

HOCKNEY'S YORKSHIRE IN SAN FRANCISCO



David Hockney's "A Bigger Exhibition" is showing at the de Young Museum in San Francisco – [\[Link\]](#)

Yorkshire becomes Hockney's California art world

On show is a lot of work from the last decade, especially since Hockney's move to the house he had bought his mother in the seaside town of Bridlington in Yorkshire. There are landscapes and portraits. Hockney makes much of his intense and very self-conscious examination of media – watercolor, oils, charcoal, video, digital sketching on an iPhone and iPad, large format digital printing.

What we liked:

- the **infectious enthusiasm for experiment** – constantly questioning how we see and represent – the work, the **process** of making marks, the journey of experiments and try-outs, rather than finished product, the artwork up-for-sale;
- the return – we recognize the energies released by a return to a place once known well – how time and distance offer insights that would never have come without the leaving and the return;
- iteration – the old arts’ practice of returning over and again to the same subject – the same track through the woods, the same tree;
- a focus upon ambient details – ambient noise against which lives are played out;
- media self-consciousness – the work through digital devices – again opening up new insights because drawing on an iPad forces an examination of what we take for granted in the connection between looking, seeing and making a mark;
- the monumental scale of many works, the “bigger” treatment, as Hockney terms it – an iPad drawing blown up to 20 feet high, hi-resolution ambient video presented on 36 screens of a walk through the woods across four seasons.



We too know Yorkshire. Helen and I recognized the physiognomy of the land, particularly in the charcoal drawings. But not quite. This is not Yorkshire. There is a disconcerting distance, displacement, as Yorkshire becomes the California of Hockney's clean color palette. The ambient detail is quite mannered, and though the videos are very revealing, they imply no setting, no scenarios, no lives for which they are setting, other than Hockney's gaze. Are we looking at Hockney's nostalgia? When distracted longing overcomes the benefits of the journey away and the reality revealed more sharply upon return.

For his is not a *chorography* – an intense depiction of the land and its character, its people and their inhabitation. There are no figures in the land(scape) other than the absent presence of Hockney, the maker of marks that we recognize as his and no other's.

And the people in the portraits are Hockney's circle. They are an international inner circle. There are no locals. The only ordinary people pictured in the show are museum guards.

The catalogue records the vandalism directed at one of the subjects of his attention – a tree stump that Hockney called “the totem” – painted with graffiti and then hacked down with a chainsaw. Was this a clue to something?

We can't help also but think of the sad events last summer in Hockney's house in Bridlington, the death of a member of his studio that seems to have led to his return to California – [\[Link\]](#)

Perhaps I am expecting too much. This is all about Hockney's art world, and that's why people have flocked to the show, including us. Why should I expect insights into anything else?

