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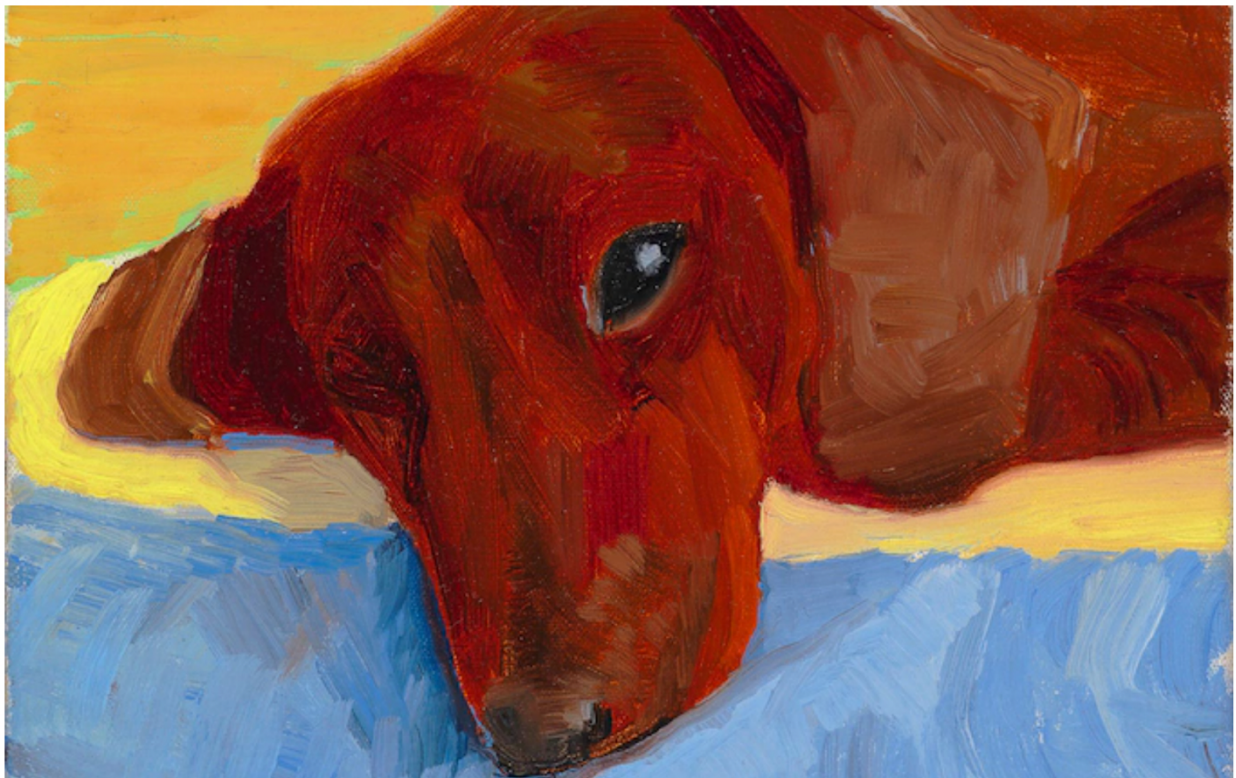
Portraits of Dogs: a treat for art-lovers and dog-lovers alike

★★★★★ 5/5

Ranging from Byron's beloved Lyon to Hockney's Stanley and Boodgie, the Wallace Collection's new show is a smartly curated delight

By Francesca Peacock

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Technicolour joy: David Hockney's Dog Painting 30 | CREDIT: Richard Schmidt Collection The David Hockney Foundation

In 1808, the poet and general ne'er-do-well Lord Byron commissioned a life-sized portrait of a beloved companion. Not a man famed for his loving treatment of the intimates in his life (his much-abused wife, his long-term mistresses, and even his sister), the expensive portrait seems something of a surprise. That is, of course, until its subject is made clear: Lord Byron had commissioned the prestigious Nottingham-based artist Clifton Tomson to paint a portrait of his dog, Lyon.

Among the ranks of writers, poets, and painters, Byron was far from alone in having his dog rendered in paint. Everyone from the 18th-century aristocratic portrait painter Thomas Gainsborough to the 19th-century French artist Rosa Bonheur turned their artistic eye towards their four-legged friend. These portraits – ranging from antiquity to the present day – are the subject of the Wallace Collection’s heartfelt and entertaining exhibition, Portraits of Dogs: From Gainsborough to Hockney.

Across the exhibition, the marble forms of The Townley Greyhounds (2nd century AD) sit only a stick’s throw away from Leonardo da Vinci’s 15th-century sketches of a dog’s paw. The disconcerting taxidermy forms of 18th-century lapdogs look on at 17th-century French court painter Simon Vouet’s intimate chalk sketch of a puppy sitting with its legs splayed open.

But, in any British exhibition about animals that has limited the scope of its loans (the Wallace Collection has not borrowed anything from abroad), there will be one name that dominates: the 19th-century artist Edwin Landseer. Generally thought to be rather out of fashion now, his portraits of noble-looking hounds number well over a dozen in this show.

Landseer was an animal portrait-painter for royalty and aristocracy: he painted Queen Victoria’s beloved Dash, as well as other dogs owned by her and Prince Albert. But he also taught the pair how to draw and paint. Here, displayed to the public for the very first time, are the surprisingly life-like and vital watercolours the royal couple made under his tutelage.



Royal pets: Edwin Landseer's Hector, Nero and Dash with the parrot Lory (1838) | CREDIT: Royal Collection Trust, His Majesty King Charles III

After a section on death – Lucian Freud’s 2003 Pluto’s Grave sits alongside Landseer’s feat of 19th-century kitsch sentimentality showing a dog grieving for its master, The Old Shepherd’s Chief Mourner – the exhibition ends with technicolour joy: six portraits by David Hockney of his dachshunds, Stanley and Boogie. Every pose they strike – from lying on their bed upside down or sitting up to attention – has its precursor in the centuries of dog portraits before them.

There’s a temptation to call an exhibition like this “populist”; an easy way to sell tickets to any self-respecting dog owner. But, when it’s this well curated and executed, it has real value for art-lovers too.

Until Oct 15. Tickets: 020 7563 9539; wallacecollection.org

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/art/what-to-see/portraits-dogs-gainsborough-hockney-wallace-collection-review/?utm_source=maturalart&utm_medium=referral