I don't think of myself as successful an artist. I mean, there's a kind of temporary popularity, obviously, isn't there? But what is, in the end, truly popular is really, really wonderful things.

Speaker 10

That's popularity and the directness and concision with which he can express himself, I think, has a slightly... disguise the fact that often what he's doing has been rather complicated and original and unusual.

Speaker 1

Despite his fame and popularity, there's one area of Hockner's work which many people know little about, his designs for the opera.

Speaker 7

Let's have a look.

Speaker 1

Both in terms of subject matter and process, the opera has presented him with a very different set of challenges.

Speaker 7

For a painter, The difference, of course, when you move into the theatre, you have to collaborate, which means compromise, essentially. Collaboration means compromise. After all, in my own studio, I compromise only with myself. But I wanted to do some operas because I love music. And when I go to the opera, I want to have something to look at. Come to the opera house to get your set started and have to do them yourself. Well, that's what I said. If you want to see a good opera, do it yourself.

Speaker 1

In 1980, Hockney worked with the Metropolitan Opera in New York, creating the designs for Ravel's Les Enfants a Les Sortillers.

Speaker 2

I made models, because if you just make drawings, That means they will make the space. And I thought, oh, I want to make the space.

Speaker 7

This is a model of the Metropolitan Opera stage. What you will see on the stage is just this.

Speaker 1

Inspired by French painters such as Matisse and Dufy, Hockney brought a vivid color palette to his designs.

Speaker 2

That was the first time we'd used colour put on to colour. You had pure ultramarine. And if you put blue light on it, well, it shimmers. And if you put red light on red, it shimmers. It was terrific, yeah.

Speaker 1

Hogney's passion for the opera has seen him return to the theatre throughout his career, working with opera houses all over the world.

Speaker 2

I did about 8 operas in 20 years. I love them, but I had to give up in the end because I couldn't hear.

Speaker 3

Well, it must have been a great loss for you, not being able to continue with that.

Speaker 2

Yeah, but... I accept that. I mean, I'm going very deaf, actually. I am. Very deaf now. But I don't mind. I think it's made me see space clearer. So I get an advantage from it as well.

Speaker 7

I've taken photographs for a long, long time, and I have about 100 albums full of photographs all the life. It's all recorded pictorially. The official view of photography is it tells the truth. But I think it's a small medium. I think it's small what you can really do with it in making pictures.

Speaker 1

David Hockness had a complicated relationship with the photographer. Early on in his career, he was highly critical of it as an artistic medium and considered it inferior to drawing and painting.

Speaker 7

The main aspect was, it seemed to me, this lack of time in the photograph. I'd become very, very aware of this frozen moment that was very unreal to me. The photographs didn't really have life in the way a drawing or painting did.

Speaker 2

If people think the photograph is reality, well, I don't think it is. I mean, it's just a perspective reality.

Speaker 3

Yet you were very tang with it at one stage, photography, weren't you? You thought you might end up doing just photography. With the joiners, you did.

Speaker 2

Well, with the joiners, I thought, well, this is breaking up photography a bit.

Speaker 1

Hong and his joiners combined many photographs of the same subject taken from different perspectives. They became his main artistic focus for the next few years.

Speaker 8

David never ceases to amaze me. You see, he'd say, Oh, come over, love. I might want to draw you or photograph you or something. And you'd go over thinking it might be a drawing. Suddenly, he's taking foreign Polaroids of you and sticking them together. Every time I went there, there was some other way of taking our profiles and exhibiting them.

Speaker 7

When I first did collages, I called it drawing with a camera. I felt that's what you were doing. Like in drawing, you make choices. We don't all see the same things. We don't all hear the same things either. That's what artists tell us, or that's what I keep trying to do anyway.

Speaker 1

One of Ankley's best known joiners is Pear Blossom Highway. It's made-up of over 800 photographs taken at a crossroads in the Mojave Desert in California.

Speaker 7

At first, it looks like, frankly, quite a conventional picture with the road disappearing into the distance, and it looks like a vanishing point there, but there's actually Many, many vanishing points in it. It was very complicated to make. I mean, it needed a ladder for a start. The lettering on the road is from a ladder looking very down. In a sense, you're close to everything in the picture. My photography friends in L.A. said it wasn't a photograph, it was a painting. I said, Well, it's just made with a camera, and it's made with all the photographic processing. On the other hand, The sky was made many times, and I kept changing the color. So in a sense, it was getting near painting.

Speaker 1

Fascinated by America's vast open spaces, in the mid-'80s, Hockney went to the Grand Canyon with his friend Celia and her family, where he once again found himself confronted by the limitations of the photographic image.

Speaker 7

The trouble with these better movie pictures, isn't it? They don't show you enough. You can't see enough.

Speaker 2

I went to photograph the Grand Canyon. I looked from that side to that side. I could get it all in if I took a lot of photographs. And I thought it was quite spacey, but not spacey enough, I thought. So I thought, well, I must paint it this.

Speaker 1

More than a decade after his trip to photograph the Grand Canyon, Hockley painted it in the series of enormous panoramic landscapes.

Speaker 3

You took, as I understand it, a chair to the edge of the Grand Canyon. You sat there. For seven days, you just looked at it.

Speaker 2

Oh, yes, What were you looking for? Well, it's a magnificent thing, the Grand Canyon, because you have to look everywhere. Well, we do that everywhere, really, but not consciously. But there, you do it consciously, because there is no-- there's no real perspective there.

Speaker 3

You mean no final points?

Speaker 2

No final points, no. And I'd always seen it as the world's biggest hole. That's what it was. And you didn't look up to the sky. You looked down into it. It's... It's an amazing place.

Speaker 1

Throughout his life, David Hawkins retained a strong connection with his native Yorkshire, frequently returning to see friends and family. When he visited, he would often paint them, especially his mother.

Speaker 3

We didn't talk about the many, many drawings you did of your mother. We talked about your father earlier on, but not about your mother.

Speaker 2

Well, in the '90s, I would go... four times a year to see her. And I'd stay up there maybe a week. But whenever I went to my mother, I always drew her. Because in the '90s-- I mean, she was 90-something. And I thought, well, it might be the last time I see her or something, it could be. So I'd always make a drawing of her. She'd always be willing to pose.

Speaker 4

He's always done loads and loads of my mother, and usually they're just like she is at the time. And then when he's gone, she'll say, Well, I never had time to talk to him. He doesn't talk when he paints. Much of my mother's distress, because she would have

liked to sit and chat, but he didn't talk, so... But she got used to sitting for him. I think she quite liked it.

Speaker 1

In 1997, Hawker was brought back to Yorkshire by the news that his good friend Jonathan Silver was terminally ill and returned home to be with him.

Speaker 7

What were you saying, Jonathan, about silent cameras?

Speaker 1

In the early '90s, Jonathan had been the curator of Hockney's Fax Event, a live art installation at Salt's Mill near Bradford, where Hockney faxed through sheets of an artwork, which were then assembled by Jonathan and his team piece by piece at the mill. Jonathan subsequently turned Salt's Mill into a cultural center, displaying several galleries of Hockney's work. Over the years, Jonathan had always tried to convince Hockney to paint Yorkshire. In the late '90s, as Hockney returned to me with his friend, he painted his first Yorkshire landscape of 40 years.

Speaker 4

He stayed with it in Bridlington, and he was going across to Wetherby to see Jonathan so often. that he became much more aware of how interesting it was in East Yorkshire. The light was larger, and I think he became aware of how peaceful and painterly it was, really.

Speaker 1

Jonathan passed away in 1997. For Hockley, the time spent in Yorkshire in the late 1990s was to be the first step towards him returning to England more permanently several years later.

Speaker 7

That's the road, isn't it?

Speaker 2

You can see the trees, the way they were planted. We went up to Bridlington in 2004. I went up with JP. We came for two weeks, and we stayed nine years. I thought East Yorkshire was a beautiful place. Not many people lived there. And we always had to drive out to Woldgate. And I did about 30 watercolours. of the summer in Bridlington. And JP had photographed me doing them. I remember one night in Bridlington when the weather forecast, I was listening to it, and it said, Don't go out tonight. because it's

going to be a terrible snowstorm and things. And I thought, why tell you that? Why not say, go out and enjoy it? Which we did.

Speaker 7

Well, it's just the ground and the sky are the same, really.

Speaker 2

Yeah, And it was fantastic, seeing this snow coming down, clinging to the branches, and making patterns. And it was a marvelous experience.

Speaker 1

The years Hockney spent in East Yorkshire was some of the most productive of his working life. He depicted the landscape on a massive scale and in a wide range of mediums, from watercolor and oil to iPad drawings and video installations.

Speaker 11

Lift it up a bit, Jonathan. Up. He was in the back of the Jeep, so we had nine cameras on the Jeep. And so he was the only one seeing the picture. I was on the Jeep. fiddling around with the cameras. JP was driving, Dominic was helping out. So we had a very small, small team, but David was composing the picture in the back, you know, like you'd compose any picture. So, you know, can you move this camera this way, this camera this way? So he was making this, he was making decisions about the joins and decisions you'd make as a picture maker, as a painter.

Speaker 2

One day, one man shouted, Why are you just filming those trees, as though they were all the same? Well, they're all different, really, aren't they? Everyone, they're like us, all different. We're all different. Every tree is different.

Speaker 6

David produced a huge amount of work in the space of less than ten years. While he was up then, a lot of it was done in that build-up from 2007, 2008. He's never painted at such a rate as he did in those years. In ten years, he painted more than other artists do in their whole lives.

Speaker 2

I found if we drove to Woldgate, I could always find subjects quickly. And we found this one place where I made about nine quite big paintings of it. And that was terrific.

Speaker 6

It was a time of intense excitement for him, and It was a kind of late flowering and rediscovering the beauty of the area he'd known as the child... ...for which he'd now had a different attachment. Morning.

Speaker 2

Morning. It's going a little bit late.

Speaker 1

Homney's work in this period would culminate in a landmark show at the Royal Academy in London in 2012. He called the exhibition a bigger picture. It was the first time a living artist had been invited to fill all of the main spaces at the Royal Academy.

Speaker 2

I did that big show in 2012 that got 600,000 people in to see it, which was amazing, really, for a painting show. But it was all about England, and it was all about the spring.

Speaker 1

The bigger picture ran for just under three months and became one of the best-attended exhibitions in British history. David Honkley's art is very much a record of where he's lived his life. Wherever he's been in the world, he's painted his immediate environment and the people around him. For the past few years, he's been living in Normandy, in northern France.

Speaker 3

About four years ago, you found this place in Normandy, decided to move here and make it your base. What's so compelling about this part of the world?

Speaker 2

For a start, there's a little more blossom than in Yorkshire. In Yorkshire, you just get the blackthorn and the hawthorn. Here you have apples, pears, cherries, and they're all in here. In this settlement? In this settlement, yes. When we came to see it, We fell in love with it straight away. We decided to buy it. This studio was just dirt floors on two levels. And JP had it done in three months, which was amazingly quick.

Speaker 1

Installed in his new studio in 2019, Hockney began to paint the landscape around him. When lockdown struck, the following spring, he found himself isolated from visitors. He painted on the iPad, largely uninterrupted, for the rest of the year. Hockney would assemble much of this work to form one enormous landscape, a year in Normandy. Can you talk about how that -- why you wanted to do that and how you set about it?

Speaker 2

Well, I had made 220 drawings on an iPad for 2020. We decided we would do a... long piece, 90 meters long. I joined them together. That took quite a while, but it was really worth it, I thought.

Speaker 10

One of the ways of projecting space, which has always fascinated David... ...is what he calls isometric projection... ...which is the way that, for example, Far Eastern art... ...Chinese, Japanese paintings have always been done. And in the '80s, he discovered a scroll in the Met... in New York, which fascinated him and made a film about it, in which he explained how this Chinese way of presenting space, unlike the Western Renaissance one, which pins you to one place, unrolls continuously, so you're moving through a landscape. And he also noticed, it was one of the triggers for moving to Normandy, that the Bayeux tapestry is he operates in exactly that way. So there were these two inspirations for his year in Normandy.

Speaker 2

Like the biotapestry, you have to walk past it to experience it. And so you can experience then the whole year. You are the moving thing. You do the moving, you walk past it.

Speaker 1

Made-up from a selection of more than 200 individual images, Hockley painted a year in Normandy at a phenomenal rate. He found that working on the iPod allowed him to paint much faster than other mediums. You like the fact that you could catch nuances of the light very quickly.

Speaker 2

Oh, yeah, really quickly, much, much quicker than even watercolor. I mean, you have to take your time with it and find out about it, but I just experimented and found out, and I thought it was a terrific medium.

Speaker 1

You got a great deal out of it, and maybe as surprisingly, so did the public. Did that surprise you?

Speaker 2

Yes, but I suppose they didn't know they were iPads. I mean, because they look like paintings, don't they? I wasn't at all interested in... imitating photography. I wanted the marks.

Speaker 3

What do you mean by the marks?

Speaker 2

The mark you make and the mark you leave. Uh... like a painting.

Speaker 1

A year in Normandy was first exhibited at the Musee de l'Orangerie in Paris, and later at Salt's Mill near Bradford. But over 90 meters long, it's Hockney's biggest ever picture. More recently, Hockney has once again returned to painting. Now in his mid-80s, he's still working at a phenomenal rate.

Speaker 2

I'm on a roll at the moment, I think. I mean, I'm just... I can't stop.

Speaker 3

You get up and you start drawing, painting, drawing.

Speaker 2

Get up and work immediately.

Speaker 3

Really.

Speaker 2

That's what I wrote on my chest of jaws at the foot of my bed when I moved into Powys Terrace. In London. Get up and work immediately. And I'd look at it and think, well, I spent a day doing this, so I wasted that day, so I'll get up anyway. Yeah, I mean, that's what I've always done, always done for 60, 70 years, yeah. You have to, yeah. All... All really good artists work all the time, I think, yeah.

Speaker 1

A lot of people, including myself, say that one of the... aspects of your painting that's very, very attractive and very uncommon, really. It's the sense of joy in it, the sense of great pleasure in it. Are you aware of that, as that's because of who you are, that you do it like that?

Speaker 2

Well, yes. I mean, painting landscapes should be a joy. I've always thought so.

Speaker 3

That's who you are.

Speaker 2

Yeah, that's who I am. That's who I am.

Speaker 3

The actual place you have here, you're making it more and more your place, aren't you? Yes, yeah, Are you modelling that on anyone?

Speaker 2

Well, Monet...

Speaker 3

Monet, yes.

Speaker 2

He had a walled garden that was a bit smaller than this, but... As I've got to know the trees, the land and things, it's just perfect for me.

Speaker 3

When you say got to know the trees, you talk about them as if they were individuals.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I mean, I know them all now. Well, when I arrived, I didn't.

Speaker 3

Do you think that helps you to, the better to paint them if you know them as well as you now know them?

Speaker 2

Oh, yeah, yeah. You can tell that, I think, in these paintings.

Speaker 1

The works you've produced here in Normandy, when they've been shown in exhibitions, have attracted enormous audiences and enormous interest. Haven't you accounted for that? Is it to do with you or your work, or is it to do with the public and their response to your-- well, it is obviously to do with the public and their response to your work. Well, what are they responding to that interests you?

Speaker 2

I don't know, but... I like to think... it might be space.

Speaker 3

Space.

Speaker 2

Space. and the depiction of space. How we put a figure in space is different through every generation. I mean, these paintings in here, they all have space and even the rain on the pond and space. My sister said she thought space was God, which I thought was a very interesting notion. I mean, I'm going to have no space soon. I'm going to die, probably next, somewhere in the next five years. And that will end my experience of space and time. I think about this a bit, but then I stop, because it might drive me mad.

Speaker 3

This is an odd question to ask, but you have been quite rightly, in my view, admired and.

Speaker 1

Thought for a very long time. Do you think it's been sometimes been rather oppressive, living up to that, or do you think it's just what it is?

Speaker 2

I just ignore that. I mean, I don't let it affect the work I do. Yeah, I could ignore that, actually. I can. I'll just have a cigarette.

Speaker 3

Well, thank you very much, David. Thank you. And we got to the cigarette.

Speaker 2

I think smoking doesn't matter. I mean, I think it's what you're doing that counts, really. Some people can smoke and some people can't. It's just all these bossy people, I think. Too many. Same hired button. And? And bossiness too. If I'd have put end bossiness now, well, that would have been a bit too bossy, wouldn't it?

Speaker 1

With headline sets from The.

Speaker 4

Cure, Calvin Harris and Lewis Capaldi join Sky Arts at the Isle of Wight Festival 2026, new Friday.

Speaker 2

Night from 7.