

## Exhibition of the week **David Hockney: Drawing from Life**

National Portrait Gallery, London WC2 (020-7306 0055, [npg.org.uk](http://npg.org.uk)). Until 28 June

“When it comes to wielding a pencil, an etching needle or just a felt pen, David Hockney has no rivals,” said Jonathan Jones in *The Guardian*. Although most celebrated for his paintings, the great artist is at heart a draughtsman: a “graphic master”. Now aged 82, he has been drawing himself and his friends with rigorous scrutiny for six decades, and as this “staggering” new show of his portraits at the National Portrait Gallery makes clear, the results of his tireless sketching are a joy. The show brings together around 150 works that trace Hockney’s career from the 1950s to the present day, focusing on self-portraits and depictions of a select group of his regular sitters: the fashion designer Celia Birtwell; his mother, Laura; his former boyfriend Gregory Evans; and lifelong friend Maurice Payne. Throughout, Hockney consistently tests himself, never once losing sight of the insatiable curiosity and “immense ability” he first displayed as a teenager in postwar Bradford. This “retrospective of a life of portrait drawing is the most dazzling display of his art I have ever seen”.

For Hockney, drawing is a “forum for experiment”, said Rachel Campbell-Johnston in *The Times*. Sometimes, this pays off: a series of portraits of his mother, for instance, is “magically



*Celia, Carennac, August 1971: “ghostly and ethereal”*

but bursting with excitement”, while portraits of Celia Birtwell depict her as “ghostly and ethereal in pinks, blues and greens”. More than anything else, the drawings here form a moving “portrait of ageing, of time passing for Hockney and the loves of his life”. For all its faults, the show is “touching, sad and yet more proof of how important Hockney is”.

intimate, subtle and tender”, while depictions of Evans reflect his changing relationship with the artist. Drawings made in the 1960s capture him with clearly “awestruck desire”, but Hockney’s view becomes ever more objective as time passes; by the end, Evans “sprawls rather grumpily, middle-aged and perhaps bored by so much posing”. Yet for all Hockney’s skill, the show quickly begins to feel “stolidly repetitive”, reaching its nadir with a series of monochrome watercolours that constitutes its “decidedly lacklustre finale”. All told, it’s rather a disappointment.

This exhibition is “a bit of a mess”, said Eddy Frankel in *Time Out*. It doesn’t feature just portraits or just works on paper – it’s a jumble. It’s also the third “major” Hockney show to be staged in London in the past three years, and by some distance the least interesting. Even so, there is much to admire. Early works, including some self-portraits as a schoolboy, are technically “shaky

### Where to buy...

*The Week* reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

### Sanctuary: Artist-Gardeners 1919-1939

at the Garden Museum

This selling exhibition at the Garden Museum focuses on a number of green-fingered British artists from the interwar period (1919-39) who drew inspiration from horticulture. While there are some relatively well-known names here – Eric Gill, Eric Ravilious and Evelyn Dunbar are all present and correct – most artists included will be unfamiliar to all but the most devoted fans of British art of the era. It’s a welcome introduction to a lot of overlooked talent: Harry Bush (1883-1957), for example, spent years painting the same set of views of his garden in suburban Wimbledon, producing canvases that echoed the marvels of Dutch Golden Age landscape painting. Other highlights include Margaret



*Bush's Summer Morning, 1953 (detail)*

Duncan’s improbably dramatic view of Reigate, a gently surreal still life by Gerald Leet, and Marion Adnams’s delicate botanical studies. This is a quietly fascinating show. Prices range from £370 to £75,000.

Garden Museum, 5 Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 (020-7401 8865). Until 5 April.

### Unveiling a new Gentileschi

Next month, the first major UK exhibition devoted to Artemisia Gentileschi, arguably the greatest female Old Master, will open at the National Gallery in London. And last week a conservation studio unveiled an exciting discovery, said Joanna



Moorhead in *The Art Newspaper*: a painting of David and Goliath newly attributed to the artist, a follower of Caravaggio. It was bought in 2018 by a collector who enlisted Simon Gillespie Studio in London to restore the painting. Upon examination, the work “seemed characteristic of Gentileschi in its atmosphere and especially in the sinuous figure of David”, said the scholar Gianni Papi in *The Burlington Magazine*. There is also evidence that King Charles I owned a depiction of the subject by Gentileschi. But then came the clincher: further cleaning revealed the remains of the 17th century artist’s signature along the blade of David’s sword. The painting will not be part of the exhibition, but it will be on show at Gillespie’s studio at the same time.