

# LA goes barking mad

David Hockney tells GEORDIE GREIG about dogs, his very successful new show and the strange ways of California

David Hockney is unashamedly sentimental about Stanley and Boogie, his two pampered dachshunds, who are the principal subjects of his largest exhibition since a Los Angeles retrospective in 1988. "I did the pictures out of love. Some friends of mine died and I felt the need to express some love, which is why I turned to Boogie and Stan. They are my little family," he says.

The dogs are a huge hit in Hollywood. The first day, more than 1,500 people poured through the LA Louver gallery, just a few yards from Venice Beach. The telephone has never stopped with offers to buy the pictures, which are not for sale.

"The dogs jump out from the wall, don't they? You can see the shapes; clear lines, not like woolly dogs," he says. "There is a sense of abandon in some of their positions, their abandon. They make lovely shapes when they sit down. But primarily they are pictures about love."

At 57, Hockney is as loquacious as ever about his work, and as colourful as his palette in turquoise

shirt, black tie, white jacket and black pinstripe trousers flapping around his ankles over cream suede shoes. He dangles a slender cane, a self-confessed theatrical affectation of middle age. "I don't need it. I just like having it," he explains with a twirl. His only other prop is a pair of hi-tech Swiss-made hearing aids with a digital control panel hanging round his neck. "It's bloody marvelous. For the first time in 15 years I have heard the sound of a brush on canvas. I can now even listen to music as background again."

Hockney is delighted with his latest exhibition, which is, in effect, two shows in one. Downstairs are enormous abstract landscapes in brilliant colours, priced between \$250,000 and \$1.2m. They are light and airy explorations of space and form, a Hockney hybrid of Matisse's later, lyrical lines and Picasso's cubist eye. "I chose the large scale because I realised I wanted to draw with the whole body. What you are seeing is a body sweeping in space. If you think of the marks I am making, I am not drawing with the wrists or elbows but the entire body," he explains.

Upstairs, along with the 25 dog pictures, are a group of pencil drawings of various members of the Californian court of King David, including his English boyfriend, John Fitzherbert, and his gardener, doctor, mother, sister, printer and various friends.

Hockney has always liked his life and art to be attractive. He first came to Los Angeles in the 1960s to escape the puritanical darkness of Britain. He has rejoiced in the Californian lifestyle, but has recently been despairing of politically correct forces in America. "A crude peasant mentality now governs everything," he says. "They want to stop people enjoying themselves and to put their own narrow-minded views on to other people's lives."

His latest gripe is the draconian ban in many American cities on smoking. He takes huge delight in a story from Britain that 80 smokers jammed themselves into a railway carriage to defy a smoking ban while singing Deutschland über alles in protest. "Bloody marvellous. We need more of that here," he says.

In fact, Hockney is so fed up with

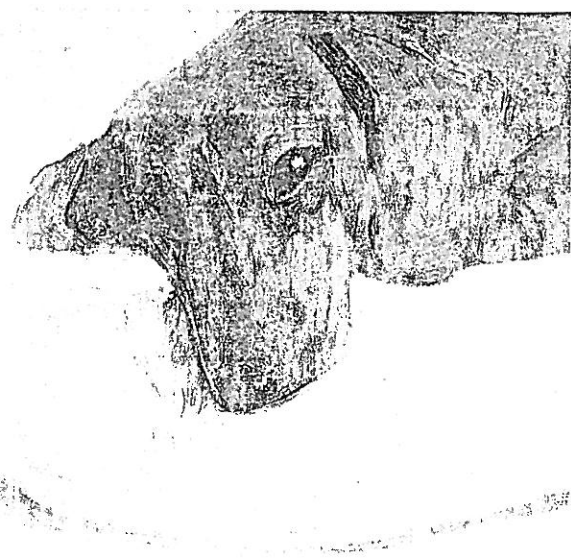
the puritanism that he has penned an angry letter to a prominent politician: "You sent me a note recently soliciting funds for the election. I think I should tell you I wouldn't now give a penny to any politician who has helped LA on its way back to being a hick city. My joke has always been that I'm shocked the city council has not stopped the flight to Paris, a very dangerous city for Angelinos, as second-hand smoke comes out of the restaurants and cafes and might just drift into the path of a passing Angelino. On D-Day Eisenhower smoked 80 cigarettes. Do you think he did not need them? Nobody will mention this today, but that's because weak people who have never faced life and death struggles seem to have taken over and haven't the imagination to put themselves in somebody else's shoes."

Such laments are extraordinary, for David Hockney is credited with having given Los Angeles its visual identity with his pictures of glimmering swimming pools, naked boys, clear sunlight, blue skies, palm trees and a sense of sexual liberation. Hockney hates fetters on the individual and feels that America is changing for the worse. He retreats more and more to his home in the Hollywood Hills or his house on the beach in Malibu, seldom straying out to other parts of LA. "It is a little enclave, a small paradise. I know it is very pretty because I made it," he says. And indeed it is like entering one of his new spatial landscapes, for he has imprinted his vision of joyful bright colours into his home. The wooden terrace is cobalt blue. The bench and table are red. Pink and yellow lilies stand in a vase on the kitchen sideboard. A sign on the

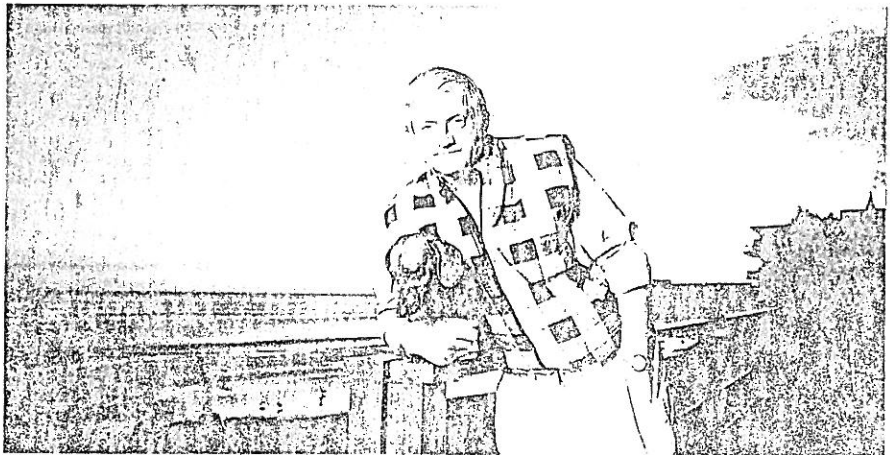
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SUNDAY-LONDON TIMES

6 Downstairs are enormous abstract landscapes in brilliant colours. They are light and airy explorations of space and form, a Hockney hybrid of late Matisse and Picasso



Dog treats: Moving Wisp, 1995, left, one of Hockney's huge landscapes. Dog Painting 30, 1995, right. The artist in Malibu, below. Photograph by Paul Harris



# for Hockney

wall reads "Surface is illusion". Another reads "Commercial painting is an artist's medium". The interior is as diverting as the dizzy three-dimensional spaces of his pictures with wooden steps leading up and down on different levels. Yet occasional gripes against Los Angeles aside, Hockney enjoys life in California. The new show is a hit with rave reviews. Accolades continue to come in and his prices rise. Oxford University is giving him an honorary degree this summer. The dog show will eventually open in his home town of Bradford. A retrospective of drawings opens in Hamburg and then the Royal Academy, in London, this summer. Hockney himself arrives in Britain next week to discuss the possibility of the production of Turandot he created for Chicago in 1992 transferring to the English National Opera in London. On top of this, opera-goers at Glyndebourne will see their programme illustrated by him, and earlier this month the New Yorker magazine printed a specially commissioned photograph of his new paintings taken with a 10x8in

camera using a 30-second exposure, wittily mixing different perspectives with painted shadows. "It will have all the photographers in New York thinking," he mused when an early copy was delivered. He still experiments with photocopies, cameras, printers and paintings and new ideas to explore space and time. "Listen to this," he says as he reaches for a book by Carl Sagan, an American professor of space studies at Cornell, before declaiming: "In some respects, science has far surpassed religion in delivering awe. How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded: 'This is better than we thought! The universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant. God must be even greater than we dreamed?' Instead they say, 'No, no, no! My god is a little god and I want him to stay that way.' A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. Sooner or later, such a re-

ligion will emerge." Hockney pauses and then proclaims: "I believe that. It should be written on a rock and read." And as if to prove it, he is off, so to speak, on a creative sprint. He photocopies a page of the text, cuts it with a scalpel, enlarges it and then proceeds to draw a rock around it. As he works he talks: "I read a little science. I read what Tom Stoppard reads. I find it all very fascinating when they are telling you that they are looking at light found to have travelled 15 billion years to come here. How did we get here first? Nothing travels faster than light yet we are here. What are we looking at?" He reaches into a drawer, an Aladdin's cave full of crayons, and soon a blue sky, green hills and rust-coloured rocks are formed. "Special notice, very important message," he writes on the page. It is less than four minutes' work, but he has effortlessly created a small picture, to be catalogued with the thousands of other works in his store in Santa Monica. Just another day in the life of Britain's best-known artist — and certainly no dog's life. □

## Now hear this

The Last Word Lunchtime Lectures, in association with The Sunday Times, begin on Tuesday at the Royal Geographical Society, in London, when the novelist P D James delivers a talk entitled Blood On The Page. Her subject will be the craft and history of the British detective story. P D James's best-known creation is the detective Adam Dalgleish, played by Roy Marsden in the ITV adaptation, who features in her most recent book, Original Sin, just out in paperback. The Lunchtime Lectures have now established themselves as a wide-ranging and stimulating series of talks. Past speakers have included David Hare on theatre, Oliver Sacks on neurology, Michael Palin on travelling to the Pole, Denis Healey the state of the world and Doug Adams on the universe. The latest series promises to be just as varied, ranging from Jk Mortimer on writing and the life and Jung Chang, the bestselling author, on her life, to the psychiatrist Dr Anthony Storr on the psychology of the appeal of music and Field Marshal Lord Carver on the security of Europe. Each session lasts an hour, and often turns into a lively debate as there is always an opportunity to ask questions. For details of The Last Word Lunchtime Lectures, see the coupon below

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