

Extract from  
STUDIO, London.

DEC 1963

107

Having his first one-man exhibition this December at the gallery of John Kasmin Ltd., in New Bond Street, London, is a young British artist who has already achieved a degree of international renown that to him at least is slightly bewildering. His name: David Hockney, and surely one to remember since though only twenty-six years old he will inevitably find his place in the international scene as Bacon did. Already he has represented British art at two Biennales of Paris, in 1961 and again this year he won the foreign prize in the graphics section; he has exhibited in the Tokyo Biennale (1963) and at the Ljubljana Print Biennial (1963) where he received 'particular mention'.

As a Gold Medallist at the Royal College of Art in 1962, a frequent contributor to Young Contemporaries and other mixed exhibitions, he has, of course, a resounding reputation already in the United Kingdom as one of the leading pop artists. So far as regards Hockney, however, the term is not one of much relevance. It is true he emerged from the Royal College of Art with a Diploma in company with several other painters who had actually lifted motives and typography from juke box and billboard references, but Hockney, while conscious of and living against the urban print feast, looked beyond it for the sources of his material.

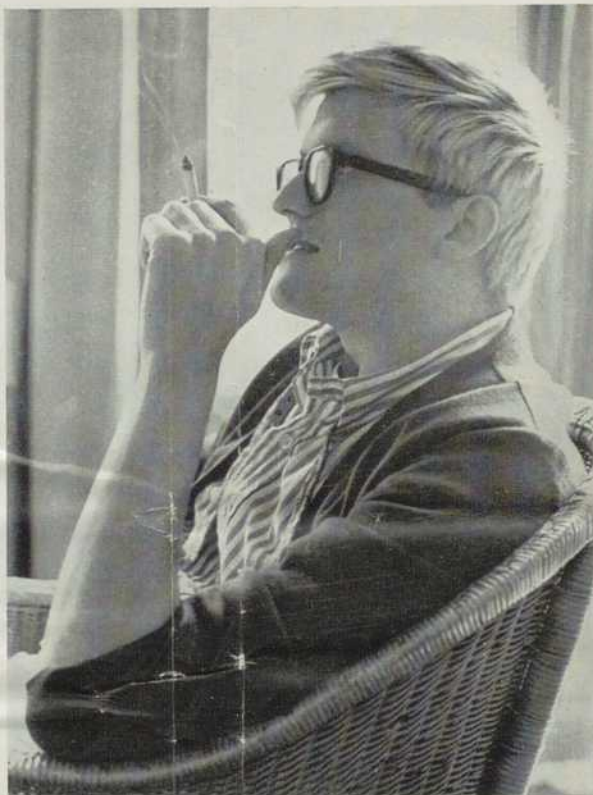
This material, largely autobiographical, is the recollection of situations, real or fictional, that absorb his interest, peopled by actual persons. So that when we look at a Hockney dramatic confrontation we may even recognize some of the sitters, as we do, say, in a figure composition by John Bratby. In point of fact there is occasionally a startling similarity in outlook of those two ex-students of the Royal College though almost a decade separates their final years. Both are of working-class origin, both are completely fascinated by the technical resources of picture making and though Hockney is the more humorous of the two both see the employment of first-hand material as a basic ingredient of their art.

Hockney was born in Bradford in 1937 and he possesses that earthy West Riding realism which combines with a poetic and gentle humour to provide a unique character to all his work. Tall, spectacled, he has a liking for the bizarre in dress—he received his gold medal at the R.C.A. appropriately wearing a gold lamé jacket and his blond hair is undoubtedly tinted. His hands are small and he talks seriously on most subjects with delicious comic reminiscences. His reading is sporadic and eclectic—poetry, especially Whitman, fascinates him and some of his etchings and paintings are pictorial evocations of poems.

In his art, his absorption is with the technical problems of composition. He made a recent visit to the National Gallery and was fascinated by Domenichino's paintings involving the use of curtains. This led him to experiment with the two planes of distance in his own paintings. These had always been flat in the mural style of tomb paintings; now he was able to get dual effects—one on the curtain level, the other on a landscape level. In his studio I saw a superb example of this duality with a glowing little landscape fragment reminiscent of Kandinsky seen beyond a curtain.

To David Hockney, art can never be divorced from its associations with life. His admired artists are Francis Bacon, Klee, Stanley Spencer and, not surprisingly, Balthus. His subject matter he sees as being about painting (in this he is at one with Bernard Cohen) and he looks for and finds unexpected contrasts—as in the Muybridge photographs of

Photo: Crispin Eurich



a naked man and woman having a cup of tea which he has made the motive of a picture. His liking for Balthus is one of a fellow-surrealist. Those nudes in airless rooms are akin to Hockney's, though Hockney is primarily graphic in his rendering.

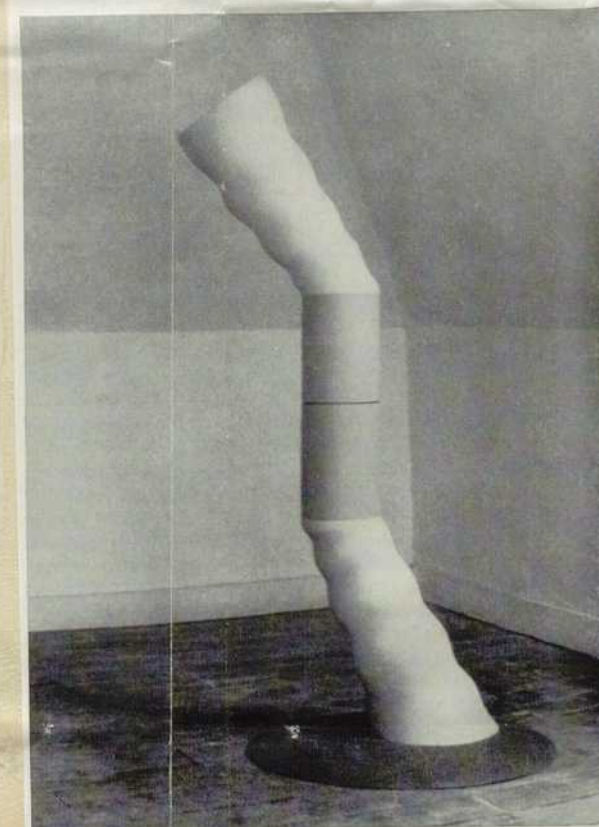
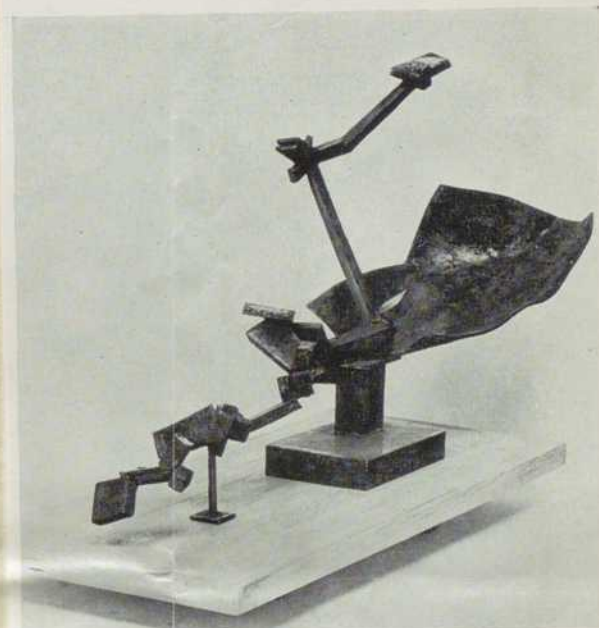
Etching, in fact, for Hockney has always been the complement of painting and coincident with the Kasmin showing of painting, the Editions Aleto: the Print Centre will have on exhibition the set of *A Rake's Progress* which Hockney has drawn in sixteen prints. This will come out as a limited edition in the spring.

I have seen the completed series and the whole is a most personal and fascinating account of the passage to perdition on a transatlantic freeway. Outstanding examples are the *Gospel singing* with the full-bosomed negress evangelist drawn in exuberant style, the *Drinking scene* and the end, showing our hero ear-plugged to pop radio and wearing the legend 'I swing with W.A.B.C.' on the back of his sweater along with several identical morons aptly titled *Bedlam*.

David Hockney has travelled to the U.S.A.; his visit provided material of worth. He has recently been to Paris—and to Egypt on a mission for *The Sunday Times*. It is certain these changes of scene will provide their motives for future works which we await with impatience. For Hockney, if not 'painterly' in the pure sense, is never dull. As a picture maker he is in fact something of an anachronism today. For, as he says of his style: 'You have all the scope of an abstract painter and the added interest of what your figures are doing.'

253

JEROME JOHNSON, U.S.A.:  
ETRANGE ALOUETTE DES CHAMPS, 1962. Bronze, 120 cm. high



255