

FULL BLOOM

David Hockney,
27th March
2020, No. 1, 2020,
iPad painting,
printed on paper.



LIGHT, LANDSCAPE, LIFE

David Hockney's paintings can be read as his life story. But a new exhibition at Paris's Fondation Louis Vuitton also shows us just how much he taught us to see. By Dodie Kazanjian.



T

"The king came here last Monday," David Hockney tells me when I visit him recently via Zoom at his London house and adjoining studio. "We talked for an hour, and the next day, when he was making Tracey Emin a dame, he told her he'd been to my studio. I don't know what she thought of that." The 87-year-old artist looks the way he always has, a bit diminished but jaunty and stylish as ever. His signature black-rimmed eyeglasses, huge and round, are bright yellow now. His hair is thinning and white.

He's wearing a turquoise sweater, a black-and-white checkered tie, and one of the nine patterned suits made for him by his favorite tailor in Cannes—it's the same suit he wears when he's painting, and the same one he's wearing in his latest self-portrait.

When we speak, he's sitting at a cluttered table in his living room, in front of a floor-to-ceiling red velvet curtain. Tess, the beloved dachshund belonging to him and his partner Jean-Pierre (JP) Gonçalves de Lima, is barking somewhere else in the house. I ask him about the "End Bossiness Soon" button on his lapel. "I was going to put 'End Bossiness Now,' but then I thought that is in itself too bossy. There's lots of bossy people around now, more than there used to be." He lights a cigarette, somewhat defiantly, and inhales. The lining of his suit jacket is decorated with images of cigars. "I smoke anything,"

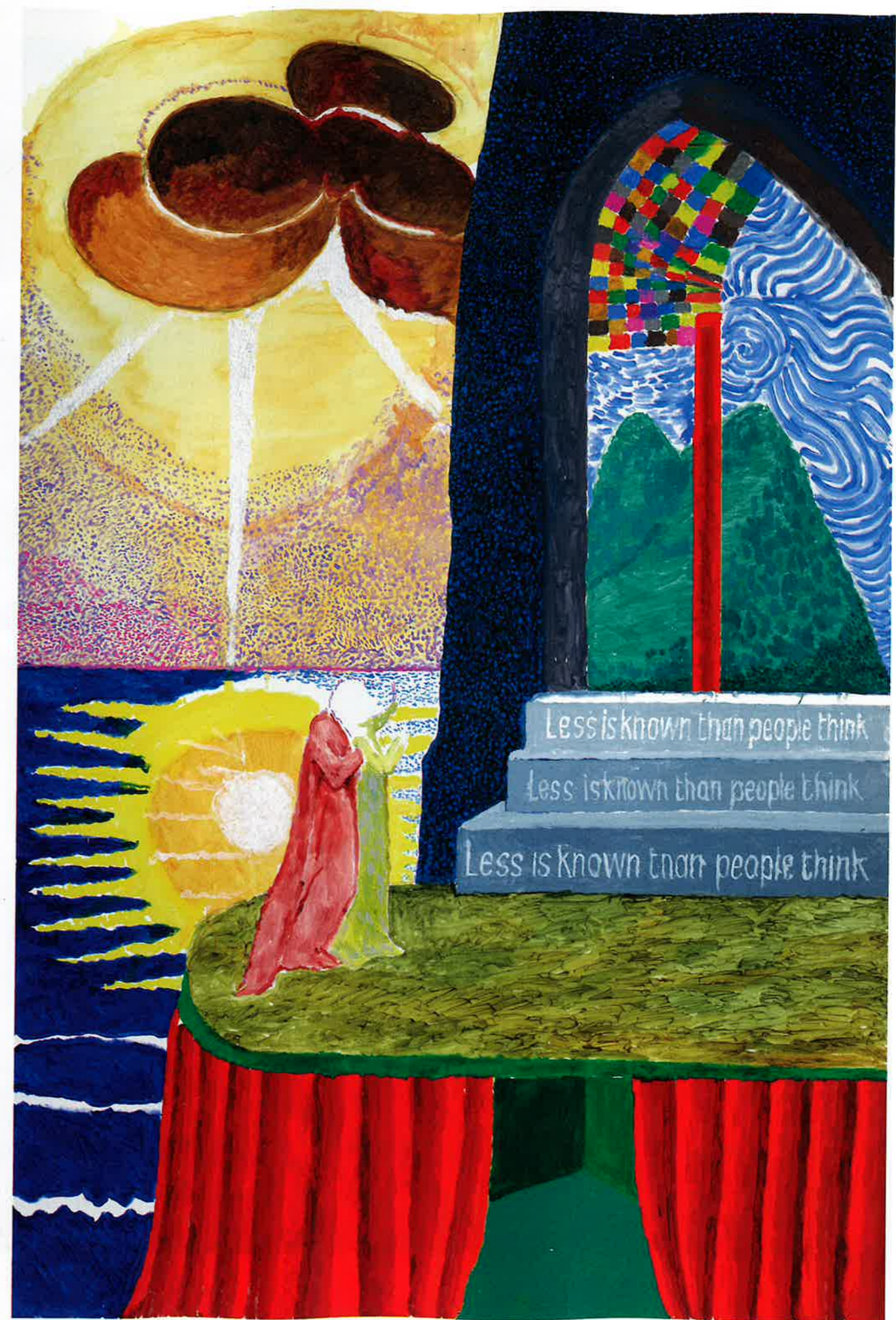
GARDEN GROWN

ABOVE: *Play within a Play within a Play and Me with a Cigarette*, 2024–25, acrylic on canvas with collage. OPPOSITE: *After Blake: Less is Known than People Think*, 2024, acrylic on canvas.

he says, when I ask him if he smokes cigars as well. "I've lived long enough. I've been a professional artist for 70 years, and I'm just about to have the largest exhibition I've ever had."

The exhibition he's referring to opens April 9 at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris. Nearly 400 works—paintings, drawings, prints, and stage designs—will take over the entire Frank Gehry-designed building in the Bois de Boulogne. "It's the biggest show they've ever had," Gehry tells me, when I reach him by phone in Los Angeles. "I can't wait to go and see it, because he doesn't just hang paintings. He really takes over a building. He has the courage to do that."

"David considers this the most important show of his career," says the art historian Norman Rosenthal, who is curating the exhibition. "He's, in the best sense of the word, very ordinary. He's just speaking to himself. And by speaking to himself, with himself, he speaks to everybody. He appeals to people without compromising his vision of the world." The project is a personal one for LVMH chairman and CEO Bernard Arnault as well.



ALL ARTWORK © DAVID HOCKNEY.

"As an admirer of David Hockney's work since the earliest days of his career," he says, "I am delighted that Fondation Louis Vuitton will be presenting this landmark exhibition. Not only will the exhibition be remarkable in its scale, but with Hockney's direct involvement in every aspect of it, it will offer an unparalleled insight into his creative universe and reveal the extraordinary evolution of his art over the past three quarters of a century."

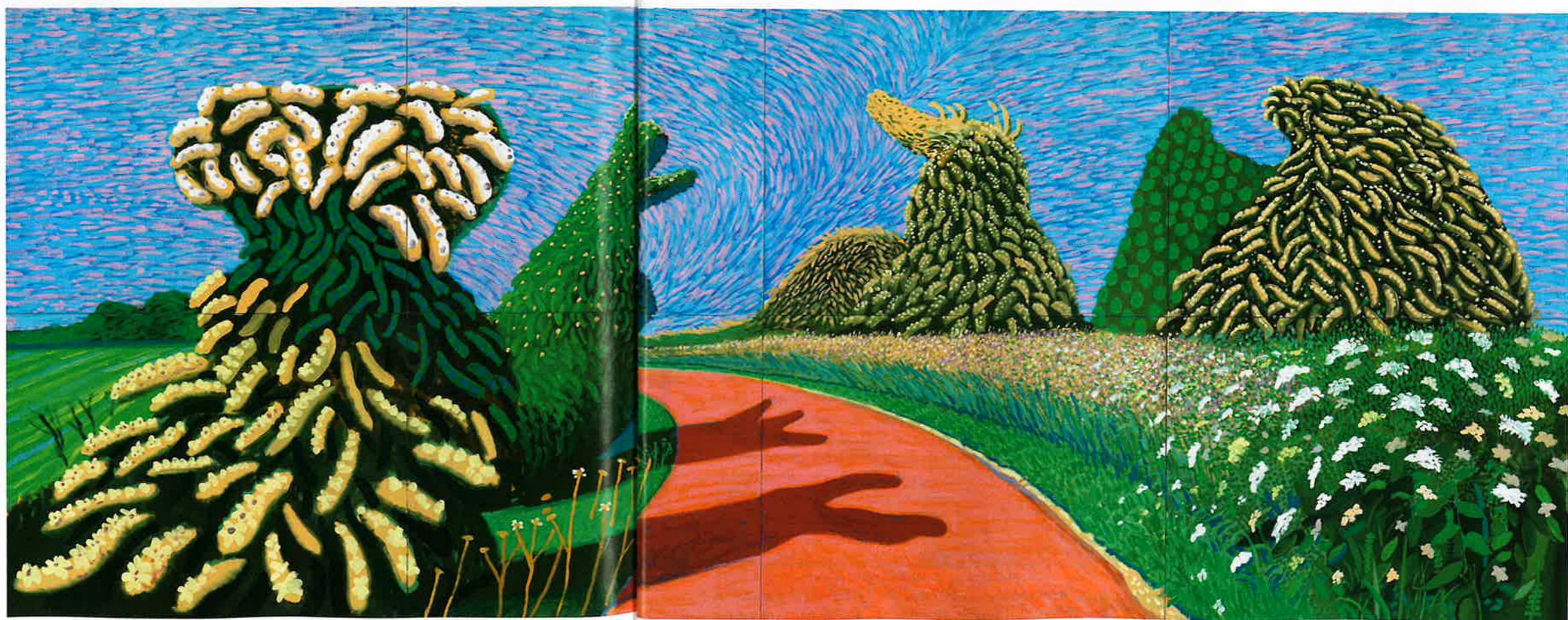
The scholar and head of contemporary programs at the Louvre museum, Donatien Grau, writes in the exhibition's catalog (published by Thames & Hudson): "David is one of the greatest draughtsmen working today, with skills akin to those of Degas or Picasso." Hockney has painted Grau's portrait twice. "You could see the things that obsess him: colors, first and foremost," Grau recalls. "He made the dark blue of my jacket sharper, the black of the trousers darker. The dots on my scarf—he painted them all, one by one. With the chair, you could almost identify every strand of the wicker."

The chair in Hockney's Kensington studio is a rather small, oddly patterned upholstered armchair, and all of his London portrait subjects know it well. Hockney has lived and worked in many different parts of the world—London, Los Angeles, Paris, Yorkshire, Normandy—but in the last couple of years, he's moved back to London. His health is fragile, but his mind is as alert as ever, and he's making new work in his studio every day. He can't help doing it. When he's not in the studio, he enjoys seeing his old friends and going to exhibitions—he saw the Van Gogh show at the National Gallery twice—and to the ballet and the opera. He reads voraciously, new art books and catalogs, and he loves biographies—recently Katherine Bucknell's life of Christopher Isherwood.

Much of his new work is being added to the Paris show: two very large paintings, CONTINUED ON PAGE 109

COLOR FIELD

FROM TOP: *Bigger Trees near Warter* or *ou Peinture sur le Motif pour le Nouvel Age Post-Photographique*, 2007, oil on 50 canvases; *May Blossom on the Roman Road*, 2009, oil on eight canvases. Details, see In This Issue.



that means I'm excited. And yeah, at this point, why not try?"

I ask if it ever felt like things were moving a bit too fast for her—in her career, but also in becoming a mom. "For a lot of moms there's this perfect image of what they're supposed to be and how it needs to go," she says, but for her and Khai, they are learning every day. "We grow together. You wake up and do your best and you realize it is enough, and there's a beauty in not necessarily knowing exactly how that's going to go." She pauses a moment, as though aware that this same sentiment could be applied to various inflection points in her career, relationships, parenting—life in general. "I think that's a huge lesson that I needed. And probably one of the reasons that Khai came to me. You can't always be in control. You can't always plan. You can look at an experience as the right or wrong time for anything, if that's your perspective. Now I just give myself the grace and look at how many things I've handled. Step by step, I learned. I got through it." □

TIME AFTER TIME

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 78

More recently, in the leap to look unique—and amidst fashion's ever-quickenening dance to eclipse the last collection with the next—celebrities, stylists, and lovers of the couture skills of rarefied eras are scouring both websites and the secret stashes of collectors to secure something rare, beautiful, brave, and dazzlingly constructed. I have always believed that there is something timeless about haute couture—something which can withstand the frenzy of trend. The trick is to shift it with a differently proportioned shoe, or simply a great sweater. The best vintage, of course, needs nothing added, but to wear vintage couture for breakfast, you have to focus on ease of movement—grace is my definition of beauty. The red-carpet looks which astonished us at recent Met Galas were worn for dramatic effect, but, quietly, vintage is being worn all the time, everywhere: a vintage bias slip with a 1970s Elsa Peretti Tiffany cuff, or a '90s Helmut Lang heel, or, from now, Maison Margiela tabis. And the reaction is always the same: "Where is that from?"

For this fashion story, I didn't want to just shoot the iconic dresses we have been seeing on the red carpet—there is simply so much great vintage out there, just waiting to be worn and spun into new proportions by pairing them with different volumes and emphasizing different focal points. It feels like inviting our favorite dancers back to the party in ever-new combinations with myriad partners—or perhaps we are *all* about to be swung into Prokofiev's "Dance of the Knights," the

piece that played at Alessandro Michele's recent Valentino couture show, his paean to the river of fashion history.

Today's fashion can sometimes feel overexposed: Fewer looks are being produced, and those that arrive simultaneously online, in editorials and advertising, and on the red carpet tend to garner more attention than anything else. The cleverness of Phoebe Philo is to launch her drops beyond the tsunami of the collections in powerful drip feeds, which allow you to feel its exclusiveness. Azzedine Alaïa, of course, always showed his collections out of time to preserve their rarity and focus—maybe we are gradually moving toward a different way of shopping.

Until fairly recently, truly great vintage belonged only to collectors and cultural institutions—but as their curatorial eyes reach forward as well as backward, both museums and collectors regularly buy recent pieces by designers whose vision and skill they respect. Quite often, within a year or two that piece becomes gold dust. That heartbreakingly urgent desire to find a certain piece by a certain designer—John Galliano, Yves Saint Laurent, Karl Lagerfeld, or Alexander McQueen, for instance—comes from the hard fact that these clothes will never be made again, or if they are, as many labels have begun remaking pieces from their archives, the magic is missing. The original holds something—in the rhythm of the stitching, the patina of the fabric—almost as if you can hear the designer's voice within it.

In practical terms, of course, vintage pieces can never be as robust as something made recently. As the Costume Institute's Andrew Bolton explained to me when he was working on the Charles James and, more recently, the "Sleeping Beauties" exhibitions at The Met, the "inherent vice" within the very fabrics of vintage pieces can devour them completely, leaving only a skeleton of silk shreds. By wearing vintage, our bodies destroy it—and not only by movement, but by the nature of our skin, with its oils and perfumes. To wear vintage, then, is to weigh up its life span, and to tend to it with a thought for its future.

More recently minted vintage, meanwhile, simply needs to be worn in a new way. I have collected Phoebe Philo's Céline for some time, and it has been a continual revelation to witness how her pieces have such a powerful longevity—adding only a pair of leggings and my favorite Manolo heels makes a killer look for work. Everything you already own should go on being worn in new combinations, defeating the ancient in/out stratagem of fashion. You can play different music forever—even if the keys are the same. □

LIGHT, LANDSCAPE, LIFE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 84

one inspired by Edvard Munch and the other by William Blake; a new self-portrait (he's done more than 100); a portrait of one of the two nurses who are now with him around the clock. He paints from a wheelchair, and on good days, he can keep going for two hours. He and his team—JP; the nurses, Lewis and Sonia; the chef Albert Clark (son of Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell, famously immortalized in Hockney's *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*), who cooks for him every week; his technology assistant, Jonathan—all wear the same lapel buttons ("End Bossiness Soon"). Hockney's own personal motto, not written but adhered to every day, is "Love life." He started a new portrait yesterday—it's of Marco Livingstone, an art historian and longtime friend.

I ask him a question I ask every artist I write about: Is there an artist or anyone who challenges you and whom you measure yourself against—like Picasso and Braque or Rauschenberg and Johns? "Well, I mean, I'd always felt it was Picasso I was after," he says slowly. "I'm not Picasso, but Picasso did so many things. His catalogue raisonné is 34 volumes, isn't it?"

The fourth of five children, David Hockney was born in 1937 in Bradford, an industrial city in Yorkshire, England. His father was an accountant who had been a conscientious objector during the Second World War, and his mother was a housewife and strict vegetarian. Hockney excelled at drawing, and when he was 11, he decided to be a painter, "but the meaning of the word *artist* to me then was very vague," he wrote in his autobiography, *David Hockney by David Hockney*. While a student at the Royal College of Art, he bleached his dark hair into a blond mop, exchanged his National Health Service eyeglasses for large, round, black spectacles, and started wearing patterned and colorful suits. He became an artwork himself, a name that registered with people who had never seen his paintings. "He's instantly recognizable," says John (Kas) Kasmin, the art dealer who had his eye out for new talent and gave Hockney his first solo show in 1963. Kasmin had seen Hockney's work while he was a student at the Royal College, and bought his *Doll Boy* (now in the collection of the Hamburger Kunsthalle) for 40 pounds. "Like Andy Warhol, he's more than a celebrity," Kasmin continues. "He couldn't get into a London taxi without the driver knowing who he was. David was considered one of the best-dressed people in Europe for quite a while. He's the only person I know who can wear yellow Crocs to Westminster Abbey."

When Kasmin opened his own gallery in 1963, Hockney was his only figurative artist. “David was always the odd man out in my gallery,” he tells me. But Kasmin was able to sell Hockney’s work. “By the time I left the Royal College, I’d become a kind of rich student,” Hockney writes in his autobiography. Rich enough to spend some time in New York in 1963, and then Los Angeles the following year, where he would live off and on for much of the ’60s and beyond. The paintings he did in Los Angeles, many of them of young men in swimming pools or showers, established him as a major artist. Hockney had left rainy England for sunny California, and he was using acrylic paint, not oil, as the artist John Currin recently pointed out to me. “Oil is like flesh, squishable flesh. Oil is touching,” Currin says. “Acrylic is looking. It’s sun shimmering off water, half there and half not there.”

At the same time, Hockney also did arresting double portraits, such as the one of his friends Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy. (“Faces are the most interesting things we see,” he once said.) Hockney had come out as gay while he was a student at the Royal College. He was a transplant who defined the look and feel of LA as indelibly as Ed Ruscha, another transplant who came from Oklahoma. “David responds to popular culture, which I did too,” Ruscha tells me. “But he’s entirely different in his approach to making pictures. He’s an astounding artist in the variety of ways he attacks and makes pictures. He would scour LA for ideas and it would come out in his work in specific ways.”

Hockney’s work is forever changing. His stage and costume designs for operas and the theater, including *The Rake’s Progress*, *The Magic Flute*, and *Parade*, occupied him in the 1970s and ’80s, as did his use of photography as a tool to be used in combination with painting. By the late ’80s, the work got much larger and more demonstrative, with bolder and surprising colors. He was doing huge, panoramic landscapes, the most spectacular of which was *A Bigger Grand Canyon* (1998), nearly 25 feet long and comprising 60 separate canvases joined together to make one picture.

Hockney continues to paint landscapes, portraits, and still lifes of flowers, but always in new ways. Since 2010 he’s made thousands of iPhone and iPad paintings and drawings. “Looking with restless curiosity at the world as he finds it, and using paint to investigate the visual qualities of that world, he seems to approach the act of painting with a joyous state of unknowing,” the artist Cy Gavin tells me. “Where others see grass, Hockney sees the dandelions, clovers, sedges, ramps, violets, et cetera that make up a lawn. As much as there is a difference

between being alive and living, there is a difference between having eyesight and seeing.” In 2023, for the inaugural exhibition, Hockney filled London’s immersive four-story art space Lightroom with clips of his sketchbooks, theatrical designs, the stained glass window he created for Westminster Abbey, and more.

Hockney remains relevant to many artists, young and old. “I think about David Hockney’s visual clarity when I need to simplify a painting or drawing,” says the British painter Celia Paul. “I admire Hockney, as I do Holbein, because both artists convey the essential truth without painterly floundering.” When the artist Elizabeth Peyton saw the 1974 film about Hockney, *A Bigger Splash*, “it was a revelation,” she tells me. “There is no liking or not liking when it comes to an artist like Hockney,” Peyton continues. “His unwavering communication into the world about what he is seeing is undeniable. He has a way of capturing likeness that is full, complete, made so in an urgent forward flow, bringing forth so much expression of the character of people, landscapes, light. Like Monet and his Haystacks, there are things from our time that Hockney has shown us how to see.” David Hockney is a good looker.

It’s nearly 7:30 in the evening and the year-round Christmas lights are on in Hockney’s garden. “It’s an absurd world, isn’t it?” he says, lighting another cigarette, “and it looks as though it’s going more absurd.” □

INSIDE MAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 86

privilege, complicity, loyalty, manipulation, and failure.

Significant themes all, but *Purpose*, like the rest of Jacobs-Jenkins’s work, has a lot of humor. Indeed, its tonal balance feels of a piece with the playwright’s personality—erudition and prudent attention to identity and representation leavened with irreverent nods to his throat chakra, *The Artist’s Way*, and teen soaps on The WB. (When I ask what kind of performers he was drawn to as a young man, he deadpans, “I don’t want to sit here and pretend I was watching Truffaut movies when I was 14. I was really into *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.”)

“When Branden was commissioned almost, I want to say, nine years ago now, he wasn’t the Branden Jacobs-Jenkins that we know today, who’s a ‘genius grant’ winner and a Tony Award winner,” says Davis. “He was just a great writer, a young writer that everyone was watching to see what he would create.” After participating, along with Hill and Arenas, in a series of workshops—at the time, Jacobs-Jenkins had about 40 pages written—it was Davis who, upon taking

over from Anna D. Shapiro as Steppenwolf’s artistic director in 2021, actually programmed *Purpose* for the 2023–24 season. “It was the first play that myself and my partner, Audrey Francis, said, *We want to do this*,” Davis says.

When it then came to engaging a director, Rashad—who made her directorial debut with a revival of August Wilson’s *Gem of the Ocean* for the Seattle Repertory Theatre in 2007—seemed both an obvious and a pie-in-the-sky choice. Her hallowed résumé spoke for itself: “She was August Wilson’s last muse,” Jacobs-Jenkins says. “She was in the original cast of *The Wiz*. She was in the original cast of *Ain’t Supposed to Die a Natural Death*. I realized early on that a lot of directors waste a lot of time trying to convince actors to trust them, but when you are working with someone like her, they’re like, *Of course she knows what she’s saying*.” (Davis confirms as much: “You want to listen to her, you want to take her notes, you want to impress her, you want to make her proud.”)

Jacobs-Jenkins and Rashad had also crossed paths before. A few months after directing *Fences* for the Long Wharf Theatre in New Haven (a production that Jacobs-Jenkins saw), Rashad was invited by one of its stars, Chris Myers, to see him in Jacobs-Jenkins’s *An Octoroon*, which premiered at New York’s Soho Repertory Theatre in the spring of 2014. A comic riff on Dion Boucicault’s antebellum melodrama *The Octoroon*, the show—involving a stage littered with cotton balls; actors appearing in whiteface, blackface, and redface; and a playwright named “BJJ” addressing the audience in his underwear—marked a breakthrough moment for Jacobs-Jenkins, who was not yet 30 when he won the Obie Award for best new American play that May. (In fact, the prize was for both *An Octoroon* and *Appropriate*, which had concluded its first New York run a month earlier.)

After Rashad saw *An Octoroon*, “she waited after the show, and what she said to me was: ‘You are insane,’” Jacobs-Jenkins says, still delighted by the memory. “That’s all she said to me. I called my mom and I was like, ‘Phylicia Rashad just called me insane! I think my career is going to be okay.’”

When we speak by phone the following week, I ask Rashad to verify that account. “It was insane because, whose mind works like this?” she replies, her voice warm, low, familiar. What she encountered at Soho Rep was a piece full of “surprises and big leaps, but truthful ones.”

A decade later, after reading what existed of *Purpose* so far—some version of those same 40, possibly 50 pages—Rashad could appreciate its potential. “I said, ‘This isn’t finished....’” *Dramatic pause*. “‘And this is great!’ I say it all the



VOGUE

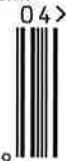
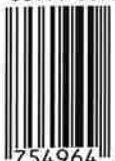
APR

SHOWTIME
BROADWAY'S
BIG SPRING

DAVID
HOCKNEY
A PARIS
SPLASH

\$8.99 US/CAN

04>



67190

0 754964 9