

PRESIDENT'S REPORT JUNE 2026

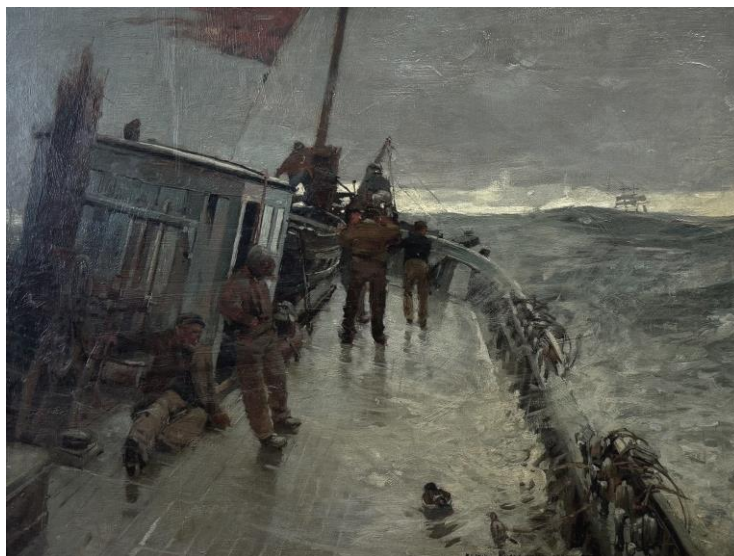
HOW TO PAINT WATER, PART 3



Frank Brangwyn, Swans

This is the third instalment of our look at how artists have approached the problems of painting water. It can not only be difficult, but also tedious. Why not just fake it with a few calligraphic gestures, or leave it blank altogether? The viewer will know what you mean. What follows is a few more examples of the solutions offered by painters of the past and present.

SIR FRANK BRANGWYN RA



Frank Brangwyn - Hope of Rescue



Frank Brangwyn, The Buccaneers

Brangwyn frequently imagines water not as a backdrop but as a force. Everything is off-balance and at the mercy of the elements. Boats and sailors rock and bounce. The sea is painted black, suggesting menacing depths. The sea is a significant player in the dramatic narrative.

Depth is paramount in his painting of swans, where the black water plays a key role in the interaction of abstract shapes. The dark shapes push forward in the flattened space, adding to a sense of precariousness.

Incidentally, although largely forgotten today, Brangwyn enjoyed enormous celebrity in his lifetime. After the First World War he was arguably the most famous artist in the world. He lived and worked in Ditchling, qualifying him as a local artist. (The Ditchling museum, which houses some of his work, has closed indefinitely while it reimagines its future. The staff have been given the heave-ho.)

MICHAEL ANDREWS



Michael Andrews, Melanie and Me Swimming



Michael Andrews, Thames Painting: The Estuary

Andrews also chooses to paint his water black. The painting 'Melanie and Me Swimming' is reminiscent of the chiaroscuro used by Caravaggio and Georges de la Tour. The figures emerge from the surrounding gloom to dramatic effect. One wonders if the photograph on which the painting was based was taken using a flash.

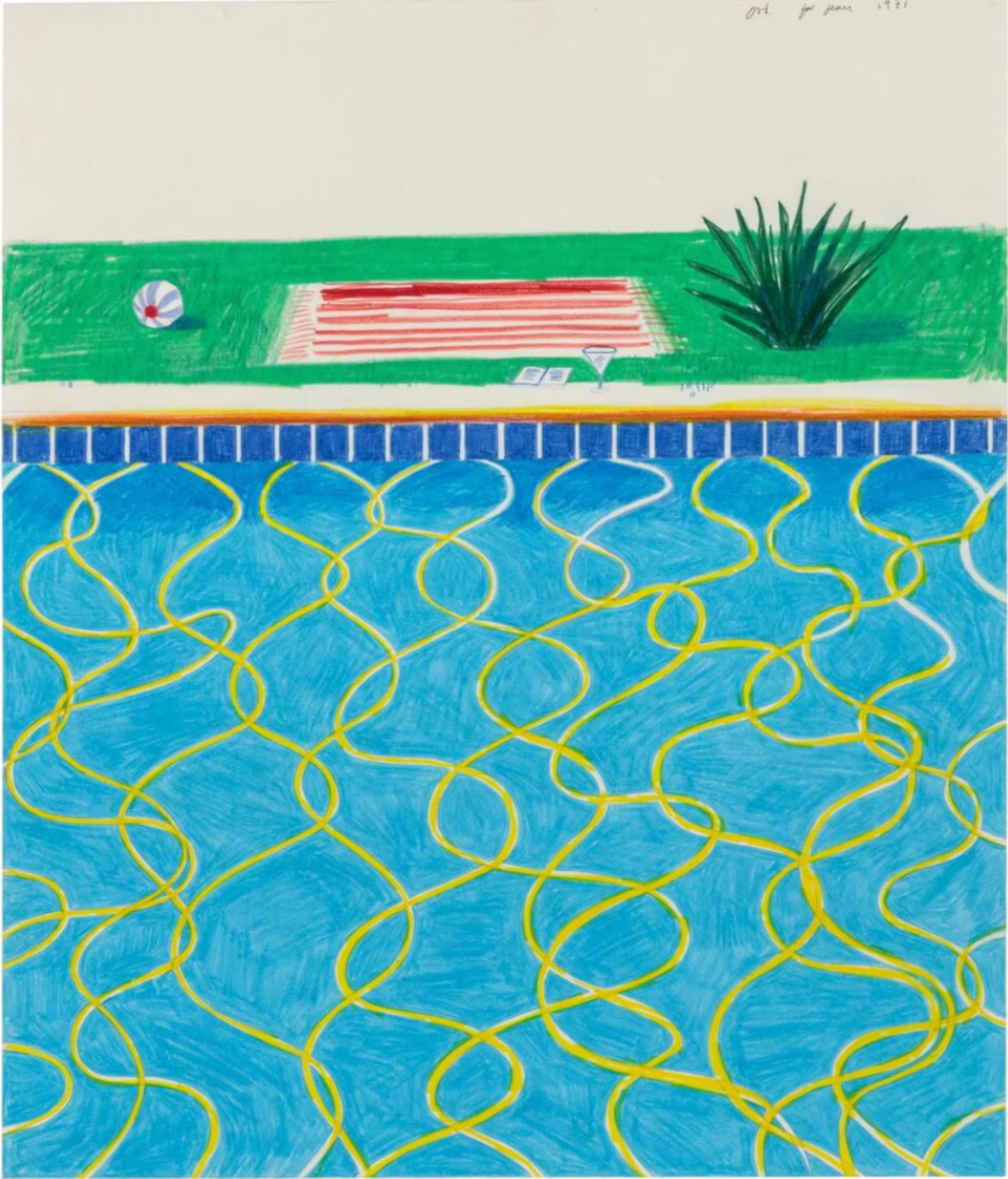
To produce 'Thames Painting: The Estuary' the artist visited that remote part of the river to draw, paint and take photographs. The nearly abstract treatment of the river and foreshore were achieved in the studio. The canvas was placed on the floor, then oil colour mixed with turps was splashed onto the surface. This mixture was manipulated using a hair dryer to move the liquid paint over the canvas, echoing the natural forces that shaped the landscape. The paint has also been mixed with sand from the Thames estuary, imparting a real sparkle.

The strange figures and boats are borrowed from Victorian photographs. They appear to be enacting an arcane ritual. Andrews knew he was dying of cancer when he executed this painting. It can be seen at its permanent home at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester.

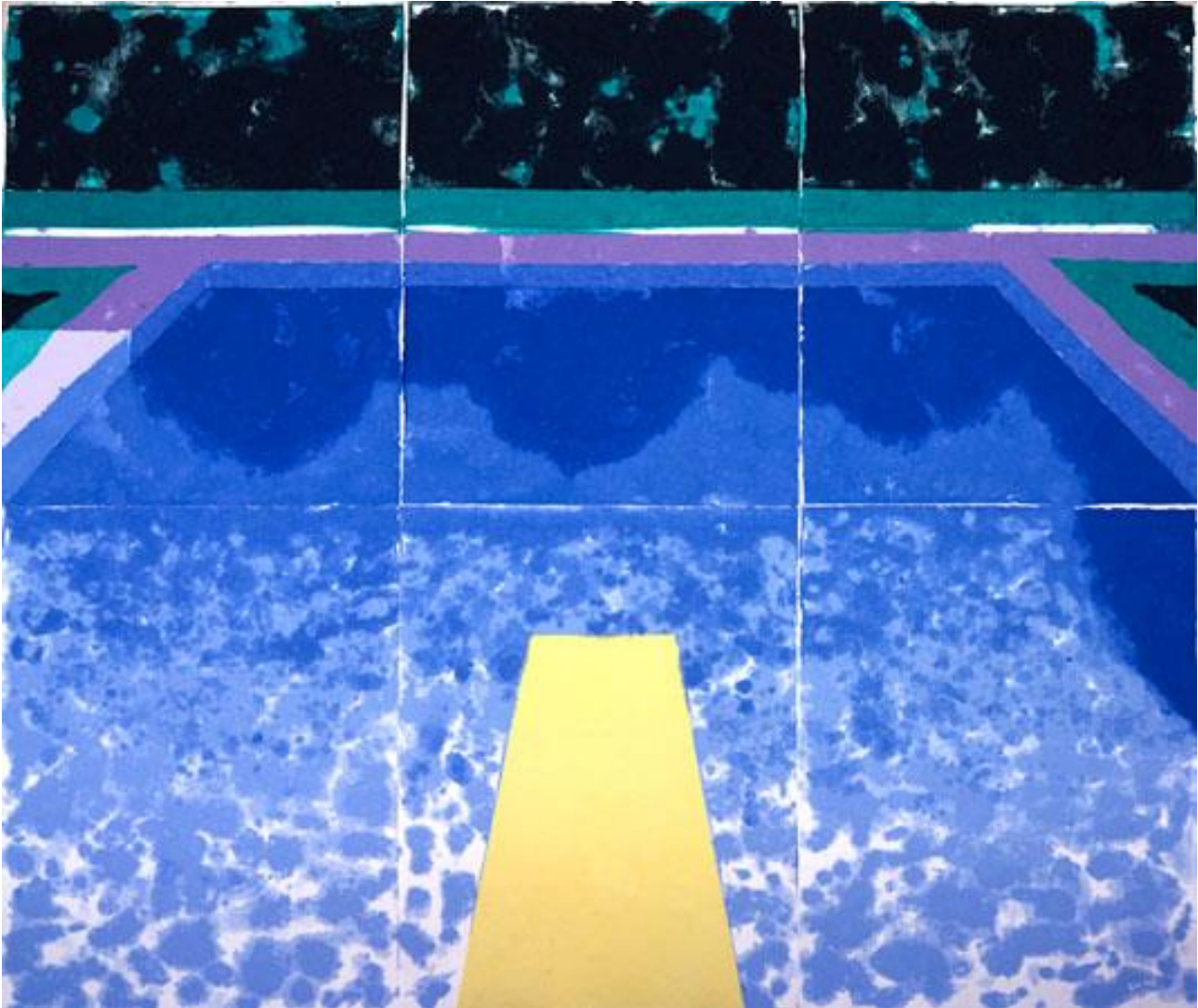
DAVID HOCKNEY



David Hockney, First Pool



David Hockney, Pool and Towel



David Hockney, Paper Pools

David Hockney first came to international prominence with his paintings of swimming pools that he encountered in California. Although they have a slightly naive and cartoonish character, the artist was making a genuine effort to pin down the light and the movement of the water. He made many attempts to find a graphic equivalent to the ceaseless changes that presented themselves. In the light of his later interests it seems that the pool paintings were at least in part done in the spirit of enquiry. However playful they might seem, they also explore ideas of perception and illusion.

They invoke a world very much unlike that of Michael Andrews.

HOWARD HODGKIN



Howard Hodgkin, Low Tide 2002



Howard Hodgkin, Low Tide



Howard Hodgkin, Low Tide 2

Howard Hodgkin's paintings hover in a space somewhere between representation and abstraction. The viewer appears to be inside looking out. The artist often includes the frame as part of the composition, suggesting a window. Given the titles of these paintings, it is not difficult to project aspects of the sea onto them. At least there is a horizon.

Hodgkin rejected the abstract categorisation of his work. He insisted they were representations of memories of real events, often of a domestic character. So these paintings are much more than seascapes but may never divulge their secrets. Hodgkin worked on many paintings at the same time, often taking years to complete them. When seen in real life they have a breathtaking spaciousness and depth.

ANDREW WYETH



Andrew Wyeth, Seabirds

Another painter whose work can border on the abstract is the celebrated American painter Andrew Wyeth. He employed a very limited, sometimes monochrome palette to create a bleak nostalgic vision of his corner of New England. In this watercolour, 'Seabirds', he uses the brush and paint in every way imaginable, from washes to dribbles to dry brush to body colour. The water is the colour of the paper.

Wyeth's main medium was egg tempera. Like Hodgkin, he took time to finish his work, completing as few as four pictures a year. Like Andrews, he often splashed paint onto the surface.

If you want to see how the painting of water has evolved in the present day, look no further than Hastings Contemporary and the work of Janaina Tschape.



Janaina Tschape, Breathing Shore