

DAVID HOCKNEY

Time and More, Space and More...

Foreword by
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FOREWORD

Tacita Dean

Driving down Westwood Boulevard, I listened to David talk on the radio about time in painting. A painting holds time, the time of its manufacture: the sedimentation of the minutes, hours, and days it has taken to make. Time issues change and the subtlety of this progression of thinking, adjusting, and rethinking is what a painting is. Painting is time made manifest in the production of image.

A photograph, David continued, is made up of one time: from the top left-hand corner to the bottom right, it is all the same fraction of a second old. For Cartier-Bresson, that fraction of a second was his universe, but it was never enough to hold David's attention. For another artist, that ennui with the technological limitations of a medium might be enough to settle them into a lifetime working where they were comfortable, but David is insatiably curious. He set about finding a way to bring time into

photography and began taking multiple Polaroids, then photographs, of a given subject and placing them side by side across the picture plane. Each photo-graph, made in its own time, then contextualizes time in the company of the next photograph: a progression of taking, adjusting, and taking: the closest photography could get to his painting.

I imagine the boy David to have been fascinated by the rotating cameras used to take the school photograph. In many a downstairs lavatory in England hangs a black and white image where one boy invariably appears twice, albeit a bit smudged, at either end of the long static block of uniformed kids staring out at the camera. The excitement behind the slow rotation that captures a singular image is somewhere buried in David's multiple photographic works and the video works that followed.

It is the eye of the lens that has always interested him, in all that it has contributed to, and distracted us from, in art history. David's thesis is that it was lenses in the Italian Renaissance that brought

about perspective and shadows in painting, and it has taken his use of lenses to confound these orthodoxies and develop ideas around reverse perspective in both his painting and photography. The recent series, of what David calls photographic drawings, radicalizes the picture plane in a way that is utterly new, especially within the medium most associated with verisimilitude that is photography. David has best described reverse perspective as being akin to a memory he had of driving through a tunnel in the Alps. Suddenly the tunnel ended and the landscape opened up, funneling out from a source rather than towards one.

Using increasingly sophisticated digital camera technology (and David is already researching drones) to photograph every chair, every trolley, and every person from every aspect and angle resonates with the imperatives behind the multiple photographic works in their accumulation of time. Further placing, or re-placing, each element back into the picture plane opens out time and dimension into hitherto

unimaginable excesses of perceptual space. Historically, artists could only attempt to find such space through Cubism and abstraction, but David has divined an equation in these works that liberate us from monocular perspective by pursuing the temporal imperative of painting through photography.

It is ironic to suggest that perspective in Western art destroyed the potential for space in painting, but, in a sense, it did, and this has preoccupied David for decades. He has long been fascinated by the parallel traditions in Chinese scroll painting and Indian manuscripts that never made use of lenses and depicted scenes using an altogether different temporal language and shadowless space. That his early curiosity about lenses, shadows, and perspective in Renaissance art should have taken him full circle and led him to make a body of work equally at home in the Eastern tradition as in his own is the perfect synthesis of David's study and use of lenses.

Something extraordinary has happened. David appears to have found space within a singular two-dimensional image where everyone else has stopped looking. Of the studio, and born out of the studio, these new works break painting and photography free from the blind alley of historical discourse and behavior where they have been content to reside since Brunelleschi.