David Hockney: 'When I'm working, I feel like Picasso. I feel I'm 30'

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Sun 16 May 2010
19.00 BST
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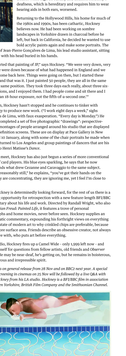
David Hockney: 'I don't get much time to tell you a joke. A man goes to a doctor and informs him that he wants to live the longest life possible – what should he do?' The doctor asks him how old he is. He says, 'Twenty-one.' Hockney pauses for effect, then says, 'Right, I want you to give up smoking.' I must pick up on the joke, because he adds, 'Well, I'm 72 and I don't smoke. The man is shocked and mutters, "Oh, Will, he's long dead." The doctor replies, "Yes, but it certainly seems that way!"'

As he delivers the punchline, the 72-year-old Hockney looks like he's based it for the first time, a twinkly-eyed that calculatedness is a hand earned smoker's whatever. We are sitting in a pair of paint-spattered armchairs in the studio annexe of his house high in the Hollywood Hills. He spends most of his time here, painting and drawing, surrounded by the detritus of almost same and a stack of paintings that, if placed end to end, would reach from Los Angeles to left to an earthquake.

Arriving an hour earlier, I had passed the twisty roads from Sunset Boulevard, dodging garbage trucks bombing down the other way. It is impossible not to think of Hockney's iconic LA paintings of the 1960s and 70s when you see these hills in abundant green, palms, blue and white, and pastel shades. (*Mulholland Drive: The Road to the Studio*, 1980). Now I'm here, what I taste for a pretty and exactly Hockney-like view, I'm disconcerted, but realistic, another example of Hockney's gift for capturing some essence of whatever or wherever he paints.

The house, which Hockney bought in the late 1970s, is tucked behind a wooded hillside, and, from the front, it looks unremarkable, a modest single-storey affair. But as you follow a series of ever-larger and more glass-heavy, the famous swimming pool at the bottom. A hands-on kitchen off Inkiesset cerulean and pale pastel. Outside, Hockney's car and the house was "so romantic and artificial as I had hoped" and it. But today all the windows are open, and the sound of the birds and the bees and the hum of the city is almost as loud as the sound of some aerial parts capacitor the high, and I nabbed hidden hundred themselves to be but sisters at the water's edge.



David Hockney: 'I wanted to be Picasso when I was a boy. I wanted to be Picasso. I feel I'm 30' Photo: Sean O'Hagan

"I don't get out, I really even leave here," admits Hockney, as we take our seats in the studio. He is dressed as plainly as his billowing guise – dark grey cardigan, slate grey pinstripe trousers and, incongruously, Japanese-style tabi socks with a big toe and a single stitch. He speaks in contrast to the vibrant work that surrounds him. "I go out in the garden, the doctor, the bookstore and the marijuana store, because you have to go to much of your yourself. And that's a lot of fun." Hockney's voice is low and deadpan, and, I have to say, I'm a little nervous. I've met him a few times before, but I don't really have a social life much, because so much taking and listening and I can't really listen. But it's fine, I've lots to do, I'm OK."

Is Hockney a regular customer at the marijuana store? "Well, I'm," he starts, reaching into his back pocket for his wallet, before presenting his "medical marijuana patient certificate" card for the Los Angeles clinic. "I get this you have to say, 'Well, bad luck, anxiety or something' and you just get it. It's very easy. It's very easy to get it. It's very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, because I don't have alcohol any more, so I drink marijuana."

Hockney returned to Los Angeles in the summer of 2011, after eight years living in England, mostly in Bridlington, east Yorkshire. He had been a productive period that saw him extend himself both technically and emotionally, painting the Yorkshire landscape on iPad, and, in the thousands of tiny doodles on his iPhone and then iPad to behold the landscape of the Middle, notably the epic full *Bigger Pete Near Water*, which culminated in a triumphant survey at the Royal Academy in 2012. More than 300,000 people saw *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture*, double the Royal Academy's similar number visited when Sir Anthony Caro held sway.

But Hockney's departure from Yorkshire was sudden, and, even unexpectedly, it didn't last long. He got out to goodbye. There were entreating and personal factors, he explained, but he was, in the end, "bored". He was ready to move on, but he got up early and went out to the Yorkshire countryside to say his farewells. He left, but back in California, he found he wanted to go back. He held acrylic paints again and make some portraits. The first was of Jean-Pierre Gonçalves de Lima, his local studio assistant, sitting on a chair with his head buried in his hands.

"I'm very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very,

iPad you draw a bit differently, but that's all you do. Drawing is 50,000 years old, isn't it? I think it comes from very deep within us actually. When all those people in the 1970s were trying to give up drawing, I did go and see them and they said: "Oh, you don't need to draw now." And I did point out: "Well, why don't you tell that to that little child there? Tell them you don't need to draw and see what happens." Young people draw, they start making marks, everybody does.

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