

As Life Goes on, Painting Never Stops—The Inner Logic and Vitality of David Hockney’s Artistic Creation

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Abstract—Hockney’s works represent natural scenery in the form of paintings and photographs, conveying the creative concept of being faithful to life and enjoying nature. This paper focuses on Hockney’s artistic creation, analyzing his distinctive and engaging personal style, and artistic creation concepts from his life and work outlook. Exploring the inner language and unique forms of expression behind them. It discusses the unique personal perspective in Hockney’s landscapes, explores the interaction between the work and the viewer from the perspective of viewing, and analyses the contemplation and reflection on life in Hockney’s artworks. This article focuses on a new chapter in the practice and exploration of contemporary art with a new way of viewing, and discusses David Hockney’s narratives on the laws of perspective, naturalism, and the role of time and space in artistic creation. Deeply explore the spiritual connotation of Hockney’s art from the perspective of contemporary art.

Keywords—Davide Hockney, abstract art, artistic presentation, optical techniques

I. CREATOR OF INNER LANDSCAPE

Hockney’s later life in Normandy was full of the flavor of Epicurus’ philosophy, enjoying life to the fullest in his later years at the peak of his life, experiencing the change of seasons in the Big Garden, entering the state of Retreat in the religious context, and waiting for the spring. The arrival of spring, “If you want to experience spring, then you need to start observing it in the winter until summer comes.” [1]. Hockney depicts the creeping arrival of spring with his own hands, putting the changes of the season into every leaf. The artist’s work has a symbiotic relationship with his studio environment, depicting what he sees and conveying what he thinks. All art is abstract, all viewing is selective, and there is no such thing as an objective perspective; the artist subjectively chooses and depicts the visible or invisible world.

For Hockney, the actual landscape is to depict the course of life; in his works, even the most ordinary things can be shocking; he is good at observing life from different angles, elaborating life and nature from a novel perspective, recording the changes of nature in his unique way of experiencing, and to depict the shapeless water, the changes of the growth of the trees, the colors of the flowers, and the weeds in the gravel. Just as the sunshine of Provence lured Van Gogh south to Arles a century ago, the sun of Normandy also attracted Hockney, and the two artists shared the same interest in appreciating nature. In February 2019, Van Gogh and Hockney encountered and communicated time and space in a major exhibition entitled “The Joy of Nature”. Hockney has been traveling with artists from the past, such as Monet, Van Gogh, Raoul Dufy, and Picasso, who have undeniably impacted contemporary and future art. His acrylic painting *Trees Mist* (2019), in which the sky is depicted freely and

elegantly, occupies most of the picture, with short lines circling to form a vortex of movement and change. The sky takes up most of the frame, with sharp lines swirling around to create a whirlpool full of action and flexibility. In contrast to the turbulent atmosphere, the horizon gradually disappears and becomes blurred, the active sky spreads out, and the flat grass pushes the space farther away; the combination of motion and static brings a sense of rhythm to the colors of the picture. The artist creates inner landscapes, depicting nature in a unique artistic language. With his rebellion against the laws of perspective, exaggerated and bold colors, and a very personal point of view, his works show the viewer the principle of pleasure in art, which is to bring the power of healing through content and form.

Paintings of Yorkshire, Watford, Grand Canyon, Malibu, and Normandy reveal Hockney’s fascination with nature. At a time when landscape painting was labeled ‘boring’, Hockney was convinced that the only way to revitalize art was to return to nature. He continued to establish a connection with nature through his artistic creations, believing that many modernist paintings failed to connect to the world in front of them, so he advocated that the present is eternal and that you must live in the present. Hockney never stopped exploring the fascinating aspects of the natural world, and he believed that the beauty of this world could only be found by looking closely at it, so he left London in the 1980s to travel to California to experience the changes in light and space, and to observe the waves of the Pacific Ocean; he also traveled deep into the western part of the United States on his own, celebrating the spectacular beauty of the Grand Canyon of Colorado in the early mornings and late afternoons. He also visited the Grand Canyon of the United States in 1981. And traveled for three weeks in China from May 20 to June 11, 1981, in the company of the British modernist poet Stephen Spender.

Hockney’s exploration of nature has continued throughout his creative career, and he believes that the law of perspective hinders spatial expression, stifles imaginative space, and loses the depiction of the passage of time, thus rendering landscape paintings tedious. Therefore, Hockney’s paintings have no perspective law in nature. He starts from Picasso’s multiple extinction points and moving viewpoints through the expression of time and space in the flow of Chinese scroll paintings. He continuously innovates across different media in easel paintings, photo collages, and new media paintings, creating a unique and vital art creation system.

II. TIME AND SPACE IN THE FLOW, STARTING WITH VIEWING

“Traditional Chinese painting emphasizes walking,

looking, travelling and dwelling”, taking the viewer’s activity into account from the early stages of the image, creating a poetic experience and a perfect sense of order through the shifting points of view, which is both an art of time and an art of space” [2]. One of Hockney’s vital, innovative concepts after the mid-1980s was the theory of moving focus, from the source of which was George Rowley’s Principles of Chinese Painting [3]. He had looked at Chinese scroll paintings deeply, exploring the flow of time and space. In an age of information overload, Hockney attributes people’s willingness to spend time in front of a piece of work to their engagement with it. Indeed, Hockney’s work intends to empower the viewer to intervene, to wander through his paintings, to find their own space, to walk between the figurative and the abstract. *Bigger & Closer*, in London in 2023 (Fig. 1), is an immersive presentation of space, where the experience of being in the gallery is amplified, and the viewer is brought closer to the subject matter, entering, and wandering around the area in the images, where time and space are no longer frozen.



Fig. 1. *Bigger & Closer*, in London in 2023.

The space is depicted on top of the reality of the viewing experience. Around the House, Spring (2019) can be unfolded like an accordion, presenting a panoramic view of the Big Garden. This presentation of space lends itself well to walking through it as the image unfolds in long scrolls from left to right, allowing the viewer to swim through it in a participatory manner. Although Hockney pursued the reality of the world and emphasized the viewing of fact, he had already made an abstract understanding of the world before he viewed and depicted it. All reproductions are necessarily non-realistic; they are not reality itself but an emulation of some reality on some plane. This makes for an ambiguity of truth in his landscapes, a subjective perception of the landscape based on personal experience rather than a mechanical depiction of the visible material world. In 2023, the exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, featured long scrolls in the form of electronic screens on a long wall, where the viewer moved his eyes along with the scrolls to experience the reality of the paintings more vividly. The overlapping layers of time allowed the viewer to experience the paintings’ existence more vividly. Layers of time overlapping together make the picture no longer flat. Extending the boundaries of creation is something he has always wanted to present in his works. In *The Avenue at Middelharnis* (Practical Knowledge), imitating *Hobbema*

(2017), he cuts off the corners of the traditional picture frame and divides the original one into three parts, deconstructing and exploring the space in Hobbema’s paintings so that the viewer can enter into this space. This is art about essence, moving points of view to make the experience more vivid, rather than art about perspective.

Paintings that begin with viewing focus on the experience of continuity, with the complexity of infinity and fluidity, and are narrative images embody temporality. Reproduction is a narrative process, both physical and mental. The artist creates a unique narrative law, reflecting the artist’s personality, state, and thoughts. Hockney’s series of iPad paintings, No. 315 (2020.5.9), 330 (2020.5.18), 333 (2020.5.20), and 335 (2020.5.22), are reflections on both painting and the world, engraving the experience of time within them. These four paintings embody the pursuit of light, with light from different weather and periods causing the colors to change almost constantly as the trunks of the trees move from sphagnum to greyish purple to orange and tawny, and the fullness of spring gradually emerges. However, the outline of the lines in these four paintings remains essentially the same, depicting in brushstrokes and texture how the sky, trees, and grasses change with the arrival of spring. Spanning 13 days, the four paintings introduce the experience of time into the painting space. No. 315’s gloomy sky and dark tree trunks; No. 330’s white, foggy sky and tree trunks with fuzzy edges; No. 333’s orange-red tree trunks and yellowish-green grass; and No. 335’s azure blue sky and newborn shoots are both depictions of time and understandings of life. Hockney’s heart, eyes, and hands feel the life energy that fills the universe and records the pulsations of life through his brush. His creations are always accompanied by profound observations and experiences, experiences that flow with time. Hockney has always believed that the camera cannot capture the beauty perceived by the human eye and brain, the camera will reduce the colors. At the same time, the artist will find more colors, which is one of the reasons why Hockney started painting collages through photography and finally returned to painting again.

Hockney has always been committed to breaking through the dominance of the Western laws of perspective and is highly interested in advancing and expanding space. Chinese painting has never been a scientific expression but a spiritual expression of art. The difference between scientific reproduction and artistic presentation lies in the emotional dimension, where the individual’s spiritual world is integrated into the formal language of art, emphasizing the unity of the heart, the hand, the eye, and the mind. Creating new narratives, changing the way people look at pictures, and reproducing the material world by offering different ways of looking at it, Hockney invites the viewer to enter his paintings, awakening the possibility of the intersection of time and space as space changes and time passes. This connection and interactivity between the viewer and the work is one of the most fascinating forms of contemporary art.

III. COMMITMENT TO OPTICAL THEORY

As a painter and art historian, Hockney applies the same scientific approach to art historical archaeology that artists of the past used when painting with the aid of optics. Such a study of observation, reproduction, perspective, space and the

connection between imaging devices is not only an exploration of his artworks, painting styles, and aesthetic values, but also reveals David Hockney's perception as a researcher outside the field of painting. He began his career in the field of optical theory in 1999, working to rediscover the lost techniques of the Western masters of painting. After seeing the exhibition of Engel's works *Portraits by Engel: Images of an Era* at the National Gallery in London, he intervened in art history as an artist, systematically and scientifically investigating how painters used optical instruments to make drawings and attempting to reproduce the rules of drawing almost six hundred years ago with his own practice. "From the early 15th century, many artists in the West began to use optical devices to create projections to help them paint. By 'optical devices' I mean mirrors and lenses (or a combination of both)." [4]. Some artists of the time made drawings and paintings directly from projected images, and this new way of presentation, this new way of viewing, soon became popular. Art historians often refer to certain painters, such as Canaletto and Johannes Vermeer, who painted with the aid of a camera obscura. This statement is also often quoted, but I would like to show that the use of optical aids in painting was much more widespread and began much earlier than originally assumed.

In Hockney's own book *Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters* and in his collaborative work with the art critic Martin Gayford, *History of Pictures: From the Cave to the Computer Screen*, Hockney argues that some of the classic works in Western art history were painted using optical techniques to achieve realistic effects, explaining why there was a sudden upsurge in high-contrast effects in Baroque art – optical techniques. The use of optical instruments explains to some extent the imbalance of proportions in the paintings and the incorrect way of depicting them out of focus and blurred. In response to some of the optical aberrations in the paintings of classical masters such as Van Eyck, Lorenzo Lotto, and Caravaggio, Hockney presents an archaeological overview of the art historical process of the use of optical techniques by European artists in 15–17 century to support their paintings, discusses the relationship between viewing styles and optical devices, and argues for conclusive evidence of the use of optical aids and for the historical justification of this method. During his research, he has worked closely with people from academia, the arts, and the media, which has led to several related discussions. At the same time, however, he emphasizes: "I repeat, I am not saying that all artists use optical aids, but I think that the effect of the lens has dominated painting and that this effect has become the object of imitation for all painters. At least before the invention of photography, the naturalistic effect produced by the lens became the goal of art and the basic criterion for judging the merits of paintings."

The assistive technology in painting and the change of viewing mode promotes Hockney's diverse artistic exploration, as a painter, how to face the science and technology, and the painting skills of this subject, Hockney not only gives a response as an artist identity, more valuable in the face of science and technology to give the art of new changes, Hockney's photo collage, scattered perspective, and iPad paintings to solve their own creative puzzles. Inheriting the tradition of visual history and renewing the way of seeing

under the change of visual cognition mode, Hockney believes that science and technology and painting skills are not contradictory opposites, and when technology intervenes, he divides the images into two kinds, one using a lens and the other using the naked eye. Through the different ways of creating images, the paintings bring different perspectives and different spatial expressions. In the movements of Impressionism, for example, everything is captured that a mere photograph cannot achieve: Time, emotions, reality. And in Cubism, for the first time in more than 400 years, the sense of the childlike returns to European painting. This is the reality of the skill that crystallizes the painter's values. As he said, great artists are not eclipsed by the use of optical aids. The use of these instruments requires skill, and their function is limited to measuring and positioning or to the production of linear perspectives that are difficult to correct with the bare hand, such as the foreshortened perspective of an ancient lute, the patterns in the folds of a fabric, the curved structure of a building, the foreshortened perspective of an interior, the human figure, etc.

Optical instruments do not paint, only the artist's hand leaves its mark on the image. In other words, technology and tools can support painting, and things can be reproduced, but the time and value of the painter's work cannot be replaced by machines. The painter's painting is the result of the artist's skill, the complete contemplation of the depicted object, combined with emotions, thoughts, and the cooperation of hand, eye, and mind. He repeatedly mentioned that compared with machines, technology, and tools, as an artist, the charm of the artist's skill is the value of their own works of art. Whether it is a lens, a lens visualizer, a camera obscura, or a computer, it is only a tool for the painter, and the value of painting is not in the tool, but in the person. Today, with the high development of images or in the future of artificial intelligence, in the process of the continuous evolution of art media, spiritual and passionate creation still has an irreplaceable beauty, and the charm of art will always be the inner representation of the individual and the expression of the truest feelings towards life.

IV. ARTISTIC CONCEPTS AND HUMANISTIC PHILOSOPHIES BEHIND THE WORKS

"During the period of modernism art from the end of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century, the path of manifesting artistic self-discipline went from figuration to abstraction, and the way of dissolving artistic self-discipline went from the tangible to the intangible." [5]. In the context of the current conceptualization, dematerialization, and de-technologization of art, Hockney insists on the connection with nature and emphasizes the return to painting. Amid the wave of anti-aesthetics and anti-art, he inherits and innovates the humanistic, aesthetic, and technical methods of art in a gesture of return. By applying his fascination with the retina to the senses and visual experience, he bucks the trend of contemporary art and returns from the street to the studio that carries the material medium, the creative process, and the subjective thinking and explores the issues of technique, form and stylistic language in both the material and the spiritual space. His extraordinarily fresh and clean artworks stem from the fact that he likes to observe everything clearly from a close distance and to clarify and simplify his perception; his

highly saturated, strongly contrasting, and vibrant color expressions come from his subjective passion for art and pure sensibility towards life; his intense desire for spatial expression and broader vision stems from his exploration of breaking through the boundaries of limitations.

Hockney has always endeavored to merge new techniques with the practice of painting, making it a multi-sensory experience. The animated short film, remember, you can't keep your eyes on the sun, and you can't keep your eyes on death utilizes kinetic effects to create fluid spaces and unfrozen moments. It depicts the grandeur of dawn. Before the sun rises, there is a dimly lit village, with hills separating the sky that is about to break through from the grass that is hidden in the darkness; as the sun rises, the light spreads out, the grass begins to brighten, and the whole scene is hidden; then the sun continues to grow, and the bright colors follow, with the light radiating outwards from the center until the sky, the grass, and the hills have all disappeared from the picture; the short film ends with a full bloom. The film ends in blossoming light, with a dazzling golden color filling the screen and the playful letters combined in a cheerful style. The short film is a narrative that consists of a series of paintings that converge in a progressive experience, transforming an episode into lines and colors in a subtle and shifting exploration of the artist's use of line and point in the terrain of time and feeling. The short film also has a miniature version of the more significant phenomenon of being faithful to live, knowing, and enjoying nature. It is a meditation on death, on the art of death as new life. Literature or poetry permeates the artist's life, personal training, and aesthetic sensibilities in various ways. It indirectly alters the artist's creative thinking and the language used in their images. When Hockney read the poem *The Man Who Played the Blue Guitar* by Wallace Stevens in 1937, he got rid of the constraints of naturalism. He began to perceive the visible material world and explore the inner space through imagination.

The world is in flux, and every viewing is new, finding more pleasure and poetry where it is increasingly barren, conveying a connection to natural life through images. "We are gradually losing touch with nature, which is rather silly, because we are part of it, not outside of it." [6]. Hockney's art is created to embody the meaning of life as it relates to everyday life, not just how to see but how to live and connect with the world in which one finds oneself. Constantly changing where he lives and works and continually opening

new projects, the excitement of creating art forces Hockney into a more rigorous working life. He has not only the poetry of the bohemian life but also his inner order, dissatisfied with the extreme constraints of life and seeking a life of spontaneity and ease while at the same time working to establish a daunting pattern of life. The artist must keep returning to nature and processing fresh ideas and experiences because art is always open. Hockney is constantly experimenting with various mediums and utilizing multiple modes of expression, all to bring painting to life. At the heart of the image is life and the self and it is a process of contemplation and introspection to create a painting full of vigor through the hands of an individual.

V. CONCLUSION

Hockney's art focuses on a unique individualized perspective based on the love of life, blending the spirituality of connecting with nature, and the exploration of artistic experimentation, conveying a new way of understanding the world through painting, thus profoundly expanding art's formal and emotional dimensions. He advocates artistic aesthetics, creative techniques, and the spirit of the subject and believes that the essence of painting is "human nature". In his inexhaustible artistic creation, he brings to the art world a historical co-temporality that removes the preconceptions of the medium.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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