

FIRST NIGHT

David Hockney 25 review — the artist's biggest ever show is a knockout

In Paris's Fondation Louis Vuitton a dazzling selection of works from the past quarter of a century make up the largest showcase yet for the 87-year-old British painter



Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures), 1972

© DAVID HOCKNEY. PHOTO CREDIT: ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES/JENNI CARTER

Nancy Durrant | Tuesday April 08 2025, 1.00pm BST, The Times

★★★★★

I suspect not many international visitors to Paris venture to the Bois de Boulogne, a park more than two and a half times the size of Hampstead Heath that makes up the western half of the city's 16th arrondissement. It's a bit out of the centre, up to 45 minutes from the Gare du Nord by public transport, and in any case it's not as famous as, say, the Jardin des Tuileries.

But that is going to change with the opening of *David Hockney 25*, the 87-year-old artist's largest exhibition to date, at the park's Fondation Louis Vuitton (FLV). This is the first time the FLV has devoted its whole Frank Gehry building, now a decade old, to a living artist; four sprawling floors, lavishly hung with works, among which are the smash hits but also a few surprises.



David Hockney at the exhibition at the Fondation Louis Vuitton on Monday
LUC CASTEL/GETTY IMAGES



Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy, 1968, on display

STEPHANE DE SAKUTIN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

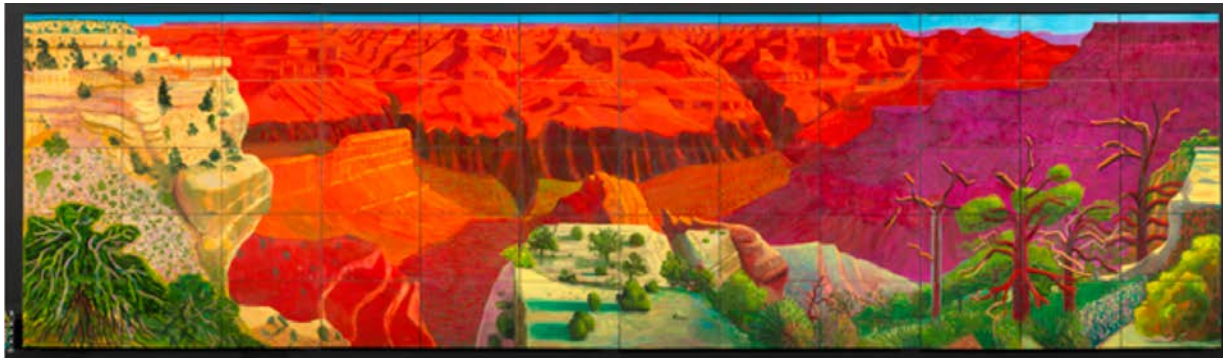
Hockney, despite recent ill health, has been hands-on, choosing the works, the hang and the wall colours. It was his idea to dispense with the first 45-odd years of his career on one floor and devote the rest of this mammoth show to works from the past 25.

We start, though, with one of his very earliest, a 1955 canvas of his father. It's a remarkable character study and a very fine portrait, with Hockney senior's pensive look, shifting seat and clasped hands expressing his discomfort. Hockney was 18 when he painted it.

We rattle through key moments — scrappy, graffiti-ish canvases overlaid with text, such as *We Two Boys Together Clinging*, 1961, or *Two Men in a Shower*, 1963, with which he boldly explored his homosexuality at a time when it was still illegal in England. Things ignite as he gets to Los Angeles in 1964: here's *A Bigger Splash*, 1967; *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*, 1970-71; *Portrait of an Artist*, 1972. We see him

reduce his environment to its essentials in *A Lawn Being Sprinkled*, 1967, taking pleasure in its absurd manicuring. But here are also his American landscapes of 30 years later, including *A Bigger Grand Canyon*, 1998, in almost hysterical colours.

This is all a precursor to the heart of the show, which is his glorious landscapes, starting with Yorkshire; often the same view at different times of the year, with colour giving life to winter scenes and honouring the explosions of spring and summer, including the vast *Bigger Trees near Warter or/ou Peinture sur le Motif pour le Novel Age Post-Photographique*, 2007, made up of 50 canvases taken from different perspectives and using digital technology to assemble it. Here too are a lovely selection of preparatory watercolours.



A Bigger Grand Canyon, 1998

DAVID HOCKNEY, COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA



A wall of portraits forms part of the show, sprawling across four floors of the FLV
STÉPHANE DE SAKUTIN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Later rooms take us to Normandy, where he spent lockdown, treating his surroundings to the same scrutiny, while also creating 220 iPad drawings of the cheerful spring to send to friends. Shown here en masse, mostly printed, some on screens, they evoke the shivering vitality of nature quite as well as paint on canvas. A room devoted to his moonlit garden is sensationnally atmospheric.

An exploration of his portraits over 25 years is welcome but requires a shift of focus amid the vigour of his landscapes. Particular pleasures among them are those of his partner, Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima, Hockney's sister, Margaret, and his friend Celia Birtwell — and yes, Harry Styles is here, in a huge group hung like a party on one wall.

This show is almost too huge. But just when you're flagging, the final floor has treats in store. A couple of genuinely enjoyable video works — *A Bigger Space for Dancing*, 2012, in which dancers frolic in a fragmented view of a studio, will be a hit with kids — sit alongside paintings illustrating Hockney's obsession with art history, and how to subvert what he sees as the tyranny of traditional perspective. I could have

spent an hour in *Hockney Paints the Stage*, a new immersive audio-visual experience that animates the painter's drawings and sets it to various operas set to their thrilling music.

Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, Apr 9 to Aug 31, fondationlouisvuitton.fr

- *Times+* members have the chance to win a trip to Paris to celebrate the opening.

Visit mytimesplus.co.uk to find out more

Beyond A Bigger Splash: four works not to miss

The Arrival of Spring in 2013 (twenty thirteen), 2013

Hockney's final tribute to the part of his native Yorkshire that had preoccupied him for almost a decade, this elegantly expressive charcoal series records the transition from winter to spring in the Wolds landscape from five different points of view, evoking space, light and texture with remarkable economy.

Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima II, 2018

There are a number of images of his partner JP in the show but none more expressive than this cheeky pose, legs and arms akimbo and a gently sly look on his face. It sheds a light on the tenderness of their long relationship.

Midnight Sun, Norway, 2003

This striking image of a strange Nordic phenomenon seems to speak to the strong symbolist tradition in that region, as well as having a strong whiff of William Blake, whom Hockney admires and directly refers to elsewhere in the exhibition.

Seven Yorkshire Landscapes, 2011

Filmed using several synchronised cameras, this slow-moving, mesmerising film defies the principle of a single viewpoint, favoured in painting since the Renaissance and reinforced by photography and cinema. It somehow more accurately recreates the experience of seeing the world in real life.

<https://www.thetimes.com/culture/art/article/david-hockney-25-review-paris-v5kkjm8p0?t=1744219310553>