

ARTS & BOOKS

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THE GRAMMYS

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

Rock fades toward an influential background

RANDALL ROBERTS
POP MUSIC CRITIC

Look at the five 54th Grammy Awards nominees for both rock performance and rock song and it's easy to envision an afternoon stroll through some enchanted forest: "Walk" by the Foo Fighters is competing against "Down by the Water" by the Decemberists, Radiohead's "Lotus Flower," "Every Teardrop Is a Waterfall" by Coldplay, and Mumford & Sons' "The Cave." How calming.

You can almost feel the dewy bliss of nature dripping into your ears — and in the perfect world, Adele's "Rolling in the Deep," arguably the most durable rock 'n' roll song of the year, would be the avalanche that crushed the entire scene. But genre distinctions are the Achilles' heel of the entire Grammy game, and if we start questioning which song fits in what category and who decides what gets nominated where (the record labels), the whole house of cards collapses.

But what the hell, somebody's gotta do it, and, as if on cue, here come the Grammy-nominated hard rockers, approaching in the distance with their anger and looking like cartoon thugs: Mastodon, Foo Fighters (nominated, curiously, in both categories), Sum 41, Dream Theater and Megadeth carry their songs of aggression "Curl of the Burl," "White Limo," "Blood in My Eyes," "On the Backs of Angels" and "Public Enemy No. 1," respectively. Scary.

Is the distinction that exists between so-called rock music and hard rock music the subject matter, the type of guitar distortion boxes used, and the quality of falsetto? Probably. It's a battle between cavemen and nature boys, at least a little testosterone required. Where do the lines blur, and why? Is it a subtle class distinction — the blue-collar hard rockers versus the "erudite" rock artists?

No wonder the commercial wing of the rock establishment has been relegated to afterthought status: This year it's a [See Roberts, E6]

Grammy nominees

Meet some of the Sunday hopefuls: folk musicians Fleet Foxes, country artist Eric Church and jazz eminence Gerald Wilson. **E6-7**



A NEW PLAY THAT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY

BACKSTAGE, E4

KIRK MCKOY Los Angeles Times



STEVE OLIVER Royal Academy



JONATHAN WILKINSON Royal Academy

"**THE ROAD** Across the Wolds" (1997), top, and "Winter Timber" (2009) are among the more than 150 works on display in the new exhibition "David Hockney: A Bigger Picture" at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

HOME, IN A NEW LIGHT

For David Hockney, bringing L.A. color back to Britain was a natural.

HENRY CHU REPORTING FROM LONDON >>> He may have traded Southern California warmth for the gun-metal skies and windy damp of his native England, but this is surely David Hockney's moment in the sun.

His compatriots are busy hailing him as undoubtedly Britain's greatest living painter now that his friend Lucian Freud has died. Queen Elizabeth II just appointed him to the Order of Merit, an honor restricted to 24 Britons at any one time for their contributions to the arts and sciences.

In the pages of the Guardian — the left-wing paper to which Hockney regularly dashes off harrumphing letters to the editor — a fashion writer felt moved to confess that the artist, a "brilliantly intentional nerd," was "my all-time style hero."

All the adulation is gratifying to Hockney, who has been living and working in Britain more or less full-time for the last few years. Which raises the question: Has he given up Los Angeles, the city he's called home for more than three decades

[See Hockney, E11]



GRAHAM BARCLAY For The Times

DAVID HOCKNEY says he hasn't given up L.A. living: "I'm on location."

ART



RICHARD SCHMIDT Royal Academy

"UNDER THE TREES, BIGGER," a 2010-11 oil on 20 canvases, is 12 feet by 20 feet. Hockney says focusing on the Yorkshire landscape for so long was exhilarating.

A bigger landscape for Hockney

[Hockney, from E1] and that considers him an adopted son?

Hockney waves away the notion with one of the cigarettes that seem permanently lodged between his fingers.

"I haven't really left L.A. When people in Hollywood ask what I'm doing, I say I'm on location," he says with a chuckle in his Kensington studio. "That's a term they understand. It's just taking a lot longer than I expected."

The reason for the extended absence can now be seen on the walls of London's prestigious Royal Academy of Arts. Late last month, "David Hockney: A Bigger Picture" opened to rapturous reviews and massive ticket sales, making it the first blockbuster art show of 2012 in the British capital.

The exhibition marks a late-in-life return to big landscape painting for an artist many identify with indolent scenes of swimming pools and slender young men. Its title even riffs on the most well-known of those paintings, "A Bigger Splash."

The scale of the new show is gargantuan, both in the number of works on display (more than 150) and the sheer size of some of them (the largest is 12 feet by 32 feet).

Remarkably, however, this is no nostalgic retrospective, though a handful of works date as far as the 1950s and '60s. Most of the paintings and drawings were created in the last several years, including a staggering 52-part series from 2011, in a burst of productivity that can be attributed to Hockney's boundless enthusiasm and energy at age 74, his ever-present iPad and the cavernous room in the gallery where the entire set hangs.

California influence

The exhibition plants him firmly back in the East Yorkshire of his youth, a region in northern England of unassuming chalk hills and leafy lanes that he used to cycle around as a boy and later as a young man who took on summer farming jobs.

Though some Britons dismiss East Yorkshire as drab by comparison with the romantic heather and moors of Bronte Country to the west, in Hockney's hands the area is a riot of color — deep reds, shocking purples, splashy yellows and multiple shades of green in the trees, fields, paths and hawthorn bushes. The paintings and poster-size prints from iPad drawings evoke Van Gogh, Seurat, Rousseau and even Hockney himself from his earlier, sun-drenched period.

"These are landscapes of Yorkshire painted by somebody from Yorkshire but who lived in California for 30 years. It's bound to have an effect," says Hockney, who still speaks with a Yorkshire accent. "People said, 'You brought California color there.' I said, 'Not quite,' but [it's] certainly made me look at color" differently.

"West Yorkshire is quite dramatic and beautiful, the crags and things," he adds. "East Yorkshire, to the uninitiated, just looks like a lot of little hills. But it does have these marvelous valleys that were caused by glaciers, not rivers. So it is unusual."

Hockney began returning more often to Yorkshire in the 1990s, usually to visit his mother, who died in 1999. A friend who was terminally ill encouraged him to turn his brush-



GRAHAM BARCLAY For The Times

LIVING IN CALIFORNIA for 30 years influenced how he looks at color, Hockney says.



DAVID HOCKNEY Royal Academy

HOCKNEY is back in his boyhood home with "The Arrival of Spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011 (Twenty Eleven)."

es to capturing the local surroundings, which he did at first with paintings based on memories of the area, some from his boyhood.

In 2007, Hockney produced "Bigger Trees Near Warter," a monumental oil spread across 50 canvases that was displayed at the Royal Academy before he gave it to the Tate Gallery. The academy eventually asked Hockney if he would be interested in mounting an exhibition in 2011 devoted to his

Yorkshire landscapes, a project he eagerly accepted, though he insisted it wait till 2012 so that he could have more time to observe and prepare.

"When the RA asked me to do this exhibition, I said, 'I need three more springs.' That's three years; you can't speed them up," he says. "That's the big difference with L.A. You do have the seasons in L.A., but you have to be a botanist and know what flowers come out

works as a younger artist.

Their super-saturated colors may be directly related to his advancing age and his growing deafness, a subject he speaks of at length. ("I do do a lot of talking, because it saves me listening.") Loss of hearing, he thinks, may have heightened his already-sharp visual awareness and the delight he receives through the eyes.

And exploring a single subject so long and so deeply requires an older person's patience and perspective.

It proved an exhilarating, not exhausting, experience, Hockney says, comparable to what he believes Monet must have felt with "Les Nymphéas," the vast waterlily paintings that grace Le Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris.

"I will point out that the chain-smoking Monet didn't begin the 'Nymphéas' until he was in his 70s. It took 10 years. Then he died," Hockney says. "But it must have given him, the moment he saw this project, a very powerful force in him that kept him alive."

The new exhibition includes Hockney's recent reworkings of Claude Lorrain's "The Sermon on the Mount" and giant iPad drawings made in October of Yosemite, which are crowded into a small room at the end — symbolic, perhaps, of California's relegation to the background in Hockney's life at the moment.

The famous 1986 photo collage "Pearblossom Highway," on loan from the Getty Museum, hangs on one wall; "Mulholland Drive," held by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, makes an appearance as well, but only as a full-sized photographic replica. LACMA was leery of rolling up the huge painting for a potentially stressful journey to London; Hockney says he understood. "It's not the best thing to do.... I wouldn't like it damaged."

As well-known as some of the other works are, it's the lavish treatment of the northern English countryside that has generated much of the excitement in Britain over the show.

"Absolutely amazing," Rachel Malka, 49, said recently as she stood in the room housing the 52-part series, titled "The Arrival of Spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011 (twenty-eleven)." "It makes you want to go up there and have a look. You'd recognize it instantly — his attention to detail is phenomenal."

From London, the exhibition will move to Bilbao, Spain, and then Cologne, Germany, where it's scheduled to close a year from now. There is no word whether it might travel to the U.S.

Hockney will, though: He plans to drop in on L.A. this month for the Oscars and the parties. He's not done yet with working in England, and he still holds only a green card for U.S. residency after all these years (he's not "respectable" enough for American citizenship, he says), but Southern California will always beckon.

"I have a house in L.A., since 1979, and I have no intention of getting rid of it," Hockney says. "California is always in my mind."

"I've lived in L.A. far longer than London. I know it better.... It is full of mad, creative people."

Minus one, for now. But he'll be back.

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Go online for more photos from the David Hockney landscape retrospective.

[then]. It doesn't hit you on the head as it does here....

"If the RA hadn't come along, I would probably have done a few more and maybe just gone back to L.A.," he says. "But because they offered what are splendid rooms, right in the middle of London, I thought, 'One should use this opportunity.' Of course you should. And it's a big stimulant."

He set up residence and an immense studio, a converted industrial workspace, in the seaside village of Bridlington, about 75 miles from where he was born in the city of Bradford. In search of different angles, plays of light and states of verdure, Hockney roused his staff at unpredictable hours and worked through all four seasons, at times painting outdoors on an easel while gazing at the view, at others hurriedly sketching from memory onto his iPad as he sat in the car to escape the harsh winter cold.

An enthusiastic early adopter of new technology, he sent his iPad drawings electronically to L.A., where another team of assistants printed them.

"We had to get special software to do it. Otherwise, they pixilate," Hockney says. "It's very new, and very, very different."

Aging colorfully

It's tempting to see his Yorkshire paintings — with their attention to the changing seasons, the cycle of life and death — as a natural progression for a septuagenarian artist, a suggestion he doesn't deny. Hockney likes to call painting "an old man's art," and concedes that he probably wouldn't, or perhaps couldn't, have made these