

Art Walk

Los Angeles Times

8

Part IV—Mon., Dec. 4, 1978

By now we know David Hockney as the leading British figurative painter to emerge in the '60s. Inhabitants of the art sphere are familiar with his dandified appearance topped by a shock of blond hair à la Warhol and owlsh glasses recalling Elton John. He and his art are diffident, funny and tend to create an impression of having changed little in the past two decades.

A survey of his drawings and graphics serves as a remarkable encapsulation and contradicts our fixed imaginings. Here are two Hockneys with shadings in between. The earliest is the mordant satirist of "Rake's Progress" circa 1961. Here Hockney plays Candide coming to New York for the first time after leaving London's Royal College of Art. His vision is whacky. It got him bracketed with the Pop artists. The most recent Hockney is a progressively more sober portraitist who may put us in mind of Holbein or Chardin.

Graphic series include illustrations for Grimm's Fairy-Tales, the "Hollywood Series" and a group of variations on Picasso's blue period guitarist. Hockney has great fun with Picasso. He does a send-up of the master's "The Artist and His Model" with himself posing demurely nude.

Hockney comes across as a midroad, top-grade traditional artist in an epoch of extremes. He does have fixed concerns with virtuosity (he is really dueling with Picasso), and a candor of vision which makes him an extraordinary children's illustrator. As he outgrows a self-conscious need to be clever, we find an artist of remarkable insight and compassion. (L.A. Louver Gallery, 55 N. Venice Blvd., to Dec. 31)

—W.W.