

# GUGGENHEIM BILBAO **XX** 1997 2017

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on November 10, 2017

## **David Hockney** **82 Portraits and 1 Still-life**

## *David Hockney: 82 Portraits and 1 Still-life*

- Dates: November 10, 2017–February 25, 2018
  - Curated by Edith Devaney
  - Exhibition organized by the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in collaboration with the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao
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- After his monumental landscape exhibition in 2012, the artist returns to the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao with an intense, immersive installation of portraits.
  - Each work is the same size, was painted in the same time frame of three days, and shows the sitter in the same chair, illuminated by the bright light of southern California, against the same vivid blue background.
  - Thanks to Hockney's virtuoso paint handling, the uniformity of the elements in each painting underscores the differences between the sitters, allowing their personalities to leap off the canvas with warmth and immediacy.

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is pleased to present *David Hockney: 82 Portraits and 1 Still-life*, an exhibition featuring a remarkable new body of work in which the British artist returns to portraiture with a renewed creative vigor, offering an intimate snapshot of the LA art world and the people who have crossed his path in recent years.

After the monumental and highly successful landscape exhibition *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture* at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in 2012, the artist turned away from painting and his Yorkshire home and returned to Los Angeles. He was recovering from a very difficult series of events, including a minor stroke, and he did not paint for some time, which was unusual for him. Little by little, he became reacquainted with the quiet contemplation of portraiture, and in the summer of 2013 he painted the first of what was to become a collection of over 90 portraits, 82 of which can be seen in this exhibition.

Hockney views these portraits collectively as a single body of work. The installation in near-chronological order permits another psychological study: that of the artist himself. His own emotional state seems to lighten throughout the series, as does his conviction in the format and medium. His subjects—all chosen from among his friends, family, and acquaintances—include studio staff, fellow artists such as John Baldessari, and curators and gallerists like Larry Gagosian.

“Celebrities are made for photography,” says Hockney. “I don’t do celebrities, photography does celebrities. My friends are my celebrities.” Each depiction—the result of intense scrutiny—becomes a kind of psychological exploration.

Each work is the same size and shows the sitter in the same chair, illuminated by the bright, expansive light of southern California against the same vivid blue background. All were painted in the same time frame of three days.

Thanks to Hockney's virtuoso paint handling, the uniformity of the key elements in each painting underscores the differences between the sitters, allowing their personalities to leap off the canvas with warmth and immediacy. In this exhibition, Hockney has created an intense, immersive installation that reexamines the role of the painted portrait in an age when selfies and photo-portraits have proliferated in social media. The only non-portrait in the show, a Still-Life, was created when one sitter was unable to make his appointment and the artist, primed and ready to paint, decided to portray what was available in his studio, a selection of fruit and vegetables.

### **Sitting for David Hockney** (Portrait of Edith Devaney, curator of the exhibition)

As Edith Devaney comments: "Working with Hockney on his 2012 Royal Academy exhibition gave me the opportunity to get to know him well, and to speak to him at length about his work. Sitting for a portrait and spending a very concentrated time with him in the studio, however, revealed to me much more about his practice".

His studio manager, Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima, undertook the considerable task of scheduling all the portraits over a period of over two years. Edith Devaney was painted twice, first in September 2015 and then again in February 2016; the latter portrait is in the exhibition, as a result of a process of editing out a number of portraits of sitters who had been painted more than once.

The sitters' attire was left to them to decide; Hockney wanted them to have the chance to express their characters. The pose and the position of the chair were similarly determined by each sitter finding a position that was both comfortable and natural, although Hockney did encourage a variety of different orientations for the chair.

Edith Devaney relates: "The second time I sat was towards the end of the project, and I'd had the opportunity to study the poses and dress of those who had gone before me. The only instruction I'd had was to tie my hair back; half way through painting the first portrait, Hockney had determined that this would make a better image. Many female sitters had dressed up for their portraits, so as a contrast I decided to wear more casual clothes".

The session began at around nine o'clock in the morning. The studio was very ordered, with the primed canvas ready on the easel and the paints, brushes and palettes all arranged on a table to the right of the easel. The platform with the chair was to the left, in front of the easel. Sitting on the chair I tried a variety of positions, then leaned forward with my head supported in my hand, in what felt like a natural and familiar position. Hockney liked it, hoping I could hold it for three days.

The first and perhaps most intense part of the process was the charcoal drawing that Hockney sketched directly onto the primed canvas.

He describes this outline of head, body and chair as 'fixing the pose', saying that he paints what he sees, and he makes sure he sees everything. The scrutiny and concentration of his gaze were remarkable, his head moving continuously from subject to canvas.

Once the drawing was completed, the painting began. The portraits were all executed in acrylic paint, a medium Hockney hadn't used for twenty years. After the first few paintings he started using a new brand that has a higher gel content and thus remains wet for longer. This enabled him, over the course of three days, to make the faces of the sitters a little more nuanced.

After an hour for a good lunch and some lively conversation, the sessions continued into the afternoon. During morning and afternoon breaks Hockney would sit in an armchair at some distance from his canvas, studying its progress and smoking a cigarette. He discussed various aspects of the painting during these breaks, but while he was painting there was complete silence.

The process is a very physical one for Hockney, who continually moves forwards and backwards to look at the canvas close up and then from a few feet back. There is a remarkable sense of fluidity in his motions as he reaches over to reload his brush with paint, mix new colours or select a different brush. He can move his easel up and down by means of an electric motor, so that close, detailed work is always conducted at the optimum height.

Throughout, the intensity of his concentration is unabated. Any exhaustion he feels afterwards is offset by the joy of creation.

Sitters share in that joy as the image emerges. I found my likeless somehow both familiar and unfamiliar. Hockney says he paints "What he sees", acknowledging that we all see differently as our view is shaped by our many experiences. Being subjected to such close scrutiny makes one consider the effect of one's thought processes on one's physical appearance, and Hockney's consummate skill in depicting this internal complexity adds to the exhibition's psychological intensity.

When my portrait had been completed I asked Hockney whether he thought he had captured me. "I have got an aspect of you", he said. "The first portrait captured a different aspect, and if I were to do a third it would be different again". Hockney's fascination with portraiture is completely intertwined with his *Deep sympathy for the individual*, and all the fragilities we embody, "la comédie humaine" as he puts it.

## **A selection of sitters**

### **Margaret Hockney**

David Hockney has three brothers and one sister, and the siblings are all close. He has always had a particular bond with Margaret, a retired nurse, and has drawn her a number of times in recent years, when she and David spent much time together in Bridlington while he was working on his Yorkshire landscape works. She travelled to Los Angeles last year with a close friend, Pauline Ling, also the subject of a portrait.

### **Rufus Hale**

The British artist Tacita Dean spent time in Los Angeles in 2015, researching at the Getty Institute. She visited Hockney, later filming him smoking in a contemplative state for her work *Portraits* (2016). When visiting she was accompanied by her eleven-year-old son Rufus.

Reminded of himself at the same age, Hockney felt compelled to paint Rufus, who proved to be a very good sitter, becoming very engaged in the process.

### **Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima**

Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima first met Hockney when he worked for him in his London studio. A Parisian musician of Portuguese parentage, he went on to manage Hockney's large studio in Bridlington during the creation of the Yorkshire landscape paintings. He has supported Hockney throughout the production of these portraits, scheduling each session, preparing the artist's painting materials and creating a remarkable archive of photographs to document interim stages of each portrait.

### **Gregory Evans**

Gregory Evans has been Hockney's close companion over several decades and has a deep knowledge of his work. With the artist, he established and continues to manage David Hockney Studio, which oversees the artist's work and archives. Since their first meeting in Los Angeles in 1971, Evans has been a frequent sitter and model for Hockney. Their easy relationship and Evans's considerable experience of sitting for Hockney make his portrait one of the most relaxed of the group.

### **Celia Birtwell**

Since they first met in the 1960s, the textile designer Celia Birtwell has remained one of Hockney's closest friends. Birtwell and her previous husband, the fashion designer Ossie Clark, were the subject of the artist's famous double portrait *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy* (1970–71; Tate). Since then Birtwell has continued to be his most regular female model.

When she visited Hockney in the summer of 2015, she was accompanied by her husband, Andy Palmer, and her granddaughter, Isabelle Clark, both of whose portraits can also be seen in the exhibition.

### **Bing McGilvray**

An artist based in Boston, Bing McGilvray has been a friend for several decades. Hockney enjoys and values his relaxed company and ready wit, and they share a love of smoking. A frequent visitor to Los Angeles, McGilvray often keeps the artist company when members of Hockney's team are travelling. Hockney has painted him a number of times, each portrait capturing a different aspect of his friend.

### **John Baldessari**

Born and raised in California, the conceptual artist John Baldessari has long been one of the West Coast's most celebrated contemporary artists. A few years older than Hockney, he has been a friend for many decades.

## DIDAKTIKA

As part of the Didaktika project, sponsored by BBK, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao designs didactic spaces and special programs to complement the exhibitions, where tools and resources help visitors better understand and enjoy the artworks on view.

The In Focus didactic space devoted to David Hockney: 82 Portraits and 1 Still-life explores the role of portraiture throughout the artist's career and reveals the keys of his creative process: from the importance of his models and their relationship with Hockney to the techniques and technological advances he used to produce his portraits, such as analogue photography or the iPad.

This educational information is located in gallery 105 and includes a portrait of Hockney at work with one of his sitters, which reminds us of the artist's studio in Los Angeles, as well as the screening of an interview of Hockney with exhibition curator Edith Devaney, where the personal and artistic meaning of this series of portraits is analyzed.

### Programs connected to the exhibition

#### **Secret Portraits — Express Tours**

For these portraits, Hockney's method was the same: he worked for three days on each portrait, showing the sitters in the same place against the same background. But beyond the atrezzo, what inspired the artist was the "secret knowledge" of the personalities of each and every one of his models.

Free with Museum admission and available in various languages and at different hours, the express tours offer the keys to this series of portraits and the opportunity to discover the identities of people described physically and psychologically by participants in a Q&A game, employed here as a means of learning. Virtual portraits created by group work that will reinforce the use of language and will stimulate different types of memory, such as visual and aural memory.

#### **Shared Reflections**

Unique tours led by Museum professionals where participants discover behind-the-scenes details of the exhibition. Sponsored by Fundación Vizcaína Aguirre.

- **Curatorial Vision:** With Petra Joos, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao curator (November 15)
- **Key Concepts:** With Marta Arzak, Associate Director of Education and Interpretation of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (November 22)

#### **Cover image**

David Hockney in his Studio, Los Angeles March 1st 2016

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Jean-Pierre Goncalves de Lima

**For more information:**

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David Hockney

"Dagny Corcoran, 15th, 16th, 17th January 2014" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"

Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)

48 x 36"

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney

"Jacob Rothschild, 5th, 6th February 2014" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"

Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)

48 x 36"

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney

"David Juda, 22nd, 23rd, 25th March 2015" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"

Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)

48 x 36"

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney

"Barry Humphries, 26th, 27th, 28th March 2015" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"

Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)

48 x 36"

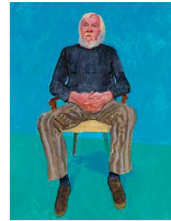
© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt





David Hockney  
"John Baldessari, 13th, 16th December 2013" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"  
Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)  
48 x 36"  
© David Hockney  
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney  
"Rita Pynoos, 1st, 2nd March 2014" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"  
Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)  
48 x 36"  
© David Hockney  
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney  
"Celia Birtwell, 31st August, 1st, 2nd September 2015" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"  
Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)  
48 x 36"  
© David Hockney  
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney  
"Rufus Hale, 23rd, 24th, 25th November 2015" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"  
Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)  
48 x 36"  
© David Hockney  
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney  
"Edith Devaney, 11th, 12th, 13th February 2016" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"  
Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)  
48 x 36"  
© David Hockney  
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney  
"Earl Simms, 29th February, 1st, 2nd March 2016" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"  
Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)  
48 x 36"  
© David Hockney  
Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney

"Fruit on a Bench, 6th, 7th, 8th March 2014" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"

Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)

48 x 36"

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney

"Margaret Hockney, 14th, 15th, 16th August 2015" from "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life"

Acrylic on canvas (one of an 82-part work)

48 x 36"

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Richard Schmidt



David Hockney, Los Angeles, 9th March 2016

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Jean-Pierre Goncalves de Lima



David Hockney in his Studio, Los Angeles March 1st 2016

© David Hockney

Photo Credit: Jean-Pierre Goncalves de Lima

