

# Interview with Margaret Hockney

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Interview by Caroline Collett

**Margaret, your work is photographic, but with a twist. How do you define it?**

It is flat bed scanner photography really. Maybe they could be called “scannographs”. I just actually describe the work as “scanned flowers or scanned octopus” or whatever!



**How did you start with this whole way of working? Was it a hit-and-miss discovery or were you actively looking for some kind of unique methodology?**

Well, it sort of started the first month that I got my computer system in May 1999. It was one of those systems that included a printer, scanner, digital camera, and lots of different software. Within 6 months I had found an Internet discussion group of “Third Agers” where I learnt how to make a website using HTML, and how to put photographs into the discussion. There was a group of us who were all learning how to use digital cameras and software – and despite living thousands of miles apart we shared our learning experiences and became Internet friends at <http://www.thirdage.com>. This suited me very well because deafness is no problem on Internet discussions – and I did lots of classes online to learn how to use Photoshop and other software.

This is why I did lots of experiments with the camera and then with the flat bed scanner. The scanner really excited me because it was just so handy and great fun seeing the results. There was lots of feedback as we were all experimenting and learning about digital images and how to use computers for graphic art.

Most of the early scan images that I made were only used to put on the “web” – I didn’t consider them more than a bit of fun, so there were not enough pixels to make decent prints of them.

**Have you always loved photography? When did the whole love affair with the photographic image begin?**

I have always liked photography and have shoeboxes full of prints and slides – but they are only snap shots of memories. Film and processing were too expensive for amateur experiments. When I got the free digital camera – a whole new world opened. That is when I really looked at the scope and potential of digital images.

**What are the tools of your trade? Is everything digital or do you work with film?**

No film at all since 1999 when I got my first digital camera. I have had several different digital cameras, but most of the artwork that I have exhibited and sold in galleries has not involved those “real” cameras, it has been done on an Epson A4 flatbed scanner, and printed with an A3 Epson printer.

**Your work to date is predominantly of flowers, often arranged in quite a formal way, like an old master still life. Is that painterly feel deliberate?**

Yes I wanted to produce something for Tony’s (Tony Hogan) gallery actually, and at the time, he did not particularly like photographs as art, so I concentrated on making images with the scanner – and then trying to make them suitable for an art gallery, using Photoshop techniques – in the “digital darkroom”

**Other works include landscapes and, more recently, other wonders of nature from squid to vegetables! How do you choose your subject matter?**

Well, there were a few acceptable landscapes for the gallery, mainly from a visit to Venice with Tony, Eileen, Liz and Rob – all fellow artists. As for the octopus – that was a bit strange I suppose. Eileen and a couple of other local artists were submitting work to the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, and they asked me to submit something. I thought it was really audacious that any of us were even thinking about Royal Academy standard – however the idea was planted in my mind, and as I was shopping in Morrison’s supermarket, I noticed the fishmonger, and wondered... could I scan fish? So I bought the octopus and a couple of sprats. I spent the whole day scanning, cleaning the scanner, and printing – and by the next day I took 3 prints to the framers. I was absolutely stunned, but delighted when the “scanned octopus” was accepted and hung in the Royal Academy.

**What inspires you?**

Wondering how things work, nature’s changing seasons and patterns, general curiosity. Learning new skills. The Internet.

**Who are your personal artistic heroes or heroines, and why?**

Because I came late into my sort of art – I never had any particular art hero.

**Can you describe the pleasure and significance of artistic self-expression for you personally?**

Well frankly – it took me a long time to consider myself as any sort of artist. Even now I have doubts about what I produce. However, it is also a very pleasant feeling to see my framed work on a gallery wall and being enjoyed by people.

**My grandmother, also a Bradfordian, knew your parents and used to talk of seeing ‘young David’ at the bottom of the road, his paints in an old pram as he painted the city spreading out before him. What did you think of his activities at the time and what career were you then pursuing?**

I can’t remember what year he was out with the pram full of paints. Actually it seemed like a sensible idea to me! I was probably just starting out on my nursing career.

**With brothers David, John the graphic designer, Philip the designer/manufacturer and Paul's tenure as the Lord Mayor of Bradford, you come from a pretty high-achieving family. Is the influence of your parents very much a factor in this? Were they ambitious for you?**

Both parents were very keen that we had the best education, although it only went as far as Grammar schools. After that it was a case of learning skills and trades so as to earn a living. I was just one month over 16 when I left school.

**Do you believe that children often end up expressing their parents' latent talents or thwarted ambitions, given that your father was a talented amateur artist?**

Hard to tell really as both parents went through the hardships and restrictions of 2 world wars. My father was certainly interested in art and photography – and I am sure that he would have loved all the digital technology that I have discovered.

**What do you think your parents would think of your new career development? Or did you in fact begin whilst your mother was still alive?**

My father would have probably gone on a direction of his own with all the digital gadgets there are today. I know he would have been VERY interested and impressed with what I taught myself.

I got my computer system in 1999 as a retirement gift to myself. The day it was delivered is memorable because that was the day my mother died. However, she had seen the computerised sewing machine that I bought 3 years earlier with my first years "retirement pension" and was very impressed with that.

**You took up art inspirationally at a late(-ish!) age. What gave you the confidence to do that and what would you say to our readers about flouting convention when it comes to matters of age?**

The Internet and previously mentioned Third Age discussion groups and online learning sites started my enthusiasm for learning about digital art. Then I had a friend Tony (Hogan) who opened an art gallery and agreed to exhibit some of my work. It just developed from there. Another friend opened an art gallery and took some of my work, and in fact I hope to have an exhibition of new work there in September this year.  
[http://www.galleryforty-nine.com/About\\_us.html](http://www.galleryforty-nine.com/About_us.html)

I don't think age matters at all. If you find a new talent – well just go for it, enjoy it – and if someone else likes your work, well that is a bonus.