

David Hockney: Bigger & Closer Is A Magical Audio Visual Experience

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Light and magic are closely associated with movies and cinema, but as a new London exhibition called *David Hockney: Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)* proves, it can equally apply to art. The exhibition uses cutting-edge audio-visual techniques to create something special. It takes the art and film clips of artist David Hockney and projects them inside a large space accompanied by music from Nico Muhly and Hockney's voice as he narrates his feelings about his work of the last 60 years or so.



The floor is as much a part of the canvas as the walls. BHE

Unlike sitting in a cinema where you only look forward, here the images appear on five out of the six surfaces – everything bar the ceiling – ScreenX eat your heart out. And unlike a cinema where you sit neatly in rows you share the space with the others in a haphazard manner; the middle of the room, or the corner or stand – or you can even move around. IMAX’s slogan “Watch a movie, or be part of one,” came to mind – but this takes it to the next level.

“The concept of the Lightroom is to make artist-led shows that are fully immersive and use technology,” Lightroom’s CEO Richard Slaney tells me later. Slaney tells me that there are a total of 28 Panasonic 4K projectors arranged in portrait mode – the long walls are an 8K image and the shorter walls are 5K” This explains why the images are so crisp and color-rich – it’s a delight to sit and lose yourself in the images.

On the audio side, Slaney tells me that there are a 704 separate speakers at each end of the room making a remarkable 1,408 speakers in total.

Slaney tells me the loudspeaker system is from [Holoplot](#), out of Berlin. Called the X1 Holoplot says that X1 is the world's first Matrix Array, housing 96 drivers in an audio module. However, it's not just about the hardware but the software. Holoplot says that its system is based on Wave Field Synthesis and 3D Audio-Beamforming, and that its algorithms "achieve sound localization with lifelike distance and directional perception, similar to controlling light".

Slaney says this ability to control the sounds was critical to creating the piece. "It means we can drive sound anywhere in the room, including reflecting off the long walls, which are just concrete walls. So, sometimes the sound would appear to image from the long walls on the other side of you, but it's coming from the short wall reflecting and back into the room. The Holoplot software deals with the delays and the timing of that, so it doesn't feel like that's happening."



The colors from the Panasonic projectors are intense. BHE

It's undeniably effective and does mean you don't feel like there's a sweet spot or any need for one. You can move about the space and investigate the images

either up close, or indeed, from far away. Indeed, Holoplot claims that what you hear depends on where you are in the room so it would pay dividends to not stay still.

This ability of the software is impressive as unlike a cinema, the space has deliberately not been acoustically treated. This has an impact on the image too. “It's just the fabric of the building as we found it, painted,” says Slaney. “It's not special, it's a big concrete box. But that really gives it a bit of texture.”

While I know little about art I have heard of David Hockney and am aware that he first came into prominence in the 1960s, and at 85 at the time of writing, he's no spring chicken. However, it's the combination of older work being displayed in a cutting-edge medium that makes for an interesting contrast. As we learn, Hockney was quite happy to embrace the iPad as a tool for creating art and we see him working on one in real-time at one point.

Slaney explains how Hockney's response to early tests informed how it was all put together. “We did a projection test with him to show him what it looked like when his work was projected really big. And he did an amazing thing that day, which was that he stood there with us looking at his work and just talked to us about what we were seeing – just a trawl through his memories. And that formed the idea that he should be narrating this show – he should be the person”.

Anyone that enjoys cutting-edge AV, even if they are not experts on art or Hockney will get something from this show. It's not the same as standing in front of a painting, it's something else, but it certainly worked for me. On the day I went no less a presence than the actor Richard E. Grant was in attendance as well, and he appeared to be enraptured by it as much as I did so I felt in good company.

I came out of the show into a slightly gray and drizzly London but the burst of color and the life-affirming emotions generated from inside the room stayed with me, and in this day and age, that is a welcome thing.

David Hockey: Bigger & Closer in London is [booking now](#) through to the beginning of June 2023.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/bennyhareven/2023/03/07/david-hockney-bigger--closer-is-a-magical-audio-visual-experience/?sh=4a7f6d222ff4>