

David Hockney

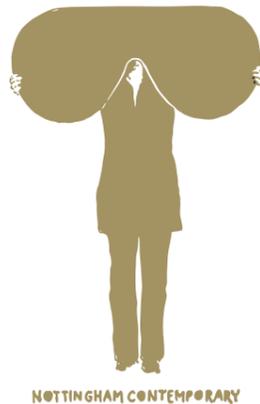
1960 – 1968: A Marriage of Styles

David Hockney was born in Bradford, Yorkshire, in 1937. He studied at the school of art there between 1953 and 1957. A conscientious objector to then compulsory National Service, he worked in a hospital for two years before starting at the Royal College of Art in London. He became a successful artist while still a student there, from 1959 to 1962. The year after he left he visited Los Angeles for the first time, and travelled to Egypt to illustrate articles for The Sunday Times Magazine. He also held his first solo exhibition in London.

Hockney returned to Los Angeles in 1964 to paint, teach and travel. Since then he has lived most of his life in the city that has inspired much of his work.

During the last five decades he has exhibited widely, and his work is in many major collections. He now lives in Yorkshire, painting landscapes. He is consistently called Britain's favourite artist.

This exhibition is the first to focus on his early years in London and Los Angeles.



We Two Boys Together Clinging, 1961

“What one must remember about some of these paintings is that they were partly propaganda.”



Hockney's paintings from this period were influenced by Abstract Expressionism, the prevailing high art of the period. Yet he incorporated symbols, writing, gay slang, and coded numbers that refer both to himself and other young men. 48 is alphabetical code for David Hockney.

“We Two Boys Together Clinging is from Walt Whitman; We two boys together clinging/ One the other never leaving/Arm'd and fearless, eating, drinking, sleeping, loving. The emphasis of the painting is on 'clinging'; not only are the arms clinging but small tentacles help keep the bodies close together as well. At the time of the painting I had a newspaper clipping on the wall with the headline TWO BOYS CLING TO CLIFF ALL NIGHT. There were also a few pictures of Cliff Richard pinned up nearby, although the headline was actually referring to a Bank Holiday mountaineering accident.



We Two Boys Together Clinging (1961).
Courtesy of Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London.
© David Hockney.

What one must remember about some of these pictures is that they were partly propaganda of something I felt hadn't been propagandised, especially among students, as a subject:homosexuality. I felt it should be done. Nobody else would use it as a subject, but because it was part of me it was a subject I could treat humourously. I loved the line We two boys together clinging; it's a marvellous, beautiful poetic line.”

David Hockney by David Hockney: *My Early Years*, Thames and Hudson, 1976

“With his growing fame, Hockney's declared sexuality contributed to the campaign that led, in defiance of majority public opinion, to the legalisation of homosexual acts between consenting adults in 1967,”

Andrew Brighton, 1960- 1968: *A Marriage of Styles*, Nottingham Contemporary, 2009.

The First Marriage (A Marriage of Styles 1), 1962

“When you look at Hockney's painting you have to change your focus, section by section. What is this man in a suit doing next to an Egyptian figure in the beginnings of a subtropical landscape? It just looks impossible. There are all sorts of things going on, many of them abstract, in the bottom left hand corner, including a Gothic arch, which possibly refers to the marriage. Then there is all this blank canvas for you to project your own interpretations. Yet this contradictory image has a very simple explanation. It's a sighting of Hockney's friend standing behind an Egyptian statue in a Berlin museum. They are both looking in the same direction, as if they are united – the statue having made a journey of thousands of years to the present moment.

There's a game being played here – the game being how one makes an image. And how that image encompasses everything that interests him – relationships, travel, culture, the art of his contemporaries, etc. Hockney is having a conversation with his peers of the time – “pure” modern artists like Kenneth Noland and Bernard Cohen, whose work was concerned with the act of painting itself, not their own experiences. He is playfully questioning the style of others. Yet this is not cynical satire. Hockney is finding his own way through his practice, his relationship with art, and its relationship to the world.”

Alex Farquharson,
Director, Nottingham Contemporary.

“There is a game being played here – the game being how one makes an image.”



David Hockney, *The First Marriage (A Marriage of Styles 1)*, 1962.
Photo (c) Tate, London 2009.

A Bigger Splash, 1967



“Hockney trod on everyone toes with his paintings of California... back in the UK we were still living in a black and white film.”

David Hockney *A Bigger Splash* 1967.
Acrylic on Canvas, 96 x 96”
© David Hockney. Photo (c) Tate, London 2009.

At first glance *A Bigger Splash* is an iconic representation of all that we have come to know as California. The turquoise pool belongs to a modernist dwelling. The unvarying blue sky is broken only by palm trees whose fronds unfurl like celebratory fireworks.

Hockney's painting has no human figures, yet the image is not without theatre. The diving board points towards the empty chair of an intent observer. The glass windows do not reflect the artist whose viewpoint has given us such a vivid sense of being there.

The diver himself is lost to view for a moment that has been stretched to eternity. His body has shaped the splash – a splash that took Hockney two weeks to paint. Its violent energy has forever disrupted this still, charged scene. It is tempting to imagine Hockney's own triumphant entry into his imagined utopia, a submerged presence in an impossibly perfect picture that still influences how we see Los Angeles.

Expertly manipulating time, expectation and style, *A Bigger Splash* draws you in, just as it invites you to step back outside its unpainted frame. Hockney is clearly signalling that this is a painting, not a window on reality. As an image that relates to the ways Los Angeles

was promoted in advertising in its day, it has some association with Pop Art. Its flat stripes and blocks are close to Abstract art, too. It is both of its time and timeless.

“Hockney trod on everyone's toes with his paintings of California [...] Back in the UK we were still living in a gritty post-War black and white film, more gas fires than central heating, showers a rarity, swimming pools municipal. Hockney show us pictures in vivid colour of naked young men bronzed but for pale buttocks disporting in sun soaked blue pools or under cascading water.”

Andrew Brighton, *David Hockney 1960-1968: A Marriage of Styles*, 2009

“...he drove me to a motel in Santa Monica and just dropped me there... I got into the motel, very thrilled; really *really* thrilled... I was so excited. I think it was partly a sexual fascination and attraction... Within a week of arriving there in this strange big city, not knowing a soul, I'd passed my driving test, bought a car, driven to Las Vegas and won some money, got myself a studio, started painting, all in a week. And I thought, it's just how I imagined it would be.”

David Hockney, *David Hockney: My Early Years*, Thames and Hudson, 1976

Frances Stark

But what of Frances Stark, standing by itself, a naked name, bare as a ghost to whom one would like to lend a sheet?

Frances Stark was born in Newport Beach, California in 1967. She still lives and works in Los Angeles. She attended San Francisco State University, before enrolling at the Art Centre College of Design. Obsessed with language and literature from an early age, she incorporates other writing within her work, mostly borrowed from 19th and 20th century literature, including that of Emily Dickinson. She uses the words of others as her own, offering tantalising glimpses of her own life.

Aspects of her work suggest some affinities with early Hockney, including the use of literary quotations that say something about the artist, the use of theatre as a metaphor and the suggestive use of large areas of blank paper, or in Hockney's case unpainted canvas. The two also share a self-deprecating irony. Two works in Stark's exhibition make indirect reference to Hockney.

And brpztzap the subject, 2005

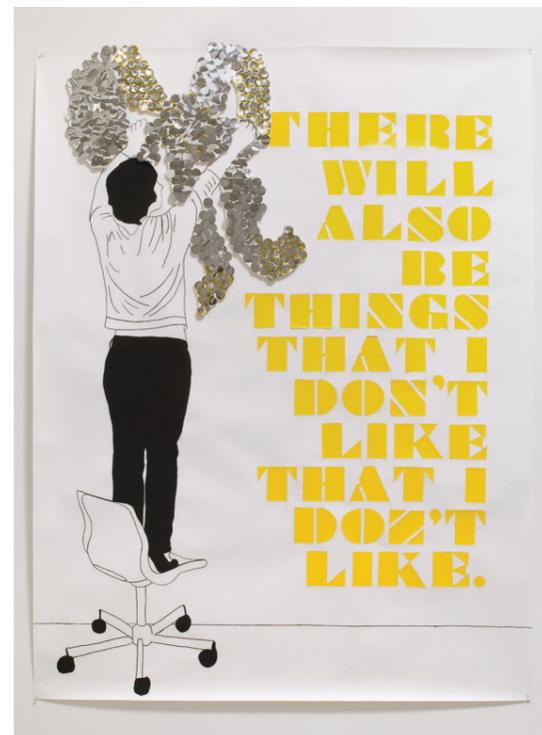


Even when she is playing herself, Frances Stark is engaged in a game of masquerade. Her work is not directly confessional, but it does offer glimpses of her life and thoughts. She is by turns direct and evasive. We are left uncertain as to who Frances Stark is, and what the relationship of her work is to the self. Does her work areveal or conceal hers? The wings of butterflies, the kimonos of opera singers and the tail feathers of peacocks all suggest a desire for both display and concealment.

In this collage, the peacock's tail feathers are made of scraps of her own past work. The letters spell out the last line of an old lyric by The Fall, the fiercely literate Mancunian punk band. Stark was involved in punk music herself. 'Brrrptzap' suggests a scratch in the record.

Frances Stark, *And Brrrptzap the Subject*, 2005. Photo courtesy of Greengrassi. © The Artist.

There will also be things I don't like, 2007



"This tough but vulnerable individualism ...is not typical of the art world."

Frances Stark, *There Will Also Be Things I Don't Like*, 2007. Image courtesy of Beth Rudin DeWoody. © The Artist.

The woman who appears in some of Frances Stark's works roughly resembles the artist herself. She is standing on a chair, with her back to the audience, hanging an elaborate party decoration on her work, as if she is attempting to deflect or make acceptable its message. She seems to be anticipating an adverse reaction to her work, too, as if to prepare herself for failure. Making an art work and preparing an exhibition is equated with preparing for a party, with the same nerve-wracking sense of self-consciousness in wondering whether the guests will arrive, and what they will think of you. The repetition of 'I don't like' in the work is like an anxious stutter.

..."This tough but vulnerable individualism asserted in Stark's work is not typical of the art world where the persona of a particular artist is cultivated until it is a formidable brand name. Instead, it is used to reveal glimpses of domestic realities in artists' lives, the creation of friendships, the intellectual exchanges that grow into ideas or works... small, plain facts that penetrate the carapace of the international art world."

Francis McKee, Director of CCA Glasgow, *But What of Frances Stark*, Nottingham Contemporary, 2009.

Backside of the Performance, 2007

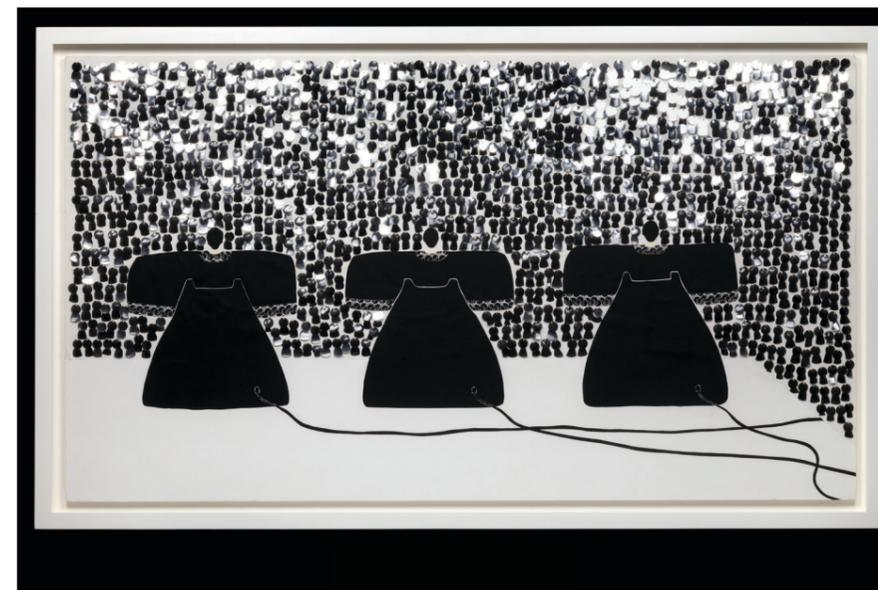
Three performers in kimonos, or old-fashioned telephones, face an audience. Like the view from the back of a stage in a theatre, the image invites you to share the artist's terrifying sense of utter exposure.

"Stark's work is sometimes about the nerve wracking, exhilarating, painful moment of putting oneself, one's art practice, oneself as a creative individual, on stage, risking both triumph and opprobrium. This is, if you like, the 'backstage' of any artist's practice, but it's rare in art to see it on full view."

Alex Farquharson, Director, Nottingham Contemporary.



"Stark's work is about the nerve-wracking, exhilarating, painful moment of putting oneself onstage."



Frances Stark, *Back Side of the Performance*, 2007. Photo courtesy of greengrassi. © The artist.

Nottingham Contemporary

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Frances Stark

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14 Nov 09 – 24 Jan 10

Exhibition guide and free poster