# A Bigger Splash: Hockney, homosexuality and pop... now on Netflix



In an era where representations of happy gay lives were almost impossible to come by, A Bigger Splash, directed by Jack Kazan, presented a positive and intimate view of the renowned British pop artist David Hockney between 1970 and 1973. The documentary chronicles Hockney’s emotional journey following his breakup with long-time partner Peter Schlesinger, a relationship that profoundly impacted his artistic output.

David Hockney, a towering figure in the pop art movement, is acclaimed for his vibrant depictions of Californian landscapes, particularly his iconic paintings of swimming pools. The documentary draws its name from one of Hockney's most famous works, "A Bigger Splash" (1967), serving as a thematic and narrative touchstone throughout the film.

Unlike typical documentaries that feature direct interviews and narratives, *A Bigger Splash* adopts a fly-on-the-wall approach. The camera trails Hockney without direct engagement, offering a naturalistic, almost voyeuristic glimpse into his life. This method eschews conventional storytelling, presenting a raw and sometimes repetitive portrayal of Hockney’s world during these emotionally turbulent years.

A pivotal aspect of *A Bigger Splash* is its exploration of the confluence between art, identity, and the urban gay communities of the 70s. The documentary is not just about Hockney's personal and artistic challenges but also about the vibrant milieu in which he lived and worked. Cities like London, New York, and San Francisco serve as backdrops to the narrative, teeming with artists, fashionistas, and socialites - all contributing to a dynamic and interwoven cultural landscape.

The film documents the intertwined lives of Hockney and his artistic contemporaries, such as designer Celia Birtwell, painter Patrick Procktor, and art curator Henry Geldzahler. These friendships and connections were not merely social; they were integral to the creative processes and outputs of these artists.

Central to the narrative is Hockney’s complicated relationship with Schlesinger, who remains a muse and a source of artistic inspiration for Hockney despite their separation. The documentary captures Hockney’s oscillation between mourning the lost relationship and finding solace in his work, particularly the creation of "Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)" (1972), a painting that encapsulates this period of his life and which later achieved a record-breaking sale.

Kazan's film skilfully uses elements of fiction and visual allegory - such as images of young men lounging by pools - to symbolize Hockney's emotional state and the lingering presence of his former lover. This blend of reality and artistic interpretation adds a layer of depth, making the viewers feel the emotional weight of the artist’s experiences.

Beyond individual experiences, *A Bigger Splash* is a broader commentary on an era rich with creativity and cultural fluidity. It provides a snapshot of a time when the lines between personal lives and artistic creation were blurred. The urban gay art scene depicted in the documentary shows a community deeply intertwined, where social and professional lives melded seamlessly, creating a fertile ground for artistic experimentation and collaboration.

As an unintended but poignant time capsule, *A Bigger Splash* also harkens to a more innocent time before the subsequent health crises and economic forces that would later impact these artists profoundly. The film’s organic and immersive style offers a glimpse into a world that, while captured neutrally, looks almost idyllic in hindsight.