

Artist documentary hardly a masterpiece

By Charles Desmarais

David Hockney is one of the world's most beloved living artists, familiar to new Bay Area fans from the de Young Museum's blockbuster 2013 retrospective, but regularly visible here — including at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and even the San Francisco Opera — since the 1970s. A new documentary, "Hockney," strains over nearly two hours to capitalize on that affection, but never quite succeeds in getting us as close as we might wish.

That's surprising, because all the elements would seem to be there. This is director Randall Wright's second film on the

Hockney



Documentary. Directed by Randall Wright. (Not rated. 112 minutes.)



To see a trailer:
<https://youtu.be/TUsjBK3q58k>

artist, and he had what seems extraordinary access both to Hockney's most intimate circle of friends and to his archive of photographs and home movies.

We learn a lot from glimpses of life in his dreary industrial hometown of Bradford, England, contrasted with recent shots of him at his adopted home in the Hollywood Hills, all brightly multicolored decks and structures, set in an idyllic



Richard Schmidt

David Hockney (left) and former boyfriend Peter Schlesinger.

subtropical garden.

And there are touching personal moments — some of surprising art historical resonance, like the priceless image of Hockney spooning on a bed with the famous Metropolitan

Museum of Art curator Henry Geldzahler.

There is what one hopes is a prematurely elegiac tone to the film, though, that creates the sense of an era passed. At 78, Hockney continues to create

and to innovate, we are told, but rather than a lively creative intelligence, we see a mourning, mooning soul. And the film fails to describe the full arc of Hockney's work and career — it is clearly addressed to those who already know that basic story.

The film's release coincides with the publication in August of an extensive update of "A Bigger Message: Conversations With David Hockney," by Spectator art critic Martin Gayford. Drawn on 15 years of interviews, paced throughout by Gayford's biographical narrative and expository insights, the small-format paperback contains only postcard-size illustrations. But it has an energy and vividness that can only be called cinematic.

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