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PORTRAIT of the ARTIST

DOCUMENTING THE PAINTER DAVID HOCKNEY

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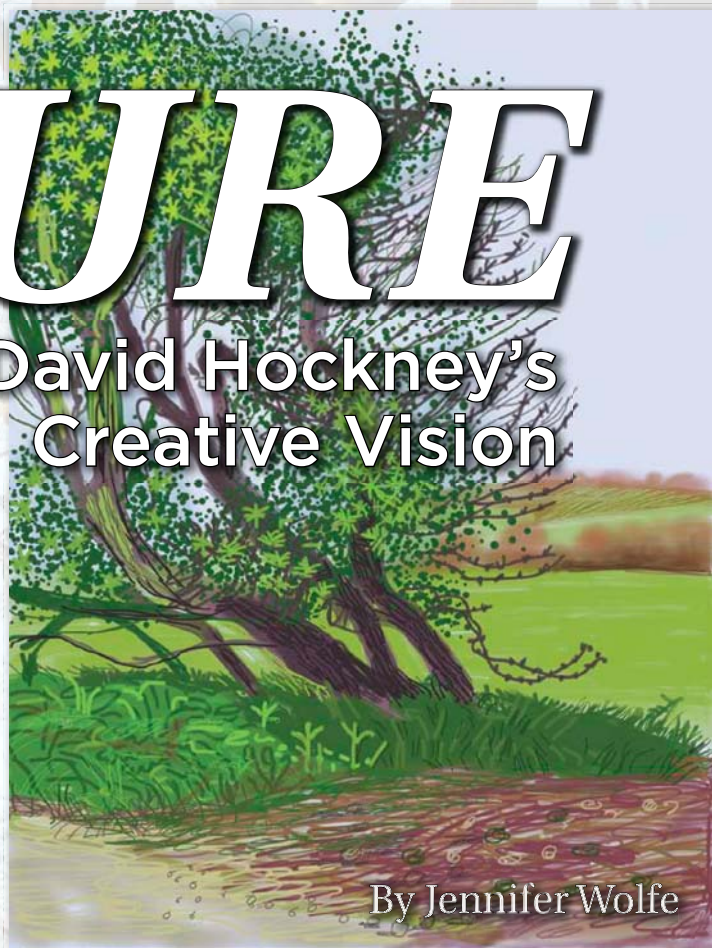
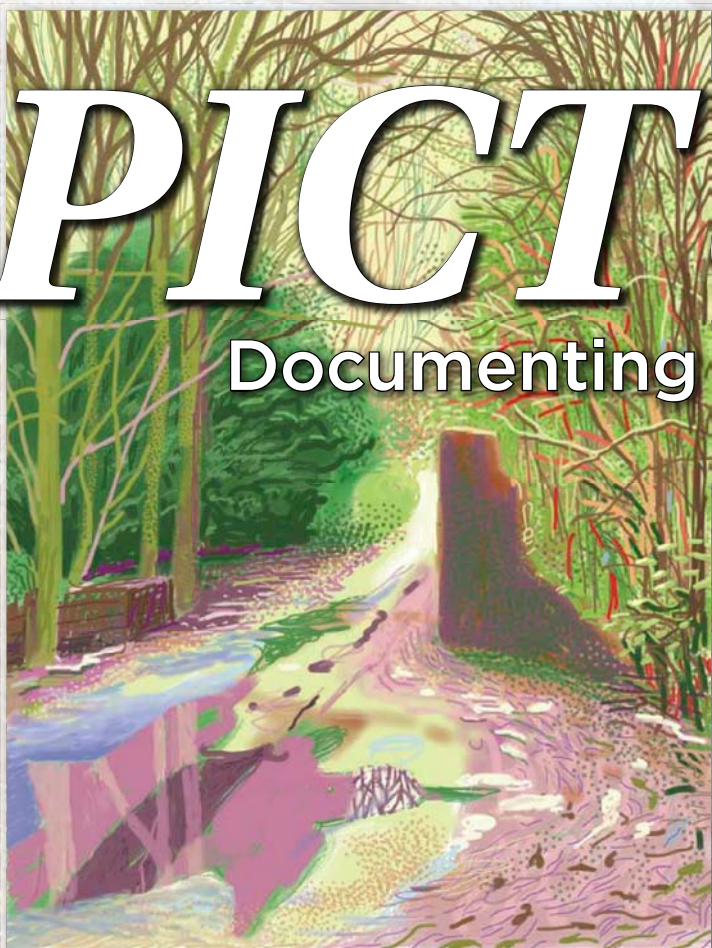
A BIGGER

PHOTO BY JEAN PIERRE GONÇALVES DE LIMA © DAVID HOCKNEY

David Hockney

PICTURE

Documenting David Hockney's Creative Vision



By Jennifer Wolfe

Left: David Hockney's *The Arrival of Spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011 (twenty eleven)- 2 January*, iPad drawing printed on paper, one of a 52-part work
 Right: *The Arrival of Spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011 (twenty eleven)- 12 April*

Award-winning documentary film director Bruno Wollheim brought his acclaimed 2009 documentary *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture* to U.S. audiences recently, with screenings and discussions at cultural institutions around the country, including the Smithsonian, Columbia, Yale and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The tour coincided with a major exhibition at the London Royal Academy of Arts of Hockney's most recent work, which opened in January and ended April 9. Part of the Royal Academy exhibit, Wollheim's film is an intimate portrait of one of Britain's greatest living artists as he returns at the age of 68 to his native Yorkshire to paint its landscape. Filmed over the course of three years, *A Bigger Picture*, now available on DVD from First Run Pictures, is an unprecedented record of a master artist at work, providing background and context for the exhibit's giant landscape paintings and

multiscreen installations.

Wollheim first came to know Hockney in 1989 while working on the BBC series *Artists' Journeys*. "When I first came to Los Angeles to see David, he was working on a series of car drives," Wollheim describes. "He would create soundtracks for various 90-minute drives and take friends, one at a time, in his car to experience these landscapes set to music. It wasn't the kind of thing you could sell—it was just this extraordinary theatrical experience that he organized and took a lot of trouble over."

Wollheim filmed Hockney again for his 2003 film *Double Portrait*, creating a psychological sketch of the artist based on his portrait sessions with various couples he knew. "He quite liked the film, much to my surprise because I thought it painted rather a bleak portrait of him," Wollheim says.

Based on the success of *Double Portrait*, Hockney invited Wollheim to Los Angeles again

to begin filming a biography project that would eventually become *A Bigger Picture*. In 2005, able to travel for the first time in years, Hockney made plans to return to the U.K. and asked Wollheim to accompany him and film him as he performed his *en plein air* landscape experiments. This would be the first time the filmmaker would be allowed to film the artist while he worked, and Wollheim jumped at the chance.

"Initially I used the Sony DSR-PD150 because that's what I had been using in Los Angeles when we still thought we were filming a biography," Wollheim details. "In early '05 I switched to the Sony HVR-Z1, which was a much easier camera to use, with significant improvements in color. The Z1 has a better chip and the focus is easier to deal with. With the PD150, it was difficult to know if you were in focus, so you couldn't zoom into a detail of a painting and zoom back out and know you had your subject in focus."

Like Hockney painting *en plein air*, Wollheim



Left: Filmmaker Bruno Wollheim and David Hockney

made use of available light while shooting. “We were going back to basics: operating solo, using a small, semi-pro camera,” he says. “David was never going to accept a full crew, so it had to be just me. I’m usually not just behind the camera but behind the *cameraman* as well, so this was a skill that I had to pick up pretty quickly.”

While very pleased with the footage acquired with the Z1, Wollheim admits the camera has its quirks. “There are various little tricks or foibles you need to get used to. You never quite know what the darks will look like, and you can get quite a bit of noise in low light. The other

problem is that you can inadvertently adjust the frame rate, which makes stopping down difficult,” he says.

The advantages of the Z1 came from its size and affordability. “To follow an artist for two years is to be involved in a fairly open-ended process,” Wollheim explains. “I didn’t have any idea how long we would do this, and I don’t think he did either. So you shoot, but you have no idea what the ending is, so you don’t know what subjects to fix on. You wouldn’t be able to do that if you were using film or a large-format camera, so in a certain way this film was only



PHOTOS BY JEAN PIERRE GONCALVES DE LIMA © DAVID HOCKNEY

made possible by using a DV camera.”

With more than 120 hours of footage acquired, Wollheim depended heavily on editor Andy Matthews to help shape the storyline. “I do think of the film as really being a joint effort between the two of us,” Wollheim says. “I did all the filming, but a large part of the film was constructed in the editing room.”

“We were working our way toward telling the story in the most truthful and entertaining way possible,” Wollheim notes. “I think we did something pretty good. I’m really pleased with it, and I still don’t mind looking at it.” **dv**

David Hockney’s *The Arrival of Spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011 (twenty eleven)*, oil on 32 canvases, one of a 52-part work



PHOTO BY JONATHAN WILKINSON © DAVID HOCKNEY