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David Hockney shares exclusive new paintings

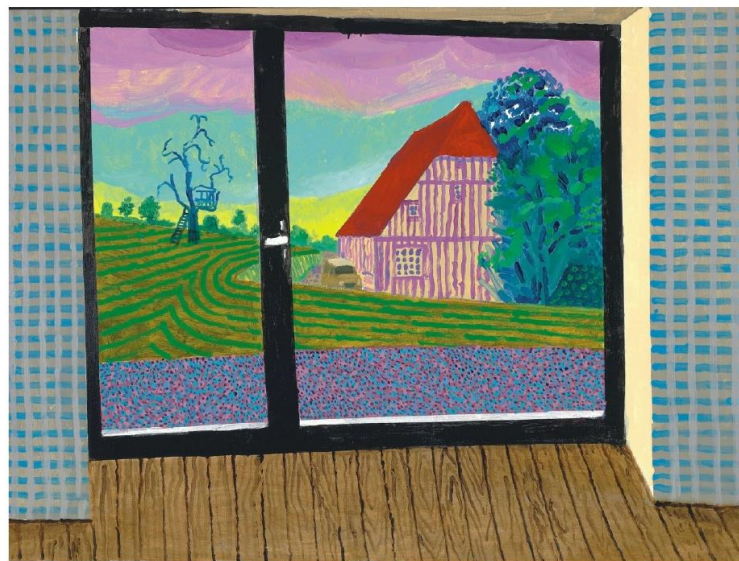
The British artist talks about how he fell in love with a ramshackle house in Normandy and discusses the work destined for a Paris show

Jackie Wullschläger 8 HOURS AGO

Two years ago, in October 2018, David Hockney flew into London from his Los Angeles home for the inauguration of his hawthorn blossom stained-glass window at Westminster Abbey. Immediately afterwards, on an impulse, he fled the noisy crowded city for a three-day road trip to empty northern France. He watched sunset over the docks at Le Havre such as Monet painted, propelled himself around the Bayeux Tapestry in a wheelchair, and decided in an instant.

I met him, gleaming-eyed, on his brief return to London. “I have a new project,” he beamed: he would paint the arrival of spring in Normandy, as he had in Yorkshire – but differently.

In those three days, Hockney found and purchased a large half-timbered property, all elm beams and “higgledy-piggledy” arrangements, with a cider press to be converted to a studio: “a seven dwarfs house in the middle of a four-acre field with a lot of fruit trees around it, totally surrounded by green fields, even the horizon is only broken by our own buildings”.



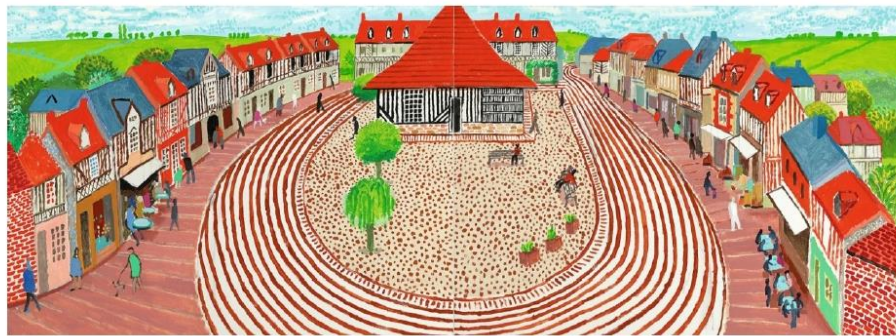
Hockney's 'View from the Studio at Dawn II' (2019) © David Hockney/Galerie Lelong

Galerie Lelong & Co.

Paris – New York

This 17th-century *maison à colombages*, common in Normandy but avoided as too picturesque and old-fashioned by the region's Impressionist and modern painters, is now Hockneyfied. Beginning with "View from the Studio at Dawn", where it rises beneath a fat Fauve pink sky with meadows sweeping around it in stylised, animated furrows, the quaint structure is abbreviated into a vibrant, spare, geometric form: roof a sloping, saturated red rectangle, timber joints a purple-white grid.

The first works from Hockney's Norman conquest go on show in Paris this week in Galerie Lelong's *David Hockney, Ma Normandie*, featuring large-scale paintings and also prints from iPad drawings, including two long, thin wrap-round vistas "Autour de la Maison", depicting in illustrational detail the area in winter – pallid light, white tonality, bare trees and fields – then the identical scene in surging summer greens plus a bright blue pond. Hockney calls these "my little Bayeux tapestries".



'Beuvron-en-Auge, Panorama' (2019) © David Hockney/Galerie Lelong

In the painting "Looking East II" the house has a double presence, an anchor for the broad spectacle of fields and low hills beyond, and a trembling white triangle reflected in the pond. In "Some Smaller Splashes" the horizon has gone and the house appears only in mirror image, flecks of luminous white in the depth of the pond as rain bounces off its surface, forming decorative circles within circles. The title refers to Hockney's iconic swimming pool "A Bigger Splash".



'In Front of House Looking East' (2019) © David Hockney/Galerie Lelong

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What happens when Hockney's motifs shrink from sexy expansive California to a pond in Normandy? In an email exchange – the phone having failed us – I recall his Malibu canvases and ask why he prefers to paint the countryside. “Well, the sea is a lot of the time only a boring horizon, it's the foreground of the sea I painted in Malibu . . . I can remember sitting in two easy chairs drinking tea with Celia and the quite rough sea was splashing over the large windows. Here we have a pond that I have painted, the rain splashing on it, I have always said I could enjoy this, I would sit and watch it in the rain for a while and then go in and paint it.”

Hockney's fragment of pond and its arabesque whorls inevitably recall the horizonless paintings of the water lily pond at Giverny, when the elderly Monet depicted external reality only in reflection. “I have always loved French painting, the way they make marks is quite delicious,” Hockney says. So the Normandy paintings are partly homage.



'In the Studio' (2019) © David Hockney/Galerie Lelong

The greatest draughtsman since Picasso, Hockney more than any other postwar painter takes off from Parisian modernism. Picasso's graphic linearity, Matisse's audacious flattened colour, underlie Hockney's lucid dramas of pictorial space that lead the eye into a world recognisable yet intensified, enhanced, made rhythmic, limpid, cool. Here the double horizontal painting “The Entrance” takes the viewer down an avenue lined with apple trees running towards the gable of a small outbuilding then turning right towards the house: the approach to Hockney's new environment crystallised and simplified into a defining image. Illusion of the real is framed into a piece of flat artifice yet the composition recedes convincingly into the distance, and close up is alive with detail – mauve dashes sweeping you along the track, leaves dancing as shadows on the bright yellow ground.

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'The Entrance' (2019) © David Hockney/Galerie Lelong

“Apple Tree”, “Pear Tree” and “Quince Tree” (“in Yorkshire I had to drive to my motifs, here I really get to know the trees”) are portraits, each tree standing alone like a stark figure against a monochrome ground composed of the huge sky, subtly varied in depths of blue and openness of brushstrokes, built up through hundreds of twisting marks, with the white primer filtering through (“I thought about it all night. I wanted it to be shimmering”). In the paired “Trees, Mist” and “Trees with Less Mist” a greyer sky still glistens; the fog lifts, the hedgerows turn an unreal turquoise, the winding path a silky aubergine — the colours and sinuosities of Hockney’s Californian landscapes.



'Apple Tree' (2019) © David Hockney/Galerie Lelong

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If painting Yorkshire was remembering his boyhood, in Normandy Hockney revisits his art, and its lifelong play with differing representational modes. His stage sets come to mind in the eight-foot painting “Beuvron-en-Auge, Panorama”, depicting his nearest village, houses around a market square tilted as a sort of oval cut-out. iPad drawings of the studio interior condensed into sensual doodles, splattered in tendrils across crosshatched, striped, dotted, staccato patterns as in “Spilt Ink”, share the laconic manner of early compositions scattered with numbers and signs.



‘Spilt Ink’ (2019) © David Hockney/Galerie Lelong

In lockdown (“having no visitors was a boon to me”), Hockney, who has no television, reread *Middlemarch* and Flaubert’s *A Sentimental Education* “because it’s about Normandy and then of course Proust’s Cabourg is only a few miles away”. Time is, self-evidently, enfolded into pastoral painting; so is memory. Also in Hockney’s Norman studio is Taschen’s sumo *David Hockney: A Bigger Book* (2016, £2,500), which “made me really look back at my work. Painters live in the Now (which is eternal) yet I must admit it gave me new ideas.” In the isolation of the Norman countryside, these are still unfolding: recent works are destined for London’s Royal Academy next spring, and “I am now going on doing the whole year, which we will show somewhere in 2022”.

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'Trees Mist' (2019) © David Hockney/Galerie Lelong

Hockney once told me Monet's lily pond "gave [him] 10 years". Today he says, "Of course I identify with the chain-smoking Monet. I love life, what's the alternative, fearing death? We have much too much of it today. Love life!"

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