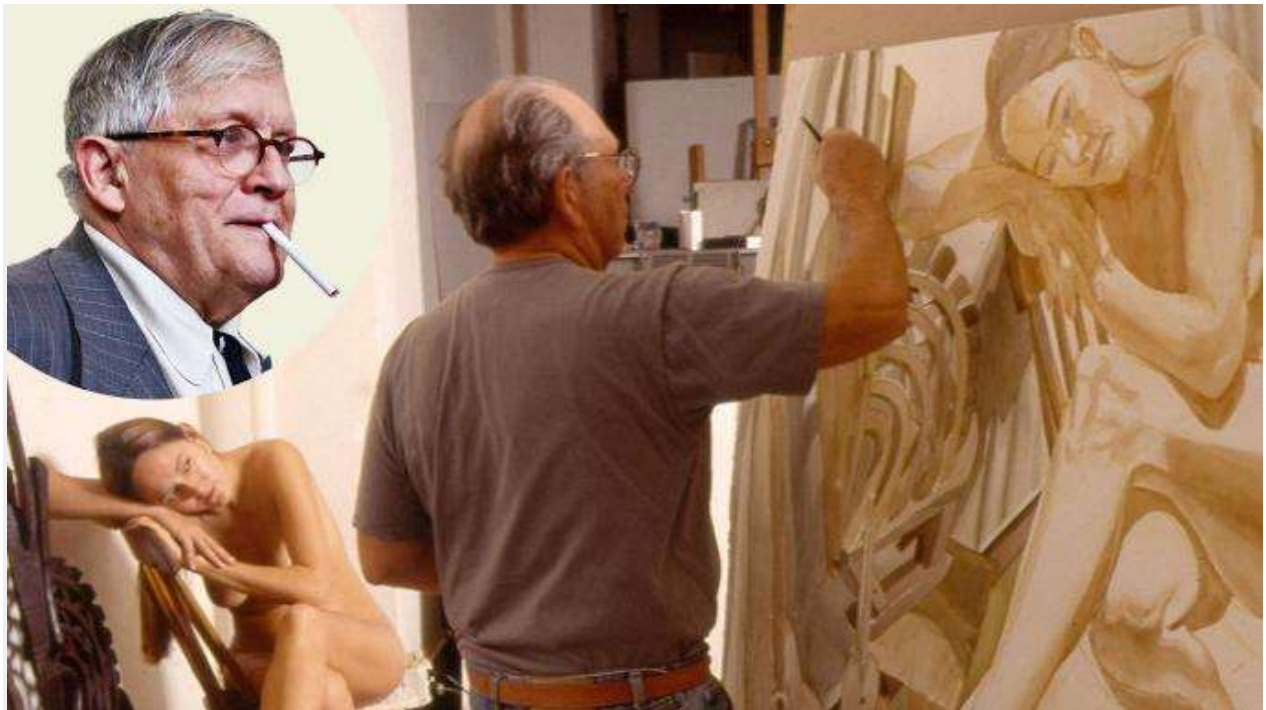


Philip Pearlstein, artist who stands the test of time

David Sanderson, Arts Correspondent

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Philip Pearlstein is known for his customary standing pose; David Hockney is famously devoted to cigarettes.

For six decades Philip Pearlstein has stood up to paint his naked men and women. Now 93, he may need a younger person to stretch his canvases, but the rest he can still do himself.

“I don’t know what the secret is,” the artist said of his longevity. “I have always painted standing up. It is easier to move around.”

The American, credited as the chief reviver of late 20th-century realism and its leading figure painter, is perhaps the oldest artist still producing exhibition-quality work.

An exhibition of his paintings from 1990 to last year opens today at the Saatchi Gallery in London. Pearlstein says his work has improved with his age.

“They have gotten much better, the designs, the overall compositions have become much more complex,” he said.

Pearlstein’s advocacy for his upright working posture comes as more companies invest in “standing desks” to help their employees’ health. The artist

admits that his work has offended “a lot of people”. “America is very prudish and I would mix up the races, white men, black women. The reaction was really very negative,” he said.

After the Saatchi Gallery show Pearlstein has two more in New York and Paris this year.

“I just coast along,” he said. “I am old. Nobody works on the painting except me but at this point I need somebody [a studio assistant] who can lift the thing. I have always painted standing up, constantly moving.”

He credits his Second World War experience as having instilled good habits.

“In the army I learnt what not to do, so no alcohol,” he said. “I never started smoking. Most of my generation were killed by smoking ultimately.”

- A film by the artist Tacita Dean of David Hockney smoking five cigarettes in 16 minutes has been bought jointly by the Royal Academy and the National Portrait Gallery. The two institutions plus the National Gallery will open three exhibitions focusing on Dean’s work this year.