



Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters

By David Hockney

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Recently, David Hockney, often described as the "world's most popular artist," has made headlines not with his own work but with his sensational and controversial theories about how some of Western art's famous masterpieces—paintings by artists such as da Vinci, Caravaggio, Velázquez, and Van Eyck—were actually created. A chance observation of a drawing in London's National Gallery led Hockney to ask, "How was this done?"

His answer led to fascinating insights into the history of art: that many of the world's most revered artists used mirrors and various optical devices—such as the camera obscura—to project images onto their canvasses and then "traced" the scenes. Hockney's radical speculations have prompted both astonishment and outrage from prominent art historians and museum directors worldwide. The debate aside, *Secret Knowledge* offers readers the exhilarating opportunity to see the Old Masters afresh—through the eyes of a living master.

In *Secret Knowledge*, hundreds of paintings are reproduced in stunning color plates, and many are discussed in close and accessible detail. Hockney's own drawings and photographs illustrate how artists would have used the technology available to them in rendering their subjects. Extracts from historical and modern documents provide further evidence while correspondence between Hockney and an impressive array of international art historians, curators, and scientists details both the evolution of his theory and the furor that has erupted over it.

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Secret Knowledge: Rediscovering the Lost Techniques of the Old Masters By David Hockney Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #674631 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Viking Studio
- Published on: 2001-10-29
- Released on: 2001-10-29
- Ingredients: Example Ingredients
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 12.20" h x 1.25" w x 9.80" l,
- Binding: Hardcover
- 296 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

British painter David Hockney, well known for his cool and lovely paintings of California pools, has taken on the new role of detective. For two years Hockney seriously investigated the painting techniques of the old masters, and like any admirable sleuth, compiled substantial evidence to support his revolutionary theory. *Secret Knowledge* is the fruit of this labor, an exhaustive treatise in pictures revealing clues that some of the world's most famous painters, Ingres, Velázquez, Caravaggio (just to mention a few) utilized optics and lenses in creating their masterpieces. Hockney's fascination with the subject is contagious, and the book feels almost like a game with each analysis a "How'd they do that?" instead of a whodunit. While some may find the technical revelation a disappointment in terms of the idea of genius, Hockney is quick to point out that the use of optics does not diminish the immensity of artistic achievement. He reminds the reader that a tool is just a tool, and it is still the artist's hand and creative vision that produce a work of art. (296 pages, 460 illustrations, 402 in color.) --J.P. Cohen

Review

When looking at pictures, one can have no more stimulating and provocative companion than Hockney. (*The Times Literary Supplement*, London)

About the Author

David Hockney was born in England in 1937 and studied at the Royal College of Art. He achieved international acclaim by his mid-twenties as part of the pop art movement and has gone on to become one of the best known artists of his generation.

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