

David Hockney

LANDSCAPE

Pearlblossom Highway

Between the years of 1982 and 1987, David Hockney experimented heavily with photocollage, creating works he calls *joiners*. You can see two examples of Hockney's joiners at the sunsite mirror of the [WebMuseum](#): *Place Furstenberg, Paris* and *Pearlblossom Highway*. Unfortunately, pictures of Hockney's other photocollages on the web are hard to find. To really appreciate these photocollages, you need to see the real thing, as they are very large and part of their impact comes about from the sense of space and immersion.

A joiner consists of a series of photographs taken from different viewpoints, arranged (overlapping) to form a single piece. By taking the pictures from carefully selected viewpoints, and arranging them in the right way, Hockney is able to change the apparent shape of space and introduce the element of time into the work. For instance, using this technique you can make a circular wall seem flat. Imagine walking around the wall taking lots of photos at a fixed distance from the wall, with the camera pointing straight towards the wall. If you just look at the middle of each photo, it will look like you are looking straight on at a flat section of wall. Since every photo looks like this, if you cut them up and lay them next to one another so that they join up, it will look like a flat section of wall. In fact part of Hockney's (not entirely self consistent) philosophy behind these joiners forced him not to cut up the photos. The above example could almost be achieved without cutting, but it would require considerably more photos for it to work.



The earlier works of this 5 year period are experimental, Hockney is exploring the medium, and perfecting his technical ability¹. In his very earliest works, he used a Polaroid camera². However, as the complexity of the joiners increased, he moved to using a Pentax 110, this allowed him to hugely increase the complexity of the pieces. His longest Polaroid joiner took 5 hours to complete, his longest Pentax joiner took 8 days of photography alone³. His later works demonstrate his mastery of the medium, and he begins to use the technique for artistic effect, this can most notably be seen in *Pearlblossom Highway* (1986), *Place Furstenberg, Paris* (1985) and *Interior, Pembroke Studios* (1986). The last of these was his last large scale joiner.

Hockney's works have strong links with Cubism, in that his motivation for producing them was to introduce three artistic elements which a single photograph cannot have, namely layered time, space and narrative. The first two of these are central Cubist themes. Hockney points out that a single photo expresses a single instant, and so cannot represent time or narrative (however, this is a debatable point, as can be appreciated by looking at the photographs of Henri Cartier-Bresson) - "*Cubism was total-vision: it was about two eyes and the way we see things. Photography had the flaw of being one-eyed... My joke was that all ordinary photographs are taken by a one-eyed frozen man!*"

The theme of narrative is present from his earliest works, for instance in *My House, Montcalm Avenue* (1982), the series of photographs are a journey through his house. In *Fredda Bringing Ann and Me a Cup of Tea* (1983), the photocollage shows Fredda at all stages of her journey from the house, down the steps to the garden, a simple narrative.

As well as narrative, there is layered time, this is similar to narrative, but a bit subtler. A good example of layered time is in *Steve Cohen, Ian, Gary, Lindsay, Doug, Anthony, Ken* (1982), which depicts a group of friends chatting. Since all the friends are continually moving and talking, and there is a space of time between each photo, the whole conversation is present in the joiner, but it is presented at once rather than sequentially (as in a film). This gives rise to a very interesting effect.

Finally, there is the spatial aspect to Hockney's joiners, which ties in to Hockney's feelings about the objectivity of the image. He firmly believed that there was no such thing as objective vision, too much subjectivity is impressed upon any image by the viewer. He explores this theme in *Pearlblossom Highway* (1986), in which the left side of the picture consists of scenic elements, and the right side consists of road elements, corresponding to the fact that the passenger seat is on the left and the passenger enjoys the view, and the driving seat is on the right and the driver looks at signs, etc. Another example of the subjectivity is his use of reverse perspective. A good example is *Chair, Jardin de Luxembourg, Paris* (1985) which consists of a chair in reverse perspective. Note: reverse perspective means that things get smaller as they get closer, one of the interesting aspects of reverse perspective is that it enables you to see 3 sides of a cube, which is very useful to Hockney. The use of reverse perspective (which is surprising to a Westerner) is in fact very old, many pre-Renaissance and Japanese paintings have reverse perspective, as it allows you to see more of a scene.