

Apollo
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GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Howard Hodgkin's paintings get better and better

Louise Nicholson



Love Song (2015), Howard Hodgkin. Oil on wood, 109.2 x 156.2 cm. © Howard Hodgkin. Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery

Standing in a room full of 18 new paintings by Howard Hodgkin – all but four of which are on public display for the first time anywhere – is like listening to a great mass, or seeing a Mozart opera for the first time, or being in sublime countryside exposed to all the elements. The paintings' exuberant swathes and swooshes of colour toss, turn, stretch and uplift the emotions. How strange that this great British painter claims to 'hate painting' when he is so good at it. But perhaps that is Hodgkin's arch way of dealing with those who cannot do what he can. As he ages – he is now 83 – his brushstrokes only get better, freer, his pictures more economic, more powerful.

Hodgkin made these oil paintings on large and small pieces of wood over the past two years. Four were done during his winter sojourns in Mumbai, a city familiar to him through decades of visits to India and collecting Indian miniature paintings – pictures that manipulate vibrant colour and form with a deliberate intensity known as *rasa*, which has surely influenced the artist despite his repeated denials.

Howard's succinct description of how he paints is good to know: 'I am a representational painter, but not a painter of appearances'. This enhances the impact of the oxygen-filled green in his *Green Monsoon*, the livid red of a rising sun in *Bombay Morning*, and the horizontal blast of lemon yellow in *Bedclothes*. He even takes up the Indian raga tradition of giving visual form to music in *Love Song* where the blue and green blotches burst over the frame. You can almost hear the notes.

'Howard Hodgkin: From Memory' is at Gagosian (Madison Avenue), New York, until 18 June.