

## **“The Suppression of the Authorial Hand”: An Analysis of the Digital Paintings of David Hockney**

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### **Abstract**

The chronological progression of artistic movements has adapted in congruence with the development of human sciences, available resources, and as a reflection of the cultural context in which it pertains. The eclectic and ever-changing techniques presented in the work of artist David Hockney demonstrates the evolution of such inherit changes, predominantly in his use of the iPad, iPhone and the computer to render his recent body of work in the twenty-first century. Although Hockney has continuously experimented with different types of media, his artwork has remained thematically cohesive. His fascination with capturing a fleeting moment – a splash of water, a sunset over an East Yorkshire landscape, or the sun’s rays as it creeps through the trees at dusk – have remained salient within his *oeuvre*. However, his digital paintings have not gone without scrutiny, with many critics perceiving these works as an “awkward digital rhapsody,” and appearing “lazy” in their brushstrokes and overall composition. The criticism has been predominantly targeted at the lack of physical engagement with his paintings and relying too heavily on the technology to render a majority of the work. The use of alternative aids by artists to create their work has, however, been demonstrated in several artistic movements. Contemporary artists working in large scale sculpture, for instance, utilize computer-aided drawing (CAD) to digitize and enlarge their sculptures; photographers utilize light-capturing devices to archive a distinct moment in time; and Conceptual artist, Sol LeWitt and his system-oriented and serial-based installations are seldom, if ever, executed by the artist himself. Similarly, in the instance of David Hockney’s iPad and computer-made drawings, it can be argued that the use of these digital devices are manipulated as an expenditure of his creativity and fascination with capturing a distinct moment in an impromptu manner.

### **1. Introduction**

“I have noticed that, in a sense, I’m a rather difficult artist for what we might call the serious art world to categorize; they never know quite how to do it.”<sup>1</sup>

-David Hockney

The growing accessibility of art, as well as the myriad platforms for self-advocacy, have inevitably resulted in an unprecedented coalition of technology and contemporary art. The utilization of new media, such as the iPad, iPhone, and computer, in the recent work of artist David Hockney (b. 1937) has not gone without inciting an inundation of criticism. With Hockney’s “hands-off” approach in the rendering of his most recent work, art critics have claimed that these digital pieces lack the artistic tangibility seen in his previous acrylic and oil paintings. Instead, Hockney has begun manipulating the iPad and iPhone as well as other electronic devices to create vibrantly colored landscapes and portraits that bend the spectator’s sense of color, perspective, and scale. In surveying the use of digital and non-human aids exhibited in various art forms and movements, this thesis will argue that the suppression of the physical

interactivity of David Hockney and his digital paintings is clearly justified as both an expansion of his creative expedition as well as a technique previously explored in other mediums.

Artists have often used artwork to express either collective or individualized emotions such as concern, contempt, anger, or curiosity as a reflection of the cultural context in which they live. Art, in a broad sense, can be employed to commemorate the past, ponder the future, and respond to the present. Over the course of art history, a plethora of styles and techniques have been explored and developed to better capture and understand its subject: the Renaissance artists with humanity, the Fauvist with color, and the Cubist with perspective, all of which have imbued the digital paintings of David Hockney. The inception of new art movements has historically incited some level of criticism from the art world, typically regarding the aesthetic validity and use of technique by the artist. Take, for example, the emergence of Fauvism and Impressionism in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century – these movements did not simply emerge without precedent but rather were formed through the shared ideals and philosophies of a collective school of artists; ones which challenged the preconceived notions of how artists and art should respond and represent the world around them.<sup>2</sup> In the late twentieth-century and still today, the same sense of skepticism can be attributed to the coalition of technology and art.

As demonstrated by the digital paintings by David Hockney, the rendering of art does not need to directly rely on the hand of the artist. Before the introduction of digital technology, Hockney argues that artists of the Renaissance commandeered visual aids in order to create illusions of precision in scale and dimension; photography enabled artists to capture a moment in time with the press of a button; and Conceptual artists managed to leave their mark on an installation without physically touching the work itself. The subject of digitized art by David Hockney must, therefore, be addressed as an expansion and development of the artist's creative approach to his work and as a continuation of the themes and subjects explored throughout his life.

Throughout Hockney's career as an artist, he has continued to experiment with alternative and nonconventional methods to render his art, whether through paintings, photography, collage, or digital painting. It is evident that he has remained thematically consistent while technically eclectic in every form of media explored; continuously reappraising and reusing motifs, models, and landscapes in different modes, styles, and techniques.<sup>3</sup> Hockney explains, saying, "I love new mediums... I think mediums can turn you on, they can excite you: they always let you do something in a different way, even if you take the same subject."<sup>4</sup> From oil and acrylic paints, to the camera, to computer generated iPad, and iPhone, it comes without surprise that David Hockney has transitioned to using a medium that is prevalent in the twenty-first century.

In addition to a variance in techniques, in his recent projects, Hockney has demonstrated a tendency to produce his paintings quickly. While working in his home of East Yorkshire from 2005 to 2007 Hockney managed to paint approximately fifty canvases in two weeks.<sup>5</sup> His fascination with capturing a fleeting moment in time has pervaded several series of his work, as indicated in his swimming pool series, his Yorkshire landscapes, and his *Yosemite suite*. With the aid of the digital touch screen of the iPad or iPhone, Hockney is able to expedite the production of his art while still being able to work within the medium of paint. In using these devices, the artist is free of having to mix paints, switch brushes, or partake in any of the time consuming practices of painting.

Similarly, David Hockney has generally subscribed to the idea that painting should communicate the artist's subjectivity through the expressive use of form, color, and surface.<sup>6</sup> According to art historian Alan Woods, Hockney's tendency to explore the same motifs and subjects in various techniques demonstrates that, "the subject is always as much the means of representation chosen as it is the object or person represented."<sup>7</sup> Take, for example, the 2017 exhibition *Avid Hockney* at the Tate Britain which displayed works created with the use of his iPad's *Brush* app.<sup>8</sup> Hockney explains that technology enables him to use large and small strokes, blend colors, adjust lighting and essentially have all the necessary painters' tools in one "pocket-size device."<sup>9</sup>

## 2. The Life and Style of David Hockney

David Hockney began his art career attending the School of Art in Bradford, England, at the age of 16. Early paintings of his depict local landscapes, domestic scenes, and people at leisure. Hockney continued his education at the Royal College of Art for a three-year post-graduate course in painting where he gained influences from the popular avant-garde tradition of the early-1960s.<sup>10</sup> Much of his artwork of this time was representative of the popularized Abstract Expressionism, though Hockney did not adhere to this style for long, as he explains, "American-abstract expressionism was the great influence. So I tried my hand at it, I did a few pictures, about twenty...and then I couldn't. It was too barren for me."<sup>11</sup> As will be addressed later, his reluctance towards Abstract Expressionism would continue to shape Hockney's ideology behind his art. After graduating from the Royal College in 1962, Hockney signed a three-year

contract with contemporary art dealer John Kasmin. Later that same year, he had his first solo exhibition in which every piece was sold.<sup>12</sup> Hockney was then, at the age of 26, projected into the world as a celebrity amongst the new generation of artists.

Soon after, Hockney shifted away from the “barren” canvases of Abstract Expressionism and began painting themes such as vegetarianism and male homosexuality. These subjects relayed an ethical side of Hockney that many of his contemporaries refrained from exposing.<sup>13</sup> Much of these depictions would continue to represent a strong theme throughout his life’s work, particularly those related to his gay lifestyle which would influence his later paintings made after he moved to California in 1964. The warm Los Angeles sun and luxurious celebrity life appealed to the artist, and would facilitate the body of work referred to as his swimming pool series, in which the artist found musings in painting his lovers at leisure.<sup>14</sup> Here, Hockney would further develop his characteristic style of a vibrant color palette, strong diagonals and lighting, and overall, interest in depicting the mundane subtleties of life, all of which would later translate into his digital works.

In spite of his inclination towards Pop art, other work by Hockney demonstrated the renewed confidence in realism in the late 1960s, a style apparent in works by his contemporaries Lucian Freud and Pauline Boty. The editor of *David Hockney*, Paul Melia, explains that artwork by artists such as these were perceived as the precursors and developers of Pop Art.<sup>15</sup> Most notably, Hockney’s portraits of *American Art Collectors (Fred & Marcia Weisman)* and *Christopher Isherwood and Dan Bachardy* which both emphasize the same strong diagonals and color schema seen in his earlier swimming pool paintings, and would later be seen in his landscapes, and computer painted portraits (Figs. 1 & 2). The refined brushstrokes used in rendering the clean lines and shading of the figures within the portraits, as well as their surrounding backgrounds, can be seen in the computer painted portraits *Sir Tatton Sykes* and *Jean-Pierre Goncalves de Lima* created by Hockney in 2008 (Figs. 3 & 4). However, within these computer-rendered pieces, the backgrounds are simplified to vacant rooms and receding floors that, arguably, emphasize Hockney’s interest in highlighting the defining characteristics or idiosyncrasies of his subjects. The colors appear to become more exaggerated as well as the line work becoming more liberal in the computer paintings. In comparing the paintings, the style and appearance are descriptive of Hockney, while also remaining true to their medium.



Fig. 1 – David Hockney, *American Art Collectors (Fred & Marcia Weisman)*, 1968, acrylic paint on canvas, 83 7/8 x 120 in., Art Institute of Chicago, IL.

<http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork/102234>



Fig. 2 – David Hockney, *Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy*, 1968, acrylic paint on canvas, 83 ½ x 119 ½ in., Tate Britain, England.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2018/animals-love-letters-christopher-isherwood-don-bachardy>

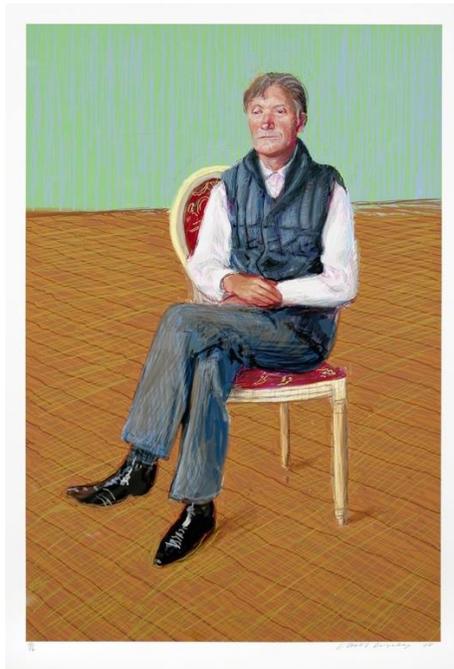


Fig. 3 – David Hockney, *Sir Tatton Sykes*, 2008, inkjet printed computer drawing on paper, 60 X 41 in.

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/david-hockney-sir-tatton-sykes>

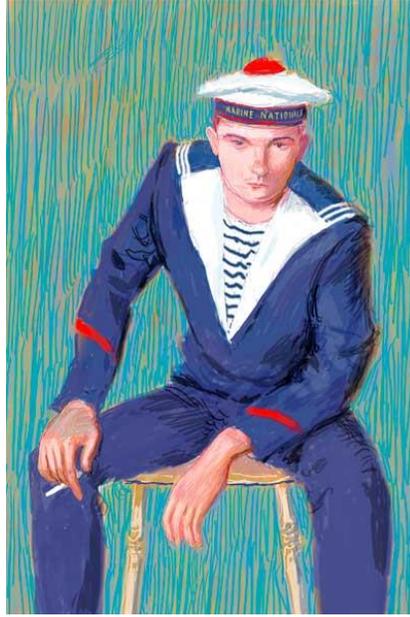


Fig. 4 - David Hockney, *Matelot Kevin Druetz I*, ed. 30, 2009, inkjet printed computer drawing on paper, 60 x 41 in. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/david-hockney/matelot-kevin-druetz-1-a-nGYarPe904Hr-IAHbxRArQ2>

Prior to establishing the identifiable characteristics of his work, Hockney struggled with asserting his own individualized artistic style. While at the Royal College of Art, Hockney's submissions for the 1962 Young Contemporaries exhibition consisted of titles such as *Figure in Flat Style*, *Tea Painting in an Illusionistic Style*, *Swiss Landscape in a Scenic Style*, and *A Grand Procession of Dignitaries in the Semi-Egyptian Style* (Figs. 5 & 6).<sup>16</sup> An incongruity of styles and techniques exhibited within these works suggests the young artist's trials of self-development through the use of work that Paul Melia notes as being "characterized by visual cliché."<sup>17</sup> Arguably, the notion of appropriation and redefining the "visual cliché" of former great art works and applying them within the modern context was a salient concept of both the Modern and Post-Modern art periods.



Fig. 5 - David Hockney, *Tea Painting in an Illusionistic Style*, 1961, oil paint on canvas, 91.5 x 32.7 x 1.5 in., Tate Britain, England. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hockney-tea-painting-in-an-illusionistic-style-t07075>



Fig. 6 – David Hockney, *A Grand Procession of Dignitaries in the Semi-Egyptian Style*, 1961, oil paint on canvas, 8.4 x 14.4 in. <https://thedavidhockneyfoundation.org/artwork/3570>

Attempts by critics to canonize Hockney's style is still prevalent today. Even at the height of his career, the contradiction of his persona as an artist and that of a celebrity have always collided. Simon Faulkner, contributor to *David Hockney*, remarks that "these attempts are an index of a persistent anxiety for commenters about the intersection of the world of the popular media and the world of serious art."<sup>18</sup> Arguably, the celebrity persona taken on by Hockney visually imbues his later work, such as his time in Los Angeles, California, and his swimming pool series. The luxurious lifestyle of the artist is invoked by the sensuality and relaxed demeanor of his subjects, most of which were lovers of Hockney. Of these paintings, for example, *Peter Getting out of Nick's Pool*, illustrates a nude male figure as he lifts himself out of the pool. White serpentine lines are used to represent the movement and light reflecting off the pool's surface (Fig. 7). The abstract forms employed to give the water a sense of movement were a gradual development in Hockney's pool side paintings. The lines used in a similar subject matter painted a year before *Peter Getting out of Nick's Pool* is seen to have a more liberal take on this technique; the curved and entangled blue ribbons of paint illustrate Hockney's progression in refining the natural world as he sees it (Fig. 8). The subtlety of a gesture, such as lifting oneself out of a pool, is exemplary of Hockney's interest in capturing a seemingly insignificant moment in time as well as the particularity of his subject.



Fig. 7 – David Hockney, *Peter Getting out of Nick's Pool*, 1966, acrylic paint on canvas, 84 x 84 in., Walker Art Gallery, England. <https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/peter-getting-out-of-nicks-pool-98307>



Fig. 8 – David Hockney, *Two Boys in a Pool, Hollywood*, 1965, acrylic paint on canvas, 60 x 60 in. Joint property of Lord and Lady Beaumont of Whitley, London.

<https://thedavidhockneyfoundation.org/artwork/3648>

This concept is further explored in Hockney’s painting, *A Bigger Splash*, from 1967 (Fig. 9). This particular painting was amongst several completed of the same subject matter - a splash, something that occurs in the time frame of “approximately two seconds.”<sup>19</sup> Unlike his previous pool side scenes, *A Bigger Splash* is devoid of Hockney’s characteristic surface water line work, as well as any figurative subject matter. The composition, made up of strong diagonals and vibrant colors, is instead centered around the splash itself. However, brief the moment of the splash took place, the painting took weeks for the artist to complete.<sup>20</sup>



Fig. 9 – David Hockney, *A Bigger Splash*, 1967, acrylic paint on canvas, 95.5 x 96 x 1.2 in., Tate Britain, England. <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hockney-a-bigger-splash-t03254>

In creating his swimming pool pictures, Hockney made efforts to capture the essence of water itself. On the inception of his interest of painting water, Hockney states, “it is a formal problem to represent water, to describe water, because it can be anything – it can be any colour, it’s moveable, it has no set visual description.”<sup>21</sup> The quandary of representing water prompts the artist to adapt and evolve his techniques to illustrate a vision that is in congruence with his own style. However, Hockney refrains from promoting the idea that artists (particularly painters) should adhere or limit

themselves to one distinct style, stating that many artists are “trapping themselves; they [are] picking such a narrow aspect of painting and specializing in it.”<sup>22</sup> Given the provided sentiment by Hockney, it becomes apparent why he has maneuvered as many techniques, styles, and mediums as he has, including that of digital painting.

Continuing his experimentation with other forms of media, he took up photography in the 1980s. One might argue that his newly found interest in the camera was Hockney’s way of rejecting the concepts of abstract painting. For example, the style of Abstract Expressionism refutes representing an object or person within any sort of context, while photography can undoubtedly and entirely capture the subject and context. He began experimenting with the idea manipulating the stillness of a single image, layered with other photographs of the same subject that were slightly shifted in one direction, to create the illusion of movement. The photo-collages, or “joiner composites” as Hockney referred to them, became his focus for the better part of the 1980s.<sup>23</sup> Within the joiner composites, Hockney’s interest was not to capture a static moment, but rather to capture *movement* within that *moment*.<sup>24</sup> This idea would later translate to his work of the twenty-first century, in which Hockney would immerse himself into the changing elements of nature and how the seasons and light differentiated how one experiences these changes.

Woods proposes that the late Pablo Picasso’s Cubist concept of trying to depict an image from multiple angles on a two-dimensional surface and the suggested movement in Marcel Duchamp’s Futurist inspired work *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) as possible influences of his photography collages.<sup>25</sup> The family portrait *George, Blanche, Celia, Albert and Percy. London, 1983*, exhibits the application of these techniques and concepts of Picasso and Duchamp (Fig. 10).<sup>26</sup> Within this joiner composite, the mother, Celia, is sitting on a sofa with her two sons on either side of her. Several polaroid photographs are joined together to show different angles of each subject’s face, limbs, and gestures. Combing photographs of either side of the central figure’s face, for instance, evokes the sense of movement in the mother looks back and forth to either son. A series of stagnant moments are photographed and then overlaid and joined together to create the illusion of activity within the portrait, similarly to the gestural brushstrokes of Duchamp’s work. However, it is the camera that conducts the exposition of Hockney’s piece, not the brush wielded hand of the artist. Instead, it is the transferal of a concept, such as movement on a two-dimensional picture, from one medium to another.



Fig. 10 - David Hockney, *George, Blanche, Celia, Albert and Percy. London, 1983*, 1983, photographic collage, 43.6 x 46 ½ in.

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/david-hockney-george-blanche-celia-albert-and-percy-london-1983>

Even while working within the medium of photography, Hockney struggled with the concept of representing “layers of time” in his joiner composite pieces. Prior to his use of photography, he stated in his autobiography that he found photography uninteresting and, on viewing exhibitions of photographs, “they always seem to have the same texture; somehow the sense of scale is always the same; there’s a monotony [to them].”<sup>27</sup> Interestingly enough, Hockney’s

2016 exhibition *82 Portraits and 1 Still Life* at the Royal Academy in London posited almost all of the unfavorable characteristics stated above. All eighty-two portraits were of seated subjects, painted on 48” x 36” canvases with the same colors surrounding the figures. Note, for example, the acrylic portraits *Rufus Hale* and *Rita Panoos* in which both subjects are seated in the same pale-yellow chair and exhibiting the same blank stare (Fig. 11). Despite his sentiment on the aesthetic of photography, Hockney, again, demonstrates his ability to integrate the defining stylistic qualities of one medium with another.



Fig. 11 - David Hockney, *Rufus Hale, 23,24,25 Novemebr* (left) 2015 and *Rita Panoos 01,02 March* (right) 2014, acrylic on canvas, 18.9 x 14.2 in. <https://hockneyportraits.guggenheim-bilbao.eus/en/exhibition>

In 2008, Hockney once again began exploring a new medium to depict his subjects – the computer. The digital portraits *Matelot Kevin Druetz I* and *Jean-Pierre Goncalves de Lima* from his 2009 *Inkjet Computer Drawings* exhibitions at the L.A. Louver in California and Annelly Juda Fine Art in London were made using both an iPad and a big screen iMac computer with a Graphics Tablet (Figs. 4 and 12).<sup>28</sup> At first glance, these portraits seem to have a similar vibrant color schema, subtle brushstrokes, and shading style composed in the *82 Portraits and 1 Still Life* portrait series. However, these paintings were created entirely on the computer. Hockney comments about the efficacy of using technology for creating and printing several editions of his work by stating that:

The computer is a useful tool. Photoshop is a computer tool for picture making. It in effect allows you to draw directly in a printing machine, one of its many uses. One draws with the colours the printing machine has, and the printing machine is one anyone can have. They are now superior to any other kind of printing.<sup>29</sup>

In his statement, it is the stages of draftsmanship within the context of the computer that Hockney is attempting to highlight. He initially introduces the computer as the platform that provides the software for Photoshop, and from Photoshop to its colors, and the colors to the printer. Lastly, he adds the accessibility of the printing machine as being one that “anyone can have.” The key concept being it (the computer) is a device in which one can draw directly into a printing machine. It is the expediency, efficacy, and multitude of prints one can obtain that Hockney is ultimately addressing in this statement.



Fig. 12 - David Hockney, *Matelot Kevin Druetz I*, ed. 30, 2009, inkjet printed computer drawing on paper, 40 x 33 ½ in. <http://www.artnet.com/artists/david-hockney/matelot-kevin-druetz-1-a-nGYarPe904Hr-IAHbxRARQ2>

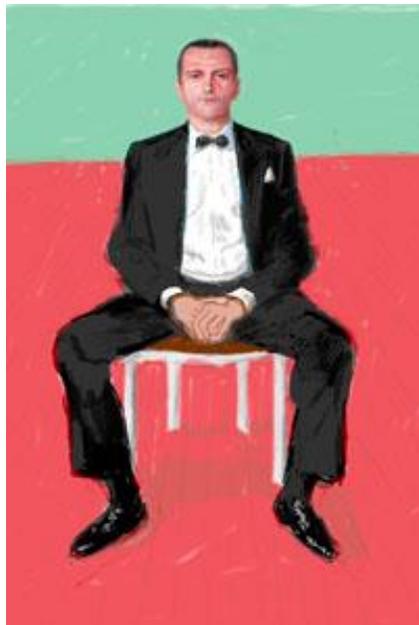


Fig. 13 - David Hockney, *Jean-Pierre Goncalves de Lima*, ed. 12, 2008, inkjet printed computer drawing on paper, 49 x 33 ½ in. <http://www.davidhockney.co/works/digital/computer-drawings>

A clear example of Hockney's utilization of technology to create a new vision in painting is seen in the 2008 exhibition *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture* at the Royal Academy (RA) in London. The landscape focused exhibition featured works inspired by his home of East Yorkshire over the span of three years. Not only were these paintings the largest the RA had ever housed, but they also revealed a remarkable technical feat. The highlight piece of the show, *Bigger Trees Near Warter or/ ou Peinture sur le motif pour le nouvel age post-photographique*, is a massive forty foot composite of fifty oil paintings and 100 digital prints (Fig. 14). The piece depicts a towering forest of winter trees on a misty day, patched together in a pixelated-like fashion. Further emphasizing Hockney's technique of fusing photography, new media, and painting, within this exhibition, he includes in the latter half of the, *Peinture sur le motif*

*pour le nouvel age post-photographique*, or Painting on the Pattern for the New Post-Photographic Age, to assert a sense of propriety in his forefront approach in the construction of the piece.

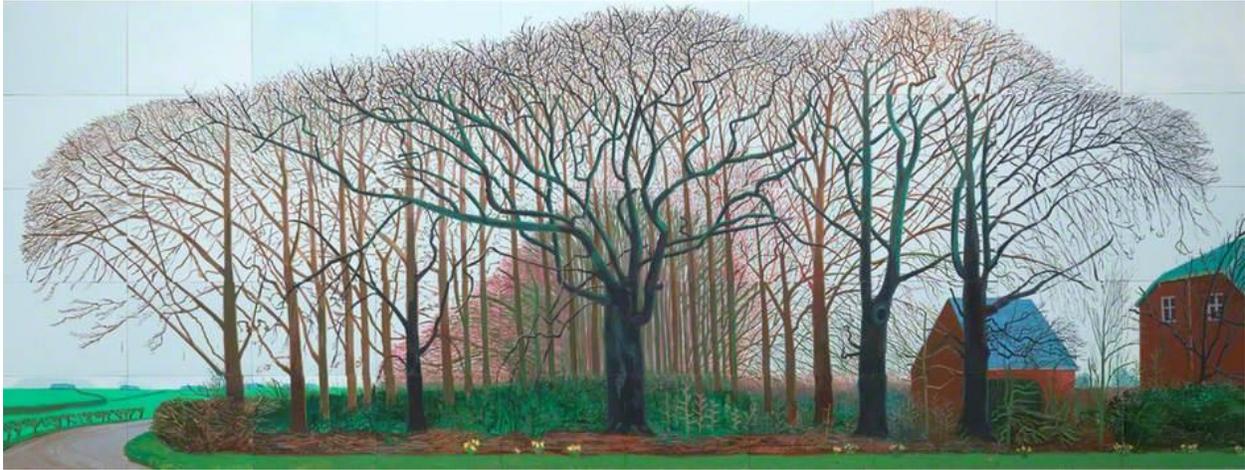


Fig. 14 - David Hockney, *Bigger Trees Near Warter or/ ou Peinture sur le motif pour le nouvel age post-photographique*, 2008, oil paint on 50 canvases and 100 digital prints, color, on paper, 58.7 x 482.3 in., Tate, London.

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/david-hockney-bigger-trees-near-warter-or-slash-ou-peinture-sur-le-motif-pour-le-nouvel-age-post-photographique>

The technological advances that made this painting possible was the digital camera. As explained in the documentary film *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture*, every segment painted by Hockney was photographed and then computerized. As Hockney states, “it’s using high tech with low tech,” the low tech being Hockney’s physical hand while the high tech is the computerization.<sup>30</sup> By utilizing both photography and digital technology, it enabled the artist to view the entirety of the piece in an all-encompassing perspective. Hockney further explains that this use of computerization of paintings can “open up painting,” possibly in a way never explored before.<sup>31</sup>

Soon after the *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture* exhibition, Hockney realized he could further manipulate the scale of his paintings when creating them solely on an iPhone or iPad and then transfer them to print, similarly to how he rendered *Bigger Trees Near Warter or/ ou Peinture sur le motif pour le nouvel age post-photographique*. An exhibition held at the Fondation Pierre, Paris in 2010 would be the first to present an entirely iPhone and iPad created collection by Hockney.<sup>32</sup> The exhibition *David Hockney: Fleurs Fraîches* (Fresh Flowers) showcased 300 brilliantly colored flower paintings displayed on iPad screens in an effort to maintain the integrity of the medium.<sup>33</sup> One of the included works, *Untitled, 168*, illustrates a vase filled with the illustrious sunflowers that favor the work of Van Gogh, while the highly contrasted magenta background and blue spotted vase resembles the color palette of Matisse (Fig. 15). Stylistically, however, the digitally rendered lines of color are distinguishably characteristic of Hockney and his forefront approach in utilizing new media technology in his art.



Fig. 15 – David Hockney, *Untitled, 168*, 2010, iPad Drawing.  
<http://www.davidhockney.co/works/digital/ipad>

After Hockney's discovery of using his iPhone's *Brush* app, he applied his fascination with light and the transparency of color in rendering the bouquets of flowers that filled his East Yorkshire home. The constant theme of light and the motif of the sun have remained consistent subjects in Hockney's body of work, as seen in his seasonal study of the varying light in the East Yorkshire landscapes as well as the illuminating warm sunshine of his LA poolside series. Hockney further extrapolates on his interest with light, both natural and digitally emitted from the screen of his Apple devices, as well as how the iPhone can be used to better represent this subject, stating:

The fact the screen is illuminated makes you choose luminous subjects...Dawn is about luminosity and so is the iPhone. People send me iPhone drawings which looks OK, but you realise that they are not picking luminous subjects – which this medium is rather good at [in ways that] another medium isn't.<sup>34</sup>

The use of the iPhone, in this case, provides Hockney with the ability to further expand his creative interest and fascination with capturing the essence of light, similar to his methodology of capturing water and a splash during his LA poolside series in the 60s. In addition, the use of the iPhone compounded his inclination to paint quickly in order to capture the natural elements and their particularities in varying conditions, also exhibited in his joiner-composites.

### 3. Criticism of the Computer as a Medium and the Digital Paintings of David Hockney

Throughout his career, this amalgamation of techniques and styles has remained a topic of scholarly criticism surrounding his work. On David Hockney's 2014 exhibition *Perspective Should Be Reversed*, Alastair Smart of the British Telegraph emphasizes that "having once set the bar so high, David Hockney is now conspicuously failing to live up to his own standards," and "to the neutral observer...these pictures look rather like a mess."<sup>35</sup> Smart continues to criticize the exhibit but ends the article by paying tribute to Hockney's reluctance to never stop experimenting. Additionally, Olivia McEwan of *Hyperallergic* reviewed the artist's retrospective at the Tate Britain and states that the visual quality of Hockney's work has been in decline ever since his 1960s LA poolside series. McEwan hones in on the work produced by Hockney post-1970 by addressing the apparent "laziness" of the brushstrokes that do not even cover the entirety of the canvas at times.<sup>36</sup> That same "laziness," she proclaims, then transferred into the most recent iPad and digital works collection. The curators of the same exhibition, Chris Stephens, Andrew Wilson, and Helen Little, address the notion of transference by stating the chronology of the exhibition is intended for visitors to experience how the "roots of each new direction lay in the work that came before."<sup>37</sup>

Arguably, technologically competent David Hockney has familiarized himself with both the growing digital art market and the presentation of this medium by contemporary art galleries around the world. In addition, he has

acquired the skills to produce a work of art within minutes on his iPhone. It is possible that the growing accessibility and immediacy in which one can view art on a digital platform, such as email, Instagram, or Facebook, has impacted the production of art itself. In *A Bigger Message: Conversations with David Hockney*, Martin Gayford points out an integral element of Hockney and his artistic perspective, stating, “his abiding preoccupation is what the world looks like, and how human beings represent it: People and pictures.”<sup>38</sup> The pictures one may capture on a daily basis are fleeting and ephemeral. It may be Hockney’s intention to occupy these images we encounter, whether they be mundane like waiting in line for coffee, or enigmatic and beautiful like a sunset.

In his book, *The Philosophy of Computer Art*, mechanical engineer Haruki Tsuchiya poses the question, “What is the philosophical nature of computer art and its implication for the world of aesthetics?”<sup>39</sup> Although the implications may have certainly altered since its publication in 1969, the question still remains valid concerning how to categorize art made using digital technology, such as the computer and iPad paintings by David Hockney. As mentioned before, art can be utilized to express emotions aesthetically, reflecting the human experience within the cultural context of the artist. A retrospective of Hockney’s work clearly illustrates this idea of art as a response to the artist’s experience in life juxtaposed to the contemporary state of the socio-economic, political, or overall moral attitude of the world. By initially entering the art world as a painter in his early life, a photographer in his adulthood, and a digital painter at his current age, Hockney has manifested his identity as an artist to one who embraces new resources and technologies to render his work while still maintaining a consistent perspective that is entirely his own. However, the introduction of digital technology as an art medium did not go without skepticism from both his former admirers and art critics alike.

Contrary to claims of the digital revolution of the 1990s, the use of digital technology, such as the computer and fax machine, had already been utilized by artists for several decades.<sup>40</sup> As New Media professor Curt Cloninger points out in his “Manifesto for a Theory of the ‘New Aesthetic,’” the “New Aesthetic” is not a new flavor of aesthetics” but rather, “it is a new way of understanding aesthetics altogether, one that renegotiates the relationship between human-subject and non-human-object.”<sup>41</sup> As evaluated in the artwork of the pool side series, the computer portrait paintings, *A Bigger Picture Exhibition*, and the joiner-composites photographs, Hockney successfully demonstrates artwork that is the result of the “human-subject and non-human-object” relationship. In examining the interconnectivity of art, technology, and humanity, artist and film-maker Stan VanDerBeek (1927 – 1984) introduces the computer in his article “New Talent – The Computer” (1970) as an amplifier of the human mind, a tool which artists can use to extend their creativity. Self-described as a technically oriented film-artist, VanDerBeek posited neologisms “expanded cinema” and “underground film” into critical discourse and intended to further impact audiences with the real-time telecommunication between computers and art.<sup>42</sup> His concepts behind the use of digital technology and its advancements into the art world in the 70s are crucial in comprehending the convoluted avant-garde “art/life axiom.”<sup>43</sup>

VanDerBeek traces the linearity of art historical movement of the nineteenth-century that arose in congruence with that of human discovery in psychology, science, and ideals; outlining the relationship between the object of art and that of nonobjective art. For example, the rise of Futurism and the invention of the machine and the interest in motion; Dadaism with the end of World War II and anti-art philosophies; Pop art with confrontation of “reality” and the rise of consumerism; Minimal art and the illusion of reduction. The examples listed are necessary in drawing the connection between the rise of new media and the mentality of humanity during this time.<sup>44</sup>

The invention of the camera and photographs evolved into the phenomena of movies, and then to television. The television, VanDerBeek proposes, has now been overhauled by the next visual stage of computer-generated and digitized art, as exhibited by David Hockney. The technical and conceptual feat of *Bigger Trees Near Warter or/ ou Peinture sur le motif pour le nouvel age post-photographique*, for example, combines all of the elements listed by VanDerBeek; the piece represents an amalgamation of Hockney’s artistic ability in painting, photography, and computer painting and digitization (Fig. 15). One might argue that VanDerBeek would be pleased to read the argument presented by Cloninger that new media aesthetics are, “a new way of understanding aesthetics altogether, one that renegotiates the relationship between human-subject and non-human-object.” What was once a technological novelty in the late twentieth century has evolved and expanded to a greater conceptual digital art movement reinforced and legitimized by the recent digital paintings of David Hockney.

#### 4. Photography and Portraiture

As previously addressed, it was in the 80s that Hockney began to explore his own previous ideas on representing time and perspective with the use of the camera. However, instead of creating a photograph that represented its subject in motion, such as that of *Animal Locomotion: Plate 625 (Galloping Horse)* by Eadweard Muybridge, Hockney manipulated several images of a single subject that were captured from slightly different perspectives, as seen in *George, Blanche, Celia, Albert and Percy. London, 1983* (Fig.10). The layering of these photographs relayed an

elevated visual approach in rendering the coalition of still and moving subjects. The same technical manifestation adheres to his use of the iPad to create his digital paintings, which illustrate a sense of movement and skewed scale.

After the introduction of the film camera, the need to represent realism in painting was moot, thus we see the development of abstraction, both in the theology rooted behind Cubism and Conceptual art. The camera, therefore, impacted the art world and changed the way in which one interpreted perspective. This new device allowed one to capture and archive a single moment in time with the single press of button (at least in the form of its later developmental stage). Prior to the inception of the camera, hours upon hours were spent by the painter to illustrate the still-frame of a moment – either fleeting, in the case of depicting the crowded and fast-paced city street, or stagnant, as an aristocrat sits for his portrait. The idea of synthesizing these antithetical elements in an image was initially attempted by Hockney in his use of the camera and the assemblage of his joiners-composites.

The manipulation of perspective and the illusion of movement exhibited in Hockney's photography and joiner compositions is accredited to his admiration of the Cubism and the work of Pablo Picasso.<sup>45</sup> The composite polaroid portrait, *Nicholas Wilder Studying Picasso. Los Angeles*, exemplifies all the favorable components of Cubism while also paying tribute to Picasso himself (Fig. 16). Within this piece, artist and art dealer Nicholas Wilder is depicted seated on a patio chair looking down at a book splayed on his lap. The composition is configured by several photographs of the subject and the surrounding landscape, all taken from slightly different angles and arranged in jigsaw puzzle-like fashion, giving the illusion of movement, such as the breeze rustling the leaves of the plants or the restless jiggle of Mr. Wilder's left foot. Hockney demonstrates an interest in capturing the human particularities in all of his portraits, across all mediums. In utilizing the camera, he is able to capture his subject as realistically as possible from a mandated perspective that is entirely his own.

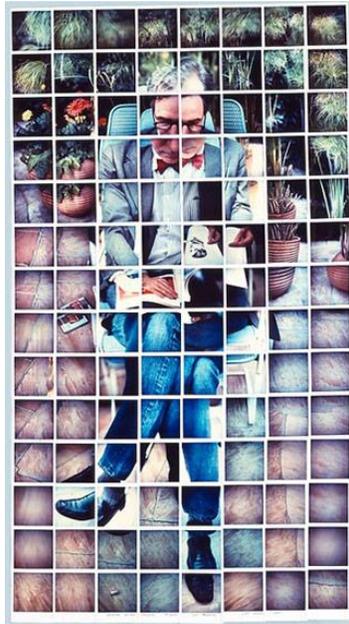


Fig. 16 – David Hockney, *Nicholas Wilder Studying Picasso. Los Angeles, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 1982*, composite polaroid, 48 ½ x 26 ½ in. <http://www.davidhockney.co/works/photos/composite-polaroids>

In *David Hockney: Portraits*, authors Sarah Howgate and Barbara Stern Shapiro present the only book solely dedicated to the portraits done by David Hockney, in all media (paintings, drawing, photocollage and prints). Howgate argues that, in examining this explored subject by Hockney, they “reveal how the artist's creative development and concerns about representation can be traced throughout portraiture.”<sup>46</sup> Given the publication of this book being just shy of Hockney's initial experimentation of painting on his iPhone, arguably the medium of digital portraits should be included within the survey of this book. Beginning with the realism explored in the double portraits of the 1960s, to the naturalism of the LA poolside portraits, as well as the abstraction in explored in his photo-collages – David Hockney has employed portraiture as a reflection of his interest in life, love, and time.

## 5. The Theory of “Optical Insights into Renaissance Art”

Critics such as Olivia McEwen, Alistair Smart, and Clair Bishop discuss the ingenuity of digital artists and their art as one which relies heavily on the machine to produce the art. The reduced form of the reviews given by these critics can be simplified to the interaction between the artwork and the artists. More specifically, it is the assessment of the ratio between artist’s physical hand and the instrumental aid, or machine (in the case of digital art). However, digital art is not the first art form to utilize an aid to render its work. David Hockney, a salient artist targeted for utilizing technology and digitizing his work, proved that the implementation of optical aids by artists has been in practice for decades.<sup>47</sup>

However, the camera, a machine, and Hockney’s photography are not inundated with the same critique. The reduced form of the reviews given by these critics can be simplified to the interaction between the artwork and the artists, or lack thereof. More specifically, it is the assessment of the ratio between artist’s physical hand and the instrumental aid. However, computer-based painting is not the first art form to utilize an aid to render its work. David Hockney along with Arizona University optical science professor Charles Falco, conducted a study to prove that the use of optical aids by artists has been in practice for over 150 years, well before the invention of the computer.

Hockney began theorizing about the concept of using optical aids, such as the camera obscura, in 2000 after he came upon a nineteenth century portrait of Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres, which suggested that the artist had employed some tactic, such as an optical device in order to render a more realistic painting.<sup>48</sup> This observation led to an extensive study of several European paintings in which the focal length and geometry, effect of aperture on depth of field (DOF), the effect of focus on magnification and vanishing points were analyzed.<sup>49</sup> Although the findings were cited as being conclusive, there is some debate to the validity of the evidence found by Hockney and Falco. In summation, the pair were able to provide strong evidence that suggested that Hockney’s theory of optical-aided paintings is evident in master painters.<sup>50</sup>

With the evidence suggesting the use of optical and illusionary tactics, the reevaluation of what art critics determine a handmade work of art should be assessed. Not only did the invention of the computer elicit artists to suppress his hand, but also enabled an expansion of the creative mind, just as Hockney testifies in his digitally rendered paintings. As indicated by his requisite to never stop experimenting with new mediums and techniques, the digital paintings are but a single avenue in which Hockney is extrapolating a means to illustrate his musings.

## 6. Sculpture, Scale, and Mass Production

In the preliminary stages of his iPhone paintings, David Hockney elaborates on his inspiration and initial intention for creating these images as a method to send flowers to his friends every morning.<sup>51</sup> The innovative tactic of creating a painting using his iPhone is significant in the fact that these images could be both sent out and possibly passed further along to others, while also appearing virtually identical to the original. Similarly, the scale of the paintings could be altered, just as was done with the digitized landscape paintings from East Yorkshire, by digitally increasing the dimensions of the paintings for print.

Both the manipulation of scale, in addition to the utilization of digitally rendering art, is demonstrated in the work of contemporary sculptor artists Jeff Koons and Richard Serra. The small, initial stages of the extensively large sculptures, such as the *Balloon Animals* by Koons and the sheet-metal assemblages by Serra, were further realized with the use of the use of computer software graphics, such as computer-aided drawing (CAD). In *The Art/Design Exchange Revitalized*, Trygve Faste promotes the integration of product design and studio art in surveying the historical and contemporary coalition of the two disciplines, stating, “Given the success with which art has been able to justify its contribution to a larger historical story, it is interesting to consider the potential significant contributions that designers could make if their work were to engage in a larger cultural dialogue about its meaning.”<sup>52</sup> A corollary between the techniques demonstrated by sculpture artists and the digital paintings of David Hockney is emphasized by the artists use of digitization as an expansion of their creative ability.

It was during his time in East Yorkshire that Hockney initially began using his iPhone to create quick and vibrantly colored paintings. In using his Apple device, Hockney could efficiently capture the fleeting moments of color that percolated the sky during sunset or sunrise. *On Hockney’s initial intention of painting bouquets of flowers on his iPhone, the artist is quoted in saying he simply wanted to, “send fresh flowers to my friends every morning.”*<sup>53</sup> *This sentimental gesture is one that is both endearing and pivotal in the dissemination of art on virtual scale.* Art critic Gayford addresses the novelty of this method of creating and distributing artwork, specifically that the new medium

offers “fresh possibilities,” and requires, “unorthodox techniques.”<sup>54</sup> He additionally remarks on the subversive quality of the paintings and their ability to be widely distributed in a world where the art market accentuates a signed work of art.<sup>55</sup>

A comparable tactic of producing multiple versions of the same piece is exhibited in the work of Conceptual art pioneer Sol LeWitt (1928-2007) and his serial and system-oriented artwork, as well as his essays on the subject. Computer art theorist Grant D. Taylor addresses the correlation between computer-based art and Conceptual art in a general sense, stating that both art forms rely on the importance of their “suppression of an authorial presence.”<sup>56</sup> The analogous sentiment provided by Grant further rationalizes the utilization of the Apple products by Hockney in that the both artists are absolving their stance as the sole arbiter of their work by allowing it to be reproduced freely at the hands of its receiver. Furthering this correlation, LeWitt discloses the idiomatic methodology of Conceptual art in stating:

To work with a plan that is pre-set is one way of avoiding subjectivity...The plan would design the work. Some plans would require millions of variations and some a limited number, but both are finite. Other plans imply infinity. In each case however, the artist would select the basic form and rules that would govern the solution to the problem.<sup>57</sup>

LeWitt’s statement that, “[t]he plan would design the work,” correlates perfectly with the application process of employing technology as a medium of art. By requiring the artist to take an off-handed approach to the inevitable visual result of his or her work, the preconceived notion of the artist as the soul arbitrator of the artwork is dissolved.

The advantage of mass producing a work of art in order to increase its chances of viewers has been in existence since the Renaissance, with master printmakers such as Albrecht Dürer, an artist who was renowned for his tactic of producing hundreds of copies of a single print in the hopes to not only reach a larger audience, but to also financially secure his trade as an artist. Similarly, modernist sculptor Auguste Rodin created casts of his sculptures for the same advantage. Indeed, there is poignant value in a one-of-a-kind work of art, however, in the digital age, there is leverage in creating art that can be viewed in all of its authenticity on a digital platform. The digital paintings of David Hockney have a provocative quality, as Gayford points out, in that they lack any signature by Hockney himself. However, if one considers the fact the Hockney has established himself as the forefront artists of digital painting, then the authenticity of the work lies within his characteristic style alone.

One of the latest series of digitally rendered pieces by Hockney was created during his trip to Yosemite National park from 2010 - 2011. Instead of bringing along an easel and canvas, Hockney opted for his iPad. He there produced over twenty in situ landscape paintings that he referred to as the *Yosemite Suite*. The compactness of the iPad device enabled the artist to work in an impromptu manner, capturing all of the subtleties of the park and its interaction with light. Similar to his previously digitally rendered works, none of these works are signed. As was stated by the artist, the original intention for employing these Apple devices was to make his paintings more accessible by virtually sending them to his friends.<sup>58</sup> In a way, it can be suggested that it was less about commodifying the work, and more about the exposure and accessibility of the work.

Art critic Noël Carroll addresses an analogous phenomenon of increased exposure to contemporary art due to technology and the ontological status of what she refers to as “mass art,” in her contribution to *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.<sup>59</sup> In defining the terminology, she outlines the history of mass art from that of the printing press of the industrial revolution all the way to the computerization of today. She further describes mass art as one, “designed for mass consumption...because mass art makes possible the simultaneous consumption of the same artwork by audiences often divided by great distances.” In this sense, Hockney’s iPad, iPhone, and computers works fall under the categorization of mass art described by Carroll; his work is bridging a gap between those with and without access to art and thus expanding his greater reach of audiences.

## 7. Conclusion

David Hockney successfully utilizes the techniques achievable by the technology available within the contemporary era to create illustrative paintings of the pertinent themes of love, life, and nature. He maintains his signature styles of bright and sometimes exaggerated colors, seen in both his figurative and his landscapes pieces, and applies these poignant elements to his digital paintings. Although received by some art critics as appearing haphazard or insignificant within the realm of contemporary art, they clearly illustrate a deeper approach to the methodology in asserting the distinguishable style unique to Hockney, and are, therefore, salient within the unraveling and progression of contemporary art today.

There is an undoubtable fluidity within the use of non-human aids as well as exploring innovative techniques by artists when looking retrospectively at the course of art historical movements. In surveying examples of suppressing the authorial presence of the artist to that of his work, such as in the case of Renaissance masters, Conceptual artists, photographers, and the contemporary sculpture artists previously addressed, a reevaluation of the necessity of interconnectivity of the artist and his work is illuminated. Moreover, the physical interaction between the two is not as conspicuous as one may have originally thought, as examined in the theory that the great Renaissance painters utilized lenses to enhance the appearance of realism in their work; or the use of the photograph to manipulate the set perspectives and portrayal or reality; or the system-based installation work of Sol LeWitt in which the artist himself remains only present through his words of instruction. The use of digital technology of Hockney thus continues the same methodology of distancing himself from the physicality of the work, augmenting the creative poignancy of the piece itself.

In examining the work of David Hockney across all media – paintings, photography, prints, and finally digital paintings – a clear transference of theme, representation, and subject matter reveals itself consistently throughout. In referencing curators Chris Stephens, Andrew Wilson, and Helen Little of the Tate Britain, the chronology of his work indeed illustrates how the “roots of each new direction lay in the work that came before.”<sup>60</sup> In a way, the use of varying media in and of itself is a defining characteristic of David Hockney. Hockney cites his initial interest and fascination with art when watching his father paint old bicycles as a child.<sup>61</sup> It was the beauty of making marks on a surface. The artist thus obtains an authoritative stance to choose how and where to place those marks. This underlying ideology behind the validity of the artist and what it means to make art further justifies Hockney’s ability to inextricably synthesize art and technology with his digital paintings.

## 8. Endnotes

1. David Hockney, *David Hockney by David Hockney: My Early Years*, ed. Nikos Stangos (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 128.
2. See Lionello Venturi, “The Aesthetic Idea of Impressionism” *Journal of Aesthetic and Art and Art Criticism*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1941): 34-45 and James D. Carney, “A Historical Theory of Art Criticism,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 28, no. 1 (1994): 13-29.
3. Alan Woods, “Hockney’s Photographs,” *Critical Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1985), 7.
4. David Hockney, *Paper Pools*, ed. Nikos Stangos (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), 10.
5. *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture*, Directed by Bruno Wolheim, (2009, Films Media Group), Film, 46:03.
6. Melia and Luckhardt, *David Hockney*, 4.
7. Alan Woods, “Hockney’s Photographs,” 7.
8. “David Hockney.” Accessed Feb 27, 2017. <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/david-hockney>
9. “David Hockney: A Painter Enjoying New Technologies,” Digital Meets Culture. <http://www.digitalmeetsculture.net/article/david-hockney-a-painter-enjoying-new-technologies/>.
10. Melia and Luckhardt, *David Hockney*, 4.
11. David Hockney, *David Hockney by David Hockney: My Early Years*, ed. Nikos Stangos (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 41.
12. This exhibition was held at the John Kasmin Gallery in 1963, London, England.
13. Melia and Luckhardt, *David Hockney*, 5.
14. Hockney, *David Hockney by David Hockney: My Early Years*, 124.
15. Melia and Luckhardt, *David Hockney*, 4.
16. *Ibid.*, 4.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*, 24.
19. Hockney, *David Hockney by David Hockney: My Early Years*, 124.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, 100.
22. *Ibid.*, 104.
23. A “joiner-composite” is a single image assembled from successions of prints that all show a small detail of the subject.
24. Hockney, *Paper Pools*, 123.
25. *Ibid.*, 124.

26. Ibid., 112, plate 14.
27. Hockney, *David Hockney by David Hockney: My Early Years*, 61.
28. Poul Webb. *ART & ARTISTS: David Hockney Digital Portraits*. Art & Artists. 2011. <http://poulwebb.blogspot.com/2011/01/david-hockney-digital-portraits.html>.
29. Ibid.
30. *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture*, Directed by Bruno Wolheim, (2009, Films Media Group), Film, 51:23.
31. Ibid., 51:34.
32. The exhibition *David Hockney: Fleurs Fraîches*, was held at the *Fondation Pierre, Paris in 2010*.
33. James Servin, "David Hockney's Fresh Flowers." Accessed Nov 24, 2017. <https://www.vogue.com/article/david-hockneys-fresh-flowers>.
34. Martin Gayford, "David Hockney's iPad Art." -10-20, 2010. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8066839/David-Hockneys-iPad-art.html>, 3.
35. Alastair Smart, "David Hockney, Annelly Juda Fine Art, Review: 'Frankly, rather a Mess'." 5/18/, 2015. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-reviews/11609368/David-Hockney-Annelly-Juda-Fine-Art-review-frankly-rather-a-mess.html>
36. Olivia McEwen, *The Digital Decline of David Hockney*, Accessed Oct 30, 2017. <https://hyperallergic.com/369975/the-digital-decline-of-david-hockney/>.
37. Ibid.
38. Martin Gayford, *A Bigger Message: Conversations with David Hockney* (Revised Edition) (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016), 9.
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43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. *David Hockney – Joiner Photographs*, Your Artfilms, 2017. <https://artfilmsblog.wordpress.com/2017/09/06/david-hockney-joiner-photographs/>.
46. Hockney, David, Sarah Howgate, Barbara Stern Shapiro, Mark Glazebrook, Marco Livingstone, and Edmund White, *David Hockney: Portraits*, (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; and The National Portrait Gallery of Britain: Yale University Press, 2006), 10.
47. Charles M. Falco and David Hockney, *Optical Insights into Renaissance Art* (*Optics & Photonics News* 11(7), 52-59. 2000), 53-55.
48. The Camera Obscura was invented by Johann Zahn in 1685 and can be described as a darkened box with a convex lens or aperture for projection the image of an external object into a screen inside.
49. Falco and Hockney, *Optical Insights into Renaissance Art*, 53-55.
50. Ibid., 59.
51. Martin Gayford, "David Hockney's iPad Art." -10-20, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8066839/David-Hockneys-iPad-art.html>.
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57. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Art Forum* 5, no. 10 (1967), 80.
58. Martin Gayford, "David Hockney's iPad Art." -10-20, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/8066839/David-Hockneys-iPad-art.html>.
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61. Hockney, *David Hockney by David Hockney: My Early Years*, 28.

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