



Courtesy of L.A. Louver Gallery

INTO THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE

David Hockney travels the roads, painting watercolors (such as this untitled one) that are at once intimate and expansive. **SEE PAGE 34.**

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AROUND THE GALLERIES

Rustic rides with David Hockney

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Special to *The Times*

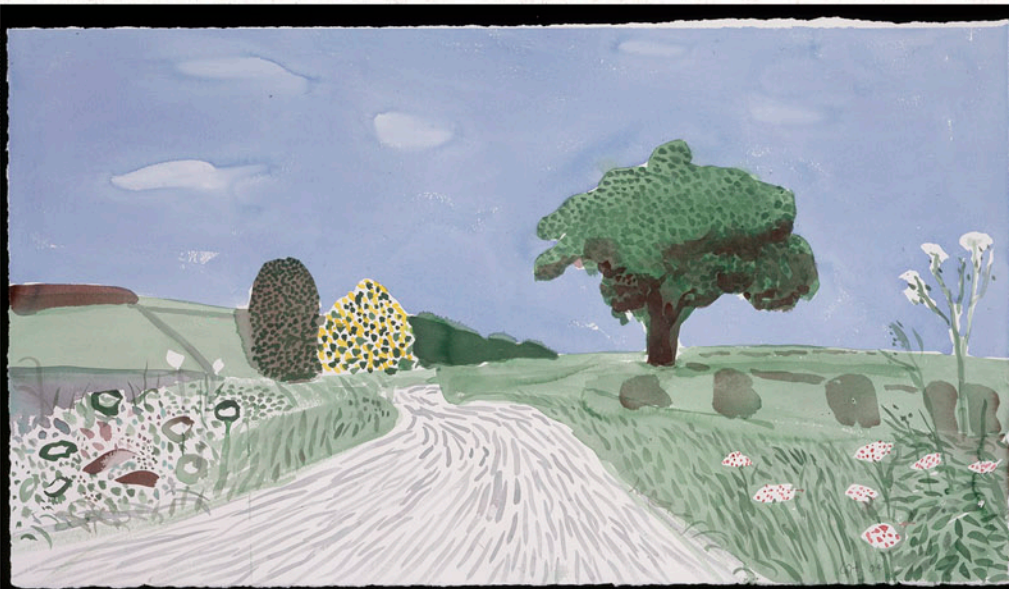
You don't have to know much about David Hockney or watercolor painting to see that the artist's 55 new works at L.A. Louver Gallery are amazing documents of rambling drives through the English countryside. Each casually exquisite picture of leafless trees, golden fields, puddled lanes, blossoming flowers, distant farmhouses, rolling hillsides and quiet towns is an astutely observed moment that would never make it to a postcard but is all the more lovely for being ordinary.

In these enlivening images glimpsed through car windows, Hockney doesn't take your breath away so much as he gets you to breathe deeply, soaking in every detail of the fleeting scenes, which are expansive. To stand in the center of any of the three galleries in which the show has been handsomely and matter-of-factly installed is to feel as if there's a lot more space around you than usual.

Part of that is because of the landscape Hockney has chosen to depict. Its patchwork fields and rolling hills allow him to pack loads of details below the horizon, including tiny villages tucked into shallow valleys, low hedgerows shadowing meandering lanes and haphazardly arranged hay rolls, which further break up the space.

Plenty of room remains for the sky. Filled with an equally rich range of colors, textures and brushstrokes, it captures different types of light and the swiftly changing weather. In Hockney's East Yorkshire, it may be rainy but it's never bleak. The cold light is crisp, the gray clouds warm and the sunshine even sweeter than it is in Southern California.

The expansiveness of Hock-



Courtesy of L.A. Louver Gallery

INTIMATE YET EXPANSIVE: A survey of 55 new David Hockney watercolors includes "Woldgate With Flowers and Blossom."

ney's watercolors is also because of the way he has painted them. Up close, the spaciousness that is palpable from a distance all but disappears. What had appeared to be fully realized, accurately shaded, three-dimensional forms turn out to be flat puddles of color, schematic shapes and quick flicks or dabs of the brush.

It's no accident that these unremarkable, anonymous marks coalesce, in a viewer's eyes, at a distance. They fascinate because they reveal that Hockney is able to instantly translate the close-up view into the distant one — that he knows, by patient observation, how subtle shifts in color mix in the eye, creating crisply convincing illusions of the landscape.

In a sense, he is in two places simultaneously: within arm's reach of the watercolor's surface, paying attention to the vicissitudes of his pedestrian materials, and across the room, taking in an overall view.

Walking up and back from each work, viewers experience something similar: jaunts through time and space that invite us to get outside of our-

selves, into a world at once mundane and extraordinary, one accessible and right outside the car window.

L.A. Louver Gallery, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4985, through April 2. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lalouer.com