Distinctively Drawn

Championed by David Hockney, the striking blue steel drawing studio at Arts University Bournemouth has made waves with its brilliant maverick design, as Jeremy Miles discovers.

AS THE world celebrates the genius of David Hockney in his 80th year it is interesting to note that, more than 50 years after he first shook the art world with his radical approach to painting, his work remains a major inspiration to young art students in Dorset.

For Hockney, who has a major retrospective of his work at Tate Britain, is an artist who has challenged and explored the practice of picture-making throughout his long career. Over the years he has worked in paint, print, photography and video but there have always been two constants - a need to examine the practice of seeing and understanding, and his exemplary draughtsman.

The influence of this is tangible in the design and ethos of the exciting new drawing studio on the campus of Arts University Bournemouth, which has picked up several awards already including the RIBA National Award 2016 and it is in the Royal Academy of Arts Top 10 Maverick Buildings 2016.

Designed by a direct Hockney contemporary, the esteemed international architect Sir Peter Cook of CRAB Studio, the drawing studio is a gorgeous building with sensuous curves and awash with light from different aspects.

Astonishingly this striking blue steel building - manufactured in a former German U-Boat factory - is the first custom-built drawing studio to open on the site of a British art school for more than a 100 years. Arts University Bournemouth principal and vice chancellor Professor Stuart Bartholomew, who commissioned the project, explains: “During the post war period and particular in the sixties a lot of drawing studios were decommissioned while many art schools were merged with other institutions.

“This project is about re-establishing what arts schools are about. What we did was to exemplify this in the curvature of the building. We now have the original drawings that Peter has given us in the foyer. You can actually see how this highly technological piece developed from pencil and paper to building.”

As Bartholomew explains, every element of the design – from the two enormous oculi to the white interior walls – celebrates and promotes natural light, invaluable in the practice of drawing.

“The condition of the room celebrates four aspects of light - central themes in looking and drawing to include a large north-light in the studio tradition, a rear clerestory that throws a softer light back from the rear wall, a discrete and even softer light that filters from beneath the bench on the east side and, finally, a graded wash of light that comes along the curve of the entrance porte cochere via the glass entrance door.”

At the opening of the studio last year Sir Peter, who was himself a Bournemouth student studying architecture in the 1950s, stressed that the studio represented a fundamental recognition of the importance of drawing for all creative subjects.

“I wanted to ensure I created a space which all students, from all disciplines - be it fashion design, graphic design, fine art or architecture like me, could make use of and feel inspired in,” he said.

Hockney himself instantly agreed to become patron of an appeal that raised money for the building, and offered his own advice to students in the form of the observation that: “Drawing makes you see things clearer and clearer and clearer still, until your eyes ache.”

Along with a group of invited Royal Academicians, Hockney also offered a drawing for sale to boost the fund-raising effort. “We supplied them with the requisite piece of paper plus the finest pencil - a palomino - and 40 pieces were returned to us,” says Bartholomew. The new studio
was opened in March 2016 by one of Sir Peter’s former students, another world famous architect, the late Dame Zaha Hadid. She was suitably impressed. The final words of her speech were: “I simply love this building.” Sadly she died of a heart attack just weeks after the opening.

Today students from across a wide variety of courses at AUB use the studio. Bartholomew says that Sir Peter Cook was a natural choice for the commission saying: “He is very much of the architectural tradition where the line is the starting point. The line describes the space and then the space takes on a three dimensional form. It is very similar to the way that David Hockney himself works.”

Surprisingly the drawing studio is Sir Peter’s only building in the UK - another reason for commissioning him: “He is a very distinguished alumni, he has buildings all over the world and received a knighthood for his services to architecture but,...

until now, nothing in the United Kingdom. Where better for him to design a very special building than the place where he studied?”

The result, says Bartholomew, is: “a very special space that has a profound effect on the students who are using it because it encourages thought as well as action. It’s quite reverential in a way.
but that gives focus to the process of drawing. It’s been an enormous success.”

Professor Bartholomew feels that Hockney’s continuing influence on contemporary students helps confirm the centrality of drawing to creative expression. “The work of people like David Hockney represents a right of passage that we still offer our students. I think with painters of Hockney’s calibre it takes the world 50 years to catch up with where they were 50 years ago. He’s completely relevant today.”

Bartholomew would love David Hockney to experience the studio for himself, but as the artist spends much of his time in California and tends to avoid public events because of increasing deafness, he accepts this is unlikely. “I do remain ever-hopeful that on one of his visits to the United Kingdom he will come and occupy this unique space.”

Hockney’s long and fascinating career is currently being celebrated at London’s Tate Britain until 29 May. At the opening of the show, which covers more than six decades of work, Tate Britain director Alex Farquharson, said: “David Hockney is without doubt one of Britain’s greatest living artists. His practice is both consistent, in its pursuit of core concerns, while also wonderfully diverse. Hockney’s impact on post-war art, and culture more generally, is inestimable.”

The works on show often use parody and self-reflection or play with representation and artifice. They include of course his ‘greatest hits’ the double portraits and the Los Angeles swimming pool paintings, as well as early art school works and the late Yorkshire landscapes of the 2000s. There are also examples of his explorations of technology and photography - a medium that he insists is fatally compromised when used merely from a fixed viewpoint like “a paralysed cyclops”. The result is multi-view assemblages and the manipulation of perspective.

Fittingly perhaps another major exhibition currently running at Tate, though this time along the Thames at Tate Modern, focuses on the work of multi award-winning photographer Wolfgang Tillmans, one of Arts University Bournemouth’s most successful former students.

German born Tillmans studied at the then Bournemouth and Poole College of Art and Design in the early 1990s. He became the first photographer to win the Turner prize in 2000 and was made an Honorary Fellow of the Arts University in 2001.

His show, Wolfgang Tillmans 2017, examines his ceaseless exploration of the nature of contemporary photography through portraiture, landscapes, intimate still-lifes and abstract artworks that range from the sculptural to the immersive. ◆

David Hockney is at Tate Britain until 29 May. Wolfgang Tillmans 2017 is at Tate Modern until 11 June.
IN early May, Jupiter and the Moon close rapidly, and on the evening of the 7th they are immediate neighbours, in the south-eastern sky. Jupiter is the dominant planet throughout May. Look for its four brightest moons, discovered 400 years ago by Galileo and visible through larger binoculars or any efficient telescope. During the last week of the month, Jupiter is joined by Saturn, which will be low in the south-east. Venus is well down in the dawn sky, in the south-east during the second half of the month.

The Full Moon on the 11th is called the Dyad Moon of May. It is in the constellation of Libra and completely outshines its faint stars. Of the many stars that adorn the early summer sky, one of the brightest is yellowish Capella (the She-goat). It shines in the north-west to the right of the ‘W’ of Queen Cassiopeia (look north), and the heavenly monarch herself is due north at 22.00. The twin heralds of summer, the glittering white beacons of Vega and Deneb, rise to prominence in the east. Together with Altair, in Aquila the Eagle, they form the large Summer Triangle, dominating the late evening sky. The straggling constellation of Hercules is now well up, and through even a small telescope, the intrepid observer will find a sparkling gem in this constellation: the bright globular cluster M13 (freestarcharts.com/messier-13), comprising some half a million stars in a condensed ball nearly 25,000 light years away. Its light has been wending its way towards us since the peak of the last Glacial Maximum, when Britain was shrouded in an ice sheet north of the Thames. Draco the Dragon now coils high above, close to Cassiopeia’s husband King Cepheus. With a little optical assistance, even small binoculars, Cepheus’ crowded starfields are an unforgettable sight in a non-polluted sky.

Looking south, we now see the second largest constellation of all, Virgo the Spring Maiden. Virgo’s chief star is Spica (the ‘Ear of Wheat’), promising the harvests to come later in the year. Spica glitters to the left of bright Jupiter. Look above Virgo for the orange star Arcturus; then look eastwards and find a delicate ‘tiara’ of fainter stars: this is the Northern Crown. Corona Borealis, with its aptly named highlight Gemma, 75 light years away. In Arabic, this star was Alphecca, the “bright one of the broken ring”. High above in the south in May is the saucepan-shaped seven-star asterism of the Plough (part of Ursa Major), its two end stars Merak and Dubhe indicating the position of the Pole Star Polaris (also known as the North Star). Below the

By Jupiter!

This giant planet dominates the night sky this month

Above:
Summer star chart for June
Plough, Leo the heavenly Lion falls towards the west.

STARGAZING IN MAY

2 May: Journey to the Centre of the Earth. Talk by David Whitehouse at Wessex Astronomical Society, Allendale Centre, Wimborne. wessex-astro.org.uk
12 May: Binocular Astronomy. Talk by Steve Torkin at Weymouth Astronomy Club, St Aldhelm’s Church Centre, Spa Road. weymouthastonomy.co.uk
15 May: In the Shadow of the Moon Talk by Bob Mizon at Sturminster Marshall Science Cafe, The Old School, Church Street. All events start 7.30pm.

Support Dorset’s Dark Skies Bid
Help Cranborne Chase AONB in their bid to create Dorset’s first Dark Sky Reserve by signing up to the ‘Dark Skies Pledge’ at ccwdaonb.org.uk.