
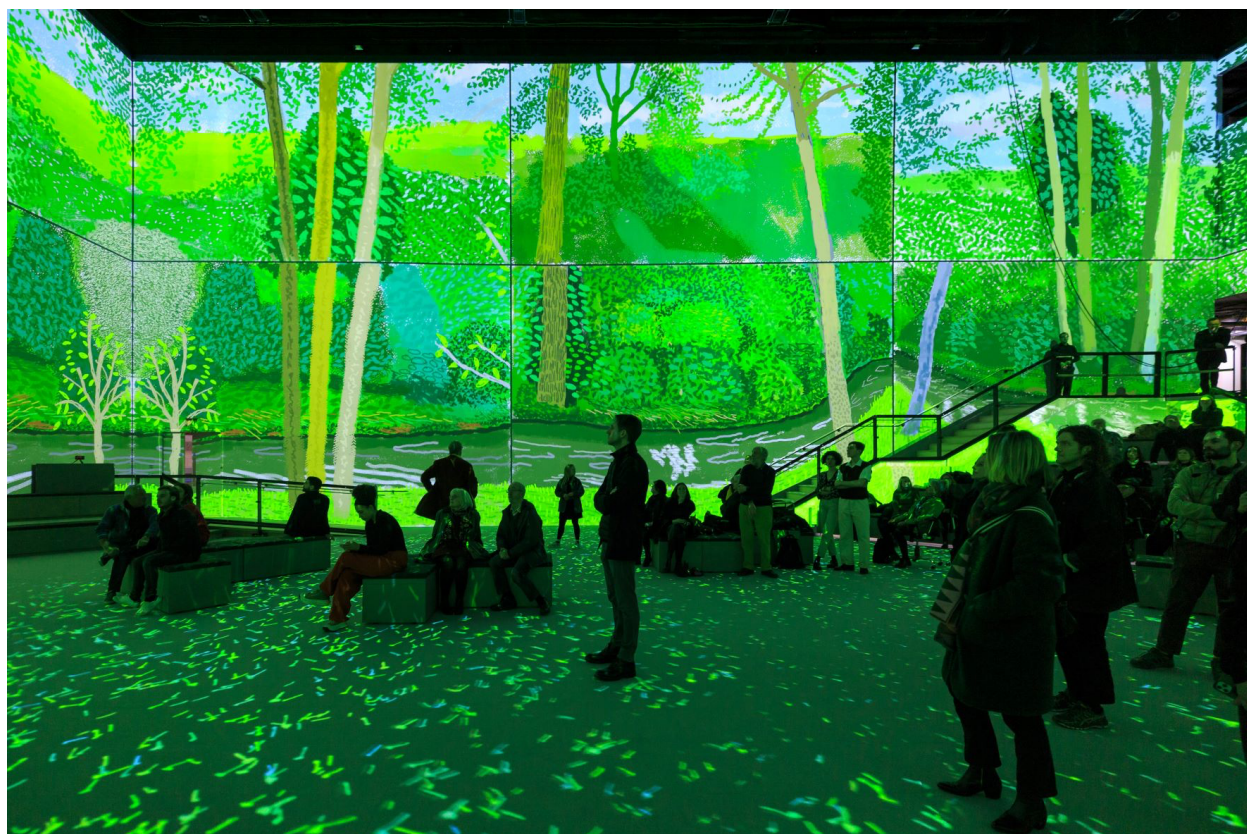


David Hockney: Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away) – Lightroom, London

Reviewer: Jane Darcy

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Director: Mark Grimmer

David Hockney: Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away) is the new immersive show which launches Lightroom at King's Cross. Both the show and the venue are marvels.

Lightroom is the brainchild of the Bridge Theatre's London Theatre Company and of 59 Productions. Together they've created a space which is somehow both huge and intimate and which holds the revolutionary technology essential to the creation of this enthralling Hockney show. We are led down passages – a vast box where a glorious selection of images of

Hockney's works are flushing over all four walls, animated, ever-changing, richly colourful. There is an appealing sound track by Nico Muhly, snatches of operas Hockney worked on, and evocative birdsong as his English and French landscapes burst into life before us.

It's not chronological. Instead the installation consists of six chapters on a 50-minute loop. From his LA years, we see Hockney's swimming pools and photo collages, including his stunning, perspective-less Grand Canyon. In 'Hockney paints the stage,' costumed characters from ballet and opera leap before us. Particularly dazzling are his designs for *L'enfant et les sortilèges* and *The Magic Flute*. 'Seeing closely' features his memorable landscapes. Looking again at some of his most recent iPad paintings from his Normandy home makes us aware that Hockney has always been excited by the possibilities extended by technological development. Although *Bigger & Closer* amply illustrates Hockney's life's work to date, this is definitely not a retrospective. Show director Mark Grimmer talks in the programme of the decision not to record a whole new voice-over. He didn't want the show to feel mediated: 'The only voice you hear is David's, and whether speaking in 1964 or 1978 or 2022, he's talking to you in a kind of "eternal present".' This makes for the show's fresh immediacy. And there's nothing elitist here – you don't need to know anything at all to access and enjoy it. It's wonderfully democratic.



David Hockney at Lightroom, photographer Justin Sutcliffe

It's a unique collaboration, with Hockney actively contributing to its creation. It is his voice alone that we hear, calmly talking about the things that matter to him. He expresses a simple delight in colour; he explains why he mistrusts theories of perspective. 'Is there really just one perspective of this chair?', he asks, as he walks around it taking photos. Above all, he stresses the importance simply of looking. Where Blake asked us to see the world in a grain of sand, Hockney talks with wonder about a single blade of grass. And what is so special about this show is that we the audience are looking as we may never have looked before.

There is such an abundance of images that we can't take it all in at once, tantalizingly aware that on the wall behind us may be pictures we have not have seen. Heads turn this way and that. But what is most striking on this opening day of the

show is a sort of blissfulness seems to have settled over the audience. With no information panels to be read, no audio guide to fuss with and above all, none of the irritable manoeuvring of viewing a traditional art blockbuster, people are simply sitting on stools, or cross-legged on the floor or contentedly lying down on their backs and looking.

If you can tear your eyes off the feast of colour on the walls, you'll notice something else extraordinary. People are smiling – just sitting quietly and smiling. No one has to be told what to admire. We the audience just respond naturally in the same way that twenty years ago crowds reacted to Olafur Eliason's *The Weather Project* in Tate Modern. No one was telling people then how to react or what to think. People simply lay down on the floor of the Turbine Hall and basked in the glorious sunshine. *David Hockney: Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)* creates another such unforgettable experience of art.

Runs until 4 June 2023

<https://www.thereviewshub.com/david-hockney-bigger-closer-not-smaller-further-away-lightroom-london/>