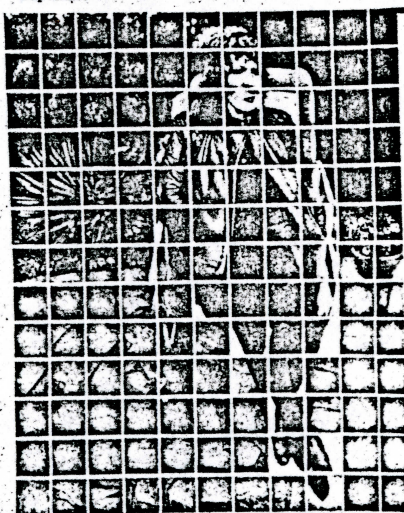


Polaroid Paintings

by William Littmann

Art can be described as a look at the world through a child's eyes, untarnished and unfettered with adult biases. David Hockney's recent exhibit, entitled, "Drawing With a Camera," is also an innocent vision, except that this child is standing with his face against a window screen and through that, looking out and perceiving the world.

What "Drawing With a Camera" (running through July 3rd at the L.A. Louver gallery in Venice) entails is a showing of Hockney's recent photo-mosaic work. Each piece is a portrait comprised of individual Polaroid photographs arranged in such a way to be representational of the whole. Each Polaroid is only a portion of the picture, one shot may be the subject's nose, while another may be a brick in the background. When assembled, the resulting image is a dreamlike view of the subject, with vertical and horizontal lines running throughout. It is as if one is looking through a window of many panes or, perhaps, through a fly's eye. Hockney's vision here, is of a world distorted, somewhat askew and probably more accurate than common perception.



Born in England and an emigré to the United States, Hockney has been critically acclaimed on both sides of the Atlantic. He now lives in Southern California and celebrates Los Angeles hedonism, narcissism and passions perfectly as only an artist who loves his subject can do.

The idea of a photo-mosaic is not new at all. Ever since those hard-backed Polaroids have stuck their little plastic tongues at us and told us to wait 60 seconds, artists have been playing around with the process. The Polaroid is a great piece of equipment for the artist, for it is of the instant. The artist doesn't have to wait two weeks for the Photo-Mate to come back with the pictures; the decision to use, abuse or to toss out is made in a split second.

Hockney is doing more than just simple Polaroid portrait work. His photo-mosaics are impressionistic, rather than realistic. His portrait of Ruth Lesserman, taken in early 1982 as with the rest of the pieces in the exhibit, is of a vibrant woman. She is plump, red, sitting in a lounge chair, looking a lot like Doris Day in a tomato suit. Hockney has given Ms. Lesserman two faces. In one Polaroid, we are given a profile of her, while in another shot, she seems to look out at us from the painting. Hockney has taken a cubist perspective and the overall effect is much like Picasso's middle and late period. Hockney may have realized how close he may have approximated Picasso's style, for one work in the exhibit is entitled, "Bing Looking at a Picasso".

In the photo-mosaics, each individual photograph works on its own. An amateur tends to shoot for the 'heart' of the matter, the person's face, or the front of a building. Hockney places importance on the insignificant pieces that make up the whole. In Hockney's world, even the slate under a subject's feet is vital in its own right.

The Polaroid camera can be much more than Mariette Hartley and James Garner giggling and taking snapshots of each other. It can be a viable piece of equipment for the artist. "Drawing With a Camera" is a fine exhibit demonstrating that photographs can be worked like sculpture into photo-mosaics and illuminate to the viewer a different and telling vision of the world, in Hockney's case, where the alignment of the Polaroids puts our world on a piece of graph paper. What better way for David Hockney to capture the ambience of Southern California than with the Polaroid. Our vacation toy has become the artist's tool.

VENICE BEACHEAD
JULY, 1982