

On View

‘Affecting’ or ‘Passionless’? Critics Are Divided on David Hockney’s Newly Opened Immersive Light Show

Move over Immersive Van Gogh. Here's how a living artist is taking on the craze for projected, animated art light shows.

Sarah Cascone, February 23, 2023



David Hockney at Lightroom. Photo by Justin Sutcliffe.

If ever there were an artist made for the animated projected art craze popularized by Immersive Van Gogh, it would seemingly be David Hockney. The octogenarian British artist has engaged with technology for decades, and was an early adopter of the iPad, which he's used to make a large portion of his work since its release in 2010.

But the fact that Hockney creates digital art himself—and was personally involved in the production—hasn't necessarily translated to an effective digital art show, according to early reviews of "David Hockney: Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)," his new exhibition at Lightroom at London's King's Cross.

The show is the brainchild of 59 Productions, a British design company for theater and opera that reached out to Hockney about the idea back in 2019. As the idea came together, Nicholas Hytner, former artistic director of London's National Theatre, was brought on as executive producer.

The 50-minute light show is meant to span Hockney's six-decade career, replete with a bombastic soundtrack by the American composer Nico Muhly and narration by the 85-year-old.



David Hockey at Lightroom. Photo by Justin Sutcliffe.

Designed to feel like a cinematic experience, the exhibition is a departure from similar vehicles capitalizing on the work of Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Frida Kahlo, Gustav Klimt and other giants of art history, according to Hockney.

“They’re dead,” the artist told the *New York Times*. “I’m a living artist, so I’ve come in and actually done things.”

Whatever Hockney’s done, however, it might not be enough to get reluctant art critics on board the immersive art train.



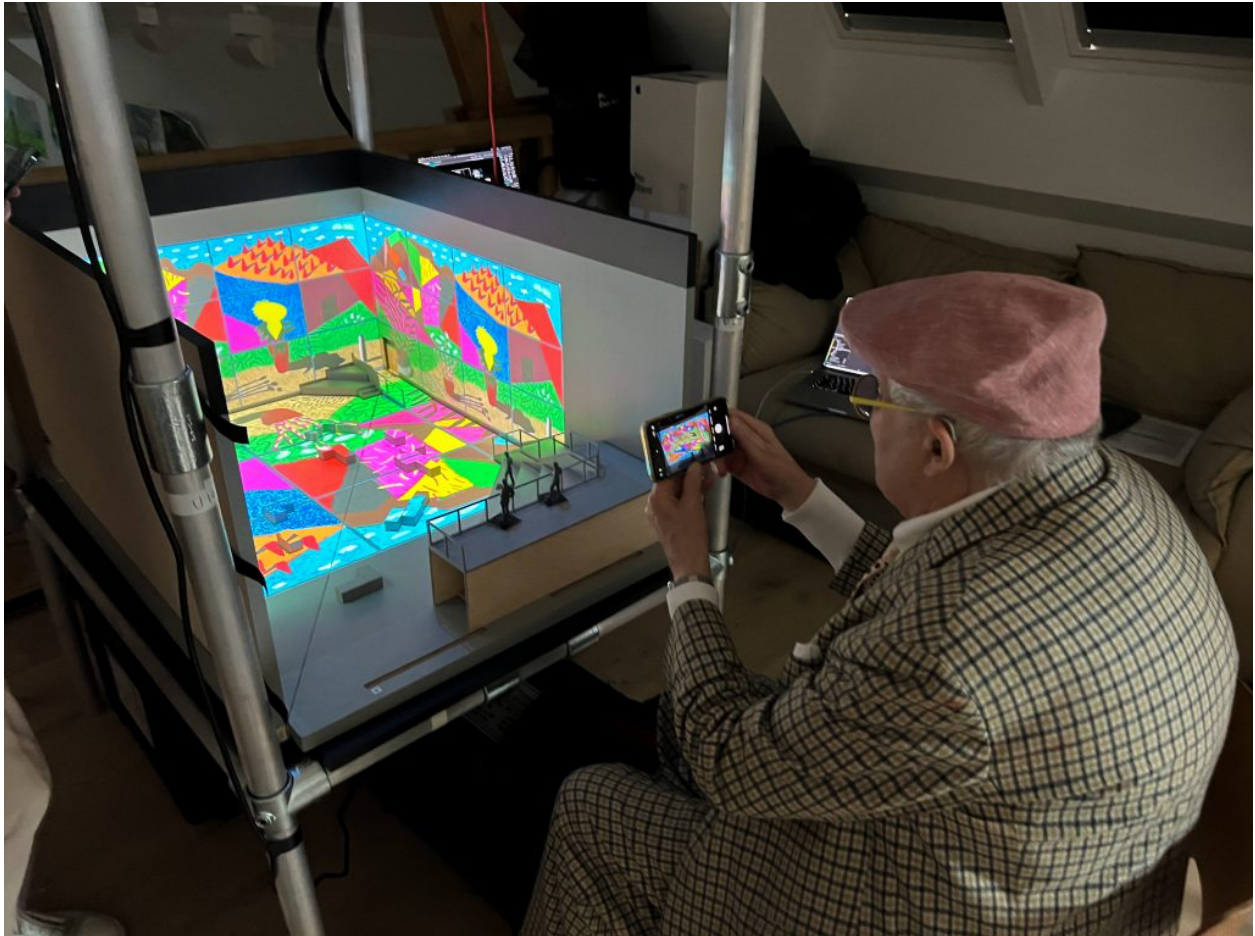
“David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)” at Lightroom, London. Photo by Justin Sutcliffe, courtesy of Lightroom.

“There’s too much that disappoints and irritates. You don’t really get a feel for much of the best of his work,” Ben Luke wrote in the *Evening Standard*. “Neither do you get a feel for the materiality of the media he extols; somehow the luscious beauty of paint, its very stuffness, gets entirely lost when blown up this big.”

“There is not a single real work by [Hockney] here to catch your memory and hold on to your soul,” Jonathan Jones—a critic always ready with a hot take—wrote in the *Guardian*. “Without real art, this entertainment goes the same way as all the other immersive exhibitions of art icons: into the weightless, passionless dustbin of forgetting.”

Even some of the positive reviews have been conditional. The *Telegraph*’s Alastair Sooke dubbed it “a coup of entertainment: accessible, affecting, and, technically, executed with panache,” but admitted the somewhat “vainglorious” project “isn’t a work

of art—or, rather, it's as much one as, say, a deluxe coffee-table book or high-end documentary exploring Hockney's oeuvre.”

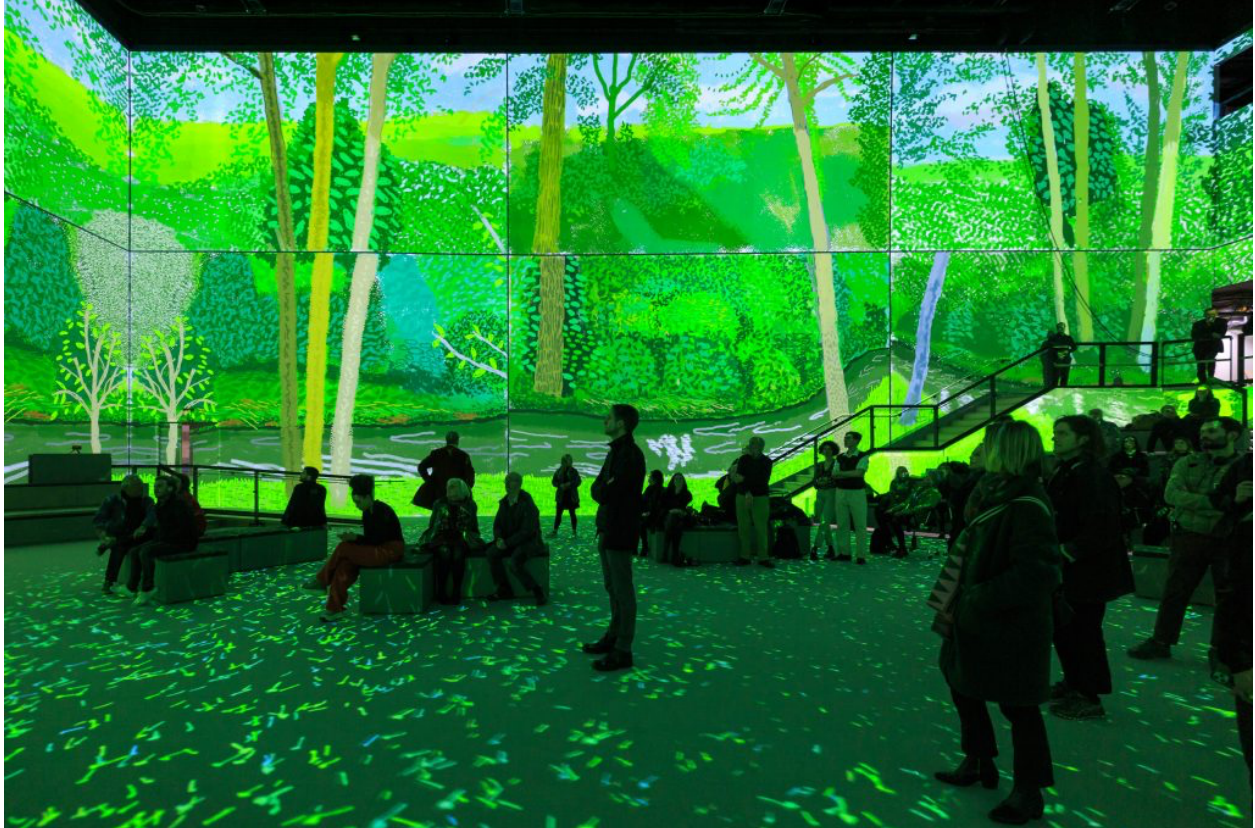


David Hockney viewing a scale model for “Bigger & Closer” created by 59 Productions. Seen on the walls are a projection of *August 2021, Landscape with Shadows*. Photo courtesy of Mark Grimmer.

But whatever the critics may think, it may be time for them to get used to seeing artworks projected at a monumental scale, turning paint and canvas into an immersive, ever-shifting display.

“Hockney has always embraced new technologies and been quick to explore their potential in his art, from the unforgettable Polaroid works (possibly the best ever use of that form) to experiments with perspective through cameras, pieces created with film, video, iPad, Instagram and more,” Jan Dalley wrote in the *Financial Times*. “This is the latest iteration, and even at a distance we can sense the artist having fun with it. Perhaps even old-schoolers like me will be won over.”

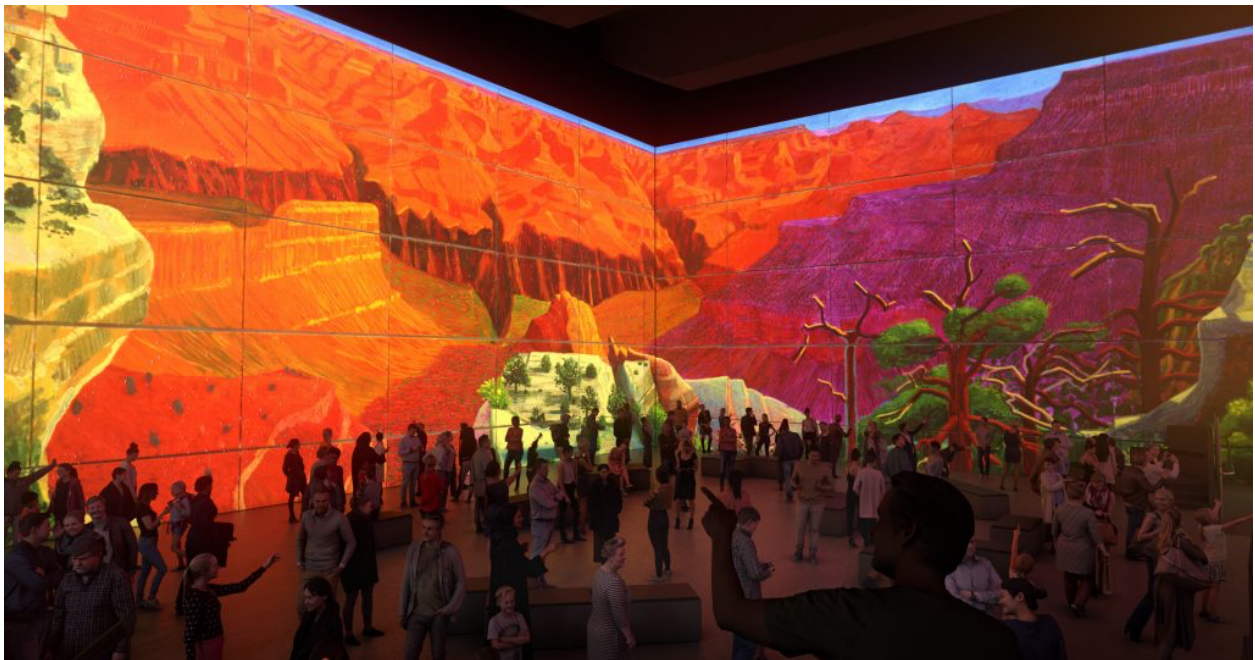
See more photos from the exhibition below.



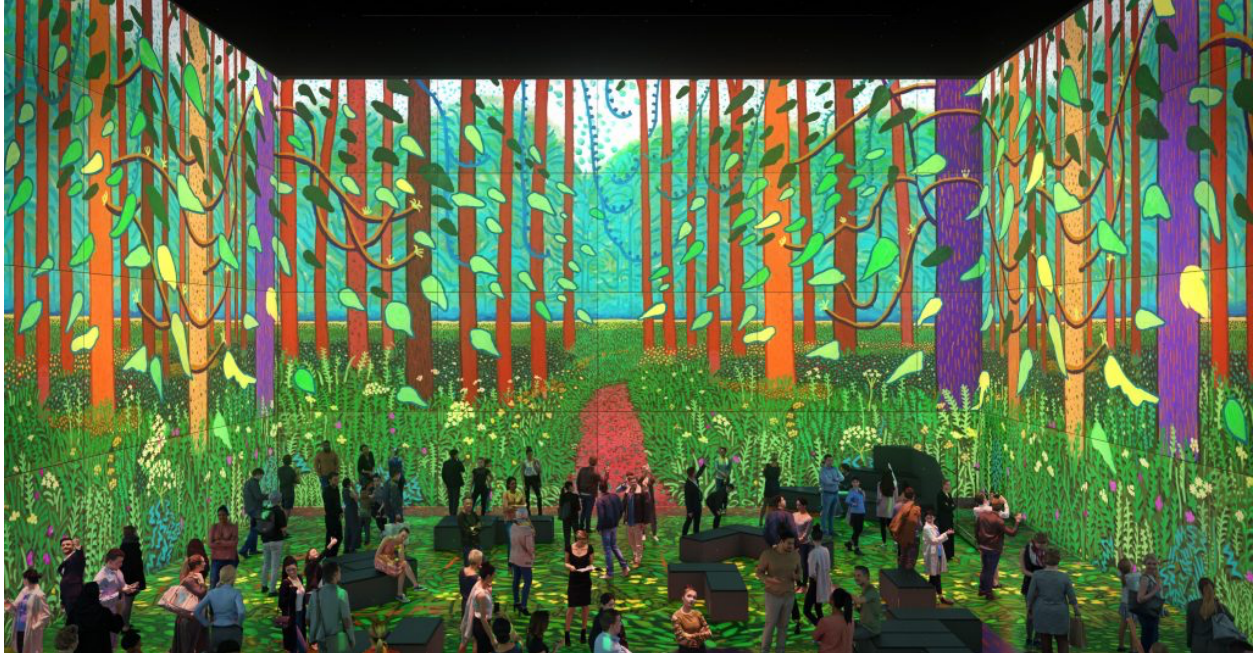
“David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)” at Lightroom, London. Photo by Justin Sutcliffe, courtesy of Lightroom.



“David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)” at Lightroom, London. Photo by Justin Sutcliffe, courtesy of Lightroom.



“David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)” at Lightroom, London, featuring *A Bigger Grand Canyon* (1998). ©David Hockney. Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.



“David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)” at Lightroom, London, featuring *The Arrival of Spring in Woldgate, East Yorkshire in 2011 (twenty eleven)*. ©David Hockney. Collection of the Centre Pompidou, Paris. Musée national d’art moderne – Centre de création industrielle.



“David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)” at Lightroom, London, featuring *Gregory Swimming Los Angeles March 31st 1982*. ©David Hockney.



“David Hockney Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)” at Lightroom, London. Photo by Justin Sutcliffe, courtesy of Lightroom.

“David Hockney: Bigger & Closer (not smaller & further away)” is on view at Lightroom, 12 Lewis Cubitt Square, London, February 22–June 4, 2023.

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/david-hockney-bigger-and-closer-light-immersive-show-2260379>