Teachers’ Notes
Information and Activities for Secondary Art Teachers

These notes focus on particular aspects of Hockney’s portraiture and on a small number of interconnecting themes developed over Hockney’s career. They are intended to help students look at Hockney’s work and enable group discussion. They can be used to assist teaching in the gallery as well as in the artroom. Each image has questions and talking points that can be adapted to meet students’ needs. The suggestions for activities are designed to lead on to further areas of research into portraiture.
The exhibition and notes are particularly relevant to the following groups:

Students of Art and Design at Key Stage 3 and 4, looking at Units 7A, Self-image, 8A Objects and Viewpoints, 8B Animating Art, 9A Life Events and Unit 10 Generic, Visiting a museum, gallery or site. The notes explore four themes:

1. The Artist as Subject
2. The Artist and Relationships
3. Hockney’s Double Portraits
4. Art Heroes and Working Methods

There are useful web-links and a list of further reading at the end of the notes. A cd produced by Acoustiguide, including interviews with some of Hockney’s sitters and friends is also available. For a free copy please send proof of teacher status and a stamped addressed envelope to:

Learning & Access Department
National Portrait Gallery
St Martin’s Place
London WC2H OHE.

Please mark your envelope ‘Hockney Sound’.

Visiting David Hockney Portraits

A special exhibition entry price of £3 per student/teacher is available to pre-booked school groups between 10.00 and 13.00 Monday to Wednesday. Places are strictly limited so please ring well in advance to make a booking for this and any of the activities outlined below on 020 7312 2483.

Introductory Slide Talk

An illustrated introduction to the exhibition, which considers the stylistic development of Hockney’s work in the context of his career. It examines highlights of his technical achievements and questions the nature of his contribution to contemporary portraiture.

Practical Art Workshops

Taking a Line for a Portrait for students aged 14 to 18 years, November 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 16, 17 and January 11 & 12. The workshops run from 10.30 – 15.00 with a break for lunch (not provided). Minimum number of students 10, maximum 20 per workshop. This dry point on aluminium printing workshop is led by artist Mandy Bonnell. Students will draw with pointed scribes into soft metal, making portraits to be revealed in print. No previous experience necessary.

Secondary Art Teachers’ Insets CPD

Portraits in Print for art teachers, November 8 & 15 and January 10 2007. Mandy Bonnell will offer advice and training in printing techniques. She will concentrate on how to make prints without expensive equipment, and how satisfying a process this can be, especially with students who lack confidence in their drawing ability.
David Hockney is one of Britain’s most distinguished living artists and this is the first major exhibition to focus on his portraits. It spans fifty years from his earliest work right up to the most recent and presents a visual diary of his life and artistic preoccupations.

Hockney grew up in an unconventional working-class family in Bradford, West Yorkshire. He was the fourth of five children and his parents were an important early influence. He remained close to them throughout their lives and they were recurring subjects in his work. Hockney’s parents supported him in his decision to become an artist, and when he was sixteen allowed him to give up his scholarship place at Bradford Grammar School to attend Bradford School of Art.

Hockney went to the Royal College of Art in 1959, and was encouraged by the artist R.B. Kitaj, a friend and fellow student, to paint what interested him most – literature, politics and people and their relationships. Hockney said that Kitaj opened my eyes a great deal… I think of my paintings beginning properly then.

Although not strictly portraiture, the work he produced was autobiographical and for the most part based around the figure. His experiences as a young gay man visiting New York City for the first time are told in his own version of Hogarth’s The Rake’s Progress.

Hockney’s first visit to Los Angeles in 1964 had a profound effect on his work. Attracted to the light, colour, space and sexual freedom of the city, he began to paint the places and the people he encountered there. In 1966, while teaching in Los Angeles, Hockney met the young art student, Peter Schlesinger, who was for him the embodiment of the California dream.

In Paris Hockney produced portraits of artists as part of a series of highly finished crayon drawings between 1973 and 1975. Each drawing was made in a single session lasting three or four hours. Hockney was able to include Andy Warhol in this series of drawings when the Pop artist visited Paris. Their first meeting had taken place ten years earlier when Hockney visited Warhol’s New York studio, ‘The Factory’.
Friends – that’s the only thread running through my life.

Hockney’s portraits provide insights into the artist’s intense observations of the people he has encountered over many years, starting with his early self-portraits and studies of his father created during his student years at Bradford School of Art. Other close associates and friends portrayed include fabric designer Celia Birtwell, art dealer John Kasmin and cultural figures such as Andy Warhol, Man Ray and W. H. Auden.

Hockney’s celebrated, almost life-size double portraits are also displayed: Henry Geldzahler and Christopher Scott (1969), American Collectors (Mr and Mrs Weisman) (1968) My Parents (1977) and Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy (1970–71) which returns to the National Portrait Gallery, where it was first exhibited in 1971.

The Camera

I’m quite convinced painting can’t disappear because there’s nothing to replace it. The photograph isn’t good enough. It’s not real enough.

Throughout his career Hockney has enjoyed a love-hate relationship with the camera. He began using photography in 1967 when he purchased his first 35mm camera and used it as an aide-mémoire for his painting. In the early 1970s, he began assembling individual photographs into small compositions.

While working on photo collages in the early 80s, Hockney was also painting and drawing. He created a group of playfully neo-Cubist portraits, which explore multiple viewpoints and distortion as a direct consequence of his renewed enthusiasm for the work of Picasso.

Techniques

Hockney has always had an insatiable curiosity about artistic technique. New ideas, new discoveries and new exhibitions have led him to explore different creative paths. In 1999 he was intrigued by an exhibition at the National Gallery of exquisitely detailed and life-like small portrait drawings by the nineteenth-century French artist, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and was determined to find out how the artist made them. He became convinced that Ingres had used a camera lucida, a tool developed in the early years of the nineteenth century that consists of a small prism suspended at the end of a flexible metal rod. The lens projects an image onto a flat surface, allowing the artist to quickly map out facial proportions. The exhibition includes a selection of portraits that Hockney has made using this drawing tool.
When asked why he didn’t do more self-portraits, Hockney expressed a reluctance to look at himself too closely – although he felt sure he would return to the subject at a later date. And in 1983, when he was in his mid-forties, he turned to an intense period of self-examination, a response in part to approaching middle age, increasing isolation due to his deafness, and the untimely deaths of many friends, some to AIDS-related illnesses. Every day for six weeks he set himself the challenge of producing a candid self-portrait, just as he found himself on that particular day. These drawings reveal a vulnerable and private side to the artist, a far cry from the bleached hair and owl glasses image of his youth.

One of the most interesting areas in portraiture is self-representation. Artists can show themselves in the context that they choose, whether this is their home, their studio or another location. Props and other figures can be added to this environment. Next is the choice of media. What is exciting about Hockney is the way he favours different media. He is not afraid of pushing the boundaries of his art and discovering new processes that reflect his evolving moods, interests and skills. He has remarked: Whatever the medium is, you have to respond to it. I have always enjoyed swapping mediums about. I usually follow it, don’t go against it. I like using different techniques.

Full of playful references to the making of art, art history and the artist himself, this work, *Self-portrait with Blue Guitar, 1977*, relies heavily on the use of a restricted palette. The primaries red, blue and yellow are tempered by black, white and viridian green. Hockney’s tulips refer to still life painting and have become a signature trait for him. He portrays himself in a football shirt drawing a simple outline of a guitar. The instrument harks back to Cubist works of Picasso and Braque, as does the sculpted head floating in space. The way the table is painted recalls the French artist, George Seurat’s Pointillist technique.

This is a complex composition, showing Hockney’s mastery of a variety of decorative styles. Linear devices split up the picture plane, both vertically and horizontally, playing with perspective. Hockney is positioned under the roof of the red painted outline of a house, wearing blue-rimmed glasses, which direct our attention to his most valuable attribute – his eyes.
Activity: Authorship and Style

• Make a list of five points that you feel define Hockney’s “style”.

• Do you think that you have your own “style” of drawing and painting?

• Make a portrait of someone exaggerating this “style” – imagine that the way you do the drawing can be identified as your own.

• Discuss the business of signatures, how important are these? Do they really identify you and your art?

• Look at Hockney’s work and see if you can identify recurring imagery. Do you think that photographers as well as painters have distinguishable styles?
1. The Artist as Subject

This painting, *Self-portrait with Charlie*, 2005, is part of a tradition of self-portraits that include artists’ friends or patrons and the canvas that is being painted. One of the most famous of these is *Las Meninas* by Velasquez, housed in the Prado, Madrid. These works often tantalise the viewer by not allowing us to see what is on the canvas that the artist is shown painting. The visual game that he sets before us is that the work we see is the work in progress on the canvas. Hockney looks at us, as if we are the mirror.

There is a great play with verticals and diagonals in this image including the bright yellow brushes, red braces, chequered trousers, table and stretcher. Charlie is about half the size of Hockney and functions as an important element in the strong perspectival composition. Charlie Scheips is an old friend and former assistant to Hockney when he lived in Los Angeles. He has sat for him before and this is an instance of how Hockney likes to return to the same subject over time.
Activity: How to look

- At home, find a large mirror (full length is best) and a big piece of paper (perhaps an old roll of wall paper). Do a charcoal drawing of yourself wearing your swimming costume. Don’t worry about making mistakes with the line or scale, just experiment. Try and enjoy making the line and making the rhythm of the line match that of the body. This drawing will require a certain amount of juggling, mistakes and approximations. Allow this drawing to be a working drawing, loose and unfinished.

- Put on winter clothes including an outdoor coat and make a similar drawing paying attention to how the body changes with this extra layering. Try and make your lines sensitive to the extra bulk. Use your figure to create diagonals within the picture plane.

- Choose one of your drawings and make a painting based on it. You can scale it down to make a more manageable size. Find out about how you can use a grid to do this.
2. The Artist and Relationships

In 1988...I wanted to look at my friends’ faces again and I painted them rather quickly and crudely... If the best ones are of my mother, it is perhaps because I know her best.

Hockney has an intimate circle of friends with whom he has remained close. They are among his frequent subjects and portraits of them span over thirty years and appear at intervals throughout the exhibition.

Hockney almost uses portraiture as a kind of diary. On moving to Los Angeles in 1964, he met and became friends with the writer Christopher Isherwood; a seminal portrait ensued. In Paris he made coloured crayon drawings of the elderly artist Man Ray (1973) and also Andy Warhol (1974). Hockney has been resistant to taking on portrait commissions, perhaps because he understands that portraiture is the result of collaboration between artist and sitter; often the best portraits come about with sitters known to the artist. Hockney’s relationships with those most involved with his art are documented in the portraits. These include his dealer Kasmin, his printer Payne, his original publisher Stangos, the curator Gelzahler (who championed his work in America) and the collectors the Weismans. These people have been both the material for his work as an artist and have been crucial in the development of his career as purchasers, critics and publicists.
The discreet and personal image of the artist’s parents anticipates the brilliant double portraits to come. It differs from these in using the square format and it is this that dominates the composition that revolves around the centrally placed square green cabinet.

The vase of fresh tulips recurs here and again in the portrait of Celia Birtwell (p.12). Next to the tulips is a mirror reflecting a painted green drape and a post card of Piero della Francesca’s (1420?–1492) *Baptism of Christ* (National Gallery). These seem to be attached to a pin board. Perhaps this is an example of a covert self-portrait: the mirror reflecting Hockney’s painterly interests together with the book about Chardin (1699–1799), on the lower cabinet shelf.

Hockney’s parents, seated on identical Habitat-style folding wooden chairs, are connected by the chairs and by their feet placed on the rug, an island in the space. Sparse and minimal, there is a calm meditative atmosphere with both sitters involved in their personal thoughts, separate but conjoined. Their body language is interesting. She is still whilst he is actively involved in reading and looking, hunched over in concentration. There is also tension in the way his feet are not fully resting on the rug. Hockney’s mother, Laura, looks straight at us/Hockney; she often sat to him for her portrait. She was a strict vegetarian, teetotaller and committed Methodist and lived for 98 years. Hockney commented on his habit of portraying the same sitters over time, *I think that the way I draw, the more I know and react to people, the more interesting the drawings will be.*
Activity: Painting another generation

- Either find a photograph of an elderly relative or find someone much older than you who is prepared to sit for you.

- Discuss with them the type of objects you could include in your portrait that would give a viewer an idea of their likes and dislikes. Do drawings of these objects e.g. books, a TV, a plant, a meal, a holiday, a dog. Analyse photographs and paintings that show family groups. Notice the positioning of the figures.

- Position your sitter so that they reflect their relationship to you, for example looking down or up as in the portrait of Peter Reclining (p.20).

- Use your preparatory drawings to organise a composition, look at Hockney’s portrait of his parents for clues. Decide if you will make your portrait square or rectangular.

- Think about the right sort of colours to use for your painting, perhaps you’d like the colours to reflect your sitter.

- Map out your ideas and then paint your picture.
Hockney met Celia Birtwell at the Royal College of Art and since then she has been a life-long friend, muse and companion. Birtwell, born in 1941, studied textile design and was married to Ossie Clark; they both appear in Hockney’s portrait, *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy, 1970–1* (p.14). The pale tulips in the foreground seem almost to be attached to Celia’s dark top like an overblown corsage. They stand out in stark contrast to the black material, making it appear to be made of printed fabric, and in this subtle way Hockney refers to her work as a textile designer. The colour and fragility of the tulips dominates the atmosphere of the drawing. Posed with a cigarette in quasi-Dietrich-style, she is dreamy, elegant, pale and romantic, her tousled blond hair and her faraway look give the portrait a poised and idealised ambience.

Hockney said, *Celia has a beautiful face, a very rare face with lots of things in it which appeal to me. It shows aspects of her, like her intuitive knowledge and her kindness, which I think is the greatest virtue. To me she’s such a special person.*
Activity: Choose a painting of one of Hockney’s friends

• Describe the relationship that Hockney has or had with the sitter.

• Give three reasons for your choice of painting.

• Choose a sitter with whom you have a special relationship.

• Take five digital photographs of your sitter that concentrate on the following: pose, expression, appropriate location, clothing, scale.

• Use the photographs to help you make a painting that reflects aspects of your favourite Hockney portrait. Try to make your work show the relationship that you have with your special sitter.
3. Hockney’s Double Portraits

Jan Van Eyck’s *The Arnolfini Marriage*, Anthony Van Dyck’s *Self-portrait with Endymion Porter*, and Thomas Gainsborough’s *Mr and Mrs Andrews* are famous double portraits. With *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*, Hockney has added another important example to art history. This work was one of the shortlist of ten, in the *Greatest Painting in Britain Poll*, carried out by the National Gallery in 2005. Hockney was the only living artist nominated. It gained iconic status, and reflects a high point in his career.

Hockney’s interest in portraiture and his deep interest in people and their relationships, comes together in the double portraits. He seems to intuitively understand how to manipulate the picture plane in order to tell the dual story of his sitters and the paintings convey his genuine excitement in portraying these visual dialogues. The compositions, colours and patterning within the paintings work as visual parallels to the emotional dialogue of the sitters – in other words their relationship is suggested by the way that they appear in the picture. The final portrait is a record of a constructed moment in their lives together.

Hockney’s double portraits have been compared to Annunciations: *There is always someone who looks permanent and somebody who is kind of visiting.*

Hockney had been at the Royal College of Art with dress designer Ossie Clark and the textile designer Celia Birtwell and he was best man at their wedding in 1969. This modern day *Arnolfini Marriage* painting was a wedding present. The pair were both a couple and business partners in *Quorum* boutique and according to Hockney, they were part of ‘swinging London’.

The figures are almost life size. In a reversal of traditional roles and poses, Celia stands whilst Ossie sits languidly in the chair, cat on lap (the cat’s name was in fact, Blanche not Percy). As in the portrait of his parents, he uses the rug to link the protagonists within the composition. Hockney painted Ossie’s head at least a dozen times, the work took a year to complete and the couple modelled at Hockney’s studio on numerous occasions. Shades of white predominate – the rug, the lilies, the phone, the cat, the table and the balcony. The sitters consider us with a fixed gaze, whilst the cat looks at the view out of the balcony and shutters. The light filters through this central gap simultaneously dividing the couple, but also joining them in reflected illumination. The pair separated soon after the painting was completed.
Activity: Double Portraits

- Think about two people that you would like to portray together, this could include you or not. Make drawings of them/you. Look at the structure of the double portraits that Hockney painted between 1968–77, particularly *My Parents*, (1977) and *Mr and Mrs Clark and Percy*, (1970–1).

- Make a pencil tracing from a reproduction of one of these, leaving out the sitters.

- Use the traced background as the structural starting point for your double portrait. Substitute your portraits for his.

- Make your own double portrait using coloured pencils, enlarge and rework your picture on another piece of paper.
3. Hockney’s Double Portraits

These Los Angeles art patrons are depicted in their garden with their sculpture collection. Marcia’s red gown is a powerful central force, and her smile and stature echo that of the totem pole. The sculptors Gilbert and George met at St. Martin’s School of Art in 1967 and performed their Singing Sculpture in New York in 1968, the same year Hockney painted this work. In Hockney’s portrait the sitters appear almost as if they were mimicking Gilbert & George; they seem stiff, static and sculptural.

The perspective lines in the pavement slabs interact with the sharp shadows and the series of verticals, the figures, house, tree and totem pole produce a staccato effect which enhances the strobe-like feeling associated with piercingly hot sun. Hockney did not require the Weismans to sit for this portrait; he used photographs instead. Hockney often makes portraits from life, as in his coloured pencil drawing of Celia but sometimes he works from memory or as in this instance from photographs. Referring to this use of photographs, he remarked, I thought in that picture it (painting them from life) wasn’t as necessary because in a sense their garden with the art in it is part of the portrait of them. (...) The portrait wasn’t just in the faces, it was in the whole setting.
Activity: Posing in pairs

- Set up a pose using two models, outside or inside.

- You can extend this project using a digital camera. Pairs could be asked to pose acting out a number of different relationships, such as siblings, a married couple, a parent and son/daughter, friends. They could also indicate different occupations using props. Taking a digital photograph of each, these could then be viewed on a computer, before printing out the most successful image.

- Discuss the pose, and look at how the different ways that the sitters relate to each other physically can reinforce our interpretation of the type of relationship they have. Ask your models to try out different poses.

- This could be used as the basis for a painting, and also for some critical work, analysing what was successful about the pose, and how it illustrates the relationship/occupations.
4. Art Heroes and Working Methods

Hockney is famous for using a variety of materials and media. His interests focus on the following areas:

- **Painting materials:** he uses oil, acrylic and watercolour for colour, particularly large areas of flat colour.

- **Drawing materials:** pencil, charcoal, crayon, pen and ink. These are used to define line, and also used in conjunction with drawing aids such as the camera lucida and the grid.

- **Printing, etching, aquatint and fax** are used for developing line particularly in the context of narrative compositions.

- **Photography, both Polaroid and 35mm.** These are used to make collage and as additional reference (aide-mémoire) for paintings.

Divine (1945–88) was a flamboyant transvestite star of underground films shot in Hollywood. He was introduced to Hockney by Don Bachardy. Henri Matisse’s influence is felt in the striking patterning and the pale blue shadow to the right of the sitter’s face which transforms Divine into an alternative Odalisque. In Matisse’s Odalisques, he employs the stripe and other patterns as compositional devices. Hockney does the same with this portrait, contrasting the red flashes on blue backdrop with the blue and pink stripes of the robe.

Bright light rendered in white on the upper body suggests a light source out of sight and behind the figure. This acrylic painting is unusual in that it is large and square, a particularly suitable choice as Divine is physically imposing and this characteristic is reinforced by the way Hockney places him in the middle of the canvas. The composition underpins the sitter’s bulky frame, the stripes of the robe combining with the diagonals of the seat to push the sitter towards the centre of our attention, even though the busy red markings in the backdrop might seem visually diverting.
Activity: Art Heroes

Artists often find that they have affinities with other artists, they may have similar artistic concerns or be attracted to the same shapes, colours or subject matter. Hockney was inspired by Matisse but also by Picasso when he visited the Tate exhibition in 1960, and after the latter died in 1973, he produced *The Student – Homage to Picasso*, together with other works relating to Picasso.

- These last two reproductions illustrate the different ways that an artist can declare their passion and admiration for other artists. Find an artist that you can relate to in some of the ways mentioned above.

- Think about the most recognisable way that you could suggest your chosen artist in a picture. For example, Michaelangelo with his Sistine Chapel ceiling, Henri Matisse with vibrant pattern and colour, Damien Hirst with a preserved shark.

- Look at Henri Matisse’s paintings of Odalisques and compare them with Hockney’s painting of Divine, looking particularly at the patterning.

- Make a drawing that includes you and your art hero/heroine.
Peter Schlesinger had a five year relationship with Hockney, who recalled that, *Not only was he beautiful but curious and intelligent too.* In this work the artist’s viewpoint comes from below the sitter, whose head lies almost horizontal on the seat. There are no shadows and the emphasis is on the graphic quality of the detailing, individually drawn hairs, beard stubble, creased shirt, delicate fingernails and signet ring. This specific drawing style recalls the lines used in Hockney’s *Rake’s Progress* etchings. Unlike painting, the inked and etched line cannot be modified and this lends a special quality to this work. The centre point of both *Divine* and *Peter Reclining* is roughly at the sternum of the sitter; the part of the body that we might also term the centre.

Peter Reclining, 1972
Private Collection, Cologne
© David Hockney
Activity: Perspective

- Consider *The American Collectors*, (1968) in terms of Hockney’s use of line and pattern, sharp lighting and physical positioning of objects.

- Look at Hockney’s photographic collage of his mother at Bolton Abbey, (1982) (Catalogue no.56) (he calls this type of portrait a ‘joiner’). Notice the far distance to the left of the picture, the closeness of his brogue shoes and the untidy edges of the collage. What does this do for the picture?

- Choose an outside space near your home that has a long view. Either make drawings or take photographs of how things seem to look smaller when they are further away from you.

- Pay special attention to how lines appear, either as part of the pavement, in the road, benches in the park, railings – their direction, width and function.

- Use your research to underpin a portrait picture created in any medium you like, but the main impact of the work must be its perspective.

- You might like to consult the NPG web link on perspective.
There is a wealth of additional information about David Hockney’s life and career and some suggestions of useful links and books are listed below.

There are ten portraits by Hockney in the National Portrait Gallery Collection as well as thirty portraits of the artist. These can be viewed online at: http://www.npg.org.uk/live/search/person.asp?search=ss&sText=hockney&LinkID=mp02210

The National Portrait Gallery Portrait Explorer over 190,000 images from the collection combining fascinating portraits, stories, facts and comments. 
http://www.npg.org.uk/visit/portrait-explorer.php

David Hockney official studio website: 
www.hockneypictures.com

LA Louver Gallery
http://www.lalouver.com/html/hockney_bio_60s.html

Metropolitan Museum, New York
www.metmuseum.org

National Gallery, London 
www.nationalgallery.org.uk

Tate Britain, London
www.tate.org.uk

NPG e-learning 

NPG shop 
http://www.npg.org.uk/shop.php

Further Reading

David Hockney Portraits
Sarah Howgate and Barbara Stern Shapiro, National Portrait Gallery, 2006

Portraiture. Facing the Subject

Secret Knowledge. Rediscovering the lost technique of the Old Masters
David Hockney, Thames & Hudson, 2001

Prints and Visual Communication

The Portrait Now
Sarah Howgate and Sandy Nairne, National Portrait Gallery, 2006

Self-portrait. Renaissance to Contemporary
Anthony Bond and Joanna Woodall, National Portrait Gallery, 2005.

Picturing the Self. Changing Views of the Subject in Visual Culture

Painting People. The State of the Art

Portraiture

Oxford History of Art. Portraiture

David Hockney (World of Art)
Marco Livingstone, Thames & Hudson, 1996.

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