



David Hockney, *Man in Shower in Beverly Hills* (1964). Acrylic on canvas, 65 7/8 x 65 3/4 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

stool; in it, Wiley explains that the objective of the piece is for viewers to add black friction tape to the black ball, or to hire those in need of work to do so, until the anniversary of Dr. King's death. Upon the anniversary, Wiley would donate the results to "an appropriate person or place." At some point, an amendment had been made: The ball would be added to until it "achieves the proper proportions." There was no way of telling what the proportions looked like in years past, but they appeared to be quite proper here. As for an appropriate place? An open bedroom in a domestic gallery, accessible to the public, is a pretty good fit for now.

On the walls hung four paintings: *Pre-Tsunami Abstraction with Migraines* (2011), *Angry Angels* (2017), *Pay Gun Totems Black Ball* (2017), and *Cosmic's Cull* (2017). Wiley has been known to deploy a wily use of language, and it is in effect within the titling of these wall works, bonded by a black-and-white actionist aesthetic. One work contains a portion of a pyramid splitting the picture's composition in half, with the phrase "So The Missing Corner / The Kissing Mourner" floating freely. These words harkened back to the romance and trauma of Greely's *The Picnic* on the ground floor, but with less spunky explicitness; rather, they projected more of a sullen resilience.

In each room down-stairs, Greely demonstrated a self-assured commitment to remaining a wild child amid the rapid flow of tepid

trends. She has a patience that often seems lost among many trying to make it in today's world. On the floor above, Wiley—over twice her age—flaunted an admirable attempt at preserving a whimsical practicality while also trying to hold on to the heaviness of the world. There is an arguable futility to this sort of act, which is likely why so few (in either generation) are willing to make the effort. Yet, despite the gap in age and aesthetics, both artists address the social and political with a dark witticism and intense vigor, with Greely couching her concerns in playfully subversive visual language and Wiley taking a more sobering approach. These artists each exude a wonderfully unconventional wisdom; and for its part, the gallery did the same by pairing an exuberant talent with a venerable and vulnerable pedagogue.

David Hockney at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (L.A. in N.Y.)

**November 27, 2017–
February 25, 2018**

Some unfortunate personal planning landed this writer at The Met one day between Christmas and New Year's when the line for admission wrapped around the building's exterior facade. Upon entrance and on my way to the Hockney show I was there to review, a crowd control measure directed us flushed,

teeming unfortunates through the 19th century painting galleries in order to reach the temporary exhibitions. Even when viewing art body-to-body, the ordained progression of painting is hard to miss with Matisse, Gauguin, Bonnard, and Braque forming a robust chain of Genius antecedents to Hockney. I would finally manage to squeeze into the exhibition after navigating the velvet roped lines for the even more famous gay painter down the hall, Michelangelo.

The exhibition's old-school objective to reify Hockney's status as a master would have been transparent even without the close proximity of the hallowed halls of 19th century painting—for this, a "major retrospective" that "honors the artist in his 80th year." Spanning the years 1960 to 2017, *David Hockney* is more or less arranged so that each room is dedicated to a different period, à la Picasso. The galleries move from early work pre- and post-art school to the Los Angeles paintings to monumental portraits to landscapes from the '80s through the present. Each tidy grouping compels viewers to feel that they have mastered an understanding of every crucial stage in the evolution of Hockney's work.

Yet, even in the stalest of curatorial formats, Hockney's work pushes against its restraints. Rather than framing the show as the result of a tidily progressing aesthetic, I am interested in further exploring a through line of messiness. Hockney didn't play by the rules, he

wasn't tidy, and he was consistently irreverent with his materials across a long career. Even in the more polished works, Hockney pushes against perfection and rewards close looking with errant drips, dabs, and bleeds.

The biggest surprise of the exhibition is Hockney's early work, made in the first few years of the '60s while he was a student at the Royal College of Art in London. Many of the pieces address Hockney's queer identity with an exceptionally *laissez-faire* attitude, considering the time—homosexuality wasn't decriminalized in Britain until 1967, seven years after Hockney himself had come out. The standout in the exhibition's first gallery is *Cleaning Teeth, Early Evening (10pm) W11* (1962), in which two worm-like, cartoonish, and primary-colored figures are caught mid-act in a 69 position with Colgate tube erections squirting wavy lines of toothpaste into each others' mouths. Here, Hockney employs a technique that will crop up again and again: the striped patterning at the top, perhaps meant to resemble bed covers, messily brushes over onto the white ground occupied by the figures. Hockney often disregards borders such that objects are left without enclosing lines or boundaries, one thing bleeding into another.

In two well-known paintings from 1967, made after Hockney had moved to L.A., he again doesn't fully circumscribe his objects. In the pool painting *A Bigger Splash* (1967), the chartreuse brush strokes that compose

the diving board messily trail over the board's top edge just like the striped bedsheets in *Cleaning Teeth*. In *The Room, Tarzana* (1967), a reclining man with a carefully rounded ass occupies the center of the composition, but the edge of the blue pillow below his head has the same unresolved border. In the room's corner, the leg of a green table pools out into the blue carpet. Even in works that seem carefully composed and especially neat, Hockney allows for unbuttoned moments where the medium can be imperfect.

Especially captivating are the early works that employed geometric grids, such that they simultaneously encompassed two styles of painting in one. *In Man in Shower in Beverly Hills* (1964), a male figure bends over in an elaborately tiled shower that takes on the qualities of a clumsy Agnes Martin. While messy brush-strokes compose a male body that lacks clearly articulated fingers or any facial features, Hockney has paid special attention to the shower tiles, even including a crack in one. This piece sets the stage for a career-long insistence on the interchangeability of "abstraction" and "representation." Hockney has painted the abstraction of the shower tiles with detailed specificity while the representational figure is rendered with brushy patches of paint.

In *Medical Building* (1966), Hockney has transposed his tiled bathroom into a steel and glass office building at the center of the composition that looks like a grid painting dropped into a SoCal landscape. His

irreverent attitude toward containers is again evident in the way that the building's glass-pane-squares drip and smudge into one another.

This exhibition's aim of securing Hockney's place as the rightful heir of Western Painting flattens the complexities of his work and does it an injustice. Even within the space of a traditional retrospective, I wonder what could have been gained from a more extended meditation on Hockney's quirks, the pieces that didn't quite fit, and the transitions between series. *David Hockney* should have taken more cues from David Hockney's own dedication to avoiding the stifling effect of neatly enclosed boundaries and reductive containers.

Edgar Arceneaux at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts

December 1, 2017–
March 25, 2018

Edgar Arceneaux's presentation at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) in San Francisco consists of only a small selection of high-impact works. The exhibition opens with the *Library of Black Lies* (2016). The *Library* is housed in a small cabin-like structure with slatted walls and low ceilings. Narrow corridors are girded by mirrored bookshelves arranged in a labyrinthine twist. Strewn on the shelves are books made ancient—awash in black, though charred, or partially encased in a crystalline crust. Most of

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