

Damien Hirst

Gallery Art in a Material World

Ulrich Blanché



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Translated from German by
Rebekah Jonas and Ulrich Blanché

Tectum

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Proofread by Rebekah Jonas

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1) Introduction

a) How does Hirst Depict Consumption?

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How does Damien Hirst, the former Young British Artist, deal with consumer culture in his art? To answer this question, this study highlights representative works of his art, specifically works dealing with different aspects of consumer culture. At the same time, an attempt was made to select works that show his versatility as well as to introduce and analyze works from different periods of his oeuvre and a range of work groups.

This book on Damien Hirst and consumption is the second part of the updated version of my German PhD thesis »Konsumkunst – Kultur und Kommerz bei Banksy und Damien Hirst« (Consumption Art, Culture and Commerce by Banksy and Damien Hirst) published in 2012. The first part of the updated, English version was published 2015 in my book »Banksy – Urban Art in a Material World«. I divided my thesis into two parts due to its length and also to reach a wider readership. Each of the two books makes sense without the other. Both contain the same chapter about Hirst's and Banksy's collaboration pieces and as well as theoretical chapters about consumption. The benefit of both books is that they can be read as autonomous as well as inter-coordinated. So Banksy-readers get to know more about Hirst and vice versa.

Inspired by the subtitle of the Tate Modern's exhibition »Pop Life« in 2009, a title of the same wording, »Art in a Material World«, has been selected as the subtitle for the present study. This consumer-art retrospective exhibition featured Hirst, Koons, and Warhol, among others, three of the artists also discussed here in detail. The exhibition, »Pop Life« explored phenomena between art and commerce, much in the same vein as the present study. Like some of the works discussed here, the title »Art in a Material World« was influenced by a pop song by Madonna in 1985: »We are living in a material world and I am a material girl«, who took the term »material world« from Karl Marx.¹ The materialistic values and faith in objects still seem representa-

¹ Cf. Madonna's single from 1985: Material Girl. See also Karl Marx: »To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under

tive of contemporary consumer society. The term »gallery art« summarizes the site-specificity of Hirst's art analogous to the site-specificity of Street Art:

»In any case, [...] [Hirst is], as Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol, a savvy gallery artist: His work exposes the process of art production, the market and the art world in the broadest sense of the word as a network of inter-related structures, and it fits best into that environment, it even commented. Like all of [Hirst's] activities [...] established here, a dialectic to the area of the commercial, and his immodest participation in it was accompanied by a critical imitation of the self-celebrating operations of the market.«²

But why choose »consumer culture« as the focus of this study? The first chapter focuses on the terminology of consumption in general as well as its use in this analysis as a phenomenon that transcends time and existence. Consumption in its modern form is, at least »for the masses«, a relatively new phenomenon. In the history of art (as dealt with in the chapter »Consumption and Art History«) consumption only first appeared in the 20th century by the DADAists and later, more conspicuously, in Pop Art, with a mix of glorification, observation, irony, criticism, or perhaps all at the same time. The positive aspects of consumer culture have secured, at least until now, rising levels of affluence in the western world, while the negative aspects of (perverted) consumer behavior are associated directly, although this association is often denied, with the most momentous issues of our time: global warming and the international financial crisis. Artists acted as »seismographs« of their socio-cultural environment and reacted to the diverse phenomena of what is here described under the term »consumer culture« in various ways. On the other hand, they also shaped society's image of consumer culture. Along with the question of (over)consumption in consumer cultures, the issue of consumption (and/or capitalism) as a source of meaning and identity will be raised in this study.

the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurges of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of 'the Idea.' With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.« In Capital. Vol. 1. Afterword to the Second German Edition.

² This quote deals originally with the artist Martin Kippenberger, but was transferred to Hirst by the author. Quote by Jessica Morgan: Sankt Martin. In: Doris Krystof, Jessica Morgan (ed.): Martin Kippenberger : Einer von Euch, unter Euch, mit Euch. Exhibition catalogue. Ostfildern 2006, p. 11.

Damien Hirst had to struggle constantly with the accusation that he was merely creating popular, salable, or easily consumable art. At the same time, there are very few contemporary artists who, intentionally and strategically organized, have garnered so much attention from the mainstream media as Hirst. The accusation of selling out and, on the other hand, the great popularity that he enjoys are both closely related to one another and act as a sign of our times; a subject examined in his oeuvre. Discussions about the aesthetic value of art – as compared to their financial value as a consumer product – are incorporated into his works, as they also deal with the value and importance of consumer products.

Not only has Damien Hirst's oeuvre hardly been discussed academically, but also the rare publications that exist tend to focus primarily on his depiction of death.³ While the present analysis will show that death continues to be a motif in Hirst's work, it became, like his other provocations, a rather routine ingredient and was eclipsed by a new focus: (over)consumption. As the »most expensive« living artist, an analysis of Hirst in light of the themes of consumption is particularly attractive. The (often) very valuable materials combined with mass production smack of consumerism, and the press surrounding his art echoes the trend: »Try to find one of many popular articles about Damien Hirst [...] which does not mention money.«⁴

Despite ongoing speculation by daily press and art publications that Hirst was just enjoying his 15 minutes of fame, a common phenomenon in modern consumer culture, his art continues to create considerable interest and is experiencing an ever increasing importance in the media and in the art world.⁵ In fact, this long-term media coverage in particular shows that despite all the allegations, the artist has been able to exemplify the consumer culture of his and our age and aptly reflect it in his works. These specifics of our time should be examined in light of Hirst's artwork. Hirst was chosen because on the surface his art seems to be transparent and easy to understand.

³ See e.g. Konstanze Thümmel: »Shark Wanted«. Untersuchungen zum Umgang zeitgenössischer Künstler mit lebenden und toten Tieren am Beispiel der Arbeiten von Damien Hirst. Marburg 1998.

⁴ Julian Stallabrass: High Art Lite. The Rise and Fall of Young British Art. 1999. Revised and Expanded Edition. London 2006, p. 81.

⁵ The majority of large national and international newspapers wrote about Hirst, e.g. the New York and London Times, German F.A.Z. and Süddeutsche Zeitung etc.

Damien Hirst is still often categorized under the label of YBA, even though he developed further in both content and form away from this narrow term. This publication does not deal primarily with Young British Art, but rather with the artist Damien Hirst and his relationship with consumer culture. Hirst increased his artistic innovations of the early YBA-years both qualitatively and quantitatively to the point of creating (self mocking) caricatures or homages of his series, allowing a number of them to end with a sensational finale at the Sotheby's auction 'Beautiful Inside My Head Forever' on 15 and 16 September, 2008. He then dedicated himself to painting for the first time, although he continued to use his previous media. September 15, 2008 also marked the day on which the financial bubble of the international markets bursts with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers investment bank, sparking the most momentous financial crisis since World War II. The present study is primarily limited to Hirst's work up to this point, while more recent work covers the years immediately preceding 2008.

Before a concrete analysis of the artistic environment of Hirst can take place, an explanation and definition of »consumer culture« and related terms like »consumer society« and »consumerism« is necessary. In the same way, consumer culture will be discussed in the context of religion, particularly with regard to Walter Benjamin's theory of »capitalism as religion«, taken from his 1921 publication of the same name. Another chapter provides an overview of this motif in art history, which establishes continuity from Marcel Duchamp to Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons and contemporary art. In addition, older examples that are closely related to consumption such as the moralizing Dutch genre painting denouncing overindulgence are briefly discussed.

A chapter that deals with the metropolis of London around the turn of the millennium follows this overview of the phenomenon of »consumer culture«. The chapter begins with a socio-cultural-political-economic background of the city; first in the Thatcher era (1979-1990) including the impact on economy and society; and then the New Labour era of Tony Blair, marked by terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 in New York as well as the attack in London in July of 2005. These historical developments are specifically related to the art scene in London since 1980, which, until that time, was dominated by historic structures and strict limitations. A portrayal of the change of system at Goldsmiths College illuminates the university environment of young Damien Hirst, who came to London in the mid-1980s. This

description will be followed by a general overview of the Young British Artists in the 1990s, of which Hirst is considered the best-known representative, as well as an overview of formative influences on his art such as advertising or the first Saatchi Gallery.

For purposes of style, the majority of Hirst's individual works selected for analysis in this work stem from the time after 2000. This time marked a conspicuous shift in his oeuvre in the direction of consumer culture. 15

Collectors looking to purchase a piece by Damien Hirst usually may only buy an object from a series, because the artist rarely creates individual works that stand alone. For that reason, this study presents four of Hirst's series. The »Natural History« series and its display cases helped Hirst develop a reputation that he later cemented with his other series, which, although usually less provocative and explicit, often utilized similar materials and motifs, such as real dead animals as a main subject.

Each series object mirrors the motifs that characterize the entire set, producing a recognition effect within the series. This study begins with an examination of the »Natural History« series, which Hirst created between 1991 and 2008. These pieces often feature dead livestock, such as cows or pigs, but also exotic animals like sharks, which Hirst presented in glass display cases filled with formaldehyde. One object in the series, »The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living,« garnered Damien Hirst a lot of recognition in 1992. His work with two formaldehyde-cows, »Mother and Child Divided« earned him the prestigious Turner Prize in 1995. The young bull in formaldehyde, »The Golden Calf« in 2008 (figure 6), analyzed below as representative of the »Natural History« series, acted as the »workhorse« of Hirst's »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« exhibition, which, as a whole, is also seen as a milestone in his work.

In this way, the »Natural History« showcases Hirst's art. It established his reputation as an artist and received the most attention in the media, not in the least because works from this series are among Hirst's most shocking, most expensive, and largest pieces. Nevertheless, as Stallabrass points out, Hirst made the most financial revenue with paintings such as butterfly, spin, and Spot Paintings, of which he also produced and sold quantitatively many more than the more expensive formaldehyde works. Paintings have a much

larger market than installations because they are also less prone to market fluctuations.⁶

Hirst used marketing and promotional techniques to structure and influence his works; methods on which he then comments in the works as well. Series and repetitions sell well. The existence of even just two works serves to reinforce the message through repetition.⁷ In this way, the series relates to the general consumer culture in terms of the associated advertising expression »recognition effect«, which, in the case of the »Natural History« series, is triggered by the name or the established »brand« of Damien Hirst in combination with the animal in formaldehyde. Like Warhol, Hirst produced works en masse in his factory with an army of up to 160 assistants, a practice that serves to question the uniqueness of a work of art and its individual production. The masses of consumers need massive numbers of original works of art. At the same time, his mass production reflects the current industrial society, as Warhol's Pop Art before it.⁸

In the same way that Warhol's intentions and motivations cannot be known, whether Hirst used his production techniques to glorify consumer production and consumer culture or comment ironically on the glamour of consumer culture remains unknown. Mass products appeal to different people in different ways.⁹ Most likely Hirst sought to show that glorification of consumption and its criticism are inextricably linked¹⁰: »I try to say something and deny it at the same time.«¹¹

Hirst (like many of his fellow YBAs) did not want to be judged on a moral basis. He is »potentially serious« and his rejection of such moral statements can again be judged as moral or immoral, an attitude also expressed in an exhibition in the text for the artwork »Shark«:

»The extraordinary tension of the piece comes from its neutrality – from raising issues yet refusing argument. The work offers drama without

⁶ Compare to: Liebs 2010.

⁷ Hirst himself stressed the relative market security of painting in an interview with Liebs in 2010. See also: Julian Stallabrass: *High Art Lite*. New York 2006, p. 162.

⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 190-191.

⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 102.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 132.

¹¹ Hirst 1997, p. 48.

catharsis, confrontation and resolution without provocation without redress. Responsibility is returned to the viewer.«¹²

The Young British Artists studied postmodern theory in detail in an effort to use and manipulate it in such a way as to hinder its use in imposing a matrix of interpretation and context on their work. In the tradition of Andy Warhol and Jeff Koons, Hirst created an artistic persona and thereby transferred the responsibility of interpreting a work to the viewer.

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What, then, are the implications for an academic study of Damien Hirst? When limited to the traditional and obvious art-history references, any statement in reference to Hirst is not much more than name-dropping: Duchamp, Warhol, Koons; and the artist himself often evokes and encourages these references. According to Stallabrass, Hirst's art is often like a board game that the viewer himself must play, because the artistic originality died with the author. An analysis of Hirst can be conducted only as recombination of fixed discourses. As game pieces, the viewer receives a set of associations: religion, science, death, love, and art history. Even philosophical theories are part of the game. Within one single work, Hirst uses the elements of belief systems like religion or capitalism contradictorily. The elements work both for and against one another at the same time¹³:

»Objects, expressions and stereotypes are hijacked and reworked in order to address traditional themes such as sex, death and destruction, love and loss.«¹⁴

Hirst uses a checklist of expectations in order to create beautiful, salable art. »Anyone who combines images, relies not only on creation of value, but also prepares the foundation for mercantile fantasies and through that, to an even greater extent he is following the logic of the art market. It appears to be both the task and the accomplishment of an artist to merge items that are as profane as possible to create ensembles that are as momentous and, consequently, as valuable as possible.«¹⁵

Hirst's art sustains a certain theoretical inquiry, but fails to impress the viewer with the education and depth of the artist. Instead, Hirst uses irony to prompt individuals to work out their own perceptions of the nuances and

¹² British Council Visual Arts Department: *Damien Hirst*. London 1992.

¹³ Clarrie Wallis: In the Realm of the Senseless. In: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 102-103.

¹⁴ Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 98.

¹⁵ Wolfgang Ullrich: *Aby Warburg. Denn Bedeutung schlummert überall*. Zeit Online 10 January 2013.

shades of gray in his artwork. Hirst's fellow YBA, Angus Fairhurst, said of himself: »I like saying a word over and over again till it loses its meaning, and then it gets it back again.«¹⁶, a statement that equally applies to Hirst. His art, according to Muir, always contains a »much used punch line of an over-told joke«¹⁷. The old joke is a good analogy for his work: he said, »I think a joke is like art, it's like water. It's got to be able to go everywhere.«¹⁸ Muir expressed similar sentiments about the YBAs:

»[...] [They] were preoccupied with a form of visual attack not entirely dissimilar to the language of advertising; recalling Saatchi's own campaigns, especially those punchy one liners that had smoothed the path to Thatcher's political victory.«¹⁹

The simple audio and visual repetition; in pop songs, advertising slogans, and other manifestations of consumption, are always ambivalent. Depending on the viewer, it is just that simple or, on the other hand, rather something that reflects and criticizes that which is so basic and kitschy.

The aim of this study is not to use structure and language to merely ruminate on tired interpretation schemes, but rather turn the tables to focus on the viewer and the manufacturing process of the works as well as the central aspects of money and art as a consumer product, themes that are often avoided in art studies because they affect both art historians and their *raison d'être* most centrally.

The second series analyzed is Hirst's set of *Butterfly Paintings*, which he created from 1991 until the aforementioned exhibition in 2008. These monochrome canvases affixed with dead butterflies are explained in two examples, both with a different focus: consumption in connection first with pop culture and second with religion. These sets are also divided formally into those with a few whole butterflies and those with many butterfly wings (*Wing Paintings*). I then deal with a sort of foil to the *Butterfly Paintings*, the »*Fly Paintings*«.

In Hirst's »*Natural History*« series as well as in the *Butterfly Paintings* (Figures 12 and 13) the animal acts both as the center of attention and as the carrier of meaning. In addition to herbal and geological materials, substances derived from both animals and humans, including bodily fluids, belong to

¹⁶ Gregor Muir: It must be a Camel (for now). In: Muir & Wallis 2004, p. 94.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 93.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 94.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 202.

the group of natural materials. These are among the oldest artistic materials in general; however, they first gained artistic autonomy in the 20th century. Among the first artists in recent art history to integrate animals or animal parts into their work were surrealists like Miró, who used a stuffed parrot in an assemblage in 1936, or Meret Oppenheim with the creation of her fur cup (»*Dejeuner en fourrure*«) in the same year. After the interruption of the Second World War, natural materials did not find their way back into works of art until the 1950s. At that time, Robert Rauschenberg used them in his collages, which he called »*Combines*«, including a stuffed goat (»*Monogram*«, 1959) or a bald eagle. His mixture of earlier Pop Art and Neo-DADA are ironic paraphrases of the dreams of consumer society and of typical characters of his time. Rauschenberg's »*Combines*« build a bridge between DADA and Damien Hirst's Butterfly Paintings, whose works also combine collage, readymade, sculpture, and painting. Both artists create works that exist between two-dimensional and three-dimensional art, in other words, between art and reality or between art and life. The transition to the third dimension is comparable to an »*incarnation*«.

Another of Hirst's pieces analyzed here is »*For the Love of God*« (Figures 23 and 24) from 2007. This work was chosen for this study due to its reputation as the most expensive piece of art by a living artist, a reputation that fits well into an examination of his works with regard to consumer culture. Additionally, the importance of this »*Diamond Skull*«, its alternate title by which it is often called, within Hirst's oeuvre as well as his references in the piece to many other series were further reasons to select this particular work for analysis. »*For the Love of God*« can be seen as the beginning of the group of works the »*Skulls*«, although precedents in Hirst's earlier work already existed. From 1998 onwards, Hirst used whole human skeletons, including »*Rehab Is For Quitters*« (1998/99) and »*Death Is Irrelevant*« (2000) and also a skull next to animal skeletons in »*Where Are We Going? Where Do We Come From? Is There A Reason?*« (2000-2004). As an independent motif, the skull appears first as a cow's skull (1994) and soon thereafter as a human skull (2005). The latter case is a silver cast of a human skull, basically a similar depiction of consumer culture as in »*The Diamond Skull*«, with the difference that its monetary value is much lower, serving to highlight the integral importance of the sale price (£50 million) for the interpretation of the Diamond Skull.

The last of Hirst's series addressed in this study is the group of Spot Paintings (Figures 34), which he has been creating on and off since 1988. A piece from this series, »Keep it Spotless (defaced Hirst)«, forms the basis of a joint work with Banksy, the analysis of which provides a seamless transition to a comparison of both artists. A short description of his series »Pharmaceutical Cabinets« (since 1989) in relation to these alternatively titled »Pharmaceutical Paintings« will be included in the analysis. The interpretation is particularly concerned with the relationship between consumer culture and science/medicine.

All these works are analyzed in terms of materials, iconography, and history of ideas with regard to their framing of consumer culture. In addition, particular emphasis is given to the position of the viewer and the use of the space that plays a dominant role for Hirst.

At the time of this study, Damien Hirst is only in his early fifties, a fact that limits the definitive scope of statements about his oeuvre. This study regards itself as the first step towards further studies about Hirst.

b) How is the Term Consumer Culture Used in this Study?

The term »consumerism« is a difficult concept often linked to negative-critical connotations such as manipulation and alienation, but is often used differently in various contexts or interpreted to varying extremes. The form of traditional Western European consumer and luxury criticism associated with this negative connotation goes back to the 17th Century or even back to antiquity. As late as the 1970s, the term was often used in a neutral, purely quantitative economic manner. Since the 1990s, the term has begun, according to Wyrwa, to lose its pejorative undertone, and is now less »than passive suffering, but as an act of communication, understood as a moment of social and political exchange.«²⁰

In the context of this study, the term consumption carries this 'positive communicative act' explicitly as well. In this context, consumption implies not just purely economically-neutral consumption, as in the now outdated

²⁰ Wyrwa in Siegrist 1997, p. 747, see also David Sabean: Die Produktion von Sinn beim Konsum der Dinge. In: Wolfgang Ruppert (Ed.): Fahrrad, Auto, Kühlschrank. Zur Kulturgeschichte der Alltagsdinge. Frankfurt/Main 1993.

term »Konsumverein« (cooperative), but rather emphasizes the importance of consumption in today's consumer society and consumer culture (see corresponding chapter). A careful examination of both the act of consumption and of the consumer (i.e. the observation of a human being with regard to what s/he selects, consumes, discards) automatically leads to a critical view of consumption, but not in the one-sided understanding embodied by the classic leftist critique of consumer society (see corresponding chapter), but in the original sense of the word criticism – something balanced, that both describes and evaluates the subject in both positive and negative ways. Nevertheless, the term »consumption« carries with it a slightly negative connotation derived from history in the same way that the term »consumerism« is not entirely neutral. In the present study, I deliberately omitted the concept of capitalism and the use of the term »critique of capitalism«, as consumption is seen here as the main and sometimes the only social action and interaction in the predominant form of modern capitalism. In this study, consumption has the same relationship to capitalism as praying to religion (see chapter consumption and religion), whereby the act of consuming is a manifestation of the current economic and social order. To consume means to be part of society. Both artists work within this present system of capitalism; they comment upon and shape its specific formulation or action, that is, consumption and human behavior within this matrix, with Banksy's sarcastic words:

»We can't do anything to change the world until capitalism crumbles. In the meantime we should all go shopping to console ourselves.«²¹

Even beyond areas like street art, YBAs, or Pop Art, that are covered in the present study, the relationship between art and the market is ever present. This relationship is also reflected in and closely tied to performance art, a form that at its inception developed as a counterweight to the idea of artwork as a consumable product and, at times, offers highly sophisticated reflections on such market mechanisms of art. As a theater scholar as well as art historian, I often compare performance art with performance; even if, for reasons of space, comparable (in terms of this work also fertile) matters such as fluxus, situationism, or land art cannot be further explored.

²¹ Banksy in Wall and Piece 2005, p. 204.

c) Sources

Academic sources on Damien Hirst are limited, with all the resulting advantages and disadvantages.

Most texts about Hirst can be divided into two categories: mass press and exhibition catalogues or articles in professional art journals. The former are concerned primarily with the person of Damien Hirst as a celebrity, that is, the persona that he presents to the public, or what he generates for the public. The works are not usually called by their official titles. Instead, they are often simplified to ironically degrading alternative titles such as »Pickled Beasts« for the »Natural History« – series, »The Shark« for »The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living«, and »The (Diamond) Skull« instead of »For the Love of God«. In addition to those titles, publications mention the (estimated or actual selling) price. Often, the open secret or insinuation that Hirst is poking fun at the art market, the buyers, and the public instead of creating »real« art (whatever that might be), is featured in such media pieces. In this study, the art market is the totality of art spaces and action places where works of fine art are traded; i.e. galleries, art fairs, collectors' fairs, or auctions.

Alternatively, exhibition catalogues and professional journals report in an »anything goes« sort of mantra, that Hirst handles elemental themes such as death, life, religion, and love. These publications often use terms such as »vanitas«, »memento mori«, »morbid«, or »beauty«, but the consumer culture aspect of his work is most often completely omitted. However, a large number of interviews with Hirst are particularly striking as sources. They are most often published by himself or his galleries, such as the collection »On the Way to Work« (2001), which he published with his favorite interview partner, the writer Gordon Burn – as a fan of Francis Bacon, Hirst saw Burn as his own David Sylvester in a way. Burn succeeded in asking at least some critical questions. In this way, Burn stands in contrast to well-known art historians and journalists such as Rudi Fuchs, Stuart Morgan, and Hans-Ulrich Obrist. Interviews were important sources for this study, although they are still regarded with caution. The interview as an academic or even neutral source is also seen by the leftist author Stallabrass as a source which lacks critical distance and objectivity:

»[I]t is an inadequate form of explication. We have seen that artists can be singularly unhelpful informants, far less concerned with elucidating

the work for people who might be puzzled by it than with using the opportunity to foster a particular artistic image and fend off critique. Nevertheless, such statements have an air of authenticity: no matter how disingenuous or evasive, they have issued from the mouth of the artist, they emanate from the inner circle, the exclusive scene, and thus take on an ineluctable quality, as symptoms of an alluring aesthetic malaise. Precisely because of this they are no substitute for critical thought.²²

The exhibition catalogue of the »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« auction includes an interview of Hirst by Burns. Other texts in the catalogue as well as texts in the catalogue for Hirst's first retrospective »Damien Hirst. The Agony and the Ecstasy« from 2004 in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, repeat statements by Hirst that are often relatively uncensored and express more or less candid thoughts about his works. The catalogue for the YBA group exhibition »Sensation« from 1997 at the Royal Academy of Art in London is also a fertile source, specifically with regard to the articles by Richard Shone and Martin Maloney although in most cases the articles do not get much beyond inventory. Another helpful source was the Tate Modern »In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida« exhibition catalogue by Gregor Muir and Clarrie Wallis in 2004.

An examination of other printed literature about Damien Hirst reveals the striking fact that most of the books were published by himself and his galleries or in cooperation with one or the other. Despite a career spanning two decades, further »independent« academic publications or catalogue essays about his exhibitions that are not »controlled« by him can be counted on one hand. The English-language based literature by Julian Stallabrass »High Art Lite. The Rise and Fall of Young British Art« (in the second, revised and expanded edition of 2006) dealt with the so-called YBAs in a rather academic, leftist and critical way, in contrast to Gregor Muir's informative and entertaining collection of anecdotes »Lucky Kunst« from 2009. Jeremy Cooper's overview and YBA-summary book »Growing up. The Young British Artists at 50« (2012) was also helpful; a book about some important YBAs, including Hirst. Cooper is interested in the artists' biographies, not so much in analyzing their work and gives helpful background information often without detailed sources.

²² See Stallabrass 2006, p. 273-274.

The unjustly neglected dissertation (published unfortunately only in German) by Konstanze Thümmel: »‘Shark Wanted’. Untersuchungen zum Umgang zeitgenössischer Künstler mit lebenden und toten Tieren am Beispiel der Arbeiten von Damien Hirst« (1997) deals with Hirst's early years and is a balanced, in-depth analysis especially with regard to his treatment of animals. Luke White's dissertation: »Damien Hirst and the Legacy of the Sublime in Contemporary Art and Culture«²³ (2009) would perhaps be more aptly titled »The Legacy of the Sublime in Contemporary Art and Culture« based on the small amount of space he actually commits to Hirst in the study. Nevertheless, he handles Hirst's sculpture »The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living« as well. Especially White's chapter »Und der Haifisch«: Hirst's Shark as an Image of Capital« (like the whole thesis) analyzes Hirst's sculpture in the context of White's theoretical thoughts. In this way, his thesis is a suitable extension to this study, as consumption also plays a major role for White.

Veit Ziegelmaier's German dissertation »Ratio et religio: das Heiligenbild bei Damien Hirst, hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Installation The Apostles (2002/03) und Jesus and the Disciples (1994) in der Londoner Ausstellung Romance in the Age of Uncertainty (2003)« from 2009 is not easy to find as it is neither accessible online nor has it been published as a book. It contains a concise summary in English. Ziegelmaier presents a study worth reading, which focuses on images of saints (»Heiligenbild«) with regards to Hirst's installation »The Apostles« and »Jesus and the Disciples«. The author's detailed and compelling analysis of the artworks shows how the artist brings together the complementary areas of *ratio* and *religio*.

The most influential literature about consumer culture for this study was Wolfgang Ullrich's »Habenwollen« (2006), even though Ullrich's concept of the guilty conscience that arises from consumption and is harmful and unnecessary in the affluent society of today, seems questionable. Furthermore, he largely ignores well-known consumer issues such as environmental degradation and exploitation of the third world, which remain relevant aspects of the critique of consumerism. The essay collection »Europäische Konsumgeschichte« from 1997 edited by Siegrist, Kaelble, and Kocka and Norbert Bolz's »Das konsumistische Manifest« from 2002 provide further valuable stimulation. But Bolz' dubious proposition, influenced by the attacks on

²³ Damien Hirst and the Legacy of the Sublime in Contemporary Art and Culture, A thesis submitted to Middlesex University 2009.

September 11, 2001 (that at the time had just recently occurred), that consumption could act as a counterweight to international terrorism, is more than questionable. Even Zygmunt Bauman's »Leben als Konsum« (2007) and particularly Naomi Klein's »No Logo« (2000) provided important academic ideas and examples. Neal Lawson's »All Consuming« is rather anecdotal and was clearly written for the UK consumer landscape in a similar style to Walter Grasskamp's »Konsumglück. Die Ware Erlösung« (2000).

Further literature consulted about single aspects include Joan Gibbons »Art and Advertising« (2005), the anthology edited by Dirk Baecker »Kapitalismus als Religion« (2003), Ute Dettmar's and Thomas Küpper's anthology »Kitsch. Texte und Theorien« (2007), and also Sarah Thornton's »Seven Days in the Art World« (2008).

2) Consumption Concepts and their Use in the Present Investigation

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»Consumption has been the leading ideology of our society for a long time.«

Boris Groys, art historian

a) The Term Consumption

The word consumption comes from the Latin *consumere* (use, expend, exhaust) and refers to the use of perishable or durable market goods and services. Consumption is one of the pair of codependent terms »consumption and production«, which form a tight reciprocal relationship: »Consumption is the goal of production.« The concept of using up or decreasing is inherent in the term consumption, a usage that results in the utilization of consumer goods in such a way as to change or transform them so that they are no longer available in another form or dimension. Because the use defines the good, often such goods no longer exist after use, but rather become a secondary product, usually waste, which may be less valuable, completely worthless, or even harmful. As a user or consumer, a natural person is designated to acquire, that is buy, goods and services for personal gratification. Often the term consumer also has a historically negative connotation (»average Joe« or German, »Otto-Normal-Verbraucher«), because it sounds rather passive and manipulated as opposed to the active producer.

Theoretically, the purpose of »doing business«, a close relative of consumption, is primarily to satisfy (cultural) needs. In practice, however, profit maximization plays a large roll, as well as the creation of consumer needs.²⁴ Private households are supplied with the consumer goods they demand. The demand for consumer goods that are not necessary for survival (non-essentials), is influenced by various factors, mostly through different types of advertising. In this way, a need and consequent demand are, at least in part, artificially generated. The demand for one consumer product compared to

²⁴ See König 2008, p. 15, 16 and 52.

another is directed by the price.²⁵ Furthermore, in theory, demand is influenced by the endowed benefits for the consumer, the consumer's needs, and the available income of the household. Rising prices of consumer goods and/or falling incomes usually result in a decrease in demand of households.

b) Consumerism

i) The Concept of Consumerism

The term consumerism generally refers to consumption critique or critique of exaggerated consumption. This consumer-criticism is not aimed at the purchase and consumption of goods that are necessary for survival, but mostly towards the purchase and consumption of non-essential luxury goods and is rooted in the aforementioned luxury debate. What is considered essential is dependent on the socio-cultural and temporal context and is therefore always debatable. The term consumption (German »Konsum«) is, at least in Germany, often equated with consumerism, because life-sustaining consumption is not generally called into question and often discussions concerning the concept have already been loaded with this critical connotation.

The concept of consumerism has been around since the 1970s, discussed, among others, by Italian film director and theorist Pier Paolo Pasolini, who published his »Scritti corsari«²⁶ in 1975, in which he criticized consumption in the western world as exaggerated. Pasolini formulated the thesis of consumerism as a new form of totalitarianism, because it claims to extend the consumer »ideology« to the entire world. The results are the threat of the destruction of social life forms and the equalization of cultures through the creation of a global consumerist mass culture. Consumer criticism and the rejection of excessive consumption are valid features of a consumer society.

»Nothing in the modern consumer society is consumed so happily as the critique of consumption. To consume just seems to be morally reprehensible – in the first place you should create, produce, be creative.«²⁷

²⁵ See Hariolf Grupp: Messung und Erklärung des technischen Wandels: Grundzüge einer empirischen Innovationsökonomik. Hamburg 1997.

²⁶ See Pier Paolo Pasolini: Freibeuterschriften. Die Zerstörung der Kultur des Einzelnen durch die Konsumgesellschaft. Berlin 1975.

²⁷ Quoted in Max Hollein: Shopping. In: Shopping 2002, p. 13.

As a proponent of consumer culture, media and communication theorist Norbert Bolz sees worldwide consumption as a counterweight to religious fundamentalism in his »consumerist manifesto«. According to Bolz, consumption has served to pacify the world through the extension of its positive effects to all people. However, the Western consumer culture has expanded globally without regard for negative environmental consequences. As the »immune system of global society«, the decay of consumption could only be self-inflicted. Kondylis contradicts Bolz' optimistic view and sees, on the one hand, the establishment of hedonistic ways of life (associated with consumption) as related to the »end of ideology« but, on the other hand, not the end of global conflicts.²⁸ According to Bolz, »hatred against the lifestyle of Western consumerism is naturally substantiated [in anti-Americanism].« It is just about the two world religions, »Anti-Americanism« and »capitalist consumerism« that are somehow a matter of opinion. The compulsion to go shopping is, according to Groys, also of a moral nature. You have to buy more and more to stimulate the economy²⁹, not because more consumption actually leads to greater satisfaction. Other consumer critics contradict this in turn.³⁰

Ullrich defends the positive aspects of consumption and argues that not all consumer preferences are artificially generated through advertising and marketing, disciplines which themselves would not exist »without the greed of the producer and the seller for profit«.³¹ Moreover, the idea of the innocent consumer (brutally) misled and manipulated by companies and advertisers, which was particularly representative of the early critique of consumption, is nowadays at least questionable. Zygmunt Bauman notes that two thirds of people are now also part of »the seduced« of consumerism.³² Mike Featherstone, on the other hand, sees the consumer rather as a hero who has

²⁸ See Panajotis Kondylis: *Der Niedergang der bürgerlichen Denk- und Lebensform. Die liberale Moderne und die massendemokratische Postmoderne*. Weinheim 1991.

²⁹ Boris Groys: *Der Künstler als Konsument*. In: *Shopping*. 2002, p. 55 und Mark C. Taylor: *Duty-Free-Shopping*. In: *Shopping*. 2002, p. 42.

³⁰ See König 2008, p. 271.

³¹ Ullrich 2006, p. 13.

³² Bauman quoted in Lodziak 2002, p. 65.

freed himself and is politically active with every new purchasing decision.³³ For the media theorist, consumption is fun and helps to teach and train »creative tactics and strategies.«³⁴ Even general criticism of the anonymity of bulk goods is, according to Ullrich, no longer appropriate today as many goods are now not only not so anonymous but rather tailor-fit to the consumer.³⁵ For Lawson, the identity of modern man is formed by consumption³⁶, an assertion that can be understood positively or negatively.

Just as consumerism is sometimes open to attack, also its opponents have occasionally questionable arguments. In their work, »The Rebel Sell: How the Counter Culture Became Consumer Culture«, the Canadian consumerism-opponents Heath and Potter regard consumer society as something positive and attempt to refute the usual criticism of consumption by portraying consumer critics as hypocritical, elitist, naive, and paralyzed. The existence of consumer-critical products proves the absurdity of consumerism.³⁷ Even though both sides may be correct in detail, their non-academic polemic is still not reason enough to abandon criticism of consumer behavior.

The consumerism concept put forth by John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas Naylor speaks of »affluenza,« a neologism combining the terms affluence and influenza, to describe the illness of excess or consumerism as a disease of the era. They cite debt, over-production of goods, and, the flip side, garbage as the main symptoms of this disease. Psychological consequences for western people include anxiety, feelings of alienation and despair, and depression, whereas the physical consequences include heart attacks, diabetes, allergies, and obesity. This »disease« is caused by the insatiable greed for more and more material goods. As an alternative to this kind of consumption, de Graaf, Naylor and Wann suggest a departure from the consumerist lifestyle in the sense of »voluntary simplicity« or an orientation

³³ See Mike Featherstone: Postmodernism and the Aestheticization of Everyday Life. In: S. Lash and J. Friedman (Ed.): *Modernity and Identity*. Oxford 1992, p. 270. Quoted after Conrad Lodziak: *The Myth of Consumerism*. London 2002, p. 34.

³⁴ Lodziak 2002, p. 38.

³⁵ Ullrich 2006, p. 25.

³⁶ Neil Lawson: *All Consuming*. London 2009, p. 4.

³⁷ See Georg Gruber: *Gegen die Gegenkultur. Ein Sachbuch als Feldzug*. Deutschlandradio Kultur Online 26 September 2005.

around a contented and healthy lifestyle instead of a concentration on material wealth.³⁸

This study seeks to present a balanced concept of consumerism critique because consumer society in its exaggerated form of excessive consumption, not consumption for the purpose of fulfilling everyday needs, is worthy of criticism. »In the consumer society, neither the total manipulation of customers nor the absolute freedom of consumers rules.«³⁹

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ii) Cultural Critique, Critique of Authority and Environmental Criticism

The three dimensions of consumerism outlined by König summarize the aforementioned positions in the critique of consumerism: Although cultural criticism recognizes material progress, the »social distribution of consumer options [,however,] leads to 'massification' accompanied by cultural disintegration« that ultimately would not bring consumers more happiness and satisfaction. The second, commonly leftist critique of power, »interpreted consumption as a means of stabilizing power« in which the consumer is, at least in part, only a spineless, dependent, self-alienated object of rulers and where consumption is solely possible on the backs of the so-called third world. A third dimension of consumerism, according to König, is called environmental criticism, which regards increasing consumption at the expense of finite natural resources like oil, which leads to natural disasters or global warming. Still, consumption will increase, since it is inherent in a system designed for growth.

»If the current increase in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production and the exploitation of natural resources continues unchanged, the absolute limits of growth will be achieved on Earth in the next hundred years.«⁴⁰

³⁸ See John de Graaf, David Wann, Thomas Naylor: *Affluenza. Zeitkrankheit Konsum*. Munich 2002.

³⁹ König 2008, p. 244.

⁴⁰ See Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers & William W. Behrens III: *The Limits to Growth*. New York 1972.

Historically, the focus has shifted from consumer-critical to a criticism of cultural domination to increasing environmental criticism.⁴¹

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c) Consumer Society

To date there is no clear definition of consumer society and/or consumer culture. Both terms are, according to Siegrist, often used analogously. Not only the notion of consumption, but also the term »consumer society« is interpreted differently within academia (so far) and a generally accepted definition has not yet been established. In particular, historians believed to have recognized consumer societies at various diverse times between the Renaissance and today.

i) Narrowing down »consumer society«

The present work follows Brewers limitation of the term, which outlines six defining characteristics for the modern consumer society:

»The provision of a rich assortment of goods for consumers from most social categories. The development of sophisticated communication systems that infuse goods with meaning as well as inspire a need for them. The development of ranges of objects forming spheres of taste, fashion, and style. The emphasis on leisure over work and consumption over production. The emergence of the consumer category. A deep ambivalence, sometimes even open hostility towards the phenomenon of consumption. »⁴²

Siegrist would add that wealth is not concentrated in a relatively small upper class. This means that a consumer culture exists at the minimum level of civil, political, and legal equality, in other words, there is a broad middle class as

⁴¹ See for the last section, ibid. chapter: Dimensionen der Konsumkritik: Kultur, Herrschaft und Natur, p. 271-272.

⁴² See John Brewers Thesis from his essay »Was können wir aus der Geschichte der frühen Neuzeit für die Konsumgeschichte lernen?«, summarized by Hannes Siegrist in id.: Konsum, Kultur und Gesellschaft im modernen Europa. In: id., Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka (Ed.): Europäische Konsumgeschichte. Frankfurt/Main 1997, p. 18. See also Brewers essay in the same volume p. 51-74.

well as social mobility and competition. In it there is »a certain value [of] pluralism, diligence, hard work, and pursuit of worldly goods out of partly religious motives« which is generally regarded as a legitimate practice. Further features of a consumer society include a certain division of labor and rationalization in industry, commerce, agriculture and

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»...an outward going working, vocational, and employment orientation within families; a differentiated institutional and legal system; rational knowledge that enables and promotes predictable and calculated actions; a cultural apparatus that allows communication between producers, intermediaries, and consumers of the goods, and that guides the interpretation of buying and consuming. Money functions as a general medium of exchange.«⁴³

A consumer society is further characterized by people consuming not only what they need to survive, so-called necessary consumption, but also by the acquisition of goods that are often purely aesthetic or »vanities«, amenities which are attributed to excess consumption.⁴⁴ Synonymous with consumer society are also the pejorative terms affluent society or throwaway society.⁴⁵

Consumer society as a term was, according to Wunderich, designed for countries in which the industrial revolution was complete. Whether it can be transferred to other cultures such as the so-called third world or the former colonies and developing countries, at whose expense industrialization at least arose and continues to exist, is questionable, »despite the claim of universality and the global impact of its values, it is in real terms limited to the narrow circle of developed economies [...].«⁴⁶ This becomes clear upon an examination of the social significance of goods for consumers as opposed to their origin from the former colonies, the »colonial goods« such as tea, spices, coffee, sugar, and cocoa. Indeed, the positive development of Western consumer societies is only possible on the basis of under or mal-development of these others. Not only in terms of historical development of consumer societies, but also with regard to their future, these connections will be of importance:

»The world's attempts to adopt the model [of the consumer society, note UB] have led to a hunt for raw material reserves on the globe and the

⁴³ Siegrist 1997, p. 18-19.

⁴⁴ See Brewer in Siegrist 1997, p. 61.

⁴⁵ A discussion at length about the term consumer society one can find in Christian Kleinschmidt: Konsumgesellschaft: Grundkurs. Stuttgart 2008.

⁴⁶ Wunderich 1997, p. 794-795.

depletion of important resources is emerging on the horizon for the first time.«⁴⁷

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ii) Emergence of Consumer Societies

How and when did consumer societies emerge?

»If we identify consciousness and ideas as the driving forces, we will make individualization, secularization and democratization responsible [for the emergence of consumer societies, note UB]. On the other hand, if existence and real life conditions are set as primary factors, industrialization, free markets, and mass affluence become the decisive elements.«⁴⁸

Early forms of consumer societies developed in England starting around the 15th century with the emergence of new printing technologies and cotton trade, which led to a significant increase in consumption. Thus, consumption is closely linked to the development of modern technical progress. A sophisticated consumer culture, however, did not begin to develop until the 18th century. At that time, the population purchased goods they could not produce themselves at weekly and annual fairs, where customers haggled and bartered instead of paying fixed prices. Only nobility could afford luxury goods like fine spices and exquisite fabrics. This led to the development of conspicuous consumption.

Industry grew in the early 18th century in Britain, leading to the creation of jobs. The resulting increase in middle class income led to increased demand for mass consumer goods such as beer, tea, soap, and printed clothing. The human interest in goods evolved from (primal) needs to desires.

»Only a society in which people can develop and satisfy desires has the opportunity to build a consumer culture – and not only a barter system driven by necessity. This especially includes the charging of goods with symbolic meaning that supersedes their actual use-value and transforms them into things that flatter their owners, that contribute to their mind-set, and that even transform them.«⁴⁹

Fashion magazines became the most successful means of communication for consumer society and led to an increased demand for consumer goods. In

⁴⁷ Wunderlich 1997, p. 798-799.

⁴⁸ Ullrich 2006, p. 17.

⁴⁹ Ullrich 2006, p. 13.

addition to Great Britain, France, Germany, and Holland were also affected by this development. By the middle of the 19th century, the advertising column had been invented, which was an important means of increasing sales through advertising.⁵⁰ With the development of advertising in newspapers, magazines, and shop windows, consumption increased steadily. Industrialization in Europe and North America led to the creation of complex production, transportation, and information networks.⁵¹ By the end of the 19th century, the first department stores had been built and were characterized by fixed prices. With the increased selection and availability of material goods, consumer demands and desires grew. Many luxury goods became bulk goods in the 20th century and were produced by the tons on »assembly lines«. The relationship between consumers and goods changed radically because of the dissociation process in which the producers were increasingly separated from the end users due to the expansion of colonial empires, where cheap raw materials and new, exotic products and variations were developed. The less effort, time, and capital required for commodity production, the more transportation, presentation, marketing, and sales expenses increased. From about 1930 onwards, it was no longer enough to be »willing to keep a certain range of standard products to satisfy the elementary, limited needs of the consumer.«⁵² Increasing numbers of international goods arrived on the market in the 1950s and the globalization of consumerism began.

»Previously it was about providing the things people needed, today it is important to awaken desire in people for things that the machines produce in order to prevent the downfall of civilization [...]. The problem for us today is not how goods can be produced, but rather how we manage to produce customers for these goods.«⁵³

In the 1960s, the market for electrical appliances boomed, in the 1970s it was the market for plastic furniture, precious raw materials, and energy sources. Starting in the 1990s through the World Wide Web, global consumption was further simplified. Shopping became an important ritual of public and community life.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Christoph Grunenberg: Wunderland – Inszeniertes Spektakel der Warenpräsentation von Bon Marché bis Prada In: Shopping. 2002, p. 17.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, p. 19.

⁵³ Samuel Strauss quoted in Shopping. 2002, p. 19.

⁵⁴ Max Hollein: Shopping. In: Shopping 2002, p. 13.

»Shopping, strolling, browsing, selecting, generally consuming is identified as both a primary pastime in our affluent society, as well as the dominant activity of modern life.«⁵⁵

»The duty to go shopping«⁵⁶ has also always contained a political and nationalist component in a consumer society.⁵⁷ If people would only buy what they really needed, the economy would quickly grind to a halt. The post-industrial economy and its growth rely primarily on the fact that consumers spend money.⁵⁸

»We have reached the point at which consumption determines the whole of life [...]. Work, leisure, nature, and culture were once scattered, autonomous, and more or less unreduced units that generated fear and complexity in our real life and in our »anarchistic and archaic' cities; in the end, they are blended, [...], air-conditioned and domesticated for the sole function of permanent shopping.«⁵⁹

d) Consumption and Religion

»Not churches, rather temples of consumerism are the sites of modern religiousness.«⁶⁰

Norbert Bolz, media and communication theorist

»The human mind has produced two great metaphysical ideas: God and money. While there are certainly people who deny the existence of God, no one would dream of similarly questioning money.«⁶¹

Burkhard Müller, journalist

The following shortened explanations can be found in detail in Bolz' »Das konsumistische Manifest« in the chapter »Money« and in the antholo-

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 13.

⁵⁶ Mark C: Taylor: Duty-Free-Shopping. In: Shopping. 2002, p. 39.

⁵⁷ See Siegrist 1997. Unterkapitel Konsum, Staat und Nation, p. 36- 39.

⁵⁸ Mark C: Taylor: Duty-Free-Shopping. In: Shopping. 2002, p. 42.

⁵⁹ Jean Baudrillard: Consumer Society. In Id.: Selected Writings. Cambridge 2001. 26-27.

⁶⁰ Norbert Bolz: Das konsumistische Manifest. Munich 2002, p. 115.

⁶¹ Burkhard Müller: Speise, die noch keiner gekostet hat. Buchkritik zu Christoph Türcke: Mehr! Philosophie des Geldes. München 2015. Süddeutsche Zeitung 03 March 2015.

gy »Capitalism as Religion«, edited by Dirk Baecker. According to Max Weber's writing from 1920 about the emergence of Western capitalism, capitalist success was a sign that people believed they were chosen by God. Following this logic, modern capitalism would be the fruit of religion. According to Weber, capitalism is the pursuit of profit and profitability – in continuous, rational working operation, but also the condition of unbridled greed of gain.⁶² As the central element of the ethics of modern (early) capitalism of Benjamin Franklin, he sees the

...the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life, is above all completely devoid of any eudaemonic, not to say hedonistic, admixture. It is thought of so purely as an end in itself, that from the point of view of the happiness of, or utility to, the single individual, it appears entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational.⁶³

In this »philosophy of avarice« Weber is not only »business intelligence«, but »...this peculiar idea, so familiar to us today, but in reality so little a matter of course, of one's duty in a calling, is what is most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture, and is in a sense the fundamental basis of it. It is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists...«⁶⁴

According to Weber, this »peculiar ethic« of Franklin's distinguishes the »spirit of the (early) capitalism« from the »spirit of modern capitalism.« This reversal of the »natural« actual situation, according to Weber »... suggests that it is worth while to ask how this connection of adaptability to capitalism

⁶² Max Weber: Die Protestantische Ethik I. Eine Aufsatzsammlung. Ed. by A. Gütersloh. Hamburg 1979, p. 12/13. English Translation: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Max Weber, Trans. Talcott Parsons, Anthony Giddens.

London ; Boston : Unwin Hyman, 1930. Available online: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/WEBER/toc.html> [May, 2013]

⁶³ Ibid. Chapter II: The Spirit of Capitalism [<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/WEBER/WeberCH2.html>]

⁶⁴ Ibid. Chapter II. [<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/WEBER/WeberCH2.html>]

with religious factors may have come about.⁶⁵ This religiosity⁶⁶ binds the individual to obtain property, for the glory of God, and to multiply it by ceaseless labor – both essential components of the »modern capitalist spirit«. In the times of Weber, the ethics freed themselves from their religious bondage – the »capitalist spirit« no longer requires the support of religion.⁶⁷ Weber developed this

»as a rival thesis to that basic Marxist formula [...], according to which social existence determines the forms of consciousness. Against this backdrop of contrasting foils, Walter Benjamin developed his notion of the capitalist religion.«⁶⁸

»Capitalism is to be seen as a religion« he wrote in 1921 in his famous text fragment.⁶⁹ Capitalism had developed not only from religion, but it also came to replace it to some degree. The intermediate step between religion and capitalism is the »vocation« as a vehicle of meaning. According to Richard Sennett, consumption is the »driving force of capitalism«⁷⁰ today and has replaced the former profession as a source of meaning. But,

»...the work-driven ethos of the people [appears for] Max Weber not as a source of human happiness, and not as the basis of mental strength. The driven man is much too bent under the burden of the weight that he has learned to attribute to work. Discipline is an act of self-denial, says Michel Foucault, and just as that it appears in Weber's presentation of work ethic.«⁷¹

Today, the same can be said for consumption. The latter, according to e.g. Pasolini, takes ideas about freedom and charges them with the »duty« to consume, prompting people to imbue the command to consume with a »feeling

⁶⁵ Ibid. Chapter II. [<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/WEBER/Weber-CH2.html>]

⁶⁶ Weber talks more concretely about Protestantism, which Henryk Grossmann disproved. Some sorts of Catholicism seem better lend themselves to a capitalistic mass moral than Protestantism. See Rick Kuhn: Introduction to Henryk Grossman's critique of Franz Borkenau and Max Weber. In: Journal of Classical Sociology 6 July 2006.

⁶⁷ Weber Vol. 1, p. 183.

⁶⁸ Bolz 2002, p. 63.

⁶⁹ Walter Benjamin: Kapitalismus als Religion. 1921. In: Dirk Baecker (Ed.): Kapitalismus als Religion. Berlin 2009, p. 15-18.

⁷⁰ Richard Sennett: Der flexible Mensch. Die Kultur des neuen Kapitalismus., Wiesbeck 2000, p. 141-142.

⁷¹ Ibid.

of freedom«. The more unmanageable the contemporary consumer society becomes, the greater the »[...] longing for unity and wholeness. God is the traditional formula for the unity of the world.«⁷² If capitalism is to be understood as a religion, money functions analogously to God, or according to Kenneth Burke, as a »technical substitute« for God:

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»This is a substitution of a substitution, because the Christian God crucified, who in modern times is replaced by money, is indeed already a symbol for substitution. The profit motive works in the same way as the One God, as a universal source of motivation.«⁷³

According to Bolz, money as god should no longer to be understood as religious, and society not as »secularized«⁷⁴, but rather, the theory of capitalism as a religion is the last theological invention, whose goal should be to legitimize a critical description of the social whole.

In this concept, the consumer product or commodity plays the role of the ideal vehicle for value-added storage, analogous to a relic

»That something supernatural [in the form of consumer product, note UB] is tangible is a concept only familiar in the world of religious symbols. And in fact, Marx regarded the world of commodities as an analogy for the religious world. Goods are not just things for consumption. They do not simply satisfy a specific need, but rather embody social things – similar to the totem! [...] The secret of commodities and the mystery of religion are the same.«⁷⁵

The act of buying or consuming compensates for emotional problems such as emptiness, boredom, weariness and chronic depression, much in the same way as praying. All these problems are typical for Fromm's depiction of the character of the modern Western man.⁷⁶ Consumption became *the* leisure activity in the western world and, to a certain degree, replaced religious practice.

⁷² Bolz 2002, p. 68.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 71.

⁷⁴ See *ibid*, p. 73.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 113.

⁷⁶ See Erich Fromm: *Haben oder Sein*. 32. Aufl. [1. Auflage 1976]. Die seelischen Grundlagen einer neuen Gesellschaft. Munich 2004.

e) Consumption in Art History

»In art the aesthetics of capitalism were first formed, which now define the entirety of consumer culture.«⁷⁷

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Wolfgang Ullrich, art historian

The exhibition »Shopping« in Frankfurt in 2002 is subtitled »A Century of Art and Consumer Culture«.⁷⁸ For a more complete and detailed investigation, please refer to the catalogue of this exhibition. The subject here will be limited to a brief summary and supplemental information.

In every »Last Supper«, »Banquet at Emmaus« or hunting still life, consumption, food intended for consumption, or consumer products are shown. The first two examples above depict exemplary episodes from the life of Christ, in which consumption is rather marginal. Other biblical episodes, such as the Golden Calf or the Prodigal Son, on the other hand, denounce negative consequences of excess consumption. The same denunciations appear in the Dutch Baroque still lifes and genre depictions. Here, consumption (of products) and the allegorical message thereof will be discussed. Stimulants such as tobacco, sweets, or pastries stand for extravagance, vice, and gluttony; (Roman) coins include a reference to the lost Roman Empire or transitory wealth in general as well as the wealthy themselves; and gold and silver flatware, chains, or pearls stand for superfluous luxuries and therefore function as an allusion for vanity. Even old masters such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder and Lucas van Leyden created genre paintings in the 16th Century, in which depictions of typical peasant and family scenes focus on the dramatic representation of negative examples of human behavior, such as pimping and even activities that are directly or indirectly related to consumption, such as alcoholism or extravagance. Similarly, representations of prostitutes criticize women as object of consumption for men.

At the same time, all these details become props in presentations full of lust for life and consumption, which were surely not purchased by a number of middle-class buyers merely as a moralizing reminder. For example, the Lenten cheese was seen as the food of immortality in that it is preserved or,

⁷⁷ See Ullrich 2006, p. 9, 97-99.

⁷⁸ See Shopping 2002.

in other words, milk in its »immortal« form⁷⁹; and Christ was described as »heavenly milk.«⁸⁰ In addition, especially Dutch still lifes show symbols of wealth that reflect tastes of clients and society in the Netherlands in general, particularly in the case of consumer products such as flowers, especially tulips. In Baroque times, Holland was already one hub of the international flower trade and many of the flowers shown in pieces of art were very precious and also twofold consumer products: both the painting itself and the actual flowers represent and emphasize consumer culture.⁸¹

The second vehicle of meaning after the actual depicted objects has always been the material used in the artwork, which, for a long time, was only used to reinforce or positively glorify the subject. The use of gold base and other valuable materials such as precious stones or expensive colors in paintings and reliques (shrines) symbolized the divine light and also stressed the importance of that which was depicted or shown, and therefore reinforced the already glorified representation, which was, however, always representing the power and wealth of the client.

In addition to the subject of an image and the material used to create it, the art object itself must also be seen as a consumer product, or at least the circumstances of its creation and presentation must be viewed in conjunction with consumption, a fact which is reflected in works of art particularly since the beginning of the 20th Century.

i) Marcel Duchamp

With his readymades from 1913 onwards, Marcel Duchamp repurposed found and ready-made objects, that is, industrially manufactured consumer products such as a urinal (»Fountain«) or a bottle rack, as art.

⁷⁹ See Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, Hanns Baechtold-Staeubli (Ed.): Handwoerterbuch des Deutschen Aberglaubens. Vol. 4. [1931/32] Berlin 1974, p. 81.

⁸⁰ See Clemens von Alexandria (ca 150-215 n. Chr.): Hymnus auf den Erlöser Christus: »*Christus Jesus; Himmliche Milch, Die aus süßen Brüsten, Der Braut, den Liebesgaben, Deiner Weisheit, Entquillt, Nehmen wir Unmündigen, Mit kindlichem Mund, Als Nahrung zu uns, Aus der Mutterbrust des Logos [...]*«.

⁸¹ See Hans-Joachim Raupp: Stilleben und Tierstücke. Niederländische Malerei des 17. Jahrhunderts der SÖR Rusche Sammlung. Berlin/Münster/Zürich 2001. p.7-10, particularly p. 8.

Paradoxically, the aforementioned old artistic materials like gold or precious stones are among the precursors of »anti-precious« readymades. The former became valuable and meaningful on their own because of their inherent qualities, and not only due to the artist. The difference between Duchamp's urinal and the gold foundation of a high altar is the identity of the artist: nature (or from earlier view, God) in the case of gold; another artist, in the case of Duchamp's version of the Mona Lisa; or a commercial company, in the case of the bottle drier or the urinal. In the latter, the artist loads the object with meaning, in the former the meaning was already created historically, since gold has been »valuable«, for a long time due to its appearance, chemical nature, and scarcity. Over the centuries, the value of consumer products such as certain cut flowers, spices, and meat changed (usually decreased), while the value of gold or diamonds stayed more or less constant and the value of rare art works partially grew, and sometimes also the meaning and reception of these various consumer products within paintings changed. Gold has been a valuable material for quite a long time. It was »ennobled« early and its value persisted, whereas the »value« of the bottle drier as a work of art was only added by Duchamp.

Gold and precious stones in the Middle Ages were »evidence-pieces« to support an ideological message. In the modern era, as in the case of Duchamp, found materials are »scepsis-pieces«. They call the audience and their perceptions into question: what is art, what construes value? When and how will something be art that is filled with value? In the gallery? In the museum?

At the same time, when Duchamp declared an industrially produced object to be art by exhibiting it in a gallery, he illustrated that art objects in a gallery are just consumer products in a store. In this way, he questions the relationship between an object and its aesthetic value (artistic value), its financial value (price) and its environment (place). The nature of this connection depends on the experience and perspective of each observer.

»THE MEDIUM MODIFIES THE MESSAGE. Artworks are now predominately defined, distinguished and given accolades in terms of the material they are made of. This is an incredibly limited approach to art, particularly when the medium itself is so incredibly limited. There is not much subtlety and flexibility possible if you are using a dead Shark as the

expressive material. In fact you can really only use it once, because beyond the fact that it has been used at all, there is little else it has to say.⁸² This quote from the 1990s British artist group Stuckists refers to Damien Hirst's shark in formaldehyde (figure 4), which conceptually originates from Duchamp's readymades, as Duchamp was generally indicative of the Young British Artists.⁸³

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»An existing object (e.g. a dead sheep) blocks access to the inner world and can only remain part of the physical world it inhabits, be it moorland or gallery. Readymade art is a polemic of materialism.«⁸⁴, the Stuckists further formulate; this meant-to-be-negative statement (again aimed at Hirst) can also be seen positively in terms of inspiration.

»The Dadaists laid much less weight on the mercantile profitability of their art than on their unexploitability as objects of contemplative meditation. This unexploitability they sought was not the least achieved through fundamental degradation of the used material.«⁸⁵

The relationship between the used artistic material, especially from found objects, often waste, and consumption remains in the finished works, which, according to Benjamin, should be of no use as »objects of contemplative meditation«, for the Stuckists these objects were reinterpreted incorrectly – as a result of their alleged one-sidedness of meaning of the material – as if they cannot serve for »contemplative meditation«. Readymades are polemics (of the materialism) of art, so they extended beyond the concept of art and became art itself.

The material value of the replicas signed by Duchamp a few years before his death, as well as the value of the props from Fluxus-actions is now estimated as extremely high, although at the time, the original »Fountain« was a pure carrier of an idea or a provocation, which (after causing a scandal and »for the photo«) was probably dumped in the trash in 1917. One reason Duchamp created replicas so late in life probably stemmed from financial need. Nevertheless, they changed the reception of his early works:

⁸² Charles Thompson: The medium modifies the message.

⁸³ Gregor Muir: Lucky Kunst. London 2009, p. 199. See also Max Podstolski: The Elegant Pisser: Fountain by »R. Mutt«. In: spark-online. Edition 2 November 1999.

⁸⁴ Billy Childish, Charles Thomson: The Stuckists. Manifesto of 4th August 1999.

⁸⁵ Walter Benjamin: Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. [1936]. Frankfurt/Main 2006, p. 65.

»Duchamp's commercial excursions were condemned nevertheless, for they seemed to turn the readymade's original critique into a celebration of exchange value.«⁸⁶

This is as paradoxical as Shearer's recognition that Duchamp's readymades or »found objects« were, at least in part, probably not found or readymade at all. For example, no bottle dryer can be found that has the exact form of Duchamp's, that leads Shearer to the assumption that Duchamp himself produced it.⁸⁷ In other words, Duchamp declared as works of art consumer products that he possibly created himself and these artificially, not industrially produced replicas were created so as to seem as industrially produced as possible.

Duchamp's aim was to keep the focus of the contemplation of artworks away from craft and finesse and rather in the direction of what they can evoke in terms of intellectual interpretation. Yves Klein's exhibition »Le Vide« at the Iris Clert Gallery in 1958⁸⁸ had the same aim, when he took 20 grams of fine gold for shares of the zone of immaterial pictorial sensibility, in other words, where an empty display case in the exhibition served as art. Duchamp was influenced by Piero Manzoni, who, in 1961, valued his »Artist's shit«, 90 sealed cans of 30 grams each, at the daily price of gold.

In all three cases, whether the artists intended to create an ironic provocation or to display something that they »really« believed was inspired in the same way as »traditional« art is, in the end, irrelevant. Time and continued positive reception proved all of them right. What an artist shows or displays in a place that is anointed as art space is accordingly regarded as art. A more productive question, then, is not whether Duchamp's readymades or Klein's »Vide« are art, but rather whether they are art objects or whether it is possible that the urinal is merely a prop in a performance, even though the concept of performance art as such had barely emerged (was still in its infancy) at the time. The context of an »art space« loads an action or object with artistic meaning and makes it art. A similar process could be observed at a

⁸⁶ Olav Velthuis: Duchamp's Financial Documents: Exchange as a Source of Value. *Tout Fait*. The Marcel Duchamps Studies Online Journal. Vol. 1/Edition 2 May 2000.

⁸⁷ See Rhonda Roland Shearer: Marcel Duchamp's Impossible Bed and Other »Not« Readymade Objects: A Possible Route of Influence From Art To Science. In: *Art & Academe*. Vol. 10, No. 1. Autumn 1997, p. 26-62.

⁸⁸ Yves Klein: *Le Vide Performance (The Void)*. In: *Yves Klein 1928-1962: A Retrospective*. Institute for the Arts, Rice University. Houston 1982.

growing rate in the 1950s. In the case of goods becoming brand products, they were not intrinsically charged with artistic significance but artificially. Both influenced and also regenerated each other, as explained in the following chapter.

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ii) Andy Warhol

*»All department stores will become museums
and all museums department stores.«⁸⁹*

Andy Warhol

Beginning in the 1960s, pop artist Andy Warhol featured a variety of consumer products and their packaging, like as detergent boxes and canned soups, in addition to diamonds and banknotes in his works. In (his) pop art, he reflected the phenomena of everyday consumer world by working with found objects that had already been produced as, and were largely representative of, consumption:

»Warhol's images, however, produce something that is already an image or, more generally, already flat itself: advertisements, comic strips, dollar bills, especially photographs. This shift has led at first to the negative opinion that Warhol's art is a tautology, that is, repetitive in the sense of doubling, his images mere visual readymades.«⁹⁰

It is often unclear whether Warhol's pop art presented these phenomena of the colorful world of commodities ironically, critically, or possibly even with admiration. Essentially, he does it all simultaneously. Warhol is not only criticizing consumer society, he affirms it without reservation, or perhaps this shameless plug was also ironic.

»When I had a lot of cash once, I sprang for my first color television. The »tingle« in black and white was driving me crazy. I thought maybe if

⁸⁹ Quoted from Mary Portas: Windows: The Art of Retail Display. New York 1999, p. 14.

⁹⁰ Michael Lüthy: Warhols Exerzitien oder Vom Umgang mit den Bildern im Bild. in: Warhol. Polke. Richter. In the Power of Painting I. Eine Auswahl aus der Daros Collection. Exhibition catalogue. Zürich/Berlin/New York 2001, p. 25-32.

I saw all the commercials in color they'd look new and I'd have more things to go out and buy again.«⁹¹

Artists such as Warhol show consumption as something important for our time and worthy of observation, but refuse to express a clear opinion. Any evaluation is usually left to the observer. Yet often the attitude of the artist in conjunction with his biography is used to interpret his works. Before his breakthrough as an artist, Warhol earned money with advertising, and often returned to this form of expression throughout his career. The inherent aspect of consumption in works of pop art is seldom absent in historical interpretations. However, the commodity characteristics of art objects inherent in the works themselves are often denied. The innocent 19th -Century »l'art pour l'art«-academic art model does not tolerate any practical use in art.⁹²

»Bourdieu saw art in danger, then, if its field is not defined clearly enough, if it becomes so much a commodity that the legality and rules of reception no longer differ from those ruling a consumer product.«⁹³

The dilemma of reducing of art to the »golden rule« of l'art pour l'art, is, according to Schneemann, just as large as the assumed, complete reduction to its' pure commercial value. Warhol is not done justice if his art is judged according to either extreme.

However, academics have to live as well so art history cannot exist just for the sake of art history, and these academics often end up promoting contemporary artists and their galleries willy-nilly. Thus art critique and the study of art become framers of art history. As long as it is affirmative, says Stallabrass, it almost does not matter what is written about an artist or a work of art.⁹⁴ When art historians quantitatively and/or qualitatively »legitimize« contemporary works, they often either advertise them as goods or deny the artistic character of others. As in the world of advertising, competitors are decried, even if these artworks obviously are and are intended to be (consumer) products, or just broach the issue of commodity-ness, such as Warhol's works do.

⁹¹ Andy Warhol: Die Philosophie des Andy Warhol von A bis B und zurück. Frankfurt 2006.

⁹² See Wolfgang Ullrich: L'art pour l'art. Die Verführungs Kraft eines ästhetischen Rigorismus. In: id.: Was war Kunst? Biografien eines Begriffs. Frankfurt/Main 2005, p. 124-143.

⁹³ Peter J. Schneemann: Physis und Thesis. In: Wert der Kunst in der Gegenwart. In: Kodikas/ Codes. Ars Semiotica. Vol. 25. No. 3-4. Tübingen 2002, p. 287.

⁹⁴ Stallabrass 2006, p. 278.

»The reflected transition of art work to commercial product allows criticism of the fictional or arbitrary determination of this value of artwork in terms of investment value.«⁹⁵

But what is criticized if a work of art now also has commercial value? What if the artwork, in content and form, deals with value of goods? Where is the line between making something the subject of discussion and its actually being so? Schneemann's quote implies that at some point in time, works of art had no value or that there are pieces of art without practical value. This omits the fact that art was also always created for purchase. The art of the Middle Ages was almost exclusively commissioned by clergy and nobility, or the artist produced more or less concrete ideas of others. From the time of the Renaissance and Baroque periods onwards, the bourgeoisie won more power and wealth and also began to commission or purchase pieces of art so artists, to a degree, began to cater to this audience as well.

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Like Warhol's screen print portraits of famous personalities mostly based on commercial newspaper photographs, many of his subjects and the resulting pieces of art fall under the heading of »icon«. Originally, icons were religious images (from the Greek image), which were consecrated to the church and had great theological and spiritual significance for the Eastern Churches. Icons are meant to arouse awe and create an existential connection between the viewer and iconic figure, and also, indirectly, between believers and God.⁹⁶ Icons can be seen in the Orthodox Church not as objects of art or as decoration, but they are an integral part of Byzantine art, too. Thus icons became fetishes themselves even as they depict fetishes as well. Believers worshiped not only the Madonna who was represented, but also the image of the Madonna.⁹⁷ Also Warhol's »reversals« of the early 1980s exploit his own pop art of the 1960s.⁹⁸ Today, Warhol's Marilyn portrait is also »worshipped«, just like the late Marilyn Monroe herself was worshipped as an icon in the 1960s. Lüthy also speaks of »iconic« in connection with Warhol:

⁹⁵ Schneemann 2002, p. 282.

⁹⁶ Those general and summarizing words about the icon are from Jane Turner (Ed.): Dictionary of Art. London 1996. Vol. 15. Entry »Icon« p. 75-77 & Harald Olbrich (Ed.): Lexikon der Kunst. Leipzig 1991. Entry »Ikone« p. 387.

⁹⁷ See Harald Olbrich (Ed.): Lexikon der Kunst. Leipzig 1991. Entry »Ikone« p. 387.

⁹⁸ Jack Bankowsky, Alison M. Gingeras und Catherine Wood (Ed.): Pop Life. Art in a Material World. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 20.

»Because Warhol's pictures are not of actual people but rather of pictures of people, he touches on the crucial point. A star is less a person of flesh and blood and more a visual reality, an »image«, aura-like and mysterious, as only pictures can be, that ultimately does not correspond with a reality behind the image. According to the logic of the star as an icon, quantitative reproduction does not reduce the uniqueness of the subject, but reinforces the basis of fame: More is more. The same applies to the Mona Lisa: Leonardo's painting has long been famous not because it is great, but great because it is famous. Quite contrary to Benjamin's thesis about the loss of aura through mechanical reproduction, a star's unique rank is based on incessant reproduction. Warhol's productivity, which knows the picture only in the plural, demonstrates how quantity and quality come to meet: Significant is solely that which is endlessly repeated.⁹⁹

The quantity artist Warhol reflects this by using serial arrangements (reminiscent of the string of products in a supermarket), by transferring to another medium, and by »blowing up« the size. Like most replication artists (Vervielfältigungskünstler) Warhol also used a variety of media. It is no longer about mastering a single medium, but rather about anointing a variety of products with an artist's brand name.

iii) Jeff Koons

»With the booming art market [of the 1980s, note UB], a celebrity cult developed that eclipsed all of Warhol's prophecies. Artists rose to the position of media stars whose trademark determined the market value of their works. The aura was transferred from the person to the work of art, bad art scored record prices as long as it came from the big names. [...] Because the market expanded faster than production capacity, [...] [the artists] started to create a variety of products that could be sold in retail and in high-end boutiques.«¹⁰⁰

Marc C. Taylor, art critic

Since 1979, Jeff Koons used products from consumer culture as a starting point for his art. He took objects and motifs of everyday art and advertising,

⁹⁹ Lüthy 2001.

¹⁰⁰ Marc C. Taylor: Duty-Free-Shopping. In: Shopping. 2002, p. 47.

then often alienated or imitated them by changing them in the manufacturing process, using different, often more precious materials, and/or playing with dimensions in creating oversized objects that stand in sharp contrast to the original object.

Koons reflects the contemporary trend of consumer products becoming more cultural and artistic, but also art and artists becoming more commercialized.

»[Koons] responded to and helped shape the zeitgeist by abrading the distinction between the content of his work and the media spectacle it inspired. His bid to achieve broader audience and a new form of artistic celebrity while maintaining his art-world credentials was a far greater gamble than his other forms of self-exposure, and in this he certainly succeeded like no artist before.«¹⁰¹

Even at the beginning of post-modernism, Adorno already noticed the parallels between art and consumer goods, especially in times of overproduction of commodities:

»The humiliating difference between art and the life people lead [...] must be made to disappear: This is the subjective basis for classifying art among consumer goods under the control of *vested interests*. If despite all this, art does not become simply consumable, then at least the relation to it can be modeled on the relation to actual commodity goods. This is made easier because in the age of overproduction the commodity's use value has become questionable and yields to the secondary gratification of prestige, of being in step, and, finally, of the commodity character itself: a parody of aesthetic semblance«¹⁰²

The relationship between Warhol's »business art«, his »next step after art«¹⁰³ and consumption embodies more the aura of the artist (in the present study I use the term »brand«), than the artwork, and this aura is already reflected in Warhol's work (and in that of pioneer Duchamp), but to an even greater extent in Koons' work: a contemporary economic phenomenon of the consumer society that Naomi Klein succinctly summarized as »brands not prod-

¹⁰¹ Scott Rothkopf: Jeff Koons and the Invention of the Art Star. In: *Pop Life* 2009, p. 44.

¹⁰² Theodor W. Adorno: Ästhetische Theorie. (1969). In: id.: *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 7. Frankfurt/Main 1997, p. 32-33. English translation from e-book version: Adorno. *Aesthetic Theory* [<http://books.google.de/books?id=NGxSnig-u3wC&printsec=frontcover&hl=de#v=onepage&q&f=false>]

¹⁰³ See Jack Bankowsky: *Pop Life*. In: *Pop Life* 2009, p. 20.

ucts«.¹⁰⁴ The branded artists Koons and Warhol »fabricated« art, Warhol with workers in his factory, Koons with 90 assistants. In the era of mass production of consumer goods, both produced consumable art products as on an assembly line. »Only Jeff Koons is purely a star of art, his fame is unsullied by his profession, his name no longer represents an aesthetic subject, but shines as a trademark – Koons is a logo.«¹⁰⁵

The (self-) staging of the aura of the artist as a consumer product, logo or brand can thus be understood as (ironic?) fulfillment of the long overdue unification of art and (consumer) life. Koons is (and wants to be) very mainstream. He achieved fame in his lifetime, which this becomes clear upon consideration of his role in the media: Picasso, Dali and Warhol acted in the media as unique and »cliche-artist« from another world, even Cindy Sherman was always standing outside in her photos as a disguised observer/commentator, never actually involved.¹⁰⁶ First Koons, starting in about 1988, was considered a celebrity by the media. He is quite the »regular guy« living the American dream, the successful boy next door, who fuses with his art, he even represents it.¹⁰⁷ His (former) muse, blonde porn star and Italian parliamentarian Ilona Staller, was, at his side, the leading lady in his art around 1990, and for a few years during that time, his wife – venal exhibitionistic love meets venal exhibitionistic art. Through scandals and resulting »publicity and prominence«¹⁰⁸ Koons created the persona of »Jeff Koons«. The aura of the artist is what is art about him, id est. the inspiration. Koons' works are products that become »art« through his signature like Duchamp's signature designated a urinal as art, such as the Nike swoosh transforms a normal shoe into a brand product with attached lifestyle-promise:

»This emphasis on the aesthetic and/or the entertaining in advertising is largely due to a surplus in production and a glut of competing, often interchangeable, products in the marketplace. This excess requires consumer choices to be made not so much on the basis of the use or ex-

¹⁰⁴ Naomi Klein: *No Logo*. [2000] London 2001, p. 21.

¹⁰⁵ Norbert Bolz: Marketing als Kunst oder was man von Jeff Koons lernen kann. In: Ute Dettmar und Thomas Küpper (Ed.): *Kitsch- Texte und Theorien*. Stuttgart 2007, p. 298-301.

¹⁰⁶ See Nicholas Cullinan: *Dreams that money can buy*. In: *Pop Life* 2009, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ See Scott Rothkopf: *Jeff Koons and the Invention of the Art Star*. In: *Pop Life* 2009, p. 37-39.

¹⁰⁸ Bolz 2007, p. 298-301.

change value of the product, but on the basis of its worth in terms of symbolic value or cultural capital.«¹⁰⁹

The same can be said about Warhol's pop art or Duchamp's readymade and even more so about Koons – to put it negatively: something is declared art when it is signed by a (known) artist¹¹⁰ or if it is located in an art venue legitimized by a (possibly un-examined) art specialist, in a museum or a gallery. However, the quote can also be understood positively: An original consumer product such as a urinal can be intellectually and aesthetically equal to or even more inspiring than »a Rembrandt,« because it is »charged« by the artist with aura or inspiration, intellectual and/or financial value.

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»By understanding like no other the aura of the commodity in our everyday culture and the dreams, desires, and expectations we project on these commodities, Koons creates the perfect, most desirable objects in all their artificiality.«¹¹¹

Reflecting consumers and their alleged wishes is sometimes even literally the case. Koons' (balloon-animal-inspired) »Rabbit« from 1986 has a reflective surface on stainless steel, which serves as a mirror for the visitors and the exhibition space. The staging and the (self) reflective observer is more important than the art object itself. Koons is no longer the creative artist of fixed modernity, where the emphasis was on production, and people defined themselves largely by their vocation. Literally, as well as mundanely figuratively he reflects consumer society, where art is what the consumer-artist Koons saw – a reflective balloon animal dog or rabbit for children or kitschy knickknacks. Finally, he presents this kitsch and himself, the persona Koons, as kitsch on a silver platter, as in a shop window display, a gallery, or reflective stainless steel made of silver and »inflated« to a gigantic size. The term »to blow-up« emphasizes – with regard to sculptures modeled after balloons – their superficiality. The consumption artist Koons creates consumer products for a (potential) buyer/viewer, who is, like Koons in the media and in his art, him/herself a constantly self-optimizing consumer product.

The artworks of the former Wall Street stockbroker Koons had a strong influence on Young British Artists like Damien Hirst and the Chapman

¹⁰⁹ Joan Gibbons: Art and Advertising. London 2005, p. 133.

¹¹⁰ »I don't see any difference between what I collect and what I make. It becomes the same.« Richard Prince. Quoted in Pop Life 2009, p. 31.

¹¹¹ Max Hollein: Der Glanz der Dinge. In: Shopping 2002, p. 203.

brothers in the 1990s.¹¹² He was named as a pioneer of the future movement of consumer-artists by John Seabrook in 1997, a group that in reality already existed in the 1980s and 1990s, in artists such as Damien Hirst, Sylvie Fleury and Takashi Murakami:

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»The artists of the next generation will make their art with an internal marketing barometer already in place. The auteur as marketer, the artist in a suit of his own: the ultimate in vertical integration.«¹¹³

Advertisers and artists like Jeff Koons create for a generation of (art-) consumers who have experienced media and television since their early childhood.¹¹⁴

¹¹² See Muir 2009, p. 99.

¹¹³ John Seabrook: The big sellout. *New Yorker* 20th and 27th October 1997, p. 182-195.

¹¹⁴ Naomi Klein: *No Logo*. [2000] London 2001, p. 294.

3) London at the Turn of the Millennium

»The spectacle of terrorism forces the terrorism of the spectacle.«

Jean Baudrillard, 1978

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Damien Hirst and Banksy are British artists who are not originally from London but who celebrated their first success there and show(ed) and lived there for a longer period of time. As analysis shows, both deal with rather universal themes and their approach is not explicitly regional, although typical British elements like the occasional macabre humor is characteristic of the oeuvre of both. They are also better known in their home country than abroad. Although they cannot be regarded as local British artists, the city of London served as a springboard to both of their artistic success.

The following section provides facts and relationships typical for the cosmopolitan city of London or the UK, but these are largely applicable to other industrial nations and cities as well. Around the turn of the millennium (or after), artists such as Hirst and Banksy dealt with topics such as consumption or the art market, so a brief historical overview is provided to illustrate the socio-cultural ground on which their contemporary art is based.

From the mid-1960s, London became the center of youth culture, first of Swinging London Carnaby Street in and around Soho, and later, in the late 1970s, by the then politicized punk movement. This study is limited to developments since 1979, the beginning of Thatcherism, the effects of which for many lasted even after the woman herself left office in 1990. It was during this time that Banksy, born in the mid 1970s, and Hirst, about ten years older, came of age.

With more than 7.5 million inhabitants in 2007, Greater London is the largest city in the European Union. As capital of Great Britain and the Commonwealth and former capital of the British Empire, London maintains close political and economic relations with the United States and several Asian countries such as the former colonies, where English is often still commercial and legal language.

A study by the British government in 2005 found that more than 300 different languages are spoken in London and over 50 foreign ethnic groups, each with more than 10,000 members, are represented, including Indians, Irishmen, Bangladeshi and Jamaican. Only 58 percent of Londoners are

British, just as many call themselves Christians. 8.5 percent are Muslims. Among others, fact that the British make up less than 60 percent of the London population reveals that London cannot necessarily be seen as a representative of Great Britain, but rather of comparably large, global, multi-cultural centers such as Paris or New York. Nevertheless, as the capital of Great Britain, London is influenced by the countryside and conversely affects the country.

Since the end of the Thatcher era, London, alongside New York and Tokyo, has been a global financial capital, where more than one-fifth of Europe's and more than half of Britain's largest companies have their headquarters. Although this time dates back nearly 20 years, Thatcher's influence continued to be felt in the reign of Labour Prime Ministers Tony Blair (1997-2007) and Gordon Brown (2007-2010), e.g. in the economic or foreign policy. London is the UK's media center where almost all the major British newspapers and television stations are headquartered. Besides its importance as a metropolis and financial center, London is also the UK's Centre of Culture and Tourism.

Since 2007, the international financial crisis changed London, as well. This banking, financial, and economic crisis that began in early summer 2007 with the U.S. housing crisis, is a result of the growth of economic bubbles in the U.S. as well as a worldwide mass speculation financed by credit. The global crisis expressed itself first in losses and bankruptcies at companies in the financial sector, mainly after the collapse of U.S. bank Lehman Brothers Investment Bank on September 15, 2008, which stands as a symbolic date for the beginning of the crisis. Consequences in the UK were/are an ongoing recession, record unemployment, falling property prices, and exchange rate losses. Approximately 100,000 financial jobs were lost in the UK alone in the years between 2007 and 2010. After 13 years of a Labour government and for the first time since the Second World War, a Tory coalition with the Liberal Democrats came to power in 2010 under the new prime minister, David Cameron.

a) London's Cultural Landscape since 1980

The art world in London around 1980 was limited, according to Iwona Blazwick, director of the Whitechapel Gallery in London since 2001.¹¹⁵ Only a handful of commercial galleries showed contemporary art at that time. Successful British artists like Richard Deacon, Bill Woodrow and Julian Opie worked mainly in the field of sculpture, which stood in harmonious contrast to the Conceptual Art and Land Art that was so dominant in the 1970s.

Margaret Thatcher lowered taxes in an effort to increase spending. At the same time, social housing and national industries were sold to private companies, and the influence of the government was generally decreased. In particular, the financial system benefited from these changes. »The »big bang« in the City of London ended import and currency controls, allowing the globalization of capital and its free flow round the planet.«¹¹⁶ At the same time, the pound was devalued, and unemployment rose. According to the sociologist Giddens, Thatcherism is defined primarily by a »lean« state, autonomous civil society, market fundamentalism, authoritarian morality in connection with economic individualism, a self-regulating labor market, an acceptance of inequality, and traditional nationalism. Linear modernization prevailed, along with a weak environmental awareness and educated neorealist thinking in international politics. The Victorian welfare state was privatized largely, and the social safety net suffered deep reductions. Thatcher said in an interview that »society« does not exist:

»I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand 'I have a problem, it is the Government's job to cope with it!' or 'I have a problem, I will go and get a grant to cope with it!' 'I am homeless, the Government must house me!' and so they are casting their problems on society and who is society? There is no such thing! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.«¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ The following paragraph quotes from a speech by Iwona Blazwick: Discussing Hirst's early work and its reception. Damien Hirst Study Day 13th January 2010, Wallace Collection, London.

¹¹⁶ Lawson 2009, p. 91.

¹¹⁷ Margaret Thatcher interviewed by Douglas Keath: Aids, Education and the Year 2000! In: Woman's Own 31 October 1987, p. 8-10.

Due to her policy, the labor market became »flexible«. The former industrial society became a service society, in which new jobs were created particularly in the financial sector and in retail trade. In 2010, over 480 banks were based in London (compared to 79 in 1985¹¹⁸). Thus London, despite ongoing economic crisis, has the largest bank density worldwide.

Mirroring the trend in other countries, since Thatcher, the average British citizen works several jobs over the span of their working years rather than staying in one occupation for the duration of their work-life. Thus, according to Lawson, a shift in identity took place, from the producer side to consumer side. We identify more with what we own or consume and less with what we do professionally, because work could change constantly. Lawson notices this in context with privatization. Citizens who are now customers or consumers, can be better served by a private contractor. After an economic boom in the 1980s followed the Black Monday crash on October 19, 1987 and a prolonged recession, unemployment rose. In addition, the United Kingdom was involved in the Gulf War. That fact coupled with the negative manifestations of Thatcher's reforms and her »selling of the family silver, privatizing the nation's public utilities«¹¹⁹ led to growing dissatisfaction with the government, which was reflected in the Poll Tax riots of the 1990s¹²⁰ when tens of thousands demonstrated against Thatcher's policies.

The »Iron Lady« cut arts funding enormously, so many artists turned to academia in order to secure their existence, for example in art schools in London like the Royal College of Art (RCA), Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, or the Goldsmiths College, which belongs to the University of London. While (roughly speaking) the RCA was very influential and produced artists such as Henry Moore and David Hockney, in particular from the 1920s until the 1960s, Saint Martin's College was stylistically seminal in the 1960s and '70s with artists like Gilbert & George and Richard Long.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Stryker McGuire: This time I've come to bury Cool Britannia. *The Observer* 29 March 2009.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p. 12, 13.

¹²⁰ See *ibid*, p. 26, 27.

¹²¹ See Richard Cork: Die Siebziger Jahre und danach. In: Susan Compton (Ed.): *Englische Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert*. Exhibition catalogue. 1987, p. 414.

Goldsmiths College, however, was the most important talent factory for the late 1980s and early 1990s.¹²² At this art school in (then and sometimes still) poorer east London, artists such as the Irish-born conceptual artist Michael Craig-Martin (born 1941) and the 1936-born painter and influential curator Jon Thompson taught classes. The latter opened up as director of the art departments at Goldsmiths, so for the first time students were able to move freely between painting, sculpture, photography, et cetera. This would later become a model for other art schools in Britain. In this way, Goldsmiths was the first to respond to the signs of times, when internationally significant and influential contemporary artists like Beuys, Nauman or Koons were difficult to define through a single medium.

Moreover, teachers began to speak about psychoanalysis, anthropology, feminism and art theory instead of talking exclusively about art history. Through Craig-Martin, Goldsmiths also broke with the hitherto prevailing traditional artist image of the solitary painter locked in his studio, which artists like Lucian Freud still practiced. Craig-Martin and his fellow lecturers incited their students to social interaction and artistic collaboration, and encouraged them to visit exhibitions and art openings. According to Blazwick, it was difficult to get invitations to private viewings at that time. In the main gallery street, Cork Street¹²³, there was an air of exclusivity and elite competition, which can sometimes still be felt today. Galleries for contemporary art were rare.¹²⁴ Also due to the small number of large institutions that showed contemporary art, it was hard for a young artist to ever exhibit and sell art at all:

»And there was the art world, the fucking British art world. There was the Lisson Gallery, which was very snobby. And Nicholas [Logsdail, the director] was virtually saying go back to your studio for five years and have a little think.«¹²⁵

¹²² See Richard Shone: From Freeze to House. 1988-94. In: Royal Academy of Arts (Ed.): *Sensation. Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*. Exhibition catalogue. London 1997, p. 12.

¹²³ Muir 2009, p. 34.

¹²⁴ Muir 2009, p. 39.

¹²⁵ Damien Hirst interviewed by Anthony Haden-Guest: Damien Hirst – fresh from auctioning of more than 200 pieces of his work [Interview]. In: Interview Magazine December 2008, p. 155.

According to Muir, at the end of the 1980s, London was not yet connected to the world of contemporary art¹²⁶, this happened only in the early 1990s with a group that became known in art history as Young British Artists.

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b) Damien Hirst and Young British Artists¹²⁷

»Marketing strategies in art history are not new, but the social mechanisms used were presented with new efficiency by the advertising mogul Charles Saatchi in the late nineties. All social roles lent their voices to the script that Saatchi contrived [...] for an exhibition with the ambiguous name 'Sensation' and well-orchestrated scandals for his label YBA, Young British Artists, also premiering in America.

Peter Schneemann, art historian

One of Craig-Martin's and Thomson's students in the mid-1980s was Damien Hirst, born in Leeds in 1965¹²⁸, who grew up in modest circumstances. Hirst worked three days a week at the established D'Offay Gallery, where he served wine at private showings and staged artwork for customer visits.¹²⁹ At Goldsmiths, he created collages of found objects like Kurt Schwitters and painted irregular color spots.¹³⁰ Compared with what would follow, his early works were not shocking at all.¹³¹

In addition to the aforementioned overcoming of the genre boundaries at Goldsmiths, the young Hirst and his fellow students gained inspiration from the architectural changes of the college. At that time, Goldsmiths underwent a long-term renovation and conversion. The studios of Damien Hirst and his generation were swapped out. The technical equipment, for example, used to produce sculptures was often away at completely different locations. Hence, the students had to send detailed instructions to the Gold-

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 3.

¹²⁷ A good addition to this chapter and the following are the first three chapters in Cooper 2012, p.17-58 and p.73-86.

¹²⁸ See: Hirst/Burn: On the Way to Work. London 2001, p. 122, 125. Also Cressida Connolly: Michael Craig-Martin: out of the ordinary. Telegraph Online from 24 November 2007. Hirst often spoke here about the Goldsmiths professor Richard Wentworth.

¹²⁹ See: Muir 2009, p. 15.

¹³⁰ Compare to Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 118-121.

¹³¹ See Muir 2009, p. 40.

smiths technicians there who would fabricate works according to the artists' specifications. This strongly influenced Hirst's methods of operation. Until 2008, Hirst created most of his works with the help of assistants who were working according to just such instructions.

Another influence on Hirst the student was advertising. In particular, the young student was fascinated by the Art Directors Club book, published annually, housed in the Goldsmiths Library, in which the professional association of leading art directors in the advertising industry gave an award to the best new advertising graphics.¹³² Advertising in the 1980s formed a contrast to the conservative governments of Reagan and Thatcher, when art became even more elite than before. The relationship between art and the media (not only) in the 1980s was also ambivalent because artists both criticized the system, on the one hand, and on the other hand, profited from it.¹³³ Furthermore, artistically designed advertising, such as the cigarette brand Silk Cut, influenced the young Hirst, and also Jake Chapman. Both refer to this brand in a number of earlier works¹³⁴:

»[T]he Silk Cut ads that have been running in British newspapers and magazines for several years contain more obvious art-historical references – Fontana's slashed canvases, for instance, Barnett Newman's 'zip' paintings – are more obviously (if ironically) 'artistic', than any or all the Acquired Inability to Escape series into which a Silk Cut cigarette packet has been incorporated without inflection or intervention. [Hirst] has produced photographic pieces – slick, sumptuous, seductive – which look like cigarette advertisements in which the copy lines have simply been removed.«¹³⁵

Because the predominant art establishment was seen as restrictive and elitist by Hirst and many of his fellow students, as well as the fact that there were simply no opportunities to exhibit contemporary art as a young artist, the

¹³² See Blazwick 2010.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ See Damien Hirst: *I want to spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, with Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now*. 1997. [reduced in printed size, with the same content in the new edition] London 2005, p. 100-110. See also Hirst's quote: »I get a lot of inspiration from ads in order to communicate my ideas as an artist and of course Charles [Saatchi] is very close to that.« From: Buck 1997, p. 127. See also Muir 2009, p. 53.

¹³⁵ Gordon Burns: *In Mr. Death in?* In: Hirst 1997, p. 11.

artists decided to take their careers into their own hands. According to Craig-Martin they had no other choice:

»In a country that had few contemporary galleries and even fewer collectors, generations of young artists had survived through art-school-teaching, the dole, various enterprise schemes, odd jobs. By the end of Margaret Thatcher's reign these options had more or less dried up. I always find it laughable that people think that the YBAs were cynical careerists. [...] The expectation of selling for more than a few hundred pounds was so low that they often made work that defied the idea of the market altogether.«¹³⁶

In early 1988, Hirst's older classmate and friend Angus Fairhurst contacted the Bloomsbury Gallery, where Fairhurst organized an exhibition entitled »Progress by Degree« in February of that year.¹³⁷ In addition to himself, his fellow students Mat Collishaw, Abigail Lane, and Damien Hirst participated. Later, all four art students would be labeled as »Young British Artists«. Today the term includes a heterogeneous group of conceptual artists, sculptors, installation artists and painters who were active in London in the 1990s, many of whom studied at Goldsmiths.

The actual birth of this then yet-unnamed group occurred by way of another exhibition, *Freeze*. As a »true a child of Thatcher« Hirst did not wait to be discovered by the few traditional and elitist institutions in London that exhibited contemporary art: the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA), the Serpentine Gallery, and the Camden Arts Centre. Rather, the 23-year-old self-organized the group exhibition *Freeze* in 1988, the second year of his undergraduate studies, which was influenced by concept art of the 1970s¹³⁸ and which was, for most of the participating artists (in retrospect), the first step towards success.¹³⁹

Hirst found the venue, a vacant office building in London's docklands, as well as business sponsors: the London Docklands Development Corporation and the company Olympia & York, who had an interest in revitalizing the run-down area.¹⁴⁰ What had been a bustling waterfront in the 1950s,

¹³⁶ Craig-Martin: Damien Hirst. The Early years. In Gallagher 2012, p. 38-39.

¹³⁷ See <http://damienhirst.com/exhibitions/group/1988/progress-by-degree> (accessed March 28, 2012)

¹³⁸ See Muir 2009, p. 23.

¹³⁹ See *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 20.

was largely vacant and decaying since 1980. The low rents attracted artists and bohemians, who moved into the empty warehouses, installed workshops and studios there, and organized large parties with art performances.

This in turn influenced Hirst, as artist-curator, to show works of 16 of his fellow students at Goldsmiths in the docklands, which at that time was an unusual practice. Hirst was so contrary to the prevailing practice of the »everyone for himself« rat race and, instead of creating an air of competition, he returned to the cooperation of the European avant-garde of the early 20th Century whose members designed and exhibited works in dialogue together.¹⁴¹ The fact that Hirst and his fellow students exhibited outside the academic and institutional environment can be seen in comparison to Courbet's pavilion du Réalisme 17, which served as a counterpart to the official Paris Salon exhibition. Liebs wrote about Hirst:

»In the Paris bourgeoisie, clever provocateurs and self-marketers could succeed in the market, as in the case of the painter Gustave Courbet, who, rejected by the official Salon, simply founded his own exhibition space. Courbet's [and again Hirst's, note UB] pursuit of attention, understood as a desire for freedom, was considered as distinct, and also goes for art as a whole: it cut the cord with the traditional canon, declared him autonomous, and served to free him from the force of trade of the artist-genius of Modernism, which served as a source of its own power.«¹⁴²

Freeze was divided into three periods¹⁴³, Craig-Martin was able to activate well-known faces of the art world like Sir Norman Rosenthal from the Royal Academy of Arts, Sir Nicholas Serota of the Tate Gallery and the art collector and »media mogul« Charles Saatchi, who all came to the opening.¹⁴⁴ The show ran at different stations for several months and, in spite of low media coverage, was later understood as the initial spark for the new art scene in London. Hirst then organized and (co-) curated as artist-curator two warehouse-exhibitions in the East End in 1990, *Modern Medicine* and *Gambler*, and sparked an explosion of art exhibitions outside the traditional gallery space, which continues in London to this day (2012).

¹⁴¹ See Blazwick 2010.

¹⁴² Holger Liebs: Mach's doch selbst. Damien Hirst: der Künstler als Leitbild der Krise. SZ Feuilleton from 26 November 2008.

¹⁴³ Part one ran from 6-22 August, part two from 27 August-12 September, and part three from then until 29 September 1988.

¹⁴⁴ See Jessica Berens: *Freeze: 20 years on*. Online edition of the Guardian from 1 June 2008.

The term YBA in its long form was coined by the aforementioned »advertising mogul«, art collector, and early supporter and patron of the artists in this group, Charles Saatchi, with a series of exhibitions of the same name that started in 1992, a title that was then carried on as a label by the press.

In 1970, then 26-year-old Saatchi along with his brother, Maurice, founded the advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi.¹⁴⁵ With their political campaign »Labour Isn't Working,« they contributed to the 1979 electoral success of Margaret Thatcher's Tories and were perceived and referred to as »Thatcher's children«. From 1983 onward, Saatchi & Saatchi developed the previously mentioned artistic advertising campaign for Silk Cut Cigarettes. Together with his then wife, the American art critic, Doris Lockhart, Charles Saatchi invested in a large modern art collection and became a gallery owner. The Saatchi Collection, which at the time was deeply influenced by Doris Saatchi, opened in 1984.¹⁴⁶ She was an expert on American minimalism, which was reflected in the works and in the presentation of the collection: According to Blazwick, London galleries in the 1980s like the Tate were hung very closely. Colorful wallpaper and rustic wood floors, gold frames and paintings in predominantly 'domestic' size dominated the museums and galleries, and thus influenced the works of many artists:

»You just couldn't fit the size of paintings we wanted to make into Cork Street. If you were supposed to fit into the art world you would have to scale the work down. [...] Warhol had done Thirteen Most Wanted Men huge. But Peter Blake and Richard Hamilton were still doing these small paintings. And little things. Very kind of local and small.«¹⁴⁷

A large former paint factory in Northwest London was converted into an art space by the American architect Max Gordon on behalf of the Saatchis¹⁴⁸ and housed the collection first and introduced, with sharp contrast to the 'small' London art world, the minimalist loft-like flair of New York City and New York art to London. A former commercial space where colors had been made was remodeled along the lines of refurbished, previously commercial American warehouses to show salable art from a collector and advertising

¹⁴⁵ See Alison Fendley: Saatchi & Saatchi: the Inside Story. Darby, 1995.

¹⁴⁶ See Darwent 1998 and Blazwick 2010. Instead of »1984« (Darwent 1998) Stuart Jeffries spoke of »1985« in his interview with Charles Saatchi. See Stuart Jeffries: What Charles did next [Interview]. The Guardian from 6 September 2006.

¹⁴⁷ Hirst in an interview with Haden-Guest 2008, p. 155.

¹⁴⁸ See Buck 1997, p. 128.

mogul in a gallery, an art shop. In 2016 Hirst put his new museum, analog to Saatchi's former paint factory building, in houses that used to be stage design workshops. The history of the buildings fill the new purpose with additional meaning.

In contrast to the prevailing British taste, the Saatchis presented a few large-scale works dramatically in a simple, white, but huge room with a concrete floor and overhead lighting. This inspired Hirst and his contemporaries to create large scale installations such as »A Thousand Years« (1990) inspired for instance by Donald Judd¹⁴⁹, whose works he saw at the Saatchi Gallery, and to show them in similarly designed warehouses, such as the one for *Freeze*:

»[Saatchi] was just there at the perfect point with a huge fucking space. [...] And then Saatchi did the New York Show. I remember walking in and going, 'Hey, my eyes!' The whiteness of it! It just blew me away. And it was so not British. And that just totally inspired all the students. We wanted to show at the Saatchi Gallery immediately. And then we started making work really to fit in there. And that's when I realized we wouldn't fit into the art world the way it was. So I just went and got a warehouse, and we did that show.«¹⁵⁰

Later labeled »Young British Artists«, a name particularly resonant abroad, these artists tried *not* to be British, their influences were clearly American and German. For Hirst especially, the show »New York Art Now« from 1987, where he saw Jeff Koons, who became important for his work, was particularly influential¹⁵¹. Saatchi also showed exhibitions of Warhol, Serra, Judd, and Nauman, as well as German greats like Kiefer and Polke. According to Doris Saatchi, Hirst was not alone in his very American-like tendency to create 'great', id est large scale art:

»In 1988 I lectured at the Royal College of Art and I was appalled at how careerist the students had become[.] [...] They all wanted to get work into the Saatchi Collection, so they were making huge things to fill all those huge spaces. So un-British: well, pace Turner, anyway. We live in a

¹⁴⁹ See Hirst's interview with Mira D'Argenzo in: Eduardo Cicelyn, Mario Codognato and Mirta D'Argenzo (Eds.): *Damien Hirst. The Agony and the Ecstasy. Selected works from 1989-2004*. Cat. Exh. Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Napoli 2004, p. 72.

¹⁵⁰ Hirst im Interview mit Harden-Guest 2008, S. 155.

¹⁵¹ The Saatchi Gallery: *New York Art Now (Part 1)* life from September 1987 to January 1988.

time that is heavily influenced by advertising and, as we all know, Charles Saatchi is a master of that discipline. The influence is felt in much of the art made today, and, for me, it's soft at the centre. I don't want narrative, but there's a lack of rigor in it.«¹⁵²

Saatchi wanted to buy Hirst's capstone show in 1989 but Goldsmiths College would not sell it to a collector, just to a gallery. The works therefore went to the Karsten Schubert Gallery, which sold it in turn with a profit to Hirst's dealer, Jay Jopling, a few weeks later.¹⁵³ The same year, however, Saatchi bought two of Hirst's medical cabinets in the »New Contemporaries« exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. In 1990, he bought Hirst's »A Thousand Years«, part of the warehouse group exhibition »Modern Medicine« organized by Hirst. The artwork was inspired and bought by Saatchi and his Gallery, who from then on bought Hirst and many of his colleagues.¹⁵⁴ According to Hirst, Saatchi's by that time ex-wife Doris bought a Pharmaceutical Cabinet in the same exhibition.¹⁵⁵

In retrospect, one can see Saatchi's taste in art as well as a good deal of foresight and calculation. After the 1989 stock market crash and the expensive divorce from his (for his collection) influential wife, Doris in 1988, Saatchi sold most of his collection of first class British, American, and European art and began to purchase works of unknown, young British artists. »The market was overheated and it was a good time to sell« was Saatchi's laconic explanation of his 1989-91 sell-off.¹⁵⁶ In his exhibitions in the late 1980s, Saatchi initially showed British artists of the recent past such as Freud, Auerbach and Deacon.

In 1991, Saatchi read of Hirst's plans for an art project that the latter wanted to make a piece with a shark. He offered to cover the costs for Hirst. Hirst then created »The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living« for £50,000.¹⁵⁷ This tiger shark preserved in formaldehyde became not only Hirst's most famous work, but also the most significant of

¹⁵² Hirst im Interview mit Haden-Guest 2008, S. 155.

¹⁵³ See Hirst's interview with Mirta D'Argenzo. In: Napoli 2004, p. 68.

¹⁵⁴ See Colin Gleadell: Market news: Counter. Online edition of the Telegraph from 17 March 2003.

¹⁵⁵ See Hirst's interview with Mirta D'Argenzo. Napoli 2004, p. 62.

¹⁵⁶ Buck 1997, S. 128. Vgl. auch Stallabrass 2006, S. 5.

¹⁵⁷ See BBC News: Saatchi mulls £6.25 m shark offer. BBC News online from 23 December 2004.

the group of the 'Young British Artists'.¹⁵⁸ Since 1992, Hirst, Sarah Lucas, and others showed in an exhibition called »Young British Artists« at London's Saatchi Gallery, which solidified this label. The artists who were listed as YBAs fluctuated constantly, and today the term is still vague. This exhibition series ran until November 1996, from »Young British Artists I« to »Young British Artists VI,« each at the Saatchi Gallery. Although he made at least 42 million U.S. dollars with art deals in 1996, Saatchi denies purchasing art purely for profit reasons. At least initially, Saatchi publicly invested a lot of money in these still 'cheap' young artists to increase their awareness, reputation, and their symbolic and financial value, much as he did with the Saatchi brand.

In 1991¹⁵⁹, Hirst met his future gallerist Jeremy »Jay« Jopling. Then a student, Jopling organized an art auction for charity in his final year at Edinburgh University and managed to convince »hip« artists like Basquiat, Haring and Schnabel to donate works. The auction brought in 500,000 dollars.¹⁶⁰ Born in 1963, Jopling was an Eton graduate who went on to study fine arts and own a gallery. He was (besides Saatchi) the most influential non-artist-personality of the Young British Artists (»Some London art dealers and collectors, such as Jay Jopling and Charles Saatchi, were more famous than their artists«¹⁶¹). He is still the dealer for Hirst and many former YBAs. Jopling's ascent to über-dealer is closely linked to the rise of his old friend Hirst.

Beginning in 1991, Hirst's works were shown in many international solo and group exhibitions, including one in 1993 in the Aperto section of the Venice Biennale and in 1996 at the famous Gagosian Gallery in New York. From then on, Larry Gagosian was Hirst's permanent American dealer.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ See Richard Brooks: Hirst's shark is sold to America. Online edition of the Times from 16 January 2005.

¹⁵⁹ Muir writes (p. 37) that they worked together starting in 1991, Thümmel sets it in 1990 (p. 18). In 2012, Hagan wrote: »At a Serpentine gallery show that same year [1991, note UB], Hirst met Jay Jopling, who would soon become his dealer.«

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 37.

¹⁶¹ Stryker McGuire: This time I've come to bury Cool Britannia. The Observer from 29 March 2009.

¹⁶² »No Sense of Absolute Corruption« was Hirst's first exhibition in the Gagosian Gallery in New York in 1996. Up until the publication of this work, the relationship has yet to be terminated.

c) What Makes a British Artist in the 1990s a Young British Artist?

The phenomenon YBA or yBa is older than the term. No manifestos exist and there was no official formation of a group with the name YBA.

There is a difference between the description »young British artists« in a text about art (already mentioned in The Burlington Magazine in 1917) or (parts of) titles of exhibitions called »Young British Artists« (Museum of Modern Art, New York, July 1968 – October 1969¹⁶³) and the phenomenon that happened in London, not really in the whole of Britain, in the late 1980s and 1990s. The English Wikipedia entry on YBA states that Michael Corris coined the term »young British artists« in ArtForum in May 1992. Corris mentions »young British artists« only in a footnote and describes them as »semiabstract, [...] blandly narrative and [...] environmentally anecdotal«.¹⁶⁴ A description in a footnote is far from coining a name for a group of artists although Corris did actually refer to the phenomenon YBA. Already in March 1992, three months earlier, Saatchi entitled his exhibition »Young British Artists I«. The continuity of naming six exhibitions »Young British Artists« actually established the term for the phenomenon.

The phenomenon »Young British Artists« points to the origin (and main use) of the term in advertising and journalism. It was inaccurate from the start. Cerith Wyn Evans was 34 in 1992, was that still »young«? The term »young« pointed to a (then) contemporary phenomenon, whose subjects were at that time no longer »young« around the year 2000. The soon-to-be-datedness is part of the term. It works in contrast with »older« British artists and points to the fact that since the days of the »London School« (also a highly problematic term) with Bacon and Freud, or 1960s British Pop Art with Hockney and Hamilton, not much happened in the UK in the way of contemporary art in the 1970s (Gilbert & George, Richard Long, Anthony Caro) and »80s (Julian Opie, Tony Cragg), which was also recognized outside the UK. The soon-to-be-datedness also points to the purpose of the term; it was not a term for art history books or specialist literature but rather

¹⁶³ According to Thümmel, the term Young British Artist had already emerged in 1966 on the occasion of the Venice Biennial. See Thümmel 1997, p. 17.

¹⁶⁴ Michael Corris: British? Young? Invisible? w/Attitude?, in: ArtForum, May 1992, p. 109. <http://www.blumandpoe.com/sites/default/files/press/GallaccioArtforum0592.pdf> (retrieved 23 February 2017).

something meant to advertise something today or report about something today without thinking about tomorrow.

Why Young *British* Art? What is British? British born? As stated in the previous chapter, the YBAs looked at American and German Art of the 1980s, concerning the size of the artworks or ways of presenting them in an art space. They used conceptual ideas and painterly influences of artists like Kippenberger, Koons, Kiefer, Polke, Judd, Schnabel. YBA was never nationalist art although it emerged at the same time as Cool Britannia and Britpop (see next chapter), which both have »Brit[ain]« in the name, as well.

The acronym term »YBA« (or »yBAs«) was not used until the end of 1994.¹⁶⁵ Between Damien Hirst's *Freeze* group show of Goldsmith students in 1988 and Saatchi's First YBA show (and also later) this still nameless phenomenon was sometimes alternatively called BritArt or Britart, the artists the BritPack or Brit Artists, New Boomers or New (British) Art, or, as Stallabrass alone called it in 1999 – High Art Lite.

Young British Art is usually slightly conceptual or painterly (painting or referring to painting), often figurative and provocative. The art of the Young British Artists publicly provoked taboo infringements and scandals through the representation of connections between sex, violence, and social misery, and addiction and crime. Often, their works contain ironic references to earlier art history, for instance Da Vinci in the work of Sam Taylor-Wood and Goya in that of the Chapman brothers, but also in the vanguard of the early 20th Century, Pop Art (as in the case of Gavin Turk and Hirst) and advertising (with Sarah Lucas, Angus Fairhurst and Tracey Emin, etc.). However, all this was also true for most contemporary art in the 1990s. The term Young British Artists is a lowest common denominator for a group of emerging (Young) artists who mainly just came out of art school in London (British), whose art does not have much in common with one another; apart from the fact that it looks like mass media would report on it and like an ad man would buy it. The answer to the above question of what makes a British artist in the 1990s a Young British Artist requires approaching the subject through a means other than the artworks.

While the name started with Saatchi, the phenomenon itself, at the time still nameless, began earlier, in the 1980s. In retrospect, the warehouse show *Freeze* (1988) marked the prominent start. However, there was a less promi-

¹⁶⁵ Muir 2009, p. 122.

inent predecessor organized by Angus Fairhurst, featuring himself, Damien Hirst, Abigail Lane, and Mat Collishaw in a little show called *Progress by Degree* at the Bloomsbury Gallery of the University of London (Institute of Education)¹⁶⁶ shortly before Freeze (6 August 1988 – 29 September 1988).

Shortly afterwards (15 November – 7 December 1988) gallerist Karsten Schubert exhibited Ian Davenport, Gary Hume, and Michael Landy, who all exhibited in Freeze, in his gallery. So YBAs' start was both institutional (Bloomsbury Gallery of the University of London) and self-organized (Angus Fairhurst). Many self-organized warehouse shows (starting with *Freeze*) went on to be picked up, some immediately, by gallerists (Schubert et al. in 1988, and in 1993 by Jay Jopling) and a prominent collector (Saatchi), who attended *Freeze* and whose wife at the time had bought a Hirst at a degree-show at an earlier time.

Schubert and Saatchi exhibited other artists as well. Institutions like the ICA (with their New Contemporaries shows since 1989) and the Serpentine Gallery showed some artists, who were later called YBAs, in group shows early on (Hirst, Glenn Brown) – as well as many others who are not necessarily considered to be(-come) YBAs. So warehouse shows like *Modern Medicine* and *Gambler* (both curated by Billie Sellman and Carl Freedman, partly with Hirst) and *East Country Yard Show* (curated by Henry Bond and Sarah Lucas) were, together with the two aforementioned self-organized shows, my starting point for a more systematic approach to the question above. The Serpentine Gallery, a public institution, had already shown YBAs *avant la lettre* before Saatchi started his series of exhibitions in March 1992. In 1993 and 1994, a few institutional shows took place (where YBAs were shown together with other artists): *Minky Manky* at the South London Gallery, curated by Carl Freedman, and again at the Serpentine, Hirst's *Some Went Mad, Some Ran away*.

Artists who participated in *Progress by Degree*, *Freeze*, *Modern Medicine*, *Gambler*, *Lucky Kunst*, etc. also participated in group-shows at the Serpentine Gallery, in two big shows in the US (*12 British Artists* and *Brilliant!*). In the early 1990s many of those artists (and others) were in the Saatchi Collection, some were shown in his *Young British Artists at the Saatchi Gallery I–IV* exhibitions between 1992 and 1996 and/or were part of his *Sensation* show (1996) at the Royal Academy. This institution was a conservative stronghold

¹⁶⁶ <http://www.damienhirst.com/exhibitions/group/1988/progress-by-degree> (retrieved 4 January 2017). See also Muir 2009, p. 18.

of the arts. Therefore, *Sensation* was regarded as a kind of accolade by the establishment for the YBAs. The exhibition, which went on to tour internationally, was accompanied by scandals and big media coverage. *Sensation* is the biggest YBA show to date. 110 works by 42 artists (20 Goldsmith, 7 Royal College graduates) were represented who were an average of 35.5 years old at that time and graduated between 1981 and 1994. With over 350,000 unique visitors in London, it was also successfully shown in New York, Berlin, and Canberra.

The most quoted works of the YBAs might be Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) and the tent, titled *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995* by Tracey Emin from 1995, purchased by Saatchi shortly before *Sensation*. Further works often cited in connection with the show include Jake and Dinos Chapman's life-size figures of children with genitals in the face (*Tragic Anatomies*, 1996) and a self-portrait by Marc Quinn cast from his own frozen blood, entitled *Self* from 1991. Most media coverage during *Sensation*, however, centered on Marcus Harvey's *Myra*, the larger than life portrait of Myra Hindley, the notorious British woman who was convicted of multiple counts of child murder in 1966. Harvey compiled her portrait as a mosaic of children's hand plaster casts. When *Sensation* moved to New York, Chris Ofili's painting *The Holy Virgin Mary* caused a scandal and was defaced/vandalized by an elderly visitor who smeared white paint over it, claiming the image to be »blasphemous.

«

It is tricky however, to accept Saatchi's collection or *Sensation* as a maxim, because Saatchi always sold artworks. The collection never consistently includes works by the same artists.

Of these approximately 100 artists in all these early warehouse and institutional exhibitions who were young (that is born after 1955) British artists, more than twenty went to Goldsmith, twelve to the Royal College of Art. Goldsmith graduates participated earlier in group shows, so Muir called them first generation YBAs and those who attended Royal College second generation.¹⁶⁷ Karsten Schubert exhibited 20 of these artists between 1988 and 1996, Jay Jopling 13 of them between 1993 and 2000.

¹⁶⁷ Muir 2009, p. 130 f.

Reasonably defined through their art school, Saatchi, and institutional and warehouse exhibitions, YBAs were later awarded prizes: Between 1992 and 1999, five artists who are counted among the YBAs were awarded the main British newcomer award Turner Prize, and almost ten were nominated. Between 1989 and 2005 altogether about 20 of all these artists were nominated or won the Turner Prize (Hirst and Rachel Whiteread were nominated and won, Hirst in 1995 for his formaldehyde sculpture *Mother and Child Divided* after being nominated in 1992 for *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*.¹⁶⁸)

The first graph (figure 1) shows important/often mentioned early warehouse shows and institutional shows as well as the most important collector (respectively?), furthermore two gallerists along with their involvement between 1988 and 2000. In the case of curators of the early warehouse shows who also curated institutional shows a few years later, I marked their exhibitions with the same color. Of the ten institutional exhibitions between 1988 and 1996, four were abroad, two in the Serpentine Gallery.

¹⁶⁸ See Thümmel 1997, p. 18-19.

3) London at the Turn of the Millennium

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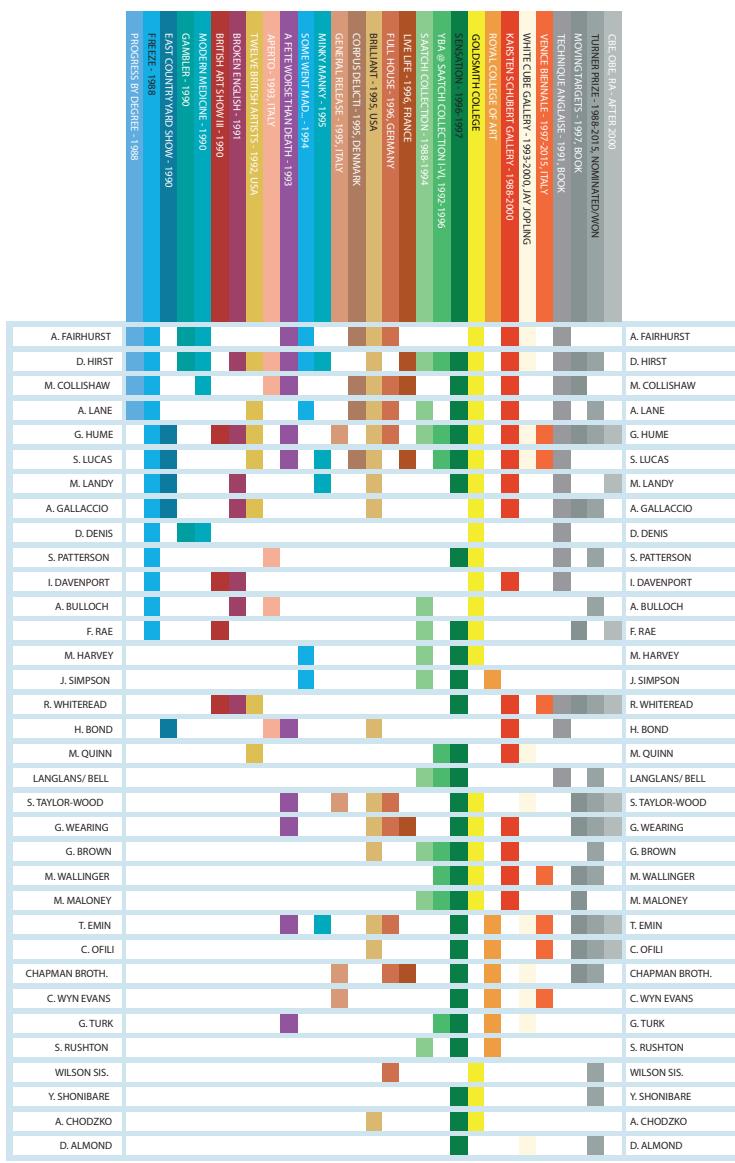


Figure 1: Institutional shows, warehouse shows, gallerists, collector of the YBAs (1988-2000).

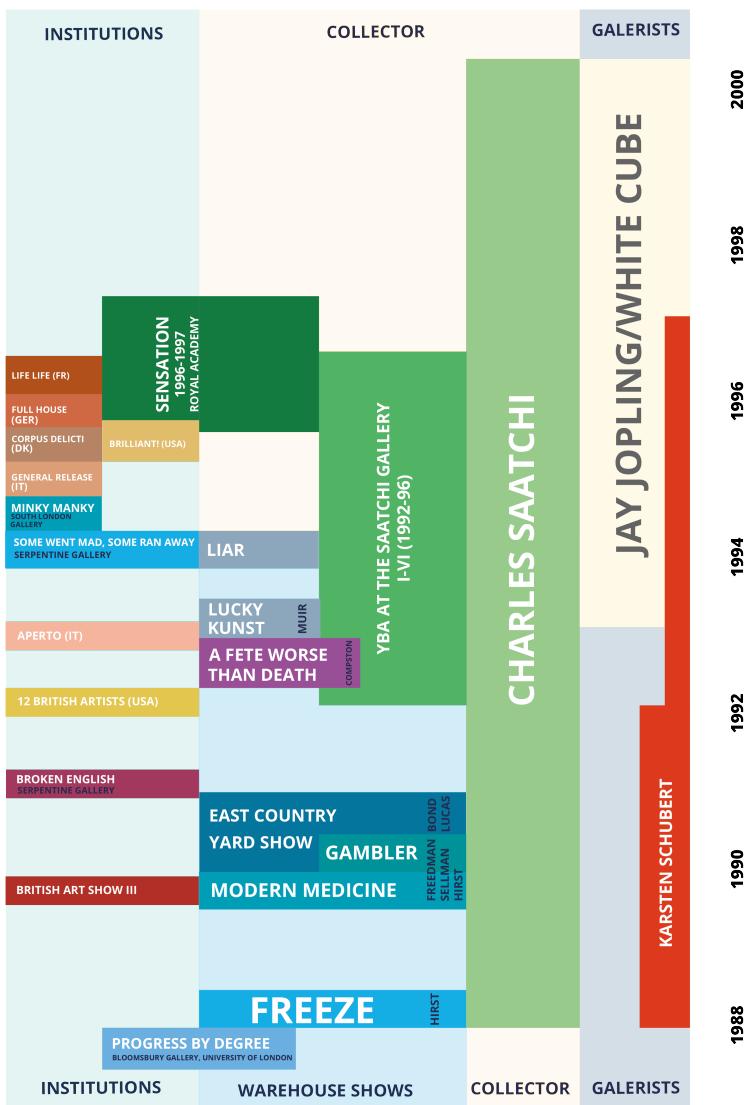


Figure 2: Important YBA exhibitions, art schools, collections, awards, galerists, books, and the artists associated with them.

The second graph (figure 2) shows which artists fulfill the most common criteria of being a YBA, shades of green show their affiliation with Saatchi, yellow Goldsmith graduates, and dark red those of the Royal College. Early warehouse exhibitions are in shades of blue, international institutional exhibitions in shades of brown-orange, while honors and prizes like the Turner Prize or Venice Biennale participations, etc. are in shades of grey.

Hirst meets the most criteria; he is the most typically YBA – followed by Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas, Mat Collishaw, and Angus Fairhurst in the first YBA generation. Tracey Emin, Gillian Wearing, and Sam Taylor-Wood lead the second generation, followed by the Chapman brothers, Chris Ofili, and Mark Wallinger. Glenn Brown, Wallinger, and Marcus Harvey, though Goldsmith graduates, appear to be typical »Saatchi artists« who were in none of the early warehouse exhibitions. Marc Quinn and Langhans/Bell, important Saatchi artists, did not need much other criteria to become significant YBAs. Angus Fairhurst is one of the significant YBAs who has never been collected or shown by Saatchi, and Emin boycotted Saatchi as well. He had to buy her »tent« on the secondary market to show it in *Sensation*.¹⁶⁹

The third graph (figure 3) visualizes romantic relationships between some of the often-mentioned YBAs (continuous line) but also the relationship of those who shared a studio or flat (dotted line). Besides attending college together, exhibiting together, and featuring one another in exhibitions, many YBAs also collaborated artistically in the sense of creating collective pieces of art with each other, for instance Fairhurst with Hirst and later with Lucas.

These three graphs show tendencies, they emphasize certain aspects and neglect others: Hirst could have been in many more shows, especially of the »second generation«, but he choose to do more solo exhibitions at that time.¹⁷⁰ He was asked to represent the UK in the Venice Biennale in 1999 or to become a Royal Academician but refused.¹⁷¹ There were other collectors besides or even before Saatchi became what he is today in retrospect for the YBAs. There was, for instance, also Peter Fleissig, Eric Frank, Ralph Burnet, Stuart Evans or Bernhard Starkmann. In addition to Jopling and Schubert there were more art dealers, for instance Prue O'Day who showed Dinos

¹⁶⁹ Muir 2009, p. 202.

¹⁷⁰ See Muir 2009, p. 131.

¹⁷¹ Cooper 2012, 83.

Chapman, Sam Taylor-Wood, Abigail Lane in 1991¹⁷² or Maureen Paley (Interim Art), who showed for instance Gillian Wearing, Bond, Bulloch.¹⁷³ Leslie Waddington (Waddington Galleries) also showed Fiona Rae and Ian Davenport, but never specialized in YBAs.¹⁷⁴ Of course there were many more warehouse, foreign, or institutional exhibitions at that time and other publications I could have consulted as well. However, to show a tendency these – which are quoted often – might already be enough.

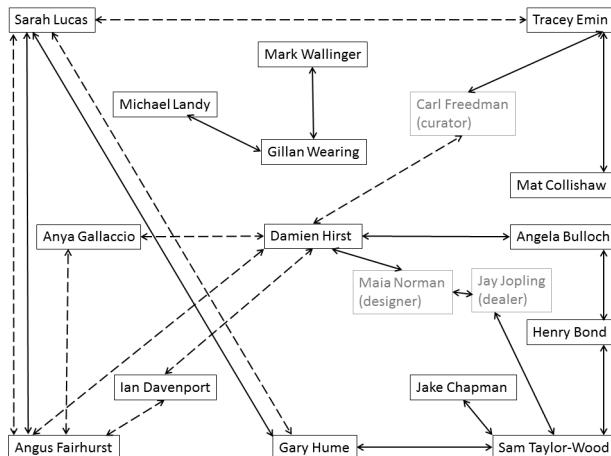


Figure 3: Romantic relationships between YBAs (solid line) and shared studio space (dashed line).¹⁷⁵

i) YBAs after 2000

Fulfilling most criteria to be an YBA in the 1990s was a guarantee of further success for Hirst, Lucas, and Hume. For instance, Chris Ofili, Tracey Emin, Gillian Wearing, or Rachel Whiteread fulfilled fewer criteria that Fairhurst and Collishaw. Nevertheless they are more famous today (Emin at auction

¹⁷² Cooper 2012, p. 36.

¹⁷³ Cooper 2012, p. 37.

¹⁷⁴ For details on YBA dealers and collectors see Louisa Buck: *Moving Targets*, London 1997.

¹⁷⁵ All information from Muir 2009.

and in the press, Fiona Rae as a professor at the Royal Academy and as CBE) and/or more recognized (Ofili with a retrospective in the Tate and as CBE, Whiteread with Tate commissions and as CBE). Marc Quinn attended neither Goldsmith nor the Royal College nor did he get close to the Turner Prize. He was never part of any of the early warehouse exhibitions, but his work *Self* is one of the icons of YBA. Nearly the same applies to Marcus Harvey and his painting *Myra*.

Hirst, Fairhurst and Lucas had a group exhibition at the Tate in 2004. Hirst and Ofili both had major mid-career retrospectives at the Tate; in 2012 and 2010. Most YBAs are in the Tate collection. Since 1997 the British Council chose YBAs to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale, first Whiteread, then Hume, Wallinger, Ofili, Emin and finally Lucas in 2015. In 2006 the British Council showed YBAs in a big group show in China called *Aftershock: Contemporary British Art 1990-2006*, including the Chapmans, Emin, Hirst, Hume, Lucas, Quinn, Taylor-Wood, Wallinger, Wearing, and two others.

Another indicator of the importance of YBAs after 2000 is the Fourth Plinth, a commissioned rolling program of temporary artworks on the empty fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square in London. The Forth Plinth commission gets broad media coverage every year. It ran from 1999 until 2001 as The Fourth Plinth Project, and since 2005 as The Fourth Plinth Commission. Winners with YBA background were Wallinger, Whiteread and Yinka Shonibare. Wearing, Emin, Hume, Whiteread, Ofili, and Rae became Royal Academics, OBEs or CBEs.

Since 2003, Charles Saatchi showed works by Young British Artists and a greater Hirst exhibition in his new Gallery, but then turned to other artists, probably because he had a falling out with Hirst in the same year. Saatchi had asked Hirst for proposals for hanging installments and exhibitions of his artwork, but later considered none of these proposals.¹⁷⁶ Saatchi also presented a small car Hirst designed for charity as a full-fledged work of art. Hirst broke ties and removed the exhibition from his CV.¹⁷⁷ In 2004, major works

¹⁷⁶ Dalya Alberge: Shark gets away as Hirst feuds with Saatchi. The Guardian Online from 26 November 2003.

¹⁷⁷ See Fiachra Gibbons: Hirst buys his art back from Saatchi. The Guardian Online from 27 November 2003.

by well-known representatives of the YBAs such as Hirst, Emin, and the Chapman brothers burned up in Saatchi's depot in East London.¹⁷⁸

Selected works from Damien Hirst's extensive collection, which he calls *Murderme* (a morbid pun on 'moderne'), were presented to the public in an exhibition called *In The Darkest Hour There May Be Light* in November 2006. In Hirst's own museum, the Newport Street Gallery in London, which opened in 2015, he started showing alternating one-man-exhibitions from his collection, after John Hoyland and Jeff Koons he exhibited also a former YBA, Gavin Turk, in 2016.

Among the artists from the *Murderme* collection were Francis Bacon, Jeff Koons, Banksy, and Andy Warhol, but also one-third of the exhibition was made up of artists who were formerly known as YBAs. In their brief biographies in the *Darkest Hour* exhibition catalogue the term 'Young British Artists' is not mentioned once.¹⁷⁹

This can be seen as a distancing move and reflects the fact that the term was applied more from the outside then self-selected and is used more in retrospect today: the continued international success and regularly exhibiting artists of this main group are no longer 'Young', but rather all in their 50s. The term »Young British Artists« thus defines a bygone era, namely British art in the 1990s.

The origin of the term (coined by an ad man), its simplicity, its soon-to-be-datedness or its vagueness (as lowest common denominator of diverging artists and artworks) all point to advertising and the art market. Established by an ad-man-turned-art-collector who used art (also) for speculation, first shown in former warehouses, inspired by a gallery that was a paint factory, by artists who financed their first group shows themselves, outside of institutions (which were weakened by Thatcher) and commercial galleries, who did their own PR, these me-inc.-artists mostly showed art that is instantly understandable, provocative, that often points to its commercial origin in tabloid news, TV, billboards, *and the like*. Young British Art is art that an ad man would buy. Although this characterization sounds pejorative, it is meant to

¹⁷⁸ See James Meek: Art into ashes. The Guardian Online from 23 September 2004.

¹⁷⁹ See Damien Hirst: In the Darkest Hour There May Be Light. Works from Damien Hirst's MurderMe Collection. Cat. Exh. Serpentine Gallery. London 2006.

be rather descriptive and can also be seen as a mere contrast to typical artworks or artists that were there (»British«) at that time before (»Young«).

ii) Blair, BritPop and Cool Britannia

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In the same year as *Sensation*, the 18 year run of Tory leadership came to an end, a fact celebrated (at first!) by many creative people. The young British Labour Prime Minister, the charismatic Tony Blair was received enthusiastically. Under his government initially there was economic growth and enhancement of both the education and health care systems. Blair introduced among other things a minimum wage and human rights legislation. »Blair didn't just represent the end of Tory dominance; he represented the beginning of something, too. The electorate, especially perhaps those middle Englanders who voted Labour for the first time, saw him as their skywalker, the man who would lead post-imperial Britain, post-Thatcher Britain, into the uncharted 21st century.«¹⁸⁰

Since 1994, parallel to the YBAs, the so-called Britpop bands like Blur, Oasis, and Pulp, became famous in pop music. Around 1996, Hirst, who had studied with Blur and Pulp and who was friends with Oasis, as the foremost YBA, became a celebrity himself.¹⁸¹ Since the mid-1990s, the term Cool Britannia (parallel to the concept of Swinging London in the 1960s) was used to describe the trendy British pop culture before 2000 and was particularly exploited by the government. The *Observer* wrote, in retrospect, about the 1996 beginnings of Cool Britannia: »In the fashion world, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design was the place to learn the trade. The Paris fashion houses Givenchy and Dior installed two of its graduates, John Galliano and Alexander McQueen, as their top couturiers. Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Donna Karan and Tommy Hilfiger were all putting stores in Bond Street. Eurostar had brought the continent right into the heart of London. Arriving in droves, young advertising creative types were coming to London to hone their skills and soak up its' by then famous nightlife. Clubs such as the Ministry of Sound, then edgy and fresh, were pulling in young people from Europe and beyond. Immigrants from around the world

¹⁸⁰ Stryker McGuire: This time I've come to bury Cool Britannia. *The Observer* from 29 March 2009.

¹⁸¹ Muir 2009, p. 186.

pumped new skills, innovation, enthusiasm and just plain hard work into a labour-hungry, creatively starved economy. [...] Within days there stood John Major at the Lord Mayor of London's banquet, embracing 'Cool Britannia' and boasting that 'our theaters' give the lead to Broadway, our pop culture rules the airwaves, our country has taken over the fashion catwalks of Paris'. Not that it did Major much good. It was Tony Blair who benefited from the changes that were sweeping through London and Britain a dozen years ago. [...] The language of class warfare would fade, replaced by talk of 'community', which sounded good even if not everybody could figure out what it meant. New Labour, New Britain, as the Labour party slogan said. Onward and upward.¹⁸²

The term 'Cool Britannia' is almost identical to the title of the patriotic song »Rule Britannia« of 1740. Originally from a 1960s pop song, at the beginning of 1996 it was known as an ice-cream advertising slogan and soon adapted by the media.¹⁸³ The history of the term Cool Britannia is representative of our consumer society. Catchy lines from pop songs and advertising slogans are recycled to »rebrand« a country, an economic term in economic times: »Rebranding is the creation of a new name, term, symbol, design or a combination of them for an established brand with the intention of developing a differentiated (new) position in the mind of stakeholders and competitors.«¹⁸⁴

Already at the turn of the millennium, people in Britain realized this was just old wine in new bottles; Blair's politics were no better or even much different than those of Thatcher. Blair's 'rebranding Britain'¹⁸⁵ attempts were seen by many as a »pragmatic entry onto a socially sugar-coated Thatcher-course«.¹⁸⁶ Around 2000, Britpop was no longer fashionable and the Young British Artists were no longer young or an associated group.

¹⁸² Stryker McGuire: This time I've come to bury Cool Britannia. The Observer from 29 March 2009.

¹⁸³ Reiner Luyken: England sagt man nicht mehr. Die Zeit. Number 18/1998.

¹⁸⁴ L. Muzellec und M. C. Lambkin: Corporate Rebranding: the art of destroying, transferring and recreating brand equity? In: European Journal Of Marketing 40, 7/8 2006, p. 803-824.

¹⁸⁵ Klein 2000, p. 70.

¹⁸⁶ Seriousguy: Bye, bye, cool Britannia? Anmerkungen zu Thomas Assheuer. Reader's article blog (Leserartikel Blog) on the Zeit Online website 12 May 2010.

4) Damien Hirst

a) The »Natural History« Series

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»I love natural-history museums. But I think it's just because of my love for information. It's like people walking into an art gallery: they feel nervous and unsure. They don't understand, not the meaning, but the function of art in a way, whereas in a natural-history museum you're presented with lots of art that is totally understandable. [...] People can just walk in and enjoy it without questioning it, whereas in an art gallery they're very suspicious and they question it. I've always thought I'd prefer to make art that would work the way it does in a natural-history museum. You don't get the emperor's new clothes in a natural-history museum, as you do in an art gallery.«¹⁸⁷

Damien Hirst, 2012

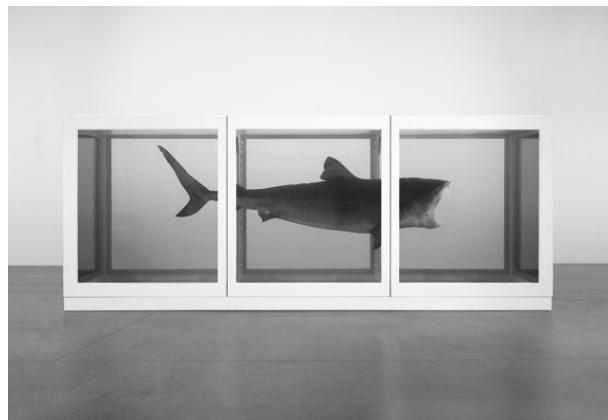


Figure 4: Hirst, The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living (tiger shark, five per cent formaldehyde solution, glass, steel, silicone) 2170 x 5420 x 1800 mm, 1991.

Photography by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd © Damien Hirst and Science. All rights reserved, DACS 2012th Privately owned by Charles Saatchi (1991-2004), Steven A. Cohen (since 2004).

Hirst became generally known in the public eye in 1992 with a work from his »Natural History« series, »The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living¹⁸⁸ (figure 4): a lifelike, conserved dead tiger shark floating in a formaldehyde-filled divided glass cabinet with a 360 degree view and stainless steel frame. This presentation is reminiscent of the display of dead animals in natural history museums, from which the title of the series, »Natural History«, is derived. Both today (2017) and at the time the work was created (1991), preservation in formaldehyde is and was an old-fashioned, historical-scientific method that is furthermore completely unusual for the preservation of animals of this size.¹⁸⁹ Hirst's website and publications state that he used »formaldehyde«. Witzgall pointed to the fact, that »formaline« would be the correct term since »formaldehyde« is a gas, not a liquid like in Hirst's tanks. Formalin is formaldehyde in water.¹⁹⁰ It was used to preserve corpses and cadavers from the time of its discovery by chance by Ferdinand Blum in 1893 – until it became obvious that formaldehyde is toxic. In this study I refer to formaldehyde, not formalin. Both the type of preservation and the objects shown in Hirst's natural History series must be viewed in a (pseudo) historical and (pseudo) scientific context.

»[...] [Hirst] shows that nature in the context of systemized scientific presentation as in the case of prepared relics in dioramas and show cases is also constructed and »draped«. Nature is presented as a cultural construction and projection of human ideas that are subject to contemporary ideologies. The staged animals are objects of presentation, of assumption, and aesthetics of exhibition.«¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Hirst interviewed by Elena Geuna: In conversation with Damien Hirst, exhibition catalogue *Freedom not Genius, Works from Damien Hirst's Murderme Collection*, London/Turino 2012, p.105.

¹⁸⁸ Hirst got £50,000 from his patron Saatchi for the execution of the work that was finished in 1992. See Muir 2009, p. 44-45. This iconic artwork by Hirst was contextualized by Luke White in the chapter: »Und der Haifisch«: Hirst's Shark as an Image of Capital, in *Ibid.: Damien Hirst and the legacy of the sublime in Contemporary Art and culture*, 2009, p. 296-352.

¹⁸⁹ See Thümmel 1997, p. 121.

¹⁹⁰ Susanne Witzgall: *Kunst nach der Wissenschaft. Zeitgenössische Kunst im Diskurs mit den Naturwissenschaften*, Nuremberg 2003, p. 93 f.

¹⁹¹ Ullrich 2004, p. 6. This quote was reframed by the author to Hirst. Ullrich spoke about the contemporary artist Mark Dion, who like Hirst (Ullrich talks about Hirst in the same paragraph) used preserved animals. Dion, like Hirst, also called a series »Natural History«.

With zoological and medical techniques Hirst pursues »scientific mimicry«¹⁹² in order to evoke »speculation around and beyond scientific explanations, whereby [...] [Hirst's prepared objects, note UB] take on post-modern conceptions accordingly, and present less so the character of pieces of evidence than pieces of »doubt«.¹⁹³

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With the help of assistants, Hirst himself initially preserved other animals in formaldehyde, mainly farm animals such as cows, pigs or sheep. Later (until 2009¹⁹⁴), this task fell solely to the helpers, who executed his instructions. Hirst showed not only complete animals, but also items like skinned cow heads or animals divided lengthwise, whose halves are each presented in freestanding showcases. He stresses that he gets all the animals from slaughterhouses, zoos, or similar facilities *after* they are killed for other purposes or naturally deceased, that is, they did not die »for the arts«.¹⁹⁵ However, they are often manifestations or mediums of human violence, even if they did not die at the hand of or for the artist.

Consistent elements of Hirst's Natural History Series include at least one dead animal or animal part conserved in formaldehyde displayed in at least one rectangular glass display case that can be observed from all sides. Hirst varied presentation, number, and species of animals (or animal parts), as well as whether the animals were preserved as looking 'alive' or dead. He also varied the number, shape, size, color and material of the display cases. This (like any) series cannot be fully captured in just one object, but rather in the overall context of the full series. Hirst repeatedly emphasized in interviews that he wanted to create a »zoo of dead animals«.¹⁹⁶

In 1997 Thümmel contributed the first art-historical analysis of this series in her PhD thesis »'Shark Wanted' – Untersuchungen zum Umgang zeitgenössischer Künstler mit lebenden und toten Tieren am Beispiel von Damien Hirst«.

¹⁹² Wenzel 2005, [p. 4]

¹⁹³ Ibid. [p. 5-6]

¹⁹⁴ At the time of publication, just a few new works from this series were exhibited by Hirst who announced in 2008 that he intended to cut back on this series. One example from 2009 has the fitting title »End of an Era«, pictured in *Pop Life*. Exhibition catalogue Tate Modern 2010, p. 176.

¹⁹⁵ See Thümmel 1997, p. 242.

¹⁹⁶ See Hirst interviewed by Mirta D'Argentio. In: Exhibition catalogue. Damien Hirst. *The Agony and the Ecstasy. Selected works from 1989-2004*. Napoli 2004, p. 134.

She only briefly touched on the consumption aspect of the Natural History series, probably because at the time Hirst's works and their reception did not (yet) play such a dominant role. The shift in perception of Hirst's works that was less so characterized by phrases like »death« or »provocation« and more so handled in light of financial records has only occurred since about 2004, at which time he sold the facilities of his closed fine dining restaurant »Pharmacy«, which he designed himself, for 11 million British pounds.¹⁹⁷ Since that time, the titles and materials that Hirst used shifted significantly toward topics that have to do with money and value, reaching a first high point with »For the Love of God« in 2007.

Animals displayed in a Natural History Museum are not presented as if they are dead (i.e. lying on their backs with their tongues hanging out), on the contrary, they are displayed in such a way as to look as alive as possible. Hirst directly refers to and even exceeds both this scientific standard as well as mode of presentation and therefore presents both as potentially deceptive.¹⁹⁸ Many works in the »Natural History« series featuring animals were prepared so skillfully that they look incredibly lifelike and more like a three-dimensional photo – an animal caught in the moment. This also applies to the »Golden Calf« (figures 5 and 6), which is dealt with here. In this case, due to the calf's closed eyes, its state of being is left in the dark somewhere between life, frozen moment, »sleep«, or the »brother of sleep«, death: »*Suspended between life and art, Damien Hirst's images find no peace.*«¹⁹⁹

Hirst's art imitates life, he does not illustrate.

In contrast to a photo, which re-presents, thus granting the viewer distance through mediation, Hirst's work provides the viewer with little distance, merely the glass of the display case separates the viewer from the formaldehyde cadavers. According to Meschede the initial shock of the viewer in reaction to the dead animals will be conquered and transformed into amazement, because the glass of the display case creates a quarantined area that contains the horror within its clear walls, separating the quarantine-room of the case

¹⁹⁷ See BBC News Online: Hirst restaurant sale makes £11 m. BBC News Online 20 October 2004.

¹⁹⁸ As previously mentioned, preserving animals in formaldehyde was already a dated historical method, replaced though other techniques in 1991, as Hirst started his series. This is just known to experts as well as the fact that it was never normal to preserve animals that big. See Thümmel 1997, p. 121.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 16.

from the room in which the viewers find themselves²⁰⁰, broaching the issue of interior and exterior. Hirst appreciates the fact that glass can be dangerous/cutting, both solid and fragile, something that simultaneously keeps the viewer away while granting them the chance to see right through it.²⁰¹ The cold, hard, man-made rectangle of the display case also highlights the paradox between the soft, organic creatures, which almost invite the viewer to pet them, and the fact that they are dead, appalling, disgusting, creepy, and scary.

The livestock featured are unique 'by nature', yet they are rarely perceived that way in daily life, but rather primarily as providers of raw material. This difference between individuals is even more striking in English than in German: an individual cow becomes abstract, that is beef, the pig becomes pork, and only lamb stays lamb.²⁰² Hirst represents both at the same time: Each specific animal is representative of its genus and of all animals. At the same time, Hirst returns individuality to individual animals that died at the hand of and for people, at least as a single animal of a species, as opposed to a mass-produced piece of meat. He also represents more human conceptions of animals than an individual animal itself: »And indeed, the animal was always seen in relation to man and used to formulate comments on humans [...]«²⁰³

The preservation agent formaldehyde reflects mass production and consumption and mirrors consumer society. It preserves the dead animal, clear as oil or brine, transforming a dead animal into canned meat. »*I use formaldehyde because it is dangerous and it burns your skin. If you breathe it in it chokes you and it looks like water. I associate it with memory.*«²⁰⁴ For Ziegelmaier Formaldehyde is Hirst's artistic material, his paint:

»Since Hirst does no longer picture mimetically, but uses transient organic material, as *found object* directly employed, the preserving chemical substance serves him at first as a means to an end. He, however, connects

²⁰⁰ See Friedrich Meschede: *Weder die Liebe, noch der Tod, aber das Staunen davor*. In: *Exhibition catalogue. Damien Hirst. 1995*, p. 32/33 and Jerry Saltz: *More Life. The Work of Damien Hirst*. In: *Art in America 6. 1995*, p. 84.

²⁰¹ See Napoli 2004, p. 70.

²⁰² A similar sentiment is expressed by Ullrich 2004, p. 3: »*Vermutlich fällt es doch gerade wegen des fehlenden Blicks [des toten, verarbeiteten Tieres, Anm. UB] leichter, Tiere in handlich verpackten Stücken, also als Filet, Kotelett, Keule etc., zu kaufen und nicht als Kalbsköpfe oder komplette Hühner.*«

²⁰³ Ibid, p. 2.

²⁰⁴ Hirst 1997, p. 298-299.

with it the idea that a chemical material replaces the millennia-old act of creating art with brush, colour, hammer and chisel. With formalin we combine the idea of preserving a thing in a durable condition, one of the main tasks of art, especially in the form of portraits that are meant to live on. So the chemical substance with its potential preserving property becomes a symbol of remembrance and passed-on tradition.«²⁰⁵

The visual similarity between toxic, corrosive formaldehyde and water, the original habitat of the shark, no longer applies to the farm animals. In this way, each work in the Natural History series contains an inherent reference to »The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living«, particularly in the case of the livestock: the animals are conserved to be consumed in a greater quantity and over a longer period of time, a fate that is all too common for farm animals. This also applies to the shark, whose skin and other organs are consumed by the people who hunt them in their free time as a sport, sharks' greatest enemy. However, sharks are conversely classified as animals dangerous to man, a reputation supported by films like »Jaws«. More than 50 million sharks per year are caught as unwanted by-catch in trawls of international fishing companies.²⁰⁶

Hirst's »Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living« is reminiscent of the supposed danger of sharks publicized in the media. He presents (or uses) stereotypes about the animal's metaphorical meanings, all of which revolve around danger and death, like the loan shark, a symbol for dubious lenders whose greed for money matches the (supposed) blood lust of sharks.

At the same time, however, the shark can be more generally interpreted as a symbol of the hedonistic 1980s and 90s, with regard to the financial market in general as well as the art market, or even as a self-portrait of Hirst. »The capture and preservation of a fourteen-foot Shark reveals the way in which the idea of nature as wilderness – personified by the Shark – has become flattened into a logo. Though »The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living« tells us nothing about Sharks and the way they behave in their native habitats, it reveals a great deal about the society of the spectacle.«²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Ziegelmeier 2009, p. 249.

²⁰⁶ Leonard Compagno, Marc Dando, Sarah Fowler: *Sharks of the World. Princeton Field Guides*. Princeton und Oxford 2005, p. 45.

²⁰⁷ Rosenberg 2011, p. 2.

ARTnews magazine declared 1992 as »The Year of the Shark«²⁰⁸, in 1994, the Saatchi Gallery published »Shark Infested Waters,« and Thompson published »The \$ 12 Million Stuffed Shark« in 2008, according to Rosenberg. In other contexts, Lawson describes bloodthirsty sharks as a symbol for the consumer: »When blue Sharks are caught [...], curious fishermen have cut open their stomachs to watch how the smell of their own blood triggers a feeding frenzy so that they gorge on their own entrails. There we have it. Our attitude towards the planet. We are so hooked on consuming that we have been destroying the planet and ourselves.«²⁰⁹

The fact that the millionaire Saatchi sponsored the work in 1991, led to the association that Hirst has created an ironic portrait of his notorious patron and collector, who was repeatedly accused of using art mainly as an object of speculation and therefore was a typical representative of his hedonistic time. Appropriately enough, the scientific name of sharks is Selachii, which has a striking resemblance to Saatchi.²¹⁰ »Saatchi fictionalized by the Saatchi Collection is – a gorging consumer of art, swimming remorselessly up the Thames, toward the Tate Modern.«²¹¹ Even Wu equates Saatchi with Hirst's shark: »As a corporate executive Charles Saatchi is indeed the very epitome of the enterprise culture of the Thatcher decade. Like the cold-eyed Shark in the work of his protégé, Damien Hirst, he has been swimming freely in the waters of the Thatcherite free market.«²¹²

Koons also united these ideas of mass production, orchestrated sales presentation, consumption, and art.²¹³ In 1985 Hirst saw and was influenced by Koons' display cases with basketballs at the Saatchi Gallery. These cases as well as Arman's and Beuys' display cases from the 1960s are seen as precursors to the »Natural History« series.

»Unlike some historical precedents, such as the work of Arman or that of Jeff Koons in the 1980s, where the inclusion or accumulation of objects

²⁰⁸ James Hall: The Year of the Shark. In: *Artnews* 91/10 December 1992, p. 72.

²⁰⁹ Lawson 2009, p. 103.

²¹⁰ See Capri Rosenberg: The Apocalyptic Spectacle: Damien Hirst and the Crisis of Meaning. Unpublished speech 99th CAA conference in New York. 11th February 2011, p. 2.

²¹¹ Jonathan Jones: He's Gotta Have It, (Part Two) In: *The Guardian Online* 4 April 2003, quoted in Rosenberg 2011.

²¹² Chin-tao Wu: *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*. London 2003, p. 301.

²¹³ Napoli 2004, p. 98, 161.

in transparent containers formulates and contextualizes a critical analysis of consumer society. Hirst uses materials on a level that is both literal and symbolic, oscillating continuously between the two and reconstructing the relationships between individuals in an existential context.«²¹⁴

This quote from Codognato must be supplemented with the information that Koons' vacuum cleaner display cases are not only understood as a »critical analysis of consumer society«, but in fact also as a celebration of it, as is the case with many of Hirst's works as well. Further influences include the minimalism of Donald Judd, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Jannis Kounellis, and Duchamp's readymades.²¹⁵ »*Damien Hirst is a bit pop, a bit minimalist, and a bit conceptual.*«²¹⁶ Hirst himself repeatedly cites Bacon's paintings as an influence for his display cases.²¹⁷ Bacon often used frames of painted lines to isolate his injured human creatures and masses of flesh, something that Hirst in some cases tried to directly translate into his art showcases.²¹⁸ While Bacon paints emotions, Hirst only cites them.

In all the works of the »Natural History« series, the interplay of the transparent liquid formaldehyde and the showcase glass produces an optical effect: the animal seems to jump in the eye of the viewer as they walk around the corner of the case providing two different views simultaneously. This also applies to »The Golden Calf« (figures 5 and 6). Hirst's work achieves this dramatic illusion through a certain theatricality²¹⁹, which is already expressed through the staging in a showcase reminiscent of a 'shopping window'.

Codognato's statement that Hirst uses materials like a shark, the showcases, the glass, or formaldehyde both literally and figuratively²²⁰ can be applied to the whole »Natural History« series.

²¹⁴ Mario Codognato: Warning Labels. In: Napoli 2004, p. 31.

²¹⁵ See Eduardo Cicelyn: The Agony and the Extasy. In: Napoli 2004, p. 19.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ See *ibid*, p. 15, 19.

²¹⁸ See Carol Vogel: Damien Hirst and Lever House: In New York, a \$10 million 'School'. New York Times Online 12 November 2007.

²¹⁹ Eduardo Cicelyn: The Agony and the Extasy. In: Napoli 2004, p. 18.

²²⁰ See Mario Codognato: Warning Labels. In: Napoli 2004, p. 31.

b) »The Golden Calf« (2008)



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Figure 5: Hirst, The Golden Calf (bull, formaldehyde, stainless steel, gold, glass, silicon, Carrara marble), 215.4 x 320 x 137.2 cm (with plinth: 359 x 398.9, 5 x 167.6 cm) 2008, private ownership.²²¹

Source: © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd.. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

²²¹ Allegedly François Pinault won the bid. He is the owner of the auction house Christie's and a longterm collector of Damien Hirst. See Mike Brennan: Damien Hirst: Beautiful Inside My Bank Account Forever. modernedition.com September 2008.



Figure 6: Hirst, The Golden Calf (sculpture), 2008.

Source: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates. © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

»The Golden Calf« is a dead young bull with pure white fur, standing upright in a glass display case filled with formaldehyde. His eyes are closed. A golden disc is attached to his slightly bowed head with two gold clasps and his hooves and horns have been replaced with 18 karat gold replicas.²²² The steel frame of the horizontal rectangular glass display case is beset with polished gold plates and stands on a man-high plinth of mottled gray Carrara marble.²²³

»The Golden Calf« names the content of the work in contrast to most of Hirst's associative titles – namely, a calf that is (at least in part) made of gold. The title suggests not only associations that are not apparent at first glance; a title loaded with meaning that is typical for Hirst, but in this case, he also

²²² Sotheby's: Damien Hirst. Beautiful Inside My Head Forever. Exhibition catalogue. London 2008. Heft »Golden Calf«, p. 74 and see also vol. 3, p. 77 where Hirst wrote: »Remove hooves and horns and cast in solid gold and replace«.

²²³ See Maev Kennedy: Golden calf, bull's heart, a new shark: Hirst's latest works may fetch £65 m. The Guardian Online 28 July 2008. The plinth is a part of the artwork and was auctioned with it. Admittedly (arguably for lack of space) only the glass case was available for viewing in the Sotheby's show.

repeats what the viewer sees. Much in the same vein, his »Twelve Disciples«, hinting at the disciples of Jesus, are twelve skinned cow heads in formaldehyde. This work alludes to Jesus' disciples only in the title and the number of objects in the work.²²⁴ In the booklet for »The Golden Calf,« Hirst preemptively quotes the famous Biblical passage with which art historians would associate the work in which the concept of the golden calf originates:

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»1. And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not was become of him.

2. And Aaron said to them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.

3. And all the people break off the golden earrings, which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.

4. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be they gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

5. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron maid proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.

6. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Exodus, the Bible, Chapter 32.«²²⁵

Hirst chose to quote from the King James translation, which is even more loaded with the value of tradition.²²⁶ He simultaneously illustrates an »old story« and also reenacts it by creating his own golden calf. Both the materials and the manufacturing process are »literal and symbolic«²²⁷ at the same time, like the shark. Hirst actually created a golden calf, rather than just illustrating Biblical words. In the same way, he actually showed a formerly living creature

²²⁴ Thümmel 1997, p. 210.

²²⁵ See Sotheby's 2008. Ibid. Heft »Golden Calf«, p. 3. This source quotes Exodus 32:1-4. Another Bible quote from 1 Kings 12:28-30, mentions two calves that are worshipped.

²²⁶ For this hint I am grateful to Rebekah Jonas.

²²⁷ Mario Codognato: Warning Labels. In: Napoli 2004, p. 31.

(a bull) bound to a post and pierced with arrows in »St. Sebastian Exquisite Pain«, following the legend of Sebastian.

For centuries in Christian iconography, the Biblical passage that describes the worshipping of the golden calf was translated into an image, an emblem, or allegory. Hirst repeats this while at the same time going in the opposite direction. He reconstructs the reality of what the Bible describes; he did what is written, namely he produced a statue of a golden calf. The calf is also a statue or a picture of itself: »This condenses the issue of the confusion between the object and the artistic image of an object in the response of contemporary art to the tension between physis and thesis, between nature and designation, material value and face value.«²²⁸

With »The Golden Calf,« Damien Hirst refers to a long tradition in art history. He makes this abundantly clear in the accompanying booklet where he reproduces a number of these precursors, and thus he presents himself in the same breath as Botticelli or Poussin. In contrast to this, he does not picture the subject in a painting, sculpture or other portraiture, but uses a calf that stands for the whole, for art, that is really made of gold, as it simultaneously represents the real thing and life, but it is also a real calf.

In the Bible the Golden Calf is a synonym for an idol that is worshiped although it is forbidden.²²⁹ Hirst created the Golden Calf, the symbol of the ban on graven images or idols, a paradox per se, which was avoided by artists since the Middle Ages by depicting the worshipers *and* the calf, without creating a golden calf themselves, but only an illustration of the Bible story.

There are many diverse reasons that the cast of a calf, particularly a male calf, has become a synonym for graven images or idols. A calf may be a young bull, which is obviously the case in Hirst's »The Golden Calf«. The young bull's penis is clearly visible. His sexuality is not hidden or only hinted at, as is the case with many illustrations in art history, but rather emphasized (figure 6). The bull (like the penis) is an ancient symbol for (male) aggression, sexuality, strength, and vitality.

These personality traits have been admired, sought after, respected, and feared since time immemorial. Often they are assigned to pagan gods, for instance Jupiter who, in the form of a beautiful and wild bull, robbed the Vir-

²²⁸ Schneemann 2002, p. 276.

²²⁹ Exodus 20:1-5: »You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them[...].«

gin Europe. However, Hirst's »Golden Calf« is not aggressive, but rather passive and vulnerable because his eyes are closed and his front hooves almost float, contrary to the apparent massiveness of his body, they seem to hardly touch the ground (like in other works of the series) (figure 7). Both the title and subject refer to the Bible, however; »worshiping the golden calf« has long been a figure of speech.



Figure 7: Hirst, The Golden Calf [detail] (sculpture), 2008.

Source: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

Although the title and presentation, as mentioned, reference the tradition of other golden calves in art history, »The Golden Calf« is far from a purely religious symbol. »By borrowing biblical images you're investing the work with an added kind of weight.«²³⁰, Burns said to Hirst, who agreed with him. However, when Burns claimed that Hirst was both part of this long tradition

²³⁰ See Sotheby's 2008. Vol. 1, p. 21.

of Christian imagery and that his works confirmed this heritage, Hirst replied that religion has fallen from its former status. He was, nevertheless, interested in what would take its' role as a source of meaning, because people want something to believe in. According to Hirst art might take the place of religion, but Burns counters that money and art are one and the same in Hirst's work.

Hirst is aware that »The Golden Calf« serves as a metaphor for this relationship between the current decline of religion and the simultaneous rise of capitalism: »And then when you think about all the reverences to the art market, to the stock market, and cash, and belief, and religion kind of falling apart...«²³¹

Hirst is aware of the lasting power of an image (in this case coming from the Christian mythology and iconography) and that this power has the/possibility to provoke.

Provocations belong to Hirst's image and are almost expected by his »followers« and (potential) buyers/viewers. Blasphemy and the »controlled shock« (another Hirst paradox) in response to the carcass is a calculated side effect of the »Natural History« series, which lend additional attention to individual works. In the case of »The Golden Calf« the shock is very limited because Hirst is known for »shocking« this way, a principle from the world of marketing and consumption: »Big feelings are only possible under conditions that Ellen Berscheid described as *controlled exposure situations*. You can be surprised and excited – but one can leave or turn off at any time.«²³²

In contrast to the art historical predecessors »The Golden Calf« was not created for a religious context, but for purchase by a wealthy collector, or even less so for display in a museum, but in any case for a secular context. This issue is taken into account in Hirst's work. He monitors the viewer, who was for a long time for him just a potential buyer of his art, not so much a contemplative old school museum visitor, who just wants to look at art. Hirst's supporters stress that he does not need the museum.²³³ In fact, up to the completion of this study in 2016 Hirst's works were much less shown in public institutions than in commercial galleries, despite his large Tate retro-

²³¹ Hirst interviewed by Haden-Guest 2008, p. 157.

²³² Bolz 2002, p. 94.

²³³ See Sarah Thornton: In and out of love with Damien Hirst. Making sense of spots, sharks, pills, fish and butterflies. The Art Newspaper Online 23 October 2008.

spective. His reputation as an artist is a result of his commercial exhibitions. Hirst wants to sell. He produced his series with an army of assistants in the hundreds, reminiscent of Warhol's Factory.²³⁴ Therefore, in the following, the term (potential) buyer/viewer is used to describe those who view Hirst's art, as the the artist listens to and responds to a lot to his (potential) buyers/ viewers.

For Hirst it is more important to create a functioning (or over-functioning) metaphor of the Golden Calf or to call the metaphor into question than to commit blasphemy or criticize religion. This becomes clear upon examination of the titles and contents of two works in the »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« auction: »The Mirror of Midas« and »The Mirror of Judas« are of the same size, each presenting a gold or silver canvas encrusted with butterflies or diamonds.²³⁵ The titles differ only by two letters, either associating a mythological king or a Christian traitor. Hirst runs through titles and »meaning shells« in a formal way down to the last detail: The silver color can be related to the silver coins that Judas received in return for his betrayal, the gold to the fact that everything Midas touched turned to gold, which led to his death. Midas and Judas also appear in 13 further golden and silver paintings in the auction.

In both cases, Judas and Midas, it's not about religion but about the dangerous consequences of riches, in this case, betrayal and death. If Hirst addresses wealth in his works, he speaks partly of himself, the artist, accused of betraying art, who has supposedly sold out, however, of whom people also favorably say that everything he touches turns to gold, that he has »the Midas touch.« Furthermore Hirst uses what is currently around him, found objects from the road in the 1980s, but with increasing personal wealth; gold and silver.

Hirst tried to demonstrate the ambivalence of metaphors and proverbs, because he rejects metaphors: »*I feel ridiculous being metaphorical anyway, but it's unavoidable.*«²³⁶ The Golden Calf is partly seen as a metaphor for the supererogatory worship of power and wealth.

²³⁴ Quote by art historian Gilda Williams talking about Hirst. Quoted in Sarah Thornton: In and out of love with Damien Hirst. Making sense of spots, sharks, pills, fish and butterflies. The Art Newspaper Online 23 October 2008.

²³⁵ See Sotheby's 2008. Vol. 3, p. 16, 17, 22, 23.

²³⁶ Hirst 1993. IV S. 62. Elsewhere he said: »*Metaphor seems to me false and I don't see the work as false.*« Hirst 1993, p. 132.

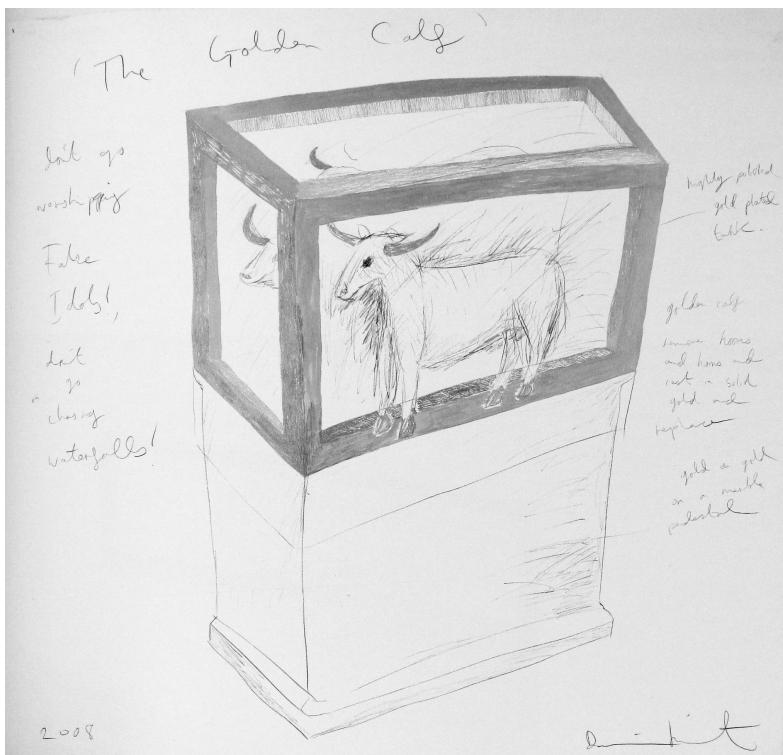


Figure 8: Hirst, The Golden Calf. Drawing, 2008.

Source: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd © Damien Hirst and Science. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. Sotheby's 2008, vol. 3, p. 77.

This becomes clear upon closer inspection of an (instructional) drawing of »The Golden Calf« (figure 8). Hirst's inscription »don't go worshipping false idols!« refers to the third commandment. Hirst satirized that fact, however, by adding a line from the famous 1990's number-one hit song »Waterfalls: »don't go chasing waterfalls!« In this song a mother says »Don't go chasing waterfalls, please stick to the rivers and the lakes that you're used to« to her drug using son, who gets infected with HIV because he did not follow her advice. In a postmodern way, Hirst connects the advice from God »do not go worshiping false idols!« with the advice of a mother in a pop song. These two figures, depending on one's worldview, may provide moral

life support on the same level. This either enhances the messages of each, or devalues their statements as empty truisms. »The Golden Calf« is therefore influenced as much by pop culture as it is by religious iconography.

»Meaning is a shaky evidence we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because of our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death.«²³⁷

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This quote leads in a similar direction because it combines worldly wisdoms or dogma with content of pop songs or »old films« and thus broaches the issue of the subjectivity and uncertainty of both (or the opposite).²³⁸ Thus Hirst reflects the postmodern present, where the traditional kind of rationality of universal absolutes, such as religion, is called into question. What creates meaning? What are we to »worship«? If in postmodernism one no longer believes in religion, in the advancement of science, or in Marxism, then possibly in capitalism, the »golden calf« of the consumer society.

i) Material Matters – Animal, Gold and Showcase

The prepared calf in »The Golden Calf« is the signifier of the (generated in the eye of the beholder) presentation of the biblical Golden Calf. Since the creature was previously living, it would not be quite right to speak of the calf as »material« such as gold. This would not be completely wrong either, as with »sculptural media [...] the baseless tissue of [this calf, n UB] was brought in a form that corresponds to the mechanics of the body and the ideas of aliveness.«²³⁹ Also, as Ullrich stressed, the »physical presence of the singular animal [stands] not for the individual animal, but for a certain animal species or the phenomenon itself. It is the example of individuals and representatives of a category and thus the image that shows only man and his ideas about nature.«²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Salman Rushdie: *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991: Essays and Criticism, 1981 to 1991*. London 1992, p. 12.

²³⁸ See the chapter *Butterfly Paintings..*

²³⁹ Wenzel 2005. [p. 2.]

²⁴⁰ Ullrich 2004, p. 5.

With the use of a dead calf Hirst brings to mind that slaughter is always a brutal and shocking act, even if it serves the purpose of food consumption or the protection of human life. Human survival is now rarely at stake when animals are slaughtered. Most animals are killed for pleasure or luxury reasons, their death has »recreational value«, or provides meat or products for consumption. The viewer is usually only aware of this in explicit situations such as bull fighting. In the case of bull fighting, as with »The Golden Calf«, a male bovine guarantees leisure entertainment with his death, something that is also considered for art today: »When you go into a butcher's shop and see how beautiful meat can be and then you think about it, you can think of the whole horror of life--of those stupid things that are said about bullfights. Because people will eat meat and then complain about bull-fighting covered with furs and with birds in their hair.«²⁴¹ Hirst's role model, Francis Bacon, said.

Not too long ago, financial restrictions dictated that the Sunday roast was the exception and not the rule of regular meat consumption. Today in Western culture, meat is often eaten daily. Thanks to industrial »manufacturing« (factory farming techniques), meats like beef or pork have become so affordable that they are ubiquitous in many people's diets. For McHugh, the constant increase in meat consumption is »*an index of global consumerism as well as its problems.*«²⁴² Hirst said that the cow, the raw material supplier, was only »*walking food*«²⁴³ and »*For me the cow is the most slaughtered animal in the history of the world, that's why I like to use it.*«²⁴⁴

In addition to his depiction as a golden calf, a cow in particular was often featured as a sacrifice in illustrations. »Probably the economic importance of cattle in many periods and cultures led into its almost cultic worship.«²⁴⁵ According to Thümmel cattle are the »secular [n] sacrificial animals of today's society.«²⁴⁶ In this quote the relationship between religion and consumption is clear. In both cases, the cow is part of a ritual. Even the necessary emphasis that a calf is the living creature not simply artistic »material«,

²⁴¹ Francis Bacon quoted in William Wilson: Francis Bacon's Vision Of Isolation. L.A. Times, October 27, 1985.

²⁴² Susan McHugh: Revolting Nuggets and Nubbins. In: Antennae, Edition 8, No. 2, Winter 2008. p. 14-19.

²⁴³ Ibid, p. 186.

²⁴⁴ Damien Hirst quoted in Thümmel 1997, p. 100.

²⁴⁵ See Ibid, p. 100.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

presents our ambivalent relationship with animals. They appear in Hirst's art more as commercially produced readymades than as living beings. Duchamp's and Warhol's readymades were mass-produced items such as detergent boxes or bottle holders, but not formerly living creatures. The cow can be used as a synonym for perverted mass production and consumption respectively: for the alienation of man from nature.

An example of Hirst's repeated use of cattle can be seen in the work from 1994 »Mother and Child Divided.« This work features a mother cow and her calf, each divided in two display cases. Around this same time, the BSE scandal exposed the perverted face of consumerism as cattle, force-fed beef, contracted mad cow disease in this twisted turn of unwitting cannibalism. Later they were killed for that very reason, which makes them modern animal sacrifices of our consumer society. In connection with »Mother and Child Divided« Thümmel says that, »man has a troubled relationship with his environment, not only with animals, but also with his fellow men.²⁴⁷ This relationship is illustrated by the human consumption.

»The animal is presented as a product that only serves human interests, on the one hand as a consumer good and on the other hand as part of the art circuit. Hirst, at least subliminally, discusses the economization and anonymization of mass slaughter, but he also forces the viewer to reconsider the current use and abuse.«²⁴⁸

On the other hand, Hirst's work is far from being only political-activist or consumer-critical because of its positive and decorative aesthetic presentation that is void of signs of death, illness, or injury to animals. It provides an available interpretation in this direction, but it contrasts it with the type of presentation:

»And so if, on the one hand, he can take full advantage of social and cultural contradictions, from which he unleashes the power of his spectacular and shocking images, on the other hand he seems to want to criticize the modern mechanism of reproduction of aesthetic value, almost as if he were proposing a romantic experience of art.«²⁴⁹

Hirst puts the viewer in a position where voyeurism (the aesthetically presented calf) collides with conventional liberal ideas (dead animals in the mu-

²⁴⁷ See *Ibid*, p. 192.

²⁴⁸ Ullrich 2004, p. 5.

²⁴⁹ Cicely in Napoli 2004, p. 22.

seum are disgusting). Hirst is interested in the ambiguity of farm animals, without ascribing value: »*Animals become meat. That's abstract.*«²⁵⁰

The role of the dead cow in Hirst's work has changed since »Mother And Child Divided«. What was disturbing and provocative at the time of BSE, is now, 20 years later, Hirst's »trademark«, namely that the beauty of the view collides with the ugliness of the material, which results initially in an uneasy, 'interesting' feeling. Since the »brand« Hirst has been well-established since the mid-1990s, it blends into the background, the provocation will only be remembered like a label. However, both the brand and the shock of provocation have worn off, like Manzoni and Ofili's »Artist's Shit« and Gilbert & George's explicit nudity, these provocations become less and less shocking over time. Excrement and pornography still balance out artwork that is too kitschy or decorative and vice versa, but this shock factor has become more familiar and less disturbing.²⁵¹ What was originally shocking about the dead animals was the directness and immediacy of Hirst's art in contrast to photography, film, or realistic/non-abstract painting.²⁵² His art is decorative, elaborate, and deliberately designed to sell.²⁵³ On the other hand, Hirst has this »*desire for realism*«²⁵⁴, which saves him from being classified as kitschy and decorative.²⁵⁵ It is not Adorno's pinch of kitsch that makes art palatable, but the pinch of unpalatability, that makes Hirst's and Koons' kitsch art.²⁵⁶

In answer to a question concerning »The Golden Calf« Hirst initially talked about earlier works in which he uses cows: »It works on many levels. I was working on cow things, and mad cow disease came out, and it became very topical and very at the moment. It's kind of a happy accident. But it makes it all the more important.«²⁵⁷

The alleged accidental timing aided Hirst as well in the case of BSE and of »The Golden Calf: The auction of the »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« exhibition with his most significant work, »The Golden Calf«, began on

²⁵⁰ Hirst 1997, p. 299.

²⁵¹ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 112.

²⁵² Ibid, p. 169.

²⁵³ See ibid, p. 112.

²⁵⁴ Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 98.

²⁵⁵ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 112.

²⁵⁶ »Als Giftstoff ist der Kitsch aller Kunst beigemischt.« Theodor W. Adorno: Ästhetische Theorie, p. 355.

²⁵⁷ Hirst interviewed by Anthony Haden-Guest 2008, p. 157.

the day the Lehman Brothers investment bank became the largest corporate failure in American financial history, and thus the poster child for the ensuing and ongoing financial crisis.²⁵⁸ Although Hirst could neither predict the outbreak of mad cow disease nor the dawn of the financial crisis, one can still say that his works reflect the zeitgeist, which is dominated by terms like profit maximization or consumer society, where so many »worship a golden calf.«²⁵⁹

In addition to the calf, *gold* is the dominant component of the »Golden Calf«. Hooves, horns, and the sun disc are cast in pure gold, the steel frame of the cabinet is covered with gold figures. Unlike paintings of a golden calf, actual gold is used and not just shown. In the same way, the calf is really there, not just pictured. Because hooves and horns are casts, they are the parts of the »Golden Calf« that represent the golden cast of the whole animal described in the Bible. As a cast the gold still represents/pictures the hooves and horns, and thus representatively the whole calf. Gold is as a rare, precious, and imperishable material synonym for »preciousness, purity, aural effect and meaning at the same time«²⁶⁰. Those (like Hirst) who create a golden calf, or (as the viewer) »worship« it, or as often quoted and shown »bow down before the golden calf« unduly worship power, represented by the bull, and material wealth (gold).

As Aaron gathered the Israelites' gold earrings in the Bible, Hirst brought in millions by selling his art, which only then allowed him to cast and erect a golden calf, to which the viewer/potential buyer could pay their respects. Hirst demonstrates that they (like Hirst himself) commit a 'little' blasphemy and that they worship a golden calf by visiting the gallery, both literally and figuratively. For Benjamin, the art »collector always retains something of a fetish-worship [...] and [plays] a part in its cultic force through his ownership of the artwork.«²⁶¹ As Thümmel noted, »the exhibition visitors will be confronted with their role as observers, because they are confronted [...] suddenly with the question of what they really wanted to see, why they have come.«²⁶² With the absence of a human in the work Hirst ad-

²⁵⁸ See Sam Mamudi: Lehman folds with record \$613 billion deb. MarketWatch Online 15 September 2008.

²⁵⁹ For the Süddeutsche Zeitung Hirst is a symbol of the crisis. See SZ 10/11 April 2010, p. V2/8.

²⁶⁰ Schneemann 2002, p. 276.

²⁶¹ Benjamin 1936, p. 22.

²⁶² Thümmel 1997, p. 75.

dressess the relationship of the viewer with the work because the viewer assumes this role in the work himself/herself.

The sudden and exponential emergence of the use of precious materials like god or diamonds in Hirst's art since about 2005 demonstrates a radical divergence from his YBA-roots, where he rather more often turned dirt and waste (cigarette butts, medical waste, dead animals from the slaughterhouse) into »gold«. This metaphor illustrates how art can be transformed into money, further showing the comparability and equivalency of monetary, aesthetic, and artistic value. Money is almost always associated with Hirst in the press. Aesthetic value and cash value usually coincide with one another in the court of public opinion.²⁶³

»The dictum to turn rubbish into gold refers to the power of artists to transform material quality. At the same time, this sentence comments on commercial success. Gold as a material gains a newfound double meaning in the process. It serves both as an indicator of value as well as a reference for the social consensus about what is valuable; that is, it serves as an equivalency instrument for the measurement of value increase.«²⁶⁴

At the same time this unusual shift from Arte Povera materials to their exact opposite represents a perpetual crisis of art: The opposing positions are l'art pour l'art on one side and the purely material focus on financial, profit-oriented art market on the other. Hirst says that for him art can heal like a religion and that art and aesthetic value have a higher value than money.²⁶⁵ Throughout time, art has been in the service of the powerful, in earlier times, the church and nobility were the primary sponsors of art in order to promote religious and secular power. Even earlier artworks were part of religious rituals, cult works. In the same way that the importance of religious influence has receded in modern times, so too has the church been replaced as the primary contractor for artists. Artists today, if they want to live off their art, are faced with the dilemma to either create art for wealthy collectors or for (mostly state) institutions such as museums.

»The Golden Calf« asks the open ended question of what is worth more, art or money, or rather, what kind of value is more important today, financial

²⁶³ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 81.

²⁶⁴ Schneemann 2002, p. 279.

²⁶⁵ See Hirst interviewed by Burn. Sotheby's 2008. Vol. 1, p. 19.

or aesthetic value, art or life? Hirst says that every object is worth as much as someone is willing to pay for it.²⁶⁶

The sun disc on the head of the calf is also made of gold. In the booklet two possible predecessors for Hirst from pop and consumer culture are shown, which have such a disc. One is a film still from the Cecil B. De Mille epic-film »The Ten Commandments« from 1956, the other is by the Christian digital kitsch artist Ted Larson from 2006.²⁶⁷ Both representations are taken from pop culture and compared to other recent golden calf representations. Both contain a mixture of Christian iconography and old Egyptian depictions of the female mother goddess Bat or Hathor, who is also depicted with cow horns and a sun disc (figure 9). She is sometimes called »the cow of gold«²⁶⁸ and was married to the sun god Re. Hathor was the goddess of death, goddess of love, peace, beauty, dance, art, and music.²⁶⁹ She can possibly be seen as a forerunner of the Biblical golden calf²⁷⁰ and is connected with ancient Egyptian sun god Aton, depicted as a sun disk, who is considered the first monotheistic God.²⁷¹ According to Freud, this helped to develop Jewish monotheism, as Moses acquainted the Israelites with the »spiritualized religion of Aton« on their exodus from Egypt.²⁷²

²⁶⁶ See Hirst in Jessica Berens: Freeze: 20 years on. *Guardian Online* 1 June 2008.

²⁶⁷ See Sotheby's: Damien Hirst. *Beautiful Inside My Head Forever*. Exhibition catalogue. London 2008. Ibid. Booklet »Golden Calf«, p. 14, 24. Maybe Hirst's understatement shows popular low art as prototypes for the Golden Calf to consciously subvert intellectual or deeper meanings as he often does in interviews.

²⁶⁸ E. Naville: The XIth dynasty temple at Deir el Bahari. Vol. III. London 1907-13. Pl. 9 B, 31 quoted in Bonnet 1952, p. 279.

²⁶⁹ See Hans Bonnet: *Lexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*. Hamburg 1952, p. 277-282.

²⁷⁰ Joachim Hahn illuminates pro and contra of ancient Egyptian influences on the biblical calf. See id.: Das »Goldene Kalb« : die Jahwe-Verehrung bei Stierbildern in der Geschichte Israels. Frankfurt 1980, p. 314-326.

²⁷¹ See Bonnet 1952, p. 59-71, especially p. 66-67.

²⁷² See Sigmund Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé: *Briefwechsel*, p. 223. Quoted in Assmann: Thomas Mann, p. 190.

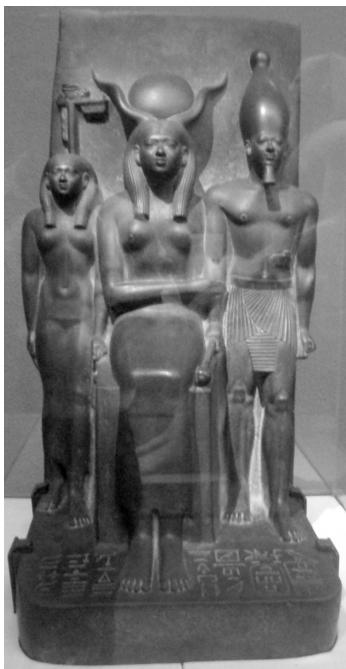


Figure 9: Triad with 15 Nome of Upper Egypt (Nome). Boston Museum, inv. 09.200.

Source: http://de.academic.ru/pictures/dewiki/84/TriadStatueDepictingHareNomeGoddesHathorAndMekaura_MuseumOfFineArtsBoston.png (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

replaced at any time, as was the case for example for »The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living«.²⁷⁴ A cabinet is like a reli-

With the sun disc Hirst also provides (in addition to gold and the art-historical aspects of the Golden Calf) a further art historical allusion for the classically educated. His pop quotes are, analogous to references meant for art historians, addressed to other, perhaps younger, viewers who were more likely educated by television.

Another »trigger« is the glass display case. Unlike art objects, which are indeed stored in display boxes or cabinets (including Hirst's »For the Love of God«), but actually independent of their cases (and photographed without them as well), Hirst's formaldehyde works need the glass box, which is in fact an integral part of the work. Like a reliquary or casket, Hirst's cabinets are specially made for each animal according to Hirst's precise specifications. »Beyond all the differences in size, design, and style, reliquaries, glass cabinets, compartmentalized display drawers / [...], dioramas, and all museum architecture, all of these things are basically always showcases seeking to teach.«²⁷³ Unlike a relic, however, the cabinet, as well as the animal, can be

²⁷³ Natacha Pugnet: Naturgeschichte des Museums, in: Kat. Ausst.: Mark Dion. The Natural History of the Museum, Carre D'Art Musee D'Art Contemporain Nimes 2007, Dunkers Kulturhus Helsingborg 2007, Seedam Kulturentrum Pfäffikon 2007, Paris 2007, S. 93.

²⁷⁴ See Carol Vogel: Swimming With Famous Dead Sharks. NY Times Online 1 October 2006. Hirst states he would often still work on pieces after he sold them to a collector.

quary, a glass coffin for the dead animal: »We get put into boxes when we die because it's clean, and we get put into a box when we are born. We live in boxes.«²⁷⁵ This quote illustrates that the formaldehyde animals should be seen as a metaphor for the human condition and the display cases for houses or living environments. For farm animals and humans, the case is like a cage, a small cage like in a laying battery.²⁷⁶

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The generality of the presentation allows for a consumer-critical interpretation due to the fact that Hirst often uses working animals, that is, livestock, or animals that provide raw materials. For Thümmel the case either upgrades or downgrades the animal, depending on how it is perceived: a symbol of mass production; a readymade or canned good as opposed to a singularly unique art product like the inherent individuality of each animal; or a revered object in the case that the display presents the animal in manner of a monument.²⁷⁷

Hirst's cases can also be seen as display windows.²⁷⁸ Such a show case presents something for sale that is at the same time clearly visible yet un-touchable and wholly separate from the viewer. The viewer should feel the urge to own the work and Hirst wants to uncover this need, which is very typical for the culture of consumption. As a first impression, the viewer should still marvel at »The Golden Calf« like consumers admire beautiful displays in a shop window. The fact that the viewer knows from experience that this animal is dead collides with the aesthetic presentation that recalls a finely draped consumer product in a shop window, not only because of the glass display case. »The window glass absorbs odor, noise and touch, and leads to the aestheticization of the commodity. The thing vanishes to an image to arouse the desire of the consumer.«²⁷⁹

Hirst selects only perfectly flawless and beautiful dead animals, which are always presented in the best light. The unmasking of this collision of perception does not arise from the contents, but the location of the presentation. In a natural history museum or in a slaughterhouse a dead calf would not be unusual. In a gallery however, the viewer is confronted with his expec-

²⁷⁵ Hirst 1997, p. 292.

²⁷⁶ See Codognato in Napoli 2004, p. 32.

²⁷⁷ See Ibid, p. 185.

²⁷⁸ See Ibid, p. 78-81.

²⁷⁹ Mark C: Taylor: Duty-Free-Shopping. In: Shopping. 2002, p. 42/43.

tations and consumer behavior.²⁸⁰ The display case functions as a small shop window in the gallery, much like the gold frame on a large display window mirrors the gallery, which itself is basically a shop designed to sell consumer products, that is works of art.²⁸¹

There is a parallel in art history to Manet's »Nana« from 1877. The painting, which shows a prostitute, and her waiting suitor, facing the viewer, was rejected by the Paris Salon, which led Manet to display the venal lady in a shop window. Both the prostitute and the painting itself have been identified as consumer products, presented by the »*pimp, client and salesman*«²⁸² Manet.

It is worthwhile in this context to return once again to the comparison of the formaldehyde case with a reliquary. Marx speaks of the fetishism of commodities.²⁸³ In »The Golden Calf« an idol is staged in a (shop) display case. In Marx's time the word 'fetishism' as a concept was first used in the context of studies of »primitive« religions. »Commodity fetishism« can ironically serve as the belief system of »capitalist societies«. Benjamin compares the beauty of mundane duty performed by the visitors of an art gallery with that of congregants at a church service.²⁸⁴ Art exhibitions are now used for recreation rather than education, as an extension of shopping. Art and commerce go hand in hand in art exhibitions and museums.²⁸⁵ The commercialization of a belief system is already found in the New Testament where Jesus chases away the dealers from the temple: »Make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.« (John 2:16) In the same way that Jesus wants to clear commerce from the place of prayer, the »l'art pour l'art« movement seeks to »clear the house« as it were, something that Benjamin described as a theology of art.²⁸⁶ This relationship between art, religion, and commerce can be found in many aspects of the »Golden Calf«: the idol, a real cow, is shown like a relic in a shrine that resembles a shopping window, and is staged in a

²⁸⁰ See Thümmel 1997, p. 78-81.

²⁸¹ Stallabrass 2006, p. 190.

²⁸² Catherine Wood: Capitalist Realness. In: Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 49/50.

²⁸³ Karl Marx: Das Kapital Vol. 1. Marx Engels Werke Vol. 23. Berlin 1990, p. 89.

²⁸⁴ Benjamin 1936, p. 23.

²⁸⁵ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 181. This might be more common in the UK as most museums are free and financial turnover is just possible through a museum shop or temporary exhibitions.

²⁸⁶ Benjamin 1936, p. 23.

context that bridges art viewing and a sales exhibition, a quasi-religious and almost literal dance around the golden calf. This becomes clear upon examination of the audience, which actually takes part in this dance. These visitors stand in stark contrast to the audience who view Hirst's works primarily in the form of (photo) reproductions. The exhibition is also about a »Midas« audience as potential buyers, who must be both rich in order to be able to buy a Hirst and also familiar with the joys and dangers of wealth. The audience at the time of economic crisis is familiar with Hirst's allusions to religion (like the »Golden Calf«) in this art auction exhibition, but is not overly religious, rather ascribing to other values, such as the commodity value of the artwork, which Hirst also challenges. Dietrichsen writes about this Hirst exhibition:

»The punch line of the current situation is certainly that in the midst of the biggest crisis of all, the traditionally seen as the most bottomless of all investments, visual arts profits of the flight into real values. The notorious Damien Hirst has found a special means to take advantage of that fact (or to satirize it). He applied real gold to his incredibly idiotic golden calf and real diamonds to a skull. He tried to force just for the artwork, what does not even apply for other goods, namely, to write the value on the forehead, what it is. Some authors described the auction spectacle as a scathing criticism of the art market. Just as every execution is a criticism of death penalty, right? But that is precisely the characteristic of circular thinking. In principle one can no longer distinguish between the execution of a deed and its distancing quotation.«²⁸⁷

Diedrichsen speaks of an »auction spectacle«, the term and the entire quote also emphasize the staging/the mise en scène of the exhibition as the thereby truly meaningful artistic component of the work.

Besides the (potential) viewers in this exhibition ritual, the other works of art in the exhibition danced around »The Golden Calf« as well. They all (in addition to the public) serve art consumption, to which they prove their honor. So one can see the 223 works as personifications of their viewers, in any art exhibition the viewer is consumed by other viewers along with the works of art, he/she »sees and is seen«. This in turn can be understood as a reflection of our times, whereby man himself is a consumer product, a Me, Inc., a promoter of him/herself.

²⁸⁷ Diedrich Diedrichsen: Hausbesuch beim Finanzkapital. Die Zeit No. 40, 25 September 2008. p. 64.

Also the highly polished, showcase frame (gilded with real gold) reflects, literally and figuratively, the 'Midas-viewer' and his/her status.²⁸⁸ This again draws parallels with mediaeval precious relics set in gold and diamonds, which also served ceremonial purposes. At the same time, however, those precious materials emphasized the importance of the depicted, for which only the most valuable materials were good enough. Shop windows and picture frames draw the eye to the goods and present them in a way that increases their impact. The cabinet frame color for Judas' cabinet is different from the others in Hirst's »Twelve Disciples« (1994, twelve skinned cow heads in formaldehyde): his frame is black, like the soul of the traitor. Unlike the religious references in »The Golden Calf« and in »Mother and Child Divided«, in this case the religious reference is obvious mostly in the title. Also, there is less reference yet to (excess) consumption or money transcending the »most slaughtered animal«.²⁸⁹

The showcase with the calf is mounted on a simple Renaissance marble plinth. The accompanying text emphasizes that it is Carrara marble, which is regarded as particularly valuable and is a material with a very long tradition.²⁹⁰ Like gold, the valuable material of marble in this case serves to increase the standing and/or the perceived value of the object that is depicted, the calf.²⁹¹ This marble provides an additional reference to art history: Carrara marble was used in ancient times and was made known by sculptors such as Michelangelo.²⁹² A similarly shaped base can be seen in a painting by Botticelli, reproduced in the booklet of »The Golden Calf«²⁹³, and might therefore have been an inspiration for Hirst.²⁹⁴ It is the first time Hirst used a base in a work of the »Natural History« series. Like the use of gold, this can be seen as a mannerist element that enriches Hirst's aging series, but it eclipses aspects such as the pseudo-scientific presentation.

²⁸⁸ The color of Hirst's glas box frames often correspond with the content.

²⁸⁹ For a detailed analysis of Hirst's »Twelve Disciples« see Ziegelmaier 2009.

²⁹⁰ Luciana und Tiziano Mannoni: Marmor, Material und Kultur. Munich 1980, p. 180-207.

²⁹¹ In his exhibition »New Religion« (2005) Hirst showed a outsized marble pill: The Eucharist, Edition of 50, 2005, 64x170x170cm. In: New Religion. Exhibition catalogue. London 2005. UNPAGED.

²⁹² See Luciana und Tiziano Mannoni: Marmor, Material und Kultur. Munich 1980, p. 198.

²⁹³ See Sotheby's 2008. Golden Calf, p. 16-17.

²⁹⁴ Other versions e.g. the one of Poussin (pictured *ibid.* p. 22) show instead of a plinth usually a column with the calf on it.

As is (possibly) the case with the glass display case, the base increases and ennobles the calf, it strengthens its dramatic, theatrical, and quasi-religious presentation. In contrast to the cabinet, it is not an integral part of the work, which can be seen from the fact that there are unauthorized pictures without base.²⁹⁵

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The work is impressive simply because of its size, with its height of four meters. The sheer size generates »importance« similar to quantity in advertising. A high price, a certain size, a large volume, or a high number demands attention.

Like in the case of the spot, spin, or Butterfly Paintings, when he created »The Golden Calf« Hirst made a conscious decision not to paint or, in this case, to translate a traditional subject of paintings into a sculpture. Hirst usually operates between the second and third dimension. As he himself has repeatedly emphasized, he is a »sculptor who wants to be a painter«.²⁹⁶ The English language does not distinguish between the German »Skulptur« and »Plastik«. This difference must be explained with adjectives like hewn or moulded in connection with sculpture. Hirst does only moulded sculptures, in German »Plastiken«. He 'translated' works of his painter-idol Bacon into 3D. His Diamond Skull is a ruminant reflex citation of Dutch Memento Mori still life paintings, in the booklet for the »Golden Calf«, he »helpfully« anticipated future interpretations by art historians and highlighted the relationship between his work and significant works of art from artists like Botticelli and Poussin, lending (self-appointed) credibility to his contribution to the cannon. Bernini did the same with his statue of Saint Laurence, a hitherto oft painted subject²⁹⁷: Bernini neither has to depict Laurence's tormentors nor does Hirst have to depict the archers in »St. Sebastian« or the worshipers of »The Golden Calf«. The effect is thus more immediate, dramatic, and theatrical because the viewer is closer to the action, and has to take the role or at least the perspective of the thief or idolater.

²⁹⁵ See Sotheby's 2008. *Golden Calf*. [Cover].

²⁹⁶ Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 206.

²⁹⁷ See Charles Avery: Bernini. Munich 2001, p. 31.

ii) Art auction / happening – »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever«

Ultimately, »The Golden Calf« is more of an object in a staged performance than a work in Hirst's exhibition, where it (like the »Diamond Skull« a year earlier) played the role of a headliner.²⁹⁸ The sales exhibition »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« at Sotheby's auction house (September 5–15, 2008) is not one of many exhibitions in Hirst's career.²⁹⁹ The lack of a price tag in luxury stores, however, indicates the influence of art displays on displays of luxury goods. The fact that an artist chose the unusual way to prepare works directly for an auction has no comparable models on that scale in art history. Normally, new works are exhibited in a gallery that represents the artist, who usually keeps 50 percent of the proceeds. Auction houses, on the other hand, offer almost exclusively works from previous owners and not from the artist directly, so that the auction proceeds will go to the previous owner of the work not to the artist.

Through charity auctions like Red 2008, Hirst had enough experience with auction houses like Sotheby's and could negotiate some particularly favorable conditions. Hirst took no small risk in this. First, there were rumors that his galleries still had hundreds of unsold Hirsts in stock. For others it is considered risky, to »flood« the art market with 223 works of an artist at the same time because it lowers prices.³⁰⁰ His tactic can probably be better understood as »a good offense is the best defense« and also that Hirst sought to make the auction a new platform or medium of his (performance) art.

Although this step was not really of financial advantage for Hirst's gallery owners, they supported him in this art auction/happening and bid on the most lots.³⁰¹ The art critic Ben Lewis sees this as confirmation of his thesis that collectors and gallery owners have to support such auctions with high prices as the value of their own Warhol or Hirst would go down if an auction of its artist failed financially.³⁰² However, with a world-scale marketing cam-

²⁹⁸ Hirst interviewed by Anthony Haden Guest 2008, p. 157.

²⁹⁹ In contrast to the years before it was Hirst's only solo exhibition apart from a second presentation of »For the Love of God« (made in 2007).

³⁰⁰ See Cristina Ruiz: Revealed: the art Damien Hirst failed to sell. The Art Newspaper Online 23 August 2008.

³⁰¹ See Sunday Times: Hirst dealers bolster prices at record sale. The Sunday Times Online 21 September 2008.

³⁰² See Ben Lewis: The great contemporary art market bubble. Video. 2008. 90 min., see also Stallabrass 2006, p. 190.

paign Hirst managed to reach many new buyers and to accurately choose the right time to launch the largest art auction by a living artist to date, right when, with a bang, the world economy collapsed. On the same date that Lehman Brothers Investment Banks went bankrupt, September 15, 2008, »The Golden Calf« was sold for £10.3 millions to an unknown, private telephone bidder³⁰³, a sum that roughly split the gap between the assessed value of eight to twelve million. This was the highest price to date for a single work by a living artist that was ever achieved at auction.³⁰⁴

The proverb of the Golden Calf was transferred here to the art market, which in turn is understood as synonymous with the world economy. Rather than picking a gallery for this happening, an institution which disguises the fact that it is in fact an art shop, Hirst chose an auction house, which frankly admits that they »sell to the highest bidder«.

Is Hirst Aaron or Moses from the Bible? Is he high priest or critic of consumerism? Ultimately, he lets the viewer or the art consumers decide. To insinuate that he tricked the (potential) buyers/viewers would assume that they are stupid. Instead, Hirst told his contemporaries quite banally with that art auction/happening that they actually worship a golden calf. Even after this spectacular auction Hirst continues to reflect his time, this time the recession: For the first time in his career he made paintings in small numbers by his own hand, rather than producing hundreds of art objects with 160 employees in a short time:

»Hirst has also finally gained control of the supply aspect of his own market, by putting a stop to his previous factory practice of churning out large quantities of Spot, Spin and Butterfly paintings. He has now gone to the other extreme by doing the paintings himself. This strategy certainly creates a sense of scarcity, but it is still to be seen whether this is a permanent transition or just a strategy to calm down a jittery market place.«³⁰⁵

After a brief slump related to the global financial crisis, investment of large sums of money in Contemporary Art soon rebounded. With his concept art Hirst demonstrates mechanisms by which (apparently?) important and valua-

³⁰³ Arguably it was the owner of the auction house Christie's, François Pinault.

³⁰⁴ See Arifa Akbar: A formaldehyde frenzy as buyers snap up Hirst works. The Independent Online 16 September 2008.

³⁰⁵ Artactic: Damien Hirst: Market Resurrection? Artactic.com Edition October 2009.

able things are presented or directed by advertising or opinion forming organizations such as museums with scientific standards (or authorities in general). He shows that our viewing of art and the world is in part determined by »outdated perceptual processes and assessment pattern[s]«³⁰⁶, that have to be challenged or that are losing their validity. These include not only religion, but also the belief in the healing promise of abundant consumption.

As previously mentioned, we can view Hirst's art exhibition auction as an object performance with the »Golden Calf« as a prop playing the leading role. A similar opinion was expressed by Greer in an article shortly after the exhibition: »Damien Hirst is a brand, because the art form of the 21st century is marketing. To develop so strong a brand on so conspicuously threadbare a rationale is hugely creative – revolutionary even.«³⁰⁷

Tate Modern curator Nicholas Cullinan commented similarly:

»The works [of the »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever«-auction, n. UB] arguably doubled as props for the performance that constituted the main artwork – the auction itself, as a kind of gesamtkunstwerk, given a further fin-de-siecle feel dramatised by the deals and hammers being struck as Lehman Brothers went bust and Meryl Lynch was bought in a fire sale.«³⁰⁸

In fact an entire room of Hirst's retrospective at the Tate Modern in 2012 was dedicated to his »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« auction³⁰⁹, which also highlights the nature and importance of this installation as an art auction/happening. Lewis objected to this view of »exhibition-auction as marketing and media/communications performance art«: »And in their climax — a room of Hirst's gold-figured works from his Sotheby's auction last year — the gallery texts have the temerity to claim that the greed-fuelled auction sale was a work of performance art in itself. That's just the same as Stockhausen calling 9/11 a work of art.«³¹⁰

³⁰⁶ See Thümmel 1998, p. 81.

³⁰⁷ See Germaine Greer: Germaine Greer Note to Robert Hughes: Bob, dear, Damien Hirst is just one of many artists you don't get. *Guardian Online* 22 September 2008.

³⁰⁸ Nicholas Cullinan: Dreams that money can buy. In: *Pop Life*. Kat Aust. Tate Modern 2009, p. 75.

³⁰⁹ Farah Nayeri: Hirst to Get First U.K. Retrospective at Tate for Olympic Year. *Bloomberg Online* 3 March 2011.

³¹⁰ Ben Lewis: Pop Life sells its soul for the big bucks. *Evening Standard Online* 1 October 2009.

Whoever we agree with now depends on how narrowly or broadly we define »art« and involve morality. Lewis's essay concludes: »*not everything done by a great artist is art, let alone great art.*«³¹¹ Similarly, not every piece of art that has been denied its artistic character by an art critic should be discounted as »non-art«. Lewis insinuates that Hirst is greedy, but forgot that the fact that the exorbitant asking price was not only met but exceeded is equally as questionable as the price tag. The comparison with Stockhausen³¹² is not wrong, Hirst was also met with similar outrage after a comment about 9/11.³¹³ Both claim to have been misunderstood.³¹⁴ The facts themselves are less problematic than the reasoning behind Lewis' denial of the artistic character behind the art auction/happening, namely that Hirst was greedy. Insinuating that Hirst was merely motivated by greed is as easy as it is superfluous. Both the negative light in which Lewis frames the event and the positive light in which the interview paints the situation give too much weight to the motivations and expectations of the artist. The question is rather what Hirst's art provides? To follow Lewis' argument, we would only care about what the artist does, not the message that reaches the viewer, giving the authenticity of the artist more weight than the authenticity of the artwork. This heated debate confirms the significance of the art auction/happening around the Golden Calf both in our time and in art history.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Stockhausen: »*Also was da geschehen ist, ist natürlich – jetzt müssen Sie alle Ihr Gehirn umstellen – das größte Kunstwerk, was es je gegeben hat. Dafür also Geister in einem Akt etwas vollbringen, was wir in der Musik nie träumen könnten, dafür Leute zehn Jahre üben wie verrückt, total fanatisch, für ein Konzert. Und dann sterben. [...]» MusikTexte 91, p. 76.*

³¹³ Hirst: »*The thing about 9/11 is that it's kind of an artwork in its own right. It was wicked, but it was devised in this way for this kind of impact. It was devised visually.*« Quoted nach Rebecca Allison: 9/11 wicked but a work of art, says Damien Hirst. The Guardian Online 11 September 2002. Banksy said something similar in an interview: »*September 11 was an amazing spectacle, very symbolic. In terms of terrorism nothing has ever come close. No amount of bombing people in little holes in Afghanistan will ever compare to that.*« See Banksy interviewed by Jim Carey: Creative Vandalism. Squall Magazine. 30 May 2002.

³¹⁴ Karlheinz Stockhausen: Message from Professor Karlheinz. stockhausen.org 19 September 2001. See also Guardian: Hirst apologises for calling 9/11 'a work of art'. The Guardian Online 19 September 2001.

c) **Butterfly Paintings (1991 – 2008)**

Damien Hirst created the series *Butterfly Paintings* (figures 12 and 13) between 1991 and 2008. All objects in this work group are painted with monochrome paint and each painting features at least one dead butterfly (or their wings) with numbers up to the hundreds. Dead butterflies of different types and sizes were pressed into the wet paint. To a large extent, Hirst used colorful butterflies and in most cases the various insects do not overlap or intersect. *Butterfly Paintings* are collages that resemble Rauschenberg's combine paintings. Like those, they connect paintings with pasted relief-like three-dimensional elements. *Butterfly Paintings* vary by title, size, color, and shape³¹⁵ of the canvases, as well as additional attached elements and number, variety, size, and arrangement of the butterflies (or butterfly wings).

Hirst's *Butterfly Paintings* evolved from his initial installation »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11) from 1991.³¹⁶ In a two-story former travel agency, strategically close to the renowned contemporary art gallery Anthony D'Offay (where Hirst worked as a student) in central London, visitors to Hirst's first solo exhibition could view the complete life cycle of various tropical butterflies. The air-conditioned upper floor featured flower-boxes, bowls with sugar water food, and white canvases with pupated caterpillars glued on, from which Malaysian moths hatched during the exhibition, subsequently flying around, mating, laying eggs, and dying.³¹⁷ A vacant store, a place to purchase consumer goods, became a temporary gallery, a shop for art. The cocoon-like space above artificially created life that thrived – temporarily. Below, one could – for a limited time only! – buy colorful, monochrome canvases or consumer products with dead butterflies on them. Upstairs the close relatives of the artistic subjects were still flitting around; alive, mating, and dying. In a figurative sense, the social butterflies; the short lived, affected, snobby, trendy members of the London art scene; consumed *Butterfly Paintings* while the literal tropical butterflies consumed sugar water from the same kind of bowls that downstairs served as receptacles for cigarette butts, consumed at a party.

³¹⁵ Canvases of *Butterfly Paintings* are usually rectangular or round, but also have more unusual shapes like hearts, ovals, et cetera.

³¹⁶ See Thümmel 1997, p. 34–35.

³¹⁷ See Thorton 2008(2) and Octavia Nicholson: *Damien Hirst*. Oxford 2009.



Figures 10 and 11: Hirst, *In and Out of Love* (Live White Paintings and Butterflies), 1991. Primer on canvas with pupae, steel, potted flowers, live butterflies, Formica, MDF, bowls, sugar-water solution, fruit, radiators, heaters, misters cool, air vents, lights, thermometer and humidistats. Dimensions variable.

Source: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates. © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

When asked whether there were parallels between the show and »Charles Saatchi with young artists, getting to them when they're unknown and cheap, collecting them and watching the value rise,« Hirst said, »As far as I'm concerned, that's a perfect reading of it. I mean, I was aware of butterflies and

collections, and art collectors.«³¹⁸ Although Hirst often tells interviewees what they want to hear, the citation shows that the installation was already read as a satire on the art market in a contemporary context 20 years ago.

Hirst sold the Butterfly Paintings separately in the basement and developed, using the same principle, the first twelve independent Butterfly Paintings in 1994/95.³¹⁹ They all have a few whole butterflies spread unevenly across the canvas. One can describe the series of paintings as a commercially viable spin-off of the installation »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11), a principle derived from marketing and advertising. The same applies to the Spot Paintings and Spin Paintings which originated as site-specific art happenings and evolved into series. Even the art happening »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« developed from the success of the auctions around Hirst's Pharmacy restaurant and his Red charity auction, where Hirst became aware of the media potential to make an auction into an art performance.

With butterflies, Hirst chose a universal, mostly positive metaphor that is both timeless and independent of socio-cultural context in addition to being understandable outside of temporal constraints to an international audience. Butterflies stand for something that is small, light, and harmless. A butterfly is insignificant; but the flap of a wing can, at least metaphorically, have a big impact: The butterfly effect refers to the fact that small events may have large, unpredictable effects on some systems. The saying »to break a butterfly upon a wheel« again stresses the small, vulnerable, harmless side of butterflies.

In ancient Greece, the word for butterflies was related to the term for psyche or soul. Even in ancient times the butterfly was both emblematic of the human soul as well as a sign of levity and frivolity. Elves are often depicted with butterfly wings as is the god of sleep, Somnus.³²⁰ In early Christian art, the butterfly was a symbol of resurrection because of its metamorphosis (caterpillar, chrysalis, and butterfly). The lifeless state of the caterpillar in the

³¹⁸ Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 20-21.

³¹⁹ Ibid, p. 40.

³²⁰ Jan Bazzant: Hypnos. In: Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC). Supplementum 2009. Düsseldorf 2009, p. 643-645. See also Engelbert Kirchbaum SJ (Ed.): Lexikon der christlichen Ikonografie. Vol. 1, p. 95 [Entry Amor and Psyche] sowie Vol. 4, p. 115. [Entry Schmetterling]. Freiburg/Breisgau 1968. Special edition 1994.

chrysalis and its emergence as a beautiful butterfly was seen as a rebirth.³²¹ For this reason, Butterflies and/or pupae can be found on numerous grave-stones. Even in Protestant baroque vanitas still life representations, the caterpillar that is transformed into a butterfly was a symbol of resurrection and redemption. Butterflies were therefore the sole exception to the general categorization of insects as symbols of evil.³²²

By 1800, classicism referred again to this ancient tradition, the butterfly was then a popular symbol of tomb art. In many cases, winged angels also embodied/signified the gliding transition into another world. They also appeared on tombs as messengers of death and companions around 1800 – then representing the image of a gentle death.

The motif of the butterfly has been over-used in kitsch, especially since the Biedermeier period, where overly happy children, cats, or dogs (to name a few) chase butterflies, or butterflies settle on children and animals like in Spitzweg's »The Butterfly Hunter« from 1840. In this 'feel good' art the motif of the butterfly highlights generally unrealistic, nostalgic, care-free, »sweet« serenities of nature.

All of the aforementioned utilizations and associations around the cyclic structure and flippancy of the butterfly motif were incorporated into the Butterfly Paintings. But – fundamentally different from vanitas still lifes, kitsch postcards, and tombs, Hirst does not depict live butterflies, but rather uses actual dead specimens. Hirst's dead butterfly is a metaphor for man who must die sooner or later, so it can be seen a bit like a 20th century Memento Mori.

Hirst wants to bring scientific reality into art, to close the gap between art and life once more. With the butterflies, Hirst emphasizes that neither the caterpillar died in the pupation phase, nor the butterfly rose from the dead through hatching, as assumed in the ancient world. He shows that the butterfly is ultimately beautiful, but dead.

The zoological term for the adult butterfly is »imago« (in the plural: *imagines*) which in Latin means »image«. In English, the relationship can be discerned more clearly. In fact, butterflies, especially their wings, show paral-

³²¹ For historical explanations about butterflies see Hermann Levinson and Anna Levinson: *Vögel und Schmetterlinge als Erscheinungsform der menschlichen Seele. – Ein zoologischer Streifzug durch die Kulturgeschichte.* – Naturwissenschaftliche Rundschau 58/ 2005, p. 531-536.

³²² See chapter on Fly Paintings.

lels to images, such as paintings. Both are relatively flat and almost two-dimensional and some moths, by operating mimicry and mimesis to deter predators, actually form warning or camouflage patterns, such as a leaf, the bark of trees or the eyes of a larger and more dangerous animal.³²³ So Hirst glued »images« onto images (monochrome paintings) and in so doing, blurred the lines between depiction and reality like in his Natural History series.

With the Butterfly Paintings, Hirst sanctions the human need for idilic and positive feelings, for kitsch, by combining the traditionally »feel-good«, kitschy subject with the sobering reality of death. Thus they become suitable for sophisticated art lovers. Gilbert & George's colorful large-scale composite high gloss photographic works also offer the same conflict between content and presentation: beautiful bright colors and clear aesthetically-pleasing structure, a presentation which contrasts with often explicit, provocative images and titles often with sexual undertones.

This tension works even in the absence of dead creatures. After Hirst publicity proclaimed the end of the Butterfly Painting series in 2008, from 2010 onwards he showed screen prints and photo-realistic paintings of butterflies in exhibitions. The (potential) buyer/viewer was familiar with the Butterfly Paintings, of which the new works were reminiscent. Hirst also commented here on collecting, which is closely related to consumption.

Upon close inspection, the effect of butterflies makes them appear as if they just flew onto the paint and stuck to it, probably because they were blinded by the bright color that drew them in »like moths to the flame«. Seen from far away the Butterfly Paintings at first produce a purely positive aesthetic experience, because of the color, like flowers for butterflies, and (some) also because of their symmetrical arrangement. The viewer is attracted by the beautiful illusiveness of the colorful and shining Butterfly Paintings. These perhaps false and dangerous promises could be a sweet and colorful auspicious trap, like advertising or a mass-produced consumer product or a luxury good, like a butterfly painting. At the same time, the promises of the Butterfly Paintings could be the nectar for the »species of the collector butterfly«, which belongs to the group of the consumers.

In addition, the reality of the material of dead insects is only clear upon closer examination. This often triggers revulsion or at least internal conflict,

³²³ See e.g. Klaus Lunau: Warnen, Tarnen, Täuschen. Mimikry und andere Überlebensstrategien in der Natur. Darmstadt 2002, p. 64-65, 15-116.

resulting from the tension between death and beauty and the harmony of the presentation. This conflict often expresses itself as anger toward the artist, who killed the animals »for the arts.«³²⁴ In reality, the tropical butterflies were specially bred in London. They have a short life span and were not picked up until after their death.³²⁵ Hirst emphasizes this – in order to counter the one-sided interpretation that he merely wanted to shock. In 2003, he said in an interview that he is now the largest importer of butterflies in Great Britain and commissioned three people exclusively for the production of this series.³²⁶ Butterflies were quasi industrially bred or mass-produced for Hirst. This diverges from the acquisition of animal carcasses for the Natural History Series in the small but important distinction between buying dead animals and raising butterflies to harvest their dead bodies. This illuminates the difference between found objects and readymades. The breeder who supplied Hirst's butterflies also became a member of Hirst's art production supply chain. In addition, animal consumption in the Western world was carried to extremes, nature became a raw material supplier of art, »Hirst has engaged in an exploration of the commodification of nature, the culture of collecting and the art market that began subtly, and grew more and more critical as this aspect of his work continued to be ignored.«³²⁷ These three aspects mentioned by Rosenberg are woven together in the *Butterfly Paintings*.

As part of his »Romance in the Age of Uncertainty«-Exhibition in London in 2003, Hirst varied his somewhat dated series and created *Butterfly Wing Paintings* (figure 13).³²⁸ As the name implies, butterfly wings without the body were then stuck on the canvas rather than using the whole insect. In addition, their more random placement was replaced by symmetrical structures and colorful patterns of wings of different colors and size reminiscent of mandalas and kaleidoscopes. Thus the background color is less visible

³²⁴ See Fiachra Gibbons: Hirst accused of sadism over butterfly collage. *The Guardian* online 15. August 2003.

³²⁵ Hirst emphasises no animal was harmed or killed for his art. See Hirst quoted in Vogel 2007.

³²⁶ Waldemar Januszczak: Interview: Damien Hirst. *Times Online* 24 August 2003.

³²⁷ Rosenberg: The Apocalyptic Spectacle: Damien Hirst and the Crisis of Meaning. 99th CAA-Conference. Speech in New York 11 February 2011, p. 1.

³²⁸ See Sarah Thornton: In and out of love with Damien Hirst. *Making sense of spots, sharks, pills, fish and butterflies*. *The Art Newspaper Online* 23 October 2008.

and looks more like the lead in Gothic church windows. In the same vein, the titles of the Butterfly Wing Paintings contain religious references such as names of cathedrals, psalms, or other terms that can be associated with religious contexts.

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In the final phase of the series, from 2006 to 2008, the Butterfly Paintings had a mannerist tendency, which was the case for all other long-term Hirst series as well. Individual Butterfly Paintings were then provided with things like knife blades, diamonds, or religious regalia. Instead of brightly colored household paint as background color sometimes Hirst used gold or silver paint, at times even spraying the butterflies with the same color. In addition, in this Mannerist and (even more) self-referential late phase of the Butterfly Paintings, they occasionally overlap with other Hirst series like the Spot and Spin Paintings, some works can be attributed to two series. All variations existed parallel to one another until the end of the series.³²⁹

i) »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys« (2006)

The diptych »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys« from 2006³³⁰ (figure 12) consists of two equal-sized circular plain white framed canvases, one of which is painted a monochrome pink, the other one is light blue. Each features 18 butterflies of varying size and color stuck to the canvases. Their 'all over' arrangement seems to follow no symmetry. In addition, scalpels, razor blades, and box cutters are attached to the canvas surface. The colored butterflies are also supposedly perfect, a sign of luxury, beauty, and current, despite the fact that they are dead.

The beautiful, though dead, butterflies show the vanity of consumption of beautiful things, such as paintings with beautiful, dead butterflies on them. Hirst's butterflies do not look dead, however, the fact they are stuck to paintings points to the fact that consumption of beauty is ultimately vain and void, because »there are no pockets in a shroud«, a proverb Hirst often

³²⁹ See Sotheby's: Damien Hirst. An Interview with Tim Marlow. Online video Sothebys.com, August 2008.

³³⁰ This work was shown 2006/07 at the [post] YBA group exhibition »Aftershock: Contemporary British Art 1990-2006« organized by the British Arts Council in the Chinese cities Guangzhou and Beijing.

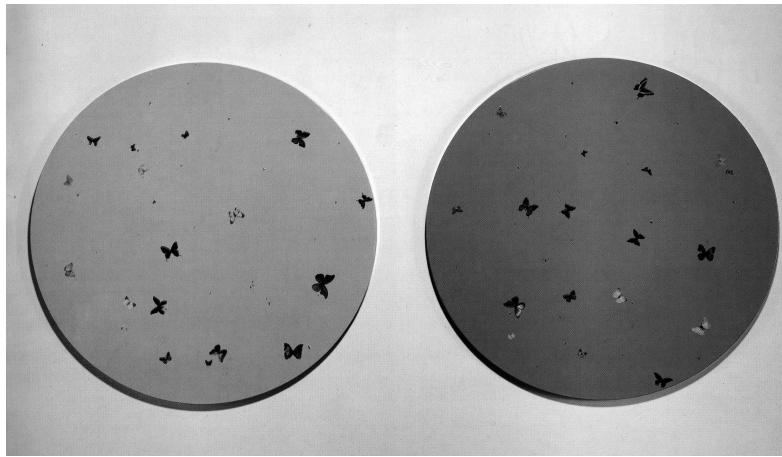


Figure 12: Hirst, Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys Who Like Girls, Like Girls Like Boys (knife blades, butterflies, scalpel blades, razor blades, carpet pitch, and household paint on canvas), diptych, diameter à 213, 4 inches, 2006.

Source: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd © Damien Hirst and Science. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. Exh. *Aftershock: Contemporary British Art 1990-2006*. London 2006, p. 83.

cited in past interviews.³³¹ The different size and shape of the butterflies on the paintings also stand simultaneously for unity and diversity.

Notwithstanding the title, the butterflies, at first glance, are not overpowering or even dominant, but rather the monochrome colors of the canvases dominate. Using the same colors of pink and light blue and with similar titles Hirst created the Spot Painting diptych »Blue For Girls And Pink For Boys«³³² in 1996, a canvas with each only pink or only light blue spots. In 2008 he executed a triptych, »Happy, Boys, Girls«³³³, again a Butterfly Painting. The blue screen is reminiscent of a summer sky, where the butterflies seem to cavort, but they stand out better against the slightly lighter pink background of the other canvas, reminiscent of the color impression of rose-

³³¹ See Hirst interviewed by Haden-Guest 2008, p. 157.

³³² See Hirst 1997, p. 190.

³³³ The latter contains a third, orange canvas, connected to the term »happy« in the title. See Sotheby's 2008. Vol. 1, p. 96.

colored glasses. Both rose-colored glasses and the summer sky evoke positive associations.

Pink and blue are reminiscent of stereotypical color assignments for females and males, and thus to both sexes in general, as evidenced by the title, which is supported in each case by the words »Girls« and »Boys«. In an interview Hirst also stressed the connection between the color combination of pink and light blue and some of his cabinets works, which each have Adam and Eve in the title. Hirst over-fulfills and breaks at the same time these and other color clichés (like blue water taps stand for cold, red ones for hot water³³⁴). According to Thornton red and blue paintings sell by far the best at art auctions.³³⁵

Divided parts of one whole thing always relate to each other and also reinforce each other³³⁶, a principle that is used in stimulating consumption and advertising, also in combination with red and blue, for instance the dentifrice double Elmex (red tube) and Aronal (blue tube) or Gauloises cigarettes, where the blue packets represent the stronger cigarettes and red the lighter ones. »*Girls are sold pink and boys blue because the brain latches onto such easy symbols,*« Lawson writes about consumer strategies.³³⁷ Hirst's series of Butterfly Paintings mirrors the processes of mass production, serving as the typical example for all his other series. The same applies for every mini-series and each diptych: »*I've always done pairs. I thought that art exists somewhere between the unique and the mass produced objects, Mona Lisa und Coke Can.*«³³⁸

Like the title of the artwork, the scalpels, razors, and box cutters suggest that this light blue/pink baby-scheme might get more complicated later in life, possibly escalating beyond societal norms. Knives may represent violence and injuries, both spiritual and physical, inflicted on one another by »Boys and Girls« in love, such as jealousy and suicide scenarios or the so-called delicate cutting, auto aggressive behavior with a knife. In his »Natural History« series, Hirst combined organic, soft, and natural materials with industrially made, hard, angular things – mammals and butterflies on one side and cabinet steel frames and blades on the other hand: the lethal or life-saving

³³⁴ See *ibid*, p. 161.

³³⁵ See Sarah Thornton: *Seven days in the art world*. New York 2008, p. 24.

³³⁶ See Napoli 2004, p. 129.

³³⁷ Lawson 2009, p. 147.

³³⁸ Hirst quoted in Napoli 2004, p. 129.

man-made contrasted with or god-made (nature). The different blade types can be associated either with medicine, science, and saving lives in the case of the scalpels or with aspects of daily life, such as the razors and other blades.

Butterflies' lavish colors serve to attract mates of the opposite sex, in the same way that men and women want to stand out and impress one another. In mutual pursuit, both men and women invest a great deal of time and money in clothes and toiletries including shaving faces and legs with razors. Some even »go under the knife«, the scalpel, to become beautiful (again). They want to be and to remain attractive like the butterfly that does not age, which is the desire of the perfect consumer. Butterflies make the viewers forget that their lives are short, and that there might be something more out there than the illusive pursuit of beauty.

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The consistently overly-positive titles of the asymmetric Butterfly Paintings – all of those created around 1995 include the word 'love' – are reminiscent of trivial texts of easily consumable pop songs. The title »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys« refers to (title and) chorus of the pop song »Girls and Boys« by British band Blur from 1994³³⁹: »*Looking for girls who are boys who like boys to be girls who do boys like they're girls who do girls like they're boys*« which Hirst does not quote exactly, but rather paraphrases, like someone trying to sing along with the fast, mumbled lyrics of a song where only the words »boys« and »girls« are easily distinguishable. A non-literal interpretation of the song text allows the artwork to be viewed in a more general way.

Because of title and the colors, the connotations of »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys« lean towards interpersonal (sexual) relationships. The nested title, the song chorus, and the confusing way it is performed by Blur also point to the complexity of peer relationships, because each individual part can be combined with the others in any number of variations to provide very different results. In one reading Blur talks about girls, who like boys, who may in turn like boys, who actually like girls, who like girls. On the one hand the title alludes to homosexual and heterosexual relationships and the problems and complications that might arise if one does not know whether the coveted counterpart finds men or

³³⁹ See also: Exhibition catalogue. *Aftershock: Contemporary British Art 1990-2006*. London 2006, p. 79.

women more attractive.³⁴⁰ The word »like« can be a verb, the opposite of »dislike«, or a comparative like the word »as«: girls, who are attracted to other girls who dress »as« boys (»like boys«). This has to be seen in connection with and in contrast to the schematic and simple classification of boys and girls at the beginning of their lives, where girls wear pink and boys wear blue.

In 1995, Hirst directed the music video for the song »Country House« for Blur. He has been friends with the band members since their time at Goldsmiths. The music video of »Girls and Boys« begins with the butterflies flying around a flickering light bulb, followed by short shots with naked men with shaved heads kissing each other, with butterflies sitting on their heads.³⁴¹

Once again the flighty, swarm-like characteristics of both butterflies and people are expressed in a song, which dropped at the same time as Hirst began the *Butterfly Painting* series, themes which Hirst then revisited over ten years later in a new variation.

Other Hirst titles are also borrowed from pop songs like the aforementioned »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11) or »Hello Space Boy« from 1995, »I Can See Clearly Now« (1991) and »My Way« (1990/91).³⁴² With allusions to songs and their music videos Damien Hirst refers to pop-culture, which is a consumer culture. The pop quote for contemporary art addresses the culturally educated viewer, like the Bible or Ovid quote earlier: the artist shows connections to what is commonly known, what shapes our lives.³⁴³ Many pop songs have catchy melodies and lyrics that easily stick in memory, like adverts. Therefore, they are often used or made popular in advertising or vice versa. The titles of Hirst's works are reminiscent of comic books, B-

³⁴⁰ Similar contrary associations can be found in the title of the pink blue spot painting mentioned »Pink for Boys, Blue For Girls«.

³⁴¹ See Kevin Godley [director]: *Girls and Boys*. Music video. 1994. Duration: 4.14 Min.

³⁴² »In & Out of Love« is the title of a few songs: The Supremes (1967) or Bon Jovi (1985). »Hello Space Boy« is a single by David Bowie and The Pet Shop Boys from the same year as Hirst's »Beautiful, Hello Space-Boy«; »I Can See Clearly Now« was written by Johnny Nash in 1972 and sung by many others. For his first series of medical cabinets Hirst used all the song titles of the »Nevermind The Bollocks«-album by British 1970's punk band »Sex Pistols«. See Hirst 1997, p. 196, 207-218, 257.

³⁴³ See Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 97. Stallabrass remarks people today don't read mythology, the Bible, or Dante anymore. See Stallabrass 2006, p. 304.

movies³⁴⁴, or stories behind well-known songs³⁴⁵, as well as aphorisms, fragments of pop songs, and advertising slogans that are ever-present in the cultural landscape and memory; just as natural and familiar as pink for girls and blue for boys.

In his artist's book in 1997, Hirst included witticisms and quips, quotes, and titles often giving them whole pages, thus lending them the same weight, space, and importance as reproductions of his own work.³⁴⁶ The same can be said of Banksy. Hirst's titles are often very complicated and convoluted, or else overly simple. Yet again and again the simple ones prevailed, even increased, and thus ever more resembled the easily consumable language of headings used by advertising to which they so often refer.

The »Boys« and the »Girls« in »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys« as well as the baby pink and blue, the round canvases also evoke the belly of a pregnant woman, or the expression »butterflies in your stomach«. Circular canvases are often found in Hirst's oeuvre, in addition to *Butterfly*, *Spot*, or especially in Hirst's Spin Paintings. »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys« look like large Smarties (small, candy-coated chocolates) or pills, bringing to mind drugs or drug consumption.

Since Hirst focuses more on the concept and the relationship between consumer object and painting than on the presentation, a round canvas often implies it does not matter whether a work is hung correctly. A circular screen always calls to mind a rotary motion, a fact Hirst emphasized by occasionally installing motors to rotate his canvases.

Like other works »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls Like Boys«, is both that which it depicts and that on which it comments: A beautiful, vain consumer product with bright candy colors, and titles reminiscent of pop songs and advertising slogans. All these present simple association shells for the viewer – thrown together seemingly at random. Here the butterflies are not necessarily the focus, they are only the brackets holding Hirst's ironic consumption cliché collection together.

³⁴⁴ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 157.

³⁴⁵ The blood graffiti »Helter Skelter« in Hirst's vitrine »Pursuit of Oblivion« from 2004 points to the Beatles-Song of the same title, which arguably inspired Charles Manson to commit his bloody deeds. Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 103.

³⁴⁶ See Hirst 1997.

ii) »Devotion« (2003³⁴⁷)

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Figure 13: Hirst, Devotion (butterfly wings with glue on canvas), 243.8 x 152.4 cm, 2003.

Source: Photographed by Stephen White. © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. *Exh. Romance in the Age of Uncertainty. Jay Jopling / White Cube (London), London 2003. Unpaged.*

foil of the regular Butterfly Paintings. The Butterfly Paintings appear more lively, on the one hand due to the fact they feature whole insects, not only wings or »animal material«, like in »Devotion«, although also here often both

³⁴⁷ See picture in Napoli 2004, p. 185.

³⁴⁸ See *Romance in the Age of Uncertainty*. Exhibition catalogue. White Cube, London 10 September until 19 October 2003.

»Devotion« (figure 13) is an example of Hirst's symmetrical, sub-species of the series, also called butterfly wing paintings.³⁴⁸ Symmetrically colorful butterfly wings are mounted on an upright oval, black-painted canvas. They cover the entire canvas like a kaleidoscope or mosaic, but do not overlap and thus always leave black colored »lead piping« effect between each wing. The dominant colors of these wings are dark blue, yellow, and white.

The ornamental structure of Wing Paintings like »Devotion« works as a

wings of one individual insect are placed very close together so that the insects almost appear to be whole. The random, spread-position of the butterflies appears much more »natural« than the »wings«, which are squeezed into geometrical patterns. So there is order, disorder, and violence, both qualitatively, since one has to pull the wings off the dead insects, and quantitatively, because the Wing Paintings require significantly more butterflies to complete the work as almost the entire canvas is covered.

By reducing the organic raw material down to disembodied wings in order to create mass, ornamental structures, Hirst uses the Wing Paintings to draw parallels to the mass production of consumer products. Early on, Hirst still wanted to create the illusion of supposedly natural and living creatures through presenting whole insects arranged randomly, but later he depicts butterflies merely as material from nature. The content changed, too: In the Butterfly Paintings Hirst showed butterflies on canvas, later he used butterfly wings as the »animal material« to create ornamental patterns. The focus shifts from the impression of the form of the insects to that of their color, while the role of the monochrome color patches recedes and their impression changes from color to shape, to ridges between the wings. As a consequence, unlike with the complete insects, the butterflies are no longer obvious as such to observers. To some extent, it is still possible to identify butterflies, in large part due to the fact that viewers are often familiar with the original Butterfly Paintings and still recognize the pairs of wings as individual creatures.

Butterflies form swarms, often moving together in the same direction. According to Reynolds each swarm »works« among other things according to the rule of »separation« (move away as soon as someone is too close to you), which applies for the Butterfly Paintings as well: the insects never touch. Some swarms form geometric formations, such as a 'V'. Those pairs of wings reminiscent of an individual also make up a larger whole, although their formations and their rules differ fundamentally from swarm rules. The individual butterflies of the Butterfly Paintings only »fly« together, but not necessarily in one direction. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman mentions consumer swarms in today's consumer society, a suitable term for Hirst's Butterfly Paintings:

»In the modern, fleeting consumer society, increasingly the *swarm* [italics in original] takes the place of the *group* [italics in original], which is equipped with leaders, authorities governed by hierarchy, and a pecking order. [...] Swarms are unburdened of the responsibility of securing the

tools of survival, they come together, drift apart, and come together again and again, each time led by a new force, led by different impulses, and attracted by constantly changing and moving targets.«³⁴⁹

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Figure 14: Poster for Alexander McQueen Spring Summer collection 2011. Model: Sasha Pivovarova.
Source: © Alexander McQueen. <http://www.designscene.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Alexander-McQueen-Spring-Summer-2011-DesignSceneNet-02.jpg> (Retrieved: March 12, 2010).

and design. Fashion designer Alexander McQueen, used butterflies for many patterns and designs (figure 14). Like Hirst, McQueen's (among others) fashion oscillates between art, design, and consumption, even if a designer tradi-

For Bauman each person consumes on their own even if they consume in the company of others. Thus consumption is a very solitary activity.³⁵⁰ In the same way, Hirst's Butterflies are lonely together, as evidenced by their spatial separation from each other. Such consumer-swarms can be found, for instance, at the openings of new IKEA stores, in the case of the publication of a new Harry Potter book, or at a summer sale, where people try to catch a bargain. Butterflies are therefore often used in advertising

³⁴⁹ Zygmunt Bauman: *Leben als Konsum*. Hamburg 2009 [Original Edition 2007], p. 101.

³⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 102.

tionally creates products not »art«. Both use butterflies for their »product lines« and Hirst, the artist, also designed clothes based on his paintings. The light, carefree but at the same time profound motifs can also be found in McQueen's poster. Three years after Alexander McQueen's suicide in 2010, his label collaborated with Hirst to create 30 limited edition scarves in 2013, nearly all of them with Butterfly Painting motifs.

Hirst »captures« the »enthusiastic« mood of a buying frenzy (like a collector with a butterfly net) in his Butterfly Paintings in a way that looks like photographic snapshots, frozen reality:

»The best way to [...] imagine [swarms] is to recall Andy Warhol's repeatedly copied images of which there is no discernible original or the original was discarded with no possibility of recovery or recreation. Each unit of a swarm mimics the movements of the others but executes them alone, from beginning to end and in its entirety (in the case of consumer swarms, the task to be executed is consumption).«³⁵¹

Bauman's reference to »swarms of images« of a consumer culture can also be transferred to Butterfly Paintings, not just the butterfly in the work itself. »Devotion« also contains all the distinguishing features of this series. Together the »imagines« (butterflies) intensify each other on the images (the paintings). To some degree all of Hirst's series together could be seen as a swarm.

The number of Butterfly(Painting)s both questions and suggests that through mere quantity a group of works is significant and important. This, too, is present in the image of the consumer-swarm, according to Bauman,:.

»In the case of rational and sentient human beings the calming effect of flying in a swarm lies in the feeling of security in a crowd [italics in original]: the belief that the direction of the swarm must be correct, because a surprisingly large swarm follows it and the assumption that so many sentient, thinking human beings cannot be deceived at the same time.«³⁵²

Robbed of their individuality or reduced to torn pairs of wings, these lonely members of a crowd can only swarm together. Predecessors of such consumer swarms (some also in ornamental arrangements) historically appeared first on religious depictions and then on government photos, two areas which unite and bring together individuals. Today such swarms occur at demonstrations and mass consumer events such as football games, public screenings, or pop

³⁵¹ Ibid, p. 101.

³⁵² Bauman 2009, p. 102.

concerts; consumption rituals of otherwise more or less alienated individuals in a consumer society. Moles and Thomas' photos of pre-arranged masses from the 1910s (figure 15) are one example of a work similar to the Wing Paintings. In »The Human U.S. Shield« a few hundred people were literally exploited for propaganda purposes.³⁵³

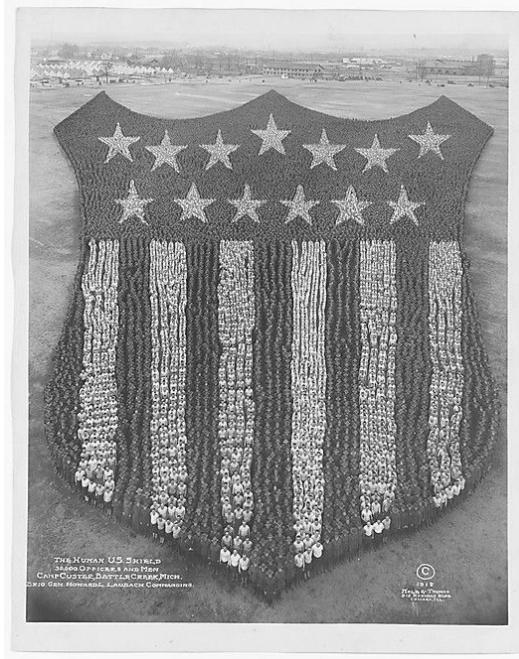


Figure 15: Mole and Thomas, The Human U.S. Shield (gelatin silver print), 32.5 x 26.4 cm, 1918. Source: http://images.metmuseum.org/CRDImages/ph/web-large/D_P109571.jpg (Retrieved: March 12, 2010).

iconography, which in its last phase reached a »Mannerist« phase by 2008, when instead of just associative titles like »Devotion,« »Absolution,« or »Forgiveness« (as in 2003) Hirst created »replicas« of actual church stained glass windows with butterfly wings and/or named them after verses from Biblical

The title »Devotion« establishes a Christian religious reference, which is supported by the shape of the canvas, which resembles a Gothic rose window of a church. Even »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys, Like Boys« recalls Christian devotional images by the fact that it is a diptych. Here the religious reference, however, goes no further than the formal allusion. Butterfly Wing Paintings such as »Devotion« relate much more to Christian

³⁵³ Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: The Human U.S. Shield. In: Collections Photographs on metmuseum.org (Retrieved: 4 March 2011).

psalms. One artwork shows the rose window of Durham Cathedral, a photograph of which Hirst printed in the booklet as well.

Stained glass windows fulfill not only the task of decorating churches and re-telling biblical events. The colorful stained glass windows of the Middle Ages created a mystical and solemn mood, and were used mainly in churches. Their task was (like the golden background in paintings) to bring the faithful closer to the meaning of the divine light. They should also represent the worldly wealth and power of the donor. This also applies to Hirst's paintings, which are status symbols due to the high price of the trademark 'Damien Hirst'. Like religion, the viewing or the purchase of a *Butterfly Paintings* satisfies a need, it provides a positive feeling. Hirst, an atheist educated in Catholic schools, used Christian iconography to create this positive feeling, although for him the associated symbols merely represent an »old story«.³⁵⁴ Due to the fact that religion served as a carrier of meaning for such a long time, it can now also represent the new relic, a stand in or proxy, i.e. consumption, in a gallery. This is reinforced by the religious presentation, on photos from a distance one actually gets the impression of being in a church (figure 16).

Like stained glass, the *Butterfly Paintings* that imitate them are also perfectly beautiful, balanced, and decorative. But in contrast to their religious role models, the *Butterfly Paintings* were created to be purchased, hung »over the sofa«³⁵⁵, to be consumed. What other artists are trying to prevent by using shocking, sinister or oversize content, Hirst ostensibly, consciously accelerates. He does not necessarily want his art in museum, but just »over the sofa«. Emphasized by the continuous and almost absurd over-fulfillment of supposed desires of viewers/potential buyers, his works are not only perfectly beautiful, but appear at the same time as critical commentary on the perfect and beautiful or *per se* art consumption.

The concept also includes the purchaser – buyers are reminded of their role as consumers. The fact that they are willing to spend a lot of money for Hirst paintings outs them and they can recognize themselves in the individual components, for instance in the titles of the aforementioned 13 »Midas« or »Judas« paintings, two figures from the Bible and mythology whose experiences with wealth were both quite ambivalent.

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³⁵⁴ Sotheby's: Damien Hirst. An Interview with Tim Marlow. Online video on Sothebys.com August 2008.

³⁵⁵ One of Hirst's companies is called »over the sofa«.

»Devotion« is itself an expensive yet beautiful, perfect 'thing', in the same way that the butterflies affixed to the work are beautiful and perfect. People collect butterflies because they are beautiful and rare, and because there are many different species/varieties, which, combined in a collection or series, offer a larger aesthetic experience than individuals on their own can offer.



Figure 16: Hirst, Superstition [installation view]. New York, 2007.

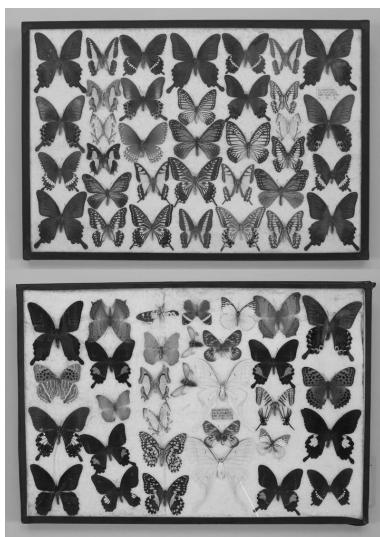
Source: Photographed by Douglas M. Parker Studio. © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

Each painting contains a »collection«, a collage of up to several hundred butterflies. The work itself is collectible, and this is exacerbated by the fact that it is part of a series which in turn is part of several other Hirst series. A series always implies that each variation seeks to produce an aesthetic effect not only individually but also in combination with other Butterfly Paintings, ie, by rows, repetitions and variations of the same subject matter, theme, or system of both constant and variable elements or principles.

Hirst's butterflies remind viewers of butterfly collections (figure 17) that became popular in the Victorian era. On the one hand these butterfly collections were associated with industrialization and the alienation of man from nature, but on the other hand they are also synonymous with an increase in an often destructive scientific interest in nature and natural phenomena. Around the same time in 18th century Europe, the first decorative butterfly collages arose. These must be understood as precursors of Hirst's Butterfly Paintings.³⁵⁶ The connection to this religious, one might say uptight age that imprisoned all feelings; the human, the primitive, the savage, and the imperfect, to view it with insulated-voyeuristic eyes, is found in the display cases in the emerging »zoo

and museum culture«. Hirst himself speaks of the presumptuous claim of the Victorian era: »[T]he Victorians going out into the world and killing all the animals and bringing them back. In the Natural History Museum, it is like they have got millions of items [...] It is all pickled and pinned. [...] How arrogant to say, let's get the world and bring it home to us. Let's have zoos.

«³⁵⁷



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Figure 17: Victorian butterfly collection, each 55x38,1 cm.

Source: © 1998-2011 Newel, LLC. <http://www.newel.com/images/Images/051076/051076-F.JPG> (March 12, 2010).

³⁵⁶ Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 103.

³⁵⁷ Hirst quoted in Napoli 2004, p. 205.



Figure 18: Dubuffet, *Sylvain de Cheveux* (butterflies and oil on canvas), 1953.

Source: http://www.artisallwehave.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/dubuffet_cheveux-de-sylvain-1953.jpg (March 12, 2010).

the many Victorian churches, but also for the »cathedrals of science« the museums of the 18th and 19th century, such as the Natural History Museum in

Blazwick called Damien Hirst's art »Victorian«³⁵⁸, an adjective that does not fit the work of Dubuffet, an artist influenced by surrealism and related to Art Brut, who also created collages of butterfly wings.³⁵⁹ (figure 18) in the 1950s, which were presented in a style that was both childlike and naive, for example in the form of faces. These can be seen as precursors of Hirst Butterfly Paintings.³⁶⁰ Dubuffet rejected what he learned and saw from the history of art. Hirst, however, purposely sought out such innuendos, he referred to medieval stained glass windows or to Victorian butterfly collections³⁶¹, dishing them out on a silver platter to help legitimize his work.

In Victorian era architecture many buildings were built in the neo-style and featured stained glass windows like the ones later quoted by Hirst. This is true not only for

³⁵⁸ See Blazwick, 2010.

³⁵⁹ See e.g. the collage »Cheveux de Sylvain« of 1953. 26,5 x 17,5 cm. See Lorenza Trucchi: Dubuffet. In: Art Dossier. Éditions Giunti. Florence December 2001, p. 18. See also Thümmel 1997, p. 45.

³⁶⁰ See Thümmel 1997, p. 45.

³⁶¹ Since the time of romanticism, debates grew in 19th century German literature about phenomena of nature in general or, more precisely, about butterflies. See Heinrich Heine: *Der Schmetterling ist in die Rose verliebt*; Christian Morgenstern: *Ein Schmetterling fliegt über mir*; Eduard Mörike: *An Clara (Im Weinberg)*, *Citronenfalter im April*; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Der Schmetterling*; Johann Gottfried Herder: *Liebes, leichtes, luft'ges Ding*, *Schmetterling*; Friedrich von Schlegel: *Der Schmetterling*.

London, built in 1860 in the Romanesque-Byzantine style, such museums are visually reminiscent of church buildings. As early as the late 19th century department stores were, according to Zola, »cathedrals of consumption«.³⁶² Benjamin's comments are similar, calling the Parisian shopping arcades of his time »temples of the capital goods«.³⁶³ Hirst refers to churches, museums, and department stores and draws a line connecting the religious Middle Ages to modern consumer society.

Hirst's butterflies (or their wings) often do not touch each other. They are separated by color, which is reminiscent of the lead piping separating the colored glass in stained glass windows or of the painted »cages«³⁶⁴ of Hirst's role model Francis Bacon. These color stripes refer to the cold isolation of a zoo, a butterfly collection, a museum display case, cabinet, or a shop window. Unlike Bacon, who was painting emotions, Hirst only cites. Also Gilbert & George's glossy photographs (figure 19) are colorful like Hirst's paintings; their creation of whole images through the combination of smaller parts in separate frames are reminiscent of stained glass as well.³⁶⁵ The symmetrical and nostalgic pop aesthetic as well as the structure and colors of church windows are the sugar for the bitter pill, Hirst's dead animals or Gilbert & George's explicit sequences (figure 19) showing naked men in combination with a crucifix made of excrement. One can also consider the reverse: naked men, excrement (also in the case of Chris Ofili), animal carcasses, blasphemy, or dead insects »sanctify« the otherwise unrestrained devotion to kitsch and the cheerful advertisement aesthetic. In addition to the strong contrasts in color and content, Gilbert & George also share with Hirst the proximity to performance. In contrast to this artist duo, Dubuffet had little in common with Hirst's view of art. For Dubuffet, an upper-class intellectual, the 19th century bourgeoisie functioned as anti-concept. Hirst, a working-class, self-acclaimed anti-intellectual, produced works highlighting (a pre or post scholarly) interest in amazement and wonder, and the impact that objects can have: no matter if they originate from art, science, nature, or other fields/categories.

³⁶² Quoted in Max Hollein und Christoph Grunenberg (Ed.): *Shopping. 100 Jahre Kunst und Konsum.* Exhibition catalogue. Ostfildern-Ruit 2002, p. 8.

³⁶³ Quoted in Bolz 2002, p. 65.

³⁶⁴ Quoted by Wallis in Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 98.

³⁶⁵ Stallabrass 2006, p. 88.

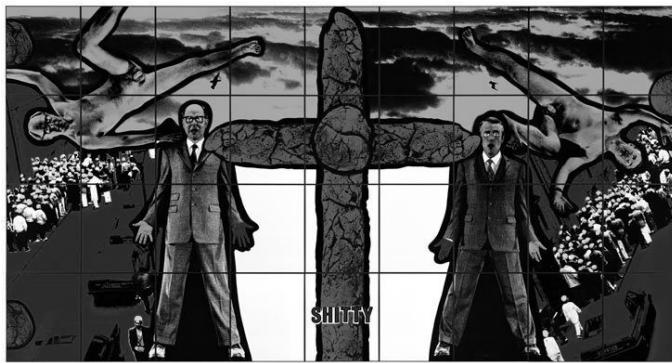


Figure 19: Gilbert & George (Shitty) from »Shitty Naked Human World«. (Photography), 338 x 639 cm, 1994, Stedelijk Amsterdam.

Source: <http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/exhibitions/gilbertandgeorge/images/rooms/1994-SHITTY-FROM-SNHW.jpg> (March 12, 2010).

»The collecting of organs [...] and shells [...] in Hirst's works harken back to the collections/treasures of private collectors and bring to mind in the broadest sense private art and curio cabinets in addition to museums as collection spaces par excellence.«³⁶⁶

Since the 14th century, European nobles founded representative collections (art and wonder chambers). Like Hirst's art they did not separate artifacts and art from craft. They contained such diverse objects as silver and gold work using coral, pearls, and rock crystals; taxidermies; large shells; mathematical and surgical instruments; so-called art clocks (often astronomical clocks), automats or rare glasses.³⁶⁷ Many of these objects can also be found in Hirst's cabinets, formaldehyde works, and/or Butterfly Paintings.

These reminiscences of wonder cabinets also recall their former claim to serve to explain the world in a kind of great cosmic synopsis or to grasp and present the whole chaotic world in the space of a room and extent of a collection.³⁶⁸ Hirst's work expresses rather the current inability³⁶⁹ to present

³⁶⁶ Thümmel 1998, p. 119.

³⁶⁷ These explanations about »Wunderkammern« (wonder or curio cabinets) are found in Gabriele Befßer: *Wunderkammern – Weltmodelle von der Renaissance bis zur Kunst der Gegenwart*. Berlin 2009. p. 14–16.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ See Thümmel 1997, p. 175.

such a common cosmic view in the present, but also the remaining desire for it. By using real cows or butterflies Hirst's »pieces of doubt«³⁷⁰ show his desire for reality.³⁷¹ Wonder cabinets contrast »artful creations of nature« with art by people. »For Damien Hirst, however, the presentation of the natural object has become the artistic activity itself.«³⁷² Hirst's »natural objects«, his cows and butterflies, were produced/raised/cultivated especially to meet the needs of human consumption. These product-like creatures are themselves already positioned somewhere between nature and consumption. This quote by Thümmel from 1997 has to be updated: For Damien Hirst the presentation of the »consumer product art« is itself an artistic activity. This consumer product also includes his »natural objects« (that have become a trademark) as a self-reminiscence.

For Hirst the presentation and its relationship to the (potential) buyer/viewer are at the center of attention. The increasing trend of museums and exhibitions to be presented as »sensation«³⁷³ or »sensual experience« calls to mind the culture of wonders and amazement that was typical for curio cabinets.³⁷⁴ As explained in the chapter on the London art scene, the dramatic staging of the exhibition space was already a focus of the first exhibitions curated by Hirst. As an occasional curator and avid art collector, Hirst »collects and curates« in his work as well. For him, the best idea of the 20th century is the collage.³⁷⁵ »*Making a show and making a work are both forms of collage.*«³⁷⁶

As a student in the 1980s Hirst began with Schwitters-like collages of things that he found on the street.³⁷⁷ This contradicts his glossy objects, like the Butterfly Paintings, only on the surface. To stress this difference in terms of the consumption aspect of this series, it is helpful to look again at Dubuffet's collage (figure 18). It is demonstratively executed in a grossly naïve,

³⁷⁰ See Katrin Käthe Wenzel: Der Künstler als Präparator – künstlerischer Umgang mit konserviertem organischem Gewebe. In: Dies.: Fleisch als Wertstoff. Objekte auf der Schnittstelle von Kunst und Medizin. Berlin 2005.

³⁷¹ See Thümmel 1997, p. 175.

³⁷² See *ibid.*, p. 176. See Bredekamp 1993, p. 45.

³⁷³ See e.g. the title of the YBA exhibition of the same name, organized and promoted by a mogul of the advertising industry.

³⁷⁴ The terms »Kunst« (art) and »Wunder« (miracle, wonder) were used interchangeably. See Befßler p. 15.

³⁷⁵ See Napoli 2004, p. 198 and Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 97.

³⁷⁶ Stallabrass 2006, p. 30.

³⁷⁷ See Hirst 1997, p. 118. See also Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 245.

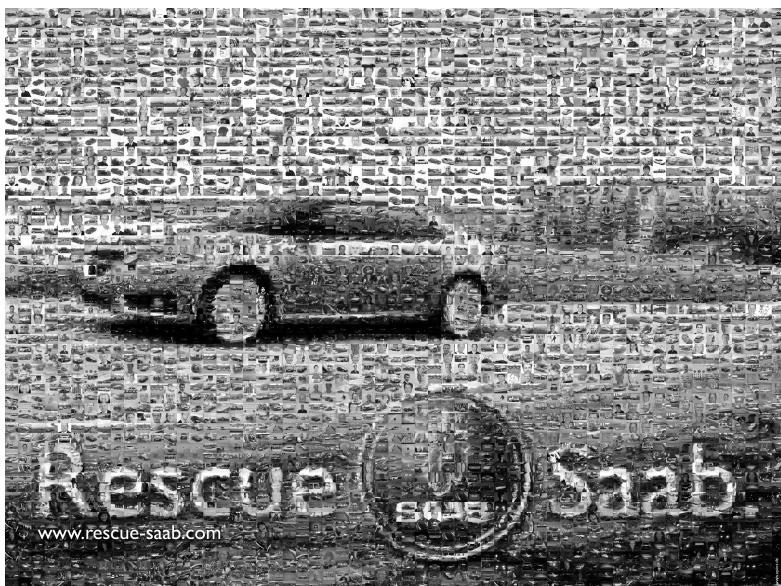
sloppy, or clumsy way, while Hirst's Butterfly Paintings are presented in similarly demonstrative way, but as clinical design objects. Any evidence of the artist's influence is hidden and these works present as almost mechanically produced. Hirst did not want to reshape naive faces from primal materials like Dubuffet. For him, the butterflies are also material, but more than that; they are the 'object' of his art. Hirst's early collages tend to have parallels with Dubuffet, they are intentionally rough and awkward, and even try to look as aged as Dubuffet's or Schwitters' collages were in the 1980s in an artificial/artistic way. Hirst wants more – in this role truly a curator and collector – he wants to show off the natural, bright colors, beauty, and purity of the butterflies and to visualize »collecting and presenting«. Hirst is the flagship consumer artist:

»From being a model producer, the artist has become a model consumer. Above all, within the framework of installation art as well as in new media, the artist works equally with both self-produced as well as externally-produced objects. The act of art production has itself become an act of shopping. The artist draws on pictures and objects from the mass culture in which he lives, and changes them for the creation of his own areas – just as every consumer does. Only the artist does it in an exhibition room, and thereby in an ostentatious and exemplary manner.«³⁷⁸

Like a proud consumer after a shopping trip Damien presents his assortment of different, combined colors (Spot and Spin Paintings), cabinets full of pills, drugs, cigarettes, diamonds, or butterfly collections, for sale or for aesthetic contemplation. Like any consumer, seller, collector, curator, andлагист, Hirst is also particularly dependent on structures in which he can present his collections of material, such as the grid of the spots, the cabinets, the patterns of the Butterfly Paintings, or the display cases. Wing Paintings such as »Devotion« appeared around the same time as the breakthrough of commercial computer-imaging software that allows the creation of photo-mosaics (figure 20) in which many smaller photographs are combined to make a whole image – like Butterfly Paintings, those are images containing other individual images (butterflies). This method (like many other similar image editing software filters) was used in advertising as well.

In contrast to the »Natural History« series no individual works dominate the reception of the Butterfly Paintings, that mix of painting and collage-like

³⁷⁸ Boris Groys: Der Künstler als Konsument. In: Shopping. 2002, p. 56.



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Figure 20: Rescue Saab mosaic ad. 2009.

Source: <http://www.rescue-saab.com/global/download/rescue-saab-download.jpg> (Retrieved: March 12, 2010).

flat relief. On the one hand Hirst created many more Butterfly Paintings than works of the »Natural History« series, on the other hand, the interpretation varies more with the latter in part due to the choice of mammals, as types of butterflies hardly play a role in the interpretation of the Butterfly Paintings, which are just a small and flat version of the Natural History Series.³⁷⁹ In both series real, dead animals play the dominant role in pop-minimalist artworks that are presented aesthetically.

Hirst always alludes to similarities between his series – in matter of form and content. Around 2008 they increasingly overlap. The fact that Hirst created various series over 17 years, from 1991 to 2008, covering much of his entire artistic career, affects the actual works themselves. This fact underlines Hirst's interaction with art as a consumer product. In and of themselves, series reflect the idea of mass production, correlating series even more so. This

³⁷⁹ This might be connected to the fact that people generally have a better working knowledge of mammals than of butterflies.

self-referential methodology shows that Hirst's series are already established as a brand or product known like an icon, they quote each other. The (potential) buyer/viewer is thus part of Hirst's happening. He/she knows for instance that the silhouette of a skull in a Spin Painting or the diamonds in a Butterfly Painting both allude to »For the Love of God«.

The principle of the series can be included in the above argument. Like stamps or rare butterflies, a series invites the purchase of several related objects or vice versa, to have one representative of each series or rare species. According to Thümmel the collection of (consumer) objects can be understood, in addition to the joy of owning beautiful and unusual things, also as fear of death: »Thus, the Butterfly Paintings by Damien Hirst evoke butterfly collections, whose value lies not in the butterfly as a living being, but as an aesthetic object [...]. Through the collections the butterflies are transformed from mortal beings into »immortal« objects.«³⁸⁰

As previously mentioned in conjunction with »The Golden Calf«, Hirst's dead animal can be seen more as a prop in a performance than an independent work of art. This also applies to the Butterfly Paintings, which are former »requisites« in an installation depicting a butterfly life cycle called 'In and Out of Love' (figures 10 and 11) from 1991. They became a consumable, purchasable, and independent souvenir.

Hirst broaches the issue of »collecting«, an activity that always has to do with consumption. He transforms the (potential) buyers/viewers into collectors, a principle that is also used increasingly in marketing to boost commodities with idealistic value:

»Meanwhile, it is often suggested to the consumers that they are actually collectors. In this regard, it is sufficient to write on a package »limited edition« to provide added value. [...] This is as equally a reliable method of fomenting possessiveness as creating the competitive situation of an auction [...].«³⁸¹

Collecting and auctioning are artistic strategies for Hirst. He applies them in his store Other Criteria, where shirts and prints are sold as limited edition, where the line between art and consumerism moves even closer towards consumerism. In addition to his exploitation of faith in God, science, and money, Hirst used this strategy of adding value to his art by making it a collectable and thereby opening up the issue to be discussed, criticized, debated,

³⁸⁰ Thümmel 1997, p. 119.

³⁸¹ Ullrich 2006, p. 190.

or exploited. He depicts collectors as the better art viewers, also analogous to the consumer culture:

»Bargains and unexpected gains, lucky finds and acquisition strategies – all this is propagated in such a way that collectors seem to be good role models for consumers. Above all, they gain authority because they spent money. This makes them seem serious. Their costs count as evidence of existential participation, the act of consumption is admired as a realization of purchasing power – virility. – [...] A collector can distinguish himself as an expert in matters of art simply by buying a work of art. He needs no arguments and theories to communicate its value. The price tag replaces any need to justify a valuation based on taste or monetary worth, consumption replaces [...] reception.«³⁸²

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These statements match (not only) the 'over-collector' Charles Saatchi, who is better known than most artists he collects. The value of an artist he buys automatically rises, this is reflected in an increase of reputation and of prices that are paid now for his/her artworks.

But the Butterfly Paintings also have in the truest sense of the word a dark side, the sub series Fly Paintings, which contribute in the following more aspects to the overall experience of Hirst's series.

iii) Fly Paintings and Sculptures (1997 – 2008)

Hirst's Fly Paintings can be described as the counterpart to the decidedly cheerfully-colored Butterfly Paintings. They are reduced to the less aesthetically pleasing second syllable of the word »Butterfly«. Again Hirst stuck dead winged insects on canvases, this time ordinary flies. He omitted the paint completely and pasted dead flies over the whole canvas. This butterfly counter series consists of just a few »specimens«. The series began in 1997 with an ingloriously titled »Untitled Black Monochrome (Without Emotion)-Landscape«³⁸³ for the events that followed: The buyer of this prototype gave it back to Hirst because the stench of the rotting animals was unbearable in her villa, because Hirst had not yet perfected the technology for pre-

³⁸² Ullrich 2006, p. 191.

³⁸³ See Sarah Thornton: In and out of love with Damien Hirst. Making sense of spots, sharks, pills, fish and butterflies. The Art Newspaper Online 23 October 2008.

serving the insects.³⁸⁴ In 2002 it was followed by a series of new, technically improved Fly Paintings that had very negative titles compared to the exuberant positive ones of the Butterfly Paintings: All were named after diseases and pests such as »plague« or »AIDS«.³⁸⁵

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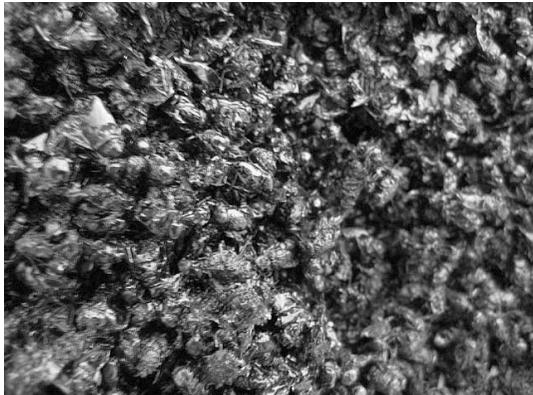


Figure 21: Hirst, AIDS [detail] (flies and resin on canvas), 137 x102x10cm, 2003.

Source: © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. Robert Tribble Collection. In: Napoli 2004, p. 88-89.

corpses.³⁸⁶ Flies are found in some cities often in large numbers where food waste spoils. The black Fly Paintings always remind of the dark side of consumption: waste, death, and destruction.

In colloquial English, the adjective »fly« means sneaky or shifty, words that always have a slightly negative connotation. Like butterflies or other insects flies symbolize small size and short life. Flies are counted among the ten plagues in the Bible³⁸⁷, to which Hirst's individual titles are partly related.

Flies feed on decaying organic materials, as hunters or parasites of other insects. They are food pests and settle on dead bodies. Fly Paintings also remind viewers that man himself is consumed after his death by flies and other insects. Some larvae, such as Hydrotaea are used by forensic scientists to determine the time of death of

³⁸⁴ See Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 94.

³⁸⁵ See ibid. and Exhibition catalogue Damien Hirst. Romance in the Age of Uncertainty. London 2003. UNPAGED.

³⁸⁶ See Jason Byrd und James Castner: Forensic Entomology: The Utility Of Arthropods in Forensic Investigations. Boca Raton 2000, p. 54-55.

³⁸⁷ Exodus 8:16

Flies were also pests in Greek mythology: people offered sacrifices to the fly catcher god Myiagros before they offered sacrifices to Zeus and Athena.³⁸⁸

In Baroque Vanitas still lifes, flies, like most insects, represent evil. The fly is traditionally regarded as a companion of the devil, Beelzebub means »lord of the flies«. Even in modern times a fly represents something negative, as in the sci-fi horror film »The Fly« (1958), in which a scientist becomes a giant fly. In the William Golding novel »Lord of the Flies« (1954) a skewered pig skull full of flies is a symbol for the human propensity for violence, the »animal« in all of us, which is waiting to drive people to do their worst.

As is also partly in the case of the Butterfly Paintings, the Fly Paintings reveal their true nature (literally) first and foremost in a personal close-up view (figure 21). Photographic reproduction (figure 22) and the view from a distance first show only black colored, although slightly shimmering, canvases, reminiscent of Malevich's Black Square. Hirst's works are thus con-

sumer objects per se; the physical presence of hundreds of dead insects, which can only be experienced or at least fully and uniquely experienced in the personal close-up view, is opposed to Banksy's ideas-art dependent only on photographic reproduction. Again, this shows the consumer-product-character of Hirst's art. In order to experience it in all facets, one has to own

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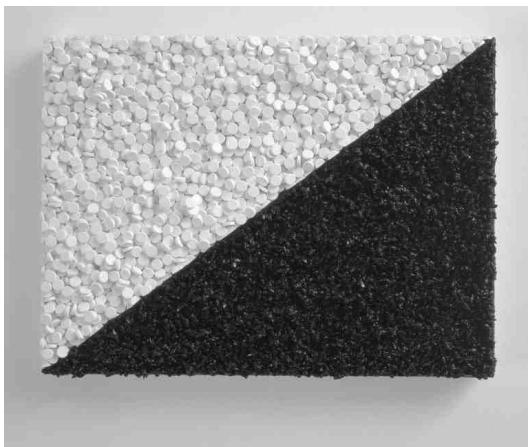


Figure 22: Hirst, Heaven Above, Hell Below (pills and flies on canvas) 38.2 x 51 cm, 2003.

Source: © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. Exh. *Romance in the Age of Uncertainty*. London 2003. White Cube Gallery, p. 81.

³⁸⁸ See Liliane Bodson: The beginnings of entomology in ancient Greece. In: Classical Outlook October/November 1983, p. 4.

it (or view it in the museum). The »Lord of the Flies« Damien Hirst mentioned already the 'distance' of the individual viewer towards a fly as analogous to towards his own insignificant life in connection with »A Thousand Years« from 1990, his first work with (mostly living) flies, whose whole life cycle he depicted. Maggots were born in the display case and once hatched, they had two ways: either they ate from a bloody cow's head (which was replaced by a lifelike replica because of the stench from the first show) and that was strongly reminiscent of Golding's pig skull, or they died in a electric fly-trap:

»I remember in the Fly piece [»A Thousand Years«, n. UB], there were loads of dead flies in the bottom of it and you just think »Oh my god! What have I done?« [...] Is it Thomas Hobbes who wrote Leviathan? He said that thing about life being »nasty, brutish and short«. It was a quote where he said, people are like flies brushed off a wall. I like that metaphorically. Your whole life could be like points in space, like nearly nothing. Also if I stand back far enough you think people are just like flies, like the cycle of a fly is like your own life.«³⁸⁹

»A Thousand Years« can be seen as the starting point of the Butterfly Paintings, as Hirst showed an insect life cycle before his butterfly installation »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11) (1991): »*If you see people as flies [...] you can see them as butterflies, small and disgusting or fragile and beautiful.*«³⁹⁰

The short life of a (butter-) fly is similar to the consumption of a cigarette³⁹¹. What remains are stubbed out butts and dead butterflies, which Hirst exhibited together in »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11). Like flies in »A Thousand Years« a human has two options: consume and/or die, or first one, then the other, or one dies by abundant consumption (from cigarettes, too much meat, or pills for instance). In this vein, Hirst designed a limited edition of Camel's »artists' pack« of cigarettes with a detail from a red Butterfly Painting in 2000.³⁹²

In the Fly Paintings Hirst discusses the pre-conceived notions of the (potential) buyer/viewer: that flies are repugnant, although they are very similar to butterflies, which are considered to be attractive. Still, although it is basi-

³⁸⁹ Hirst quoted in Napoli 2004, p. 94.

³⁹⁰ Hirst 1997, p. 12.

³⁹¹ See Ciceyn in Napoli 2004, p. 16.

³⁹² Elizabeth Bukowskii: Damien Hirst Now Deconstructs Camels, Jan. 31, 2000.

cally an almost identical subject (winged insects on canvas), the colorfully-positive Butterfly Paintings were sold in large quantities, while the Fly Paintings on the other hand were not. »Critics tend to celebrate the flies as the coolest newer development in Hirst's Œuvre, likening them to Yves Klein blue sponge paintings and noting their wry contribution to the »death of painting«. Not surprisingly, they don't command top dollar as non-connoisseurs tend to think they're revolting.«³⁹³

Two works from 2003 are not officially part of the Fly Paintings or the Butterfly Paintings, but could be, and do comment on both series. The first one is a diptych called »Salvation/Damnation«. It consists of two identically shaped and sized canvases, one is a Fly Painting, the other a Butterfly Painting.³⁹⁴

The second work is entitled »Heaven Above Hell Below« (figure 22). This (to my knowledge) single piece is a hybrid featuring a Fly Painting and a unique technique in which Hirst for the first and only time stuck (often used) pills directly onto the canvas and – like »Salvation/Damnation« – did not follow the idea any further. Objects from the real world – flies and pills – and their colors act here as carriers of meaning, their statements coincide with the title: »Then black and white you can do for life and death, and why because night time is dark and dark is negative and light is optimistic and happy.«³⁹⁵ Both of these borderline works, »Salvation/Damnation« and »Heaven Above Hell Below« represent visually and in the title the antithesis of the two sister series Butterfly and Fly Paintings.

Like »Heaven Above Hell Below«, Hirst's »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« is a nexus between two series, the Fly Paintings and the cabinets, i.e. a hybrid of painting and sculpture and the only work that gives the series' official name »Fly Paintings and sculptures« a reason to be. »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« from 2007 is an edition of 30 of real human skulls painted and covered in dead flies.³⁹⁶ This sculpture was originally created to be a counterpart to the diamond skull »For the Love of God« (see next chapter) at Hirst's exhibition »Beyond Belief« in 2007. But after completing »For the Love of God« Hirst decided to remove the fly skull from the exhibition: »the diamond

³⁹³ Sarah Thornton: In and out of love with Damien Hirst. Making sense of spots, sharks, pills, fish and butterflies. The Art Newspaper Online 23 October 2008.

³⁹⁴ [Http://www.damienhirst.com/salvationanddamnation](http://www.damienhirst.com/salvationanddamnation) (28 January 2016).

³⁹⁵ Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 161.

³⁹⁶ [Http://www.damienhirst.com/fear-of-death-full-skull](http://www.damienhirst.com/fear-of-death-full-skull) (28 January 2016).

skull's just so perfect you don't want to see anything else in the room with it.
«³⁹⁷

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d) »For the Love of God«³⁹⁸ (2007)

Damien Hirst's »For the Love of God« is a life-sized platinum cast of a human skull inlaid with 8,601 flawless industrial diamonds.³⁹⁹ From the original skull, Hirst retained only the teeth, which had been cleaned slightly.⁴⁰⁰ In the upper right jaw, one of the teeth of the original skull was missing.⁴⁰¹ »For the Love of God« has a tooth gap at the same position (figure 23). Hirst had originally intended to fill it with a gold tooth, but finally decided in favor of »braving the gap«⁴⁰², which was a logically consistent decision as the gold tooth would add another material and another color to the work. Furthermore the gold tooth would emphasize the missing tooth, it would highlight the missing symmetry more than a gap. The platinum skull is composed of 32 platinum panels with thousands of hand-lasered holes in which the diamonds are mounted.⁴⁰³ In the middle of the forehead, a large, teardrop-shaped pink colored diamond is mounted. This 52.50 carat diamond is surrounded by 14 pear-shaped pink diamonds that are also larger than the surrounding diamonds. The diamonds are classified with the color D, the purest color classification that diamonds can have.

»For the Love of God« was first shown in Hirst's solo show »Beyond Belief« at the White Cube Gallery in June 2007.⁴⁰⁴ Since then, in 2008, it was

³⁹⁷ Damien Hirst cited in »An Interview« with Hans Ulrich Obrist, »Beyond Belief«, Other Criteria/White Cube, London 2008, p. 30–31.

³⁹⁸ Jeremy Biles' essay »For the love of God«, about Hirst's sculpture of the same name, was published two years after the (German) first edition of this book. Biles' essay is worthwhile additional reading to my own thoughts in the present chapter.

³⁹⁹ See William Shaw: The Iceman Cometh. The Times Online 3 June 2007.

⁴⁰⁰ See Will Self: To die for. The Telegraph Online 2 June 2007.

⁴⁰¹ According to the FDI it is called Premolar 14.

⁴⁰² See Jeremy Lovell: Hirst covers cast skull in diamonds. Reuters Online 1 June 2007.

⁴⁰³ See Self 2007.

⁴⁰⁴ http://www.whitecube.com/exhibitions/beyond_belief/ (Retrieved: 20 August 2010).

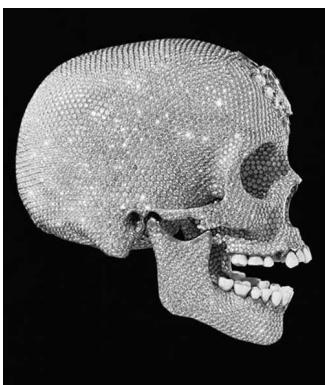


Figure 23: Hirst, For the Love of God (platinum, diamonds, human teeth), 17.1 x 12.7 x 19.1 cm, 2007, anonymous private consortium.

Source: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

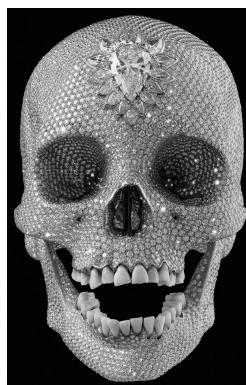


Figure 24: Damien Hirst, For The Love Of God, 2007.

Source: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd © Damien Hirst and Science. All rights reserved, DACS 2012th

presented in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam⁴⁰⁵ and in 2010/2011 in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence⁴⁰⁶, and is the core of Hirst's own (at the time of this study planned) museum in London.⁴⁰⁷

The alternate title is »The Diamond Skull«. In the same way that "The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living" is usually referred to as »shark« or »shark in formaldehyde« in publications, even the artist speaks of the »Diamond Skull« in interviews.⁴⁰⁸ This title emphasizes

⁴⁰⁵ The exhibition ran 1 November until 15 December 2008.

⁴⁰⁶ See Art Daily: The Diamond Encrusted Skull by Damien Hirst on Display at Palazzo Vecchio. artdaily.com 30 November 2010.

⁴⁰⁷ Rosie Millard: Damien Hirst in line to open his first gallery in Hyde Park. Evening Standard Online 15 June 2010. Hirst was not awarded the contract but changes a complex of buildings in Vauxhall, London. See Sean O'Hagan: Damien of the dead. The Observer Online 19 February 2006.

⁴⁰⁸ Hirst used this title as well, see his quote in the interview by Anthony Haden Guest: Damien Hirst – fresh from auctioning of more than 200 pieces of his work. In: Interview Magazine December 2008, p. 157.

the importance of the material for the reception and summarizes its main carriers of meaning – diamonds and a skull.

In contrast to most of Hirst's works, »For the Love of God« is not an object in a large series. It has a strong link to two other works. One, as already mentioned in the last chapter, functions as a counterpart: »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« was meant to be shown together with »For the Love of God«. »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« is an edition of 30 allegedly real human skulls encrusted with flies. »For the Love of God« is sparkling, bright, precious, and desirable, with a positive or at least ambivalent title and was first shown as an individual item. »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« has a negative title, consists of worthless, common, and repellent materials. »For the Love of God« contains the hardest, and most long-lasting material in the human body; teeth, and some of the hardest, most durable, and rarest materials found in nature, diamonds and platinum. »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« is rather *arte povera*, it uses poor materials glued together, »For the Love of God« is »not exactly *arte povera*« as Jannis Kounellis said to Hirst,⁴⁰⁹ it is the opposite. As an edition of 30, »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« is the opposite of a unique specimen. The teeth in »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« are invisible (or missing, or removed by Hirst), whereby the only human parts in »For the love of God« are the teeth, the skull is actually just a cast of a skull in contrast to the allegedly real skulls used in »Fear of Death (Full Skull)«.

If »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« and »For the Love of God« are literally like black and white, good and evil twins, »For Heaven's Sake« (2008), a baby skull, also inlaid with diamonds, »born« later, is a »mini-me«, a little sibling or child of the older »For the Love of God«. All these relationships within Hirst's self-referential oeuvre create value for each single work, making them more illustrious for potential collectors of these luxury consumer items because of their interconnectedness.

The motif of the skull appears in Hirst's art as early as the late 1990s, mostly as part of a (human) skeleton, and from then on increasingly in various series and media, from 2005⁴¹⁰ onwards to the late Spin Paintings (such as the »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« Exhibition in 2008), and in most

⁴⁰⁹ Hirst quoted in an interview with Elena Geuna, in: Exhibition catalogue: *Freedom not Genius*, London, Turin 2012, p. 99.

⁴¹⁰ »Hirst plans [...] a red and black spin painting [...] with a human skull in the middle [...]« Jo Tuckman: The bell tolls for Hirst's tried and tested work. *The Guardian* 24 October 2005.

Blue Paintings from 2006 to 2009. This was followed by photo-realistic representations of skulls, as well as a miniature version of the »Diamond Skull« in 2011 made from a cast of a baby skull also inlaid with diamonds called: »For Heaven's Sake« in 2008.⁴¹¹

»For the Love of God« is generally considered to be a sculpture. In the present study, however, the thesis is pursued that the artwork represents instead the *mise en scène* of the »Diamond Skull«. This thesis is based on the assumption put forth by Bankowsky, Gingeras, and Wood mentioned in the previous chapter, that the »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« auction as a whole should be considered a work of art. This is supported in a way by the fact that potential role models from older and newer (art) history that used (dead) heads or something similar were rather used as props in rituals or art happenings. Secondly, as shown, the impact and attention that this work was given was associated primarily with the information that »For the Love of God« cost £15 million to produce and was (allegedly) sold for £50 million – even if (partly) to the artist himself: Hirst's gallery had obvious difficulties in finding a buyer. The Art Newspaper reported this, stating the highest bid amounted to merely 38 rather than £50 million⁴¹². Hirst's gallery hastened to report that an »anonymous consortium« of buyers had purchased the skull for the asking price of £50 million.⁴¹³

Later it was revealed that the consortium consisted of Hirst himself; his financial manager, Frank Dunphy; his gallery owner, Jay Jopling⁴¹⁴; and the Ukrainian millionaire and (Hirst) collector, Viktor Pinchuk. Allegedly the sum was paid in cash, however; there are no documents, leading to speculation that no money exchanged hands at all.⁴¹⁵

According to Hirst, the title »For the Love of God« was influenced by an outcry from his mother: »For the Love of God, what are you going to do

⁴¹¹ See Madeleine O'Dea: Damien Hirst's Opening at Gagosian Hong Kong. Artinfo.com 21 January 2011.

⁴¹² Glen Owen und Polly Dunba: Did Damien Hirst really sell diamond skull for £50 m? Daily Mail Online 9 September 2007.

⁴¹³ Linda Sandler: Hirst Sells Skull for \$100 Million, Manager Says. Bloomberg.com 27 August 2007.

⁴¹⁴ Cristina Ruiz: Diamond skull will go to auction if it fails to sell, says Damien Hirst. The Art Newspaper Online 20 October 2008.

⁴¹⁵ John Pancake: The Art World's Shark Man, Still in the Swim. The Washington Post 10 May 2009.

next?«⁴¹⁶ When she heard what he was doing with the skull, she obviously did not approve, a reaction that sparked her outcry.

With this autobiographical hint Hirst satisfies a need of art critics and viewers who often ask: What did the artist want to tell us? What influences prompted him? Hirst plays this game, it is part of his skull-performance, to deliver autobiographical and art historical background (the Aztec skulls, *Memento Mori*, as I will comment on later) himself because, in addition to price and name of the artist, this information is a further mark of quality. Hirst turns out to be »artful arranger [...] of the modular components of our projections.«⁴¹⁷

Hirst himself provides more unrequested (autobiographical) allusions that »legitimize« his works, as he fills in his background with diamonds: »[Damien Hirst] runs through a standardized biography of the artifact – his mother serving on a jewellery stall in Leeds's covered market; his childhood realization of the stones' totemic significance: pure beauty as ultimate wealth; his acknowledgement of what others might think«⁴¹⁸

This autobiographical approach may show Hirst's close connection to things and their value at an early age. In connection with his biography it would be worth mentioning that young Damien came into conflict with the law because he stole things, which can be interpreted as testing the boundaries of wealth and morality.

⁴¹⁶ See Shaw 2007.

⁴¹⁷ Schneemann 2002, p. 288.

⁴¹⁸ See Self 2007.



Figure 25: Skull with mosaic Mixtec-Mexica (human Skulls, Turquoise, lignite, iron pyrite, shells and leather), 1500, 19.5 x 12.5 x 12cm. British Museum.

Source: UB.

»For the Love of God« consists not only of the skull, but also its materials, title, provenance, and its price tag of £50 million in connection with a supererogatory mise en scène media campaign. Proper justice is not given to »The Diamond Skull« if it is merely rated as a clever marketing campaign, in the way that the mass media in particular couched it. It is useful, however, to glean the perception that it is more of an art happening in which the object is the focus, rather than seeing the object merely as a sculpture. This is evident from the fact that no publication can keep from naming the price and circumstances of his »sales« in conjunction with the work.

A purely moral and critical examination of the work in the tradition of l'art pour l'art would submit that »For the Love of God« is trivial. However, since this work challenges (or reduces to absurdity) »the old ideals of edu-

tion, socio-critical power and moral purification«⁴¹⁹, this cannot hold completely true either. The approach taken here attempts to combine the two positions, as »the dilemma of the reduction of art to the golden morality is as great as the reduction to its resale value.«⁴²⁰ So let us first play along with Hirst's game.

In (art) history, human and/or animal skulls covered with valuable materials were often used in rituals and art happenings, »[A]cross cultures and times, people subconsciously consider the Skull the home of humanity. It is where our words come from and our emotions are shown. And what better a way to embrace that for eternity than to inlay it with precious jewels and metals?«⁴²¹

Hirst indicates that he was influenced by an »Aztec turquoise skull«⁴²² from the British Museum. This may have been »Skull with Mosaic«, dating from about 1500 (figure 25), a human skull covered with precious stones, not diamonds, but turquoise, lignite, pyrite and shells.⁴²³ In Aztec religious rituals, this skull was bound around one's waist with a leather belt. It represented the god of warriors, rulers, and sorcerers; Tezcatlipoca, which can be translated as »Smoking Mirror«.⁴²⁴ By specifying such an influence Hirst presents his work in a timeless context, which serves to charge the work with additional meaning. The roll of the Aztec skull as a prop in a ritual is applicable to »For the Love of God« as well. This becomes clear upon examination of further objects, very similar in form that could be possible precursors. Medieval relics are also religious, this time Christian precursors of »The Diamond Skull«, such as the diamond-encrusted skull of Saint Eutyches (figure 26) that is kept in the Franciscan Church in Salzburg. A skull represents concretely a deceased person and abstractly death itself. In the case of the relic of St. Eutyches, the precious diamonds reinforce the impact and importance of the (supposedly) real bones of the saint. Conversely, in the case of »For the

⁴¹⁹ Schneemann 2002, p. 287.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, p. 288.

⁴²¹ Kambiz Kamrani: Damien Hirst's diamond encrusted Skull & Jeweled Skulls in Archaeology. Anthropology.net 1 June 2007.

⁴²² BBC News Online: Hirst unveils £50 m diamond skull. BBC News Online 1 June 2007.

⁴²³ See Colin McEwan, Leonardo López Luján Ed.: Moctezuma: Aztec Ruler. Exhibition catalogue. British Museum. London 2009.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

Love of God« the skull and the idea of Memento Mori are perhaps just an earthly body for the idea of a £50 million piece of art.



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Figure 26: Skull of Saint Eutyches (about 378 to about 454) Franciscan Church in Salzburg.

Source: http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2338/1758979895_97b92a0a3c_o.jpg (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

However, the skull was not really presented with a price tag. Its *mis en scène* oscillates between the presentation of consumer goods and the presentation of art. The lack of a price tag in luxury stores, however, indicates the influence of art displays on the presentation of luxury goods. What Ullrich writes about displays of luxury goods is also true for the 'Diamond Skull':

»The goods are presented as exhibits: individual exempted, illuminated like a treasure, presented as unique. [...] At best the pieces will not be noticed as goods. To remain true to the contrast, one might recognize in this a Catholic version of consumption, this dealing with things is reminiscent of the veneration of relics. The single product – a shoe, a purse, a

watch – it epitomizes the brand as a whole. In it is the exemplary marriage of everything that belongs to its image.«⁴²⁵ As a Christian relic, the skull of Saint Eutyches could be worshiped without diamonds, whereby these gems only reinforce and emphasize sentimental value. However, without the valuable materials, »For the Love of God« would be just an ordinary, anonymous skull.

In addition to the turquoise Aztec skull, Hirst also mentioned; years later (in 2012); seven real human skulls pasted with semiprecious stones by Steven Gregory as precursors to »For the Love of God«: »They were sort of inspirational for me for the diamond skull.«⁴²⁶ Hirst bought them all and showed the skulls of this London-based sculptor in 2006 in his exhibition of his Murderme collection at the Serpentine Gallery. Although Hirst used the material »recipe« as Gregory and the Aztec turquoise skull, his »For the Love of God« was meant to communicate different issues. Gregory's skulls are more humorous. In combination with their comically grotesque glass eyes, the semiprecious stones function more like a skin that seems to bring the dead head back to life in an odd, macabre way. Hirst's Fly skull »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« does not show any teeth like »For the Love of God« or Gregory's skulls do. Without the teeth in »Fear of Death« the grin, the humor, the positive lightness and the hint to life disappear almost completely. But a little bit of it stays as the open jaw in »Fear of Death« still mimics a grin. Despite its bright grin and all the precious and shining materials »For the Love of God« is still a skull with a morbid connotation. Gregory's skulls are much more decorated objects with black humor and the Aztec turquoise skull was allegedly a prop in a ritual. But »For the Love of God« hovers between art, object, and ritual. It is a piece of concept art about materialism.

By his own assertion, Hirst was inspired to use the tear-shaped pink stone by the cartoon character Targ the Mighty.⁴²⁷ On his forehead Targ carries the »rose of Sirius« (figure 27).

⁴²⁵ Ullrich 2006, p. 183.

⁴²⁶ Hirst in an interview with Elena Geuna: In conversation with Damien Hirst, Kat. Ausst. Freedom not Genius, Works from Damien Hirst's Murderme Collection, London/Turin 2012, p.104.

⁴²⁷ Hirst interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist in exhibition catalogue. Beyond Belief 2007. Unpaged. This superhero was created by Alan Grant in 1977. His first



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Figure 27: The Mighty Targ (cartoon character), since 1977.

Source: ©2000AD. <http://media.comicvine.com/uploads/2/20087/377122-178999-Targ-the-mighty-large.jpg> (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

Through this, Hirst also provides an allusion to commercial pop culture, bringing in even »deeper« allusions. The »rose of Sirius« and Hirst's pink diamond are strikingly similar to the so-called third eye, which plays a role in many cultures and religions and which is also known in human anatomy as light-sensitive pineal gland that is located behind the forehead.⁴²⁸ In Hinduism, for example, there is religious blessing sign (figure 28) called tilak(a) (in English: sign, mark), a red dot, worn by men and women on the forehead.

⁴²⁹

appearance was in the first edition of the science fiction comic »2000 AD«. See Alan Grant: 2000 AD. Volume 1. London, 26 February 1977.

⁴²⁸ See Annette Bolz: Das dritte Auge. Die Zeit Online 18 November 1994.

⁴²⁹ A tilaka could denote religious affiliation and appears usually on the forehead but also on other parts of the body.

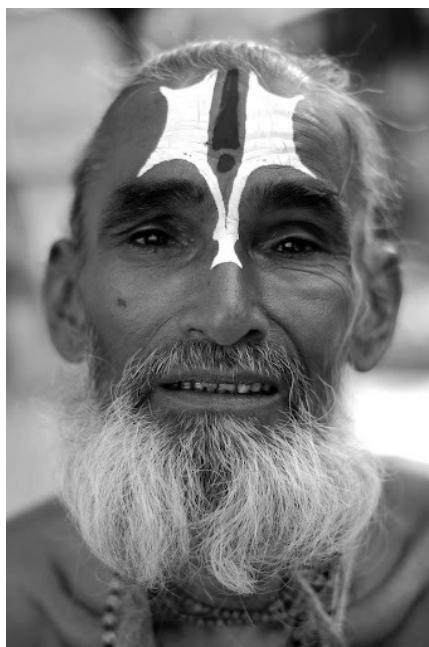


Figure 28: Tilak [a].

Source: Venkatraman S. https://lh6.googleusercontent.com/_DBBAX4odSa8/S0FMVAhI_xI/AAAAAES8/ueIQbv4KMk0/s512/DSC_0027.JPG (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

Like the sun disc of Hirst's »The Golden Calf«, which is attached to the head at a similar position, the pink diamond can also be viewed either as additional commercial embellishment or as any number of (religious) interpretations.⁴³⁰ In »For the Love of God« it serves as a strong visual feature that is reminiscent of pop culture characters as well as of religious signs of yore, which today serve more as an embellishment. At the same time the religious association of the diamond provides a connection to the word »God« in the title.

⁴³⁰ In connection with consumption it is necessary to mention the bindi. There is a smooth transition from the religious tilak mentioned here and the more decorative bindi which is just worn by women. Bindi means point or drop, which could be seen analogous to the drop-like diamond in »For the Love of God«. In the past it meant a woman was married, today it is more just decoration. The drop on the forehead was a religious sign and became a consumer product.



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Figure 29: Candy Skulls, 2010.

Source: <http://littlestmartha.files.wordpress.com/2010/10/candyskulls.jpeg> (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

In addition to the ancient Aztec cult, Hirst also cited the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead, see figure 29) on 2 November in Mexico as a potential influence on »For the Love of God«. On this most important Mexican holiday, which stems from pre-Christian traditions celebrated at the end of the harvest time, the dead come to visit and celebrate with the living in a happy reunion complete with music, dancing, and good food, according to ancient Mexican beliefs.

The Mexican treatment of death may seem strange to Western cultures, since death is not treated as a taboo there. It is regarded not as something to fear, but rather something to always meet with good humor and cheer. Even natural parts of the landscape in Mexico such as La Calzada del Hueso (The Bone Paved Road) and La Barranca del Muerto (The Death Gorge) have been harmoniously associated with death. Death is everywhere and a part of everyday life. This is particularly evident in the time leading up to and directly following the Dias de Muertos, when the Calaveras skeletons made of pa-

pier mâché, plaster, or sugar (figure 29) appear in all sorts of everyday situations, placed in streets and shops. Hirst, who has a second home in Mexico, staged his »Diamond Skull« with a similarly macabre mix of death and irony (the grinning skull) and bright ostentatious-optimism (the diamonds): »I think that the way that I deal with death is a bit Mexican. In England people hide or shy away from death and ideas about it, whereas Mexicans seem to walk hand in hand with it,« [...] [Hirst] said, a week before the country celebrated the departed on the Day of the Dead. »In that way I feel a bit liberated here.«⁴³¹

»For the Love of God« also contains elements that are both macabre and kitschy. This irony is appropriate for the masses and is reminiscent of the rituals of these Day of the Dead sculptures. Hirst, however, is more interested in value itself and the artificial creation thereof than in Mexican folklore, although he welcomes the reference.

In 19th century European art, the skull was used by Van Gogh, Ensor, and Cézanne, and later by Schiele, Munch, Picasso, Dali, and Dix: »Although its form recurs in the paintings and sculptures of Western art – from the *dances macabres* and *ars moriendi* of the Middle Ages to Baroque iconography – what prevails in art is life and its positive values. Death is not the main subject in art: it is overshadowed by life.«⁴³²

Paparoni's statement is echoed in Hirst's skull, although his handling of the skull is more reminiscent of Warhol: »One of the first artists [in the 1970s] to emphasize this subject [of the skull, n. UB] was Andy Warhol who, by presenting it as if it were an x-ray, underlined its power as a mass image, not dissimilar in form to a commercial logo or an advertising poster.«⁴³³

In advertising, popular culture, or consumer culture, there are dozens of examples of skulls. Since the 1980s both the hip hop and heavy metal scenes for instance have been adorned with skulls from materials that are at least meant to look valuable. In the media, film, and theatre, skulls made of precious materials are used as a synonym for value or worth in combination with a dark, but thrilling mystery. In 2008, the movie hero and adventurer-

⁴³¹ Hirst interviewed by Jo Tuckman: The bell tolls for Hirst's tried and tested work. The Guardian Online 24 October 2005.

⁴³² Demetrio Paparoni: Peity and Rebellion. In id. (Ed.): *Erectica. The Transcendent and the Profane in Contemporary Art*, p. 16. In this source further artists are mentioned who used a human skull in their art after 1970.

⁴³³ Ibid.



Figure 30: *La Traviata* (promotional poster), Munich 2010.

Source: http://cdn2.venyoobot.de/images/gj/wu/gjwuvz_300_423.jpg (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

tant for Hirst to give his art happening a face.

Hirst refers to Warhol not only in content and the logo-like handling of the skull-motif, but also conceptually and in form. In the case the diamonds, Warhol served as the godfather. Similarly ambivalent direct precursors are Warhol's »Gems«; screen-prints from 1979, each showing a diamond, created with paint that had been infused with diamond dust, causing the prints to shine brightly under phosphorescent light.⁴³⁴ Hirst similarly produced diamond dust_silkscreen prints of photos of »For the Love of God« that have

archaeologist Indiana Jones chases after a crystal skull. Furthermore, many other adventure movies capture the allure of skulls with titles like »Curse of the Golden Skull« (2005), »Pirate Kids II: The Search for the Silver Skull« (2006) or »Nancy Drew: Legend of the Crystal Skull« (2008). A 2010 poster for the opera »La Traviata« (figure 30) shows a skull made of diamonds, which refers to the terminally ill former high-class prostitute Violetta. A British television marriage drama from 1989 is also called »Diamond Skulls«. So Hirst used a clichéd depiction of diamond skulls from pop culture. In the end, it was impor-

⁴³⁴ Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 14, 94-97.

been displayed in art exhibitions next to Warhol's dollar sign.⁴³⁵ Even though Warhol used valuable materials and the mise en scène in the gallery space to effectively celebrate the consumer object »diamond« and its splendor, it was Hirst who took it a step further and significantly increased material costs, sales price, quasi-religious exhibition-situation, and staging for the press and the public, which became the real subjects of his artwork. Hirst also depicted less than Warhol did, he actually showed real diamonds, a platinum cast, and teeth from a real and genuine a skull, instead of only referring to these objects with diamond dust and screen printing.

»For the Love of God« is also in line with newer traditions such as the work of Duchamp, who created the »Tzanck Check,« a (bogus) financial document, which has now considerably more financial 'value' than the 115 U.S. dollars for which it is made out. He gave it to his dentist Tzanck, an art collector, to pay his bill. This extremely detailed, hand-drawn, arduous, albeit bogus, document, marked »ORIGINAL«, explores the relationship between art and money as well as the relationship between individual, hand-made versus machine-made art »Just as the paper money and checks we use in everyday transactions are fiduciary and do not embody any value themselves, Duchamp's checks destroy any illusions we may still have had about the intrinsic value of art. Instead, its value is based on a discursive context which initiates the production of belief.«⁴³⁶

In 1958, Yves Klein used a title: »Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility« to charge an empty space with meaning. He sold these 'white spaces' for 20, 40, 80, and 160 grams of gold. The buyer had to throw half of the gold in the Seine and burn the receipt. Klein got the other half.⁴³⁷ In 1961, Manzoni sold 90 cans (allegedly) containing 30 grams of his excrement for the market rate for 30 grams of gold.⁴³⁸ Both Klein's white spaces and Manzoni's

⁴³⁵ »For the Love of God, Laugh is one of a series of four editioned screen prints of the diamond skull. This particular edition is unique with a layer of alluring diamond dust framing the image whilst alluding to the original object.« See »Damien Hirst // Andy Warhol«. Exhibition in Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland. 5 – 15 February 2008. <http://www.gowlangsfordgallery.co.nz/exhibitions/pastexhibitions/hirstwarhol.asp> (Retrieved: 1 March 2011).

⁴³⁶ Olav Velthuis: Duchamp's Financial Documents: Exchange as a Source of Value. *Tout Fait. The Marcel Duchamps Studies Online Journal*. Vol. 1/ Edition 2 May 2000.

⁴³⁷ See Martin Gayford: Give me the Money. In: *Apollo*. Vol. July-August 2007, p. 79.

⁴³⁸ See Schneemann 2002, p. 280.

excrement_metaphorically realize the alchemical efforts of old and turn worthless materials into »gold« by artificially charging them with financial and/or sentimental value.

The above examples of 20th century concept art share with »For the Love of God« a (sometimes ironic) message about the relationship of viewers/buyers to objects, in particular their confidence in the financial and/or aesthetic value of art. There is not so much an object in the center of reception, but a (commercial) activity, or the relationship and interaction between the artist and the (potential) buyers/viewers. Hirst, however, deliberately shrouded »For the Love of God« as a sculpture.

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Although his »Diamond Skull« is often interpreted in terms of the idea of Memento Mori as well as the allusions to (newer and older) art history, these associations are in fact the insinuation that Hirst intends, meant to infuse the project with meaning, but in reality not central to the statement he is trying to make. This also applies to the words »Love« and »God« in the title. Hirst writes in 1997: *»God and love are just dumb words to go in between people and fears, or to connect people to other people.«*⁴³⁹ These words in turn are association shells connected with the artwork and these emotive words can be extremely meaningful or meaningless, depending on the individual viewer's background – a phenomenon also observed in the field of advertising. As early as 2006 Hirst held an exhibition in Mexico with a similar title: »The Death of God«. Both titles again smack of »significance with no meaning«. An examination of many of these associative titles, however, reveals their randomness, which is ironically demonstrated by their deliberately contrived alleged depth. »The Love of God« also sounds almost like »The Laugh of God«, which is the title of an artistic and ironic response to »For the Love of God« by Polish artist Peter Fuss in 2007.⁴⁴⁰ This Hirst parody, made of inexpensive substitutes, sought to point to the precarious situation of many Polish migrant workers in Britain, who serve as cheap labor.⁴⁴¹

The British artist Laura Keeble (born in 1977), someone who is close to the Street Art scene, also created a parody of Hirst's »Diamond Skull«: a skull

⁴³⁹ Hirst 1997, p. 37.

⁴⁴⁰ Like Hirst, Fuss created his »For the Laugh of God« in 2007. (20 x 15,5 x 21 cm). this plastic skull is covered with 9,870 glass stones that look like diamonds and cost £1000. <http://peterfuss.com/forthelaughofgod/index.html> (Retrieved: 20 August 2010).

⁴⁴¹ <http://modelatorenge.blogspot.com/2007/06/peter-fuss-for-laugh-of-god.html> (Retrieved: 20 August 2010).

encrusted with cheap imitation stones, which she placed in a glass case on top of a garbage bag in front of the White Cube Gallery in order to stage a photo titled »Forgotten Something?« (figure 31) on the last day of Hirst's exhibition with the skull.⁴⁴² This discarded skull plays on Duchamp's ready-made »Fountain«, which also landed in the garbage, in the same way that Fuss' »answer work« emphasizes the gap between art and value as well as between the object of art that is declared as an art performance in a consumer culture:

»The Damien Hirst »For the love of God« was for me, all about the experience and trying to contemplate standing in a room with an object that is worth £50 million, the security and theatricals of it all. When I created the skull install I wanted to take away the theatricals, the value, the experience that I had and see what the skull would look like without all the theatre. How would that reflect the experience I had? What questions would it raise? It was the only way I could envisage a realistic-like placement outside of security etc for the skull.«⁴⁴³



Figure 31: Keeble, *Forgotten Something?* (Installation), London 2007.

Source: © Laura Keeble http://img1.artweb.com/users/897/28595_unitled.jpg (Viewed: March 12, 2011).

⁴⁴² See artasty.com: Interview with Laura Keeble. artasty.com 2007.

⁴⁴³ Keeble quoted on artasty.com: Interview with Laura Keeble. artasty.com 2007.

Also her painstakingly produced skull was primarily a prop in an art performance, a fact which she also notes about Hirst's »Diamond Skull«.



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Figure 32: Gregory, Trust in Me –Skulker – Old Carou – A nod's as good as a wink -You Know my Resistance is low – Where'd you get Them Peepers? Strut my Stuff (7 human skulls, encrusted with (semi-) precious stones), all 7 works from 2003.

Source: In the darkest hour the maybe light. Works from Damien Hirst's Murderme Collection. Serpentine Gallery. Exh. London 2006. Unpaged.

From Hirst's direct artistic environment, there are two potential sculptural role models for the »Diamond Skull«. But both have little in common with Hirst's art happening other than in a visual way and therefore do not need to be described as 'essential' role models. Since 1993 the British sculptor John LeKay (born 1961) has regularly produced crystal skulls that have been influenced, according to LeKay, by ancient Mayan skulls.⁴⁴⁴ In 1993 his works were shown alongside Hirst's in an exhibition in New York and LeKay stated in 2007 that he inspired Hirst to create »For the Love of God«.⁴⁴⁵ LeKay does not use a real skull or parts of it, like the sculptor Stephen Gregory (born 1952) did. Seven of these real skulls encrusted with various materials

⁴⁴⁴ »This is the very first one that was inspired by an ancient Mayan crystal skull. [...] I showed this paradichlorobenzene crystal skull with in the project room at the Cohen Gallery in 1993.« John LeKay quoted on <http://www.johnlekey.com/JohnLeKey.GALLERY.htm> (Retrieved: 27. November 2009).

⁴⁴⁵ See Dalya Alberge: My old friend Damien stole my skull idea. Times Online 27 June 2007.

such as semiprecious stones created by Gregory from 2003 onward (figure 32) are part of Hirst's own collection.⁴⁴⁶

All these examples have much in common with »For the Love of God« in form. But production costs, resale value, and production media in these cases play a comparatively negligent role when held up against the diamond skull.

In »For the Love of God« Hirst examines the object in terms of its originality. Damien Hirst has to fight plagiarism allegations again and again, like the aforementioned accusation from LeKay. Hirst expressed his opinion on the matter as follows:

»Before I went to Goldsmiths, I sort of tried to be original. But then there's just so much in the world, and so much of it is derivative. Everything comes from somewhere [...]. At Goldsmiths we were kind of freed. You don't have to worry about that! If it looks good, it *is* good. [...] It's an amalgam, a mish-mash of everything you've ever seen before. If you are constantly creating things you are getting loads of ideas from everywhere. I think there's only one idea and that was fucking painting your hand red in blood and stamping it on the cave wall. And then, after that, we've all just ripped that off and copied it. But what I think is probably different about our generation is that we never felt the need to be original. That kind of frees you up to do what you want.«⁴⁴⁷

If »For the Love of God« is about the object of the skull rather than its artistic performance, LeKay's or Gregory's works would have received much more attention.⁴⁴⁸ Even before »The Diamond Skull« Hirst made a skull out of silver »The Fate of Man« (2005), which did not receive any real special attention. The effect of the skull only makes sense if you look at it as an art performance, such as Beuys' »peace hare« (German »Friedenshasen«) at the documenta 7 in 1982, in which the artist melted down a valuable historical copy of the imperial crown of the Tsar Ivan the Terrible. With the proceeds from the destruction of this historical symbol of domination and power, he created a sculpture using a common Easter baking form, which he eventually sold

⁴⁴⁶ See: In the darkest hour there may be light. Works from Damien Hirst's Mурдерме Collection. Serpentine Gallery. Exhibition catalogue. London 2006. UNPAGED.

⁴⁴⁷ Hirst interviewed by Haden-Guest 2008, p. 155.

⁴⁴⁸ »The fate of man« (2005), skull from silver (Edition of 25). Damien Hirst. Exhibition catalogue. New Religion. London 2005. Unpaged.

for 777,000 German Marks. This price was calculated using exactly double the assessed value of the crown according to the weight of the materials and Beuys used the proceeds to plant 7,000 oak trees in Kassel.⁴⁴⁹

When taken to the (absurd) extreme, comparing the material value of the oil paints and canvas used in a Picasso painting with the retail price of the painting of £140 million, the price of »For the Love of God« is actually quite inexpensive as the material costs to make the sculpture, £15 million, were much higher than those of a painting. Hirst reflects the zeitgeist, by putting the value of an artwork in such close relation to its' production value. In conjunction with the lessening relevance of religious and ideological meaning in the post-modern consumer society, art has suffered from the perception that there is »nothing new« and that the »author is dead«. In this context, at least the material things, that is money, remain »believable« as carriers of meaning. Ultimately, however, a banknote is just a piece of paper and the practical value of gold and diamonds is limited.⁴⁵⁰ However, as long as a large number of people believe in their exchange value, these things remain charged with meaning. A financial crisis like the present shows, however, that this meaning and trust in money is not always based on reality.

For Hirst »[m]oney is a tool. It works like a key and you run into a problem, when the tool is over worshiped.«⁴⁵¹ In some circumstances however, the opposite is true, that art is the medium of money, or that one at least cannot tell the difference between the value->currencies« money and art anymore. »Somethings worth what anybody else is prepared to pay for it.«⁴⁵², Hirst said in the same context. This also applies for non-financial moral or aesthetic value. Ullrich speaks of indeterminacy.⁴⁵³ Art will be charged for something infinite, which – in the words of Friedrich Schiller – was so written, »We know that, the same set of circumstances can move different people in entirely different ways, and even the same individual's response will be different at different times.«⁴⁵⁴

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⁴⁴⁹ See Schneemann 2002, p. 284.

⁴⁵⁰ Hirst mentions something similar in Napoli 2004, p. 236.

⁴⁵¹ Hirst in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 82.

⁴⁵² Napoli 2004, p. 236.

⁴⁵³ See ibid. See also Friedrich Schiller: On Matthisson's Poems (1795) (Translated by John Sigerson). http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/Schiller_essays/matthison_poetry.html (16 March 2016).

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

Therefore, as soon as urgent needs are met, which is the case in a consumer society, »money is not only an instrument of payment, but a similar stimulant as a charged brand. A brand even has to be specially developed to compete against top-joker money.«⁴⁵⁵

164 Hirst has created just such an object that oscillates between branded goods, art, and money. Hirst says, »A lot of artists have problems with money. I have had a lot of problems coming in terms with money. For me I have to believe that art is a more powerful currency than money.«⁴⁵⁶ For him the ideal value of art surpasses the financial one.

In the same way, Ullrich speaks of the refinement of money through art: »In other cases it is the high price, which charges a product with the promise of more potential. Customers interpret it as evidence of power that is inherent in a consumer item. In extreme cases – such as embellishment or art – the product appears as a symbol of money or, even more remarkably, as an enhancement thereof.«⁴⁵⁷

This spiritual significance is extremely important and will be created not only by monetary value, but, on the contrary, by the nature of presentation. Hirst emphasized in several interviews that he was afraid to create something of value that looked like a worthless imitation: »I was very worried for a while, because if it looked like bling — tacky, garish and over the top — we would have failed. But I'm very pleased with the end result. I think it's ethereal and timeless.«⁴⁵⁸

In addition to Hirst's aforementioned possible role models from art history, the role of *bling* has to be mentioned. Even if Hirst was trying to avoid that description for his skull, he was not entirely successful, something which was most likely unintended. In the American hip hop scene the term represents (often) fake, pretentious, tasteless trinkets that are intended to advertise the status and wealth of the wearer. Bling is derived from the sound that is accompanied with the effect designed to signify a particular brilliance in television commercials.⁴⁵⁹ Ullrich also draws a line from this advertising light

⁴⁵⁵ Ullrich 2006, p. 60.

⁴⁵⁶ Napoli 2004, p. 236.

⁴⁵⁷ Ullrich 2006, p. 64.

⁴⁵⁸ Hirst quoted in Shaw 2007.

⁴⁵⁹ See Aaron Peckham: Bling und Bling Bling. In: Id.(Ed.): Urban Dictionary. Kansas City 2005, p. 45.

flash to the presentation of consumption in the tradition of religious iconography:

»Thanks to a flash of light the advertised product should stick in the viewer's mind as something that is particularly fresh and brilliant. It is often unclear whether the light is a reflection off of a glossy surface or an immanent energy emanating from the product itself. In both cases the characteristics of purity and novelty – two of the primary characteristics of virginity – are associated with the product, something with makes it unnecessary for the graphic designers to strive for clear and plausible staging. [...] So a wreath of light around the product being advertised connects back to the old tradition of halos.«⁴⁶⁰

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The term refers to the bling of the (hip hop) culture of consumption, which measures prestige mainly on the size of the wealth being flaunted. Even if the wealth, the high price, in the case of the »Diamond Skull« is true and if it may also not look cheap, it still remains a symbol of consumer culture, which can be understood according to one's respective socio-cultural background positively and negatively.

Ullrich speaks in connection with the bling-flash of virginity, purity and newness. His example is taken from cosmetics advertising. The diamonds on »For the Love of God« seem like a parody of a face cream that shines perfectly, apart from the fact that it adorns a skull. Thus, in grinning »face« of the skull, the viewer looks in turn at himself, 'his future and his focus on consumption»:

»The break through of theatricality into everyday life, what we talk about when we talk about the post-modern, shows that we have lost the fear of illusion and simulation. Even towards themselves, people develop a theatrical ratio. The Americans talk of self-fashioning. What they mean is that questions of existence are now handled aesthetically. Life becomes the stuff of artwork, it is a permanent self experiment, in which consumption is considered as a high art.«⁴⁶¹

In the eye of the beholder the distinction between ideal and material value is blurred: the enormous cost of the artwork, a book published just about this one brand-new object accompanied by an essay of a renowned art historian (Rudi Fuchs), a public relations campaign, and finally a quasi religious mise en scène in a gallery space:

⁴⁶⁰ Ullrich 2006, p. 87.

⁴⁶¹ Bolz 2002, p. 96.

»The space is black, devoid of light upon first examination. One enters in a group of ten visitors like the Kaaba of the Art-Mecca London. Caution, do not push. Quiet, please. Some of the visitors, shuffling, seem to stumble, bump into each other. It takes a while for the eyes to become accustomed to the light source in the center, the object in its glass case, beams of light shine down from above, transfiguring it into the celestial.«⁴⁶²

Although this glass box does not belong to the work such as in the case of the formaldehyde cabinets (and is therefore missing from unauthorized photos), but it is part of the staging. Everything that was said in the previous chapter about glass, windows, and the guided viewing of consumer objects applies here, too. The »Diamond Skull« was issued strategically as the 'draft horse' of Hirst's solo show »Beyond Belief«, like he used the »Golden Calf« as the show-piece, which got most of the space in both the press release and advertising and has furthermore been given the most media attention.

The artist generates strategic 'meaning', which lets the viewer question his own measures of value, their development and the impact of advertising on these measures of value:

»If anyone but Hirst had made this curious object, we would be struck by its vulgarity. It looks like the kind of thing Asprey or Harrods might sell to credulous visitors from the oil states with unlimited amounts of money to spend, little taste, and no knowledge of art. I can imagine it gracing the drawing room of some African dictator or Colombian drug baron. But not just anyone made it – Hirst did. Knowing this, we look at it in a different way and realize that in the most brutal, direct way possible, For the Love of God questions something about the morality of art and money.«⁴⁶³

As Dormant aptly states, the piece is about the morality of the art market itself, and thus about the morality of excessive consumption in general. »It is an ultimate status symbol, a challenge and an irony. The most plutocratic of oligarchs would hesitate for a moment before signing a cheque for £50 m for a brand new work of art, straight out from the studio. This is a joke on the

⁴⁶² Kielinger 2007.

⁴⁶³ Richard Dorment: For the love of art and money. Daily Telegraph Online 1 June 2007.

theme of »For the man who has everything‘ – a death’s head by one of the most celebrated living artists.«⁴⁶⁴

Hirst creates the ultimate art-consumer-product with the aim to push the limits of the market and the public opinion of ‘value’. By showing that he is able to »get away with it«, he shows the spirit of the (almost) limitless spending for consumer products, which had its temporary end with the financial crisis in 2008: In the year that the market for contemporary art reached record highs in the hundreds of millions in 2007, Hirst created the most expensive work by a living artist, the »Diamond Skull«. »Damien Hirst’s diamond-encrusted Skull from two years ago now looks like the perfect artifact to draw the line between the excess of the recent past and the frightful times coming our way.«⁴⁶⁵

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The sparkling-evil grin of the skull also refers to the hard times to come, the financial crisis. It expresses a general pride in unreflective consumption that goes directly before a fall. In the 2009 recession Hirst painted oil paintings with his own hands, rather than splurging on production costs into the two millions and producing hundreds of works on the assembly line by his up to 160 employees, he even dismissed a number of employees. But as early as 2007, the moral side of art had been addressed to a small extent – again in connection with the material, the cost of production, and the purchase price rather than the depicted content: Hirst stressed that the diamonds were not so-called blood diamonds from poorer areas in Africa, which are often mined through the exploitation of local people or in other cases, the profits from which are used for the purchase of weapons. Hirst too is aware of the political responsibility, namely that the high financial value of the »Diamond Skull« can have serious consequences: »That’s when you stop laughing [...] You might have created something that people might die because of. I guess I felt like Oppenheimer or something. What have I done? Because it’s going to need high security all its life.«⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁴ Martin Gayford: Give me the money: Damien Hirst’s 50 m [pounds sterling] skull is a refreshingly self-conscious example of the way that artists transform base materials into lots of money. In: Apollo July-August 2007.

⁴⁶⁵ Stryker McGuire: This time I‘ve come to bury Cool Britannia. The Observer 29 March 2009.

⁴⁶⁶ Hirst quoted in Shaw 2007.

However, also the »clean and tidy' consumer-product-production can be morally objectionable because, according to Dorment, excessive wealth always raises the question of social responsibility:

»This is something I've often wondered about when I read of the fantastic prices private individuals pay for works by Picasso, Klimt and Warhol. How do these people sleep at night, knowing that the hundred million they just spent could have endowed schools, built hospitals, eradicated diseases and alleviated hunger? Don't they think about the morality of pouring so much wealth into something as dead as a diamond necklace, a painting, a private jet?«⁴⁶⁷

The work raises the question of »failure to render assistance« in favor of a consumption item. Who is ultimately the guilty party, he who bought or he who sold? Hirst writes in his catalog essay »*why* cunts sell shit to fools«: »*It's your fault. You're buying it.*«⁴⁶⁸ In the title, he distributes the »guilt« evenly among the artists and gallery owners (cunts), who sell art (shit) to collectors (fools). The aforementioned quote also shows that in »For the Love of God« it is the (potential) buyer/viewer, who has to take the responsibility that Hirst rejects, this is also made clear in a quotation by the art critic Will Self:

»When, on the way to Hatton Garden, I'd suggested to Hirst that some people might find it crass, this unprecedented condensation of wealth, in the light of so much human suffering for a want of a few quid, he muttered gnomically, 'Dunno, mate, it's unavoidable really I mean, I think it offers people hope.' But the following day he sent me a text message: 'When you asked me yesterday about all the money that was spent on the Skull when people are starving, I was just thinking that people don't really mind money being spent on beautiful things, it's ugly things that are a problem and there are plenty of ugly f***ing buildings in the world that cost way more than the Skull.'«⁴⁶⁹

This quote is interesting as Hirst at first seemed embarrassed to answer, and thought about it until the next day. Hirst's later objection breaks down insofar as buildings have at least some practical use, they are not mere consumer goods. Hirst's theme is here »supply and demand«, which he makes a subject of irony or the so-called snob effect.

⁴⁶⁷ Dorment 2007.

⁴⁶⁸ Hirst in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 85.

⁴⁶⁹ Self 2007.

The high prices of a Picasso or a Van Gogh are (also) driven by their ongoing importance and reception within a canon of art as well as the ennobling effect of their provenance. The reputation of these works originated and grew over decades and centuries. Hirst negates this value process in »For the Love of God« as demonstrably questionable and possible to deny. Hirst casts doubt on this process of creating meaning even if (or perhaps because) he himself draws on this process through media staging, allusions to art history, and a high selling price. This is clearly seen in the quick, yet top-class provenance of the skull, which rose in fame due to its media coverage and the reputation of its creator. In 2008 and 2010 Hirst's skull was shown as a powerful symbol in traditional art venues, as the centerpiece of an exhibition curated by Hirst with classic Memento Mori works from the museum's own collection, which emphasized its position as a »future classic« in the context of art history. One can compare the Rijksmuseum and the Palazzo Vecchio with brand-name places like the car-city Wolfsburg or Niketown: some are artificial cities, others are brand pilgrimage sites of companies which in turn combine religious, consumerist, cultural, and artistic aspects, »Such artificial cities in the city are not retail spaces, but scenes of a religious staging of the added value of the spiritual. Brands occupy ideas to eventually replace them.

«⁴⁷⁰

Just like brands, Hirst wants his works to occupy ideas, with the aim to replace them or to discuss their potential substitutability. »Instead of creating new issues or design variants, the consumer culture parasitically draws on emotionally charged content from somewhere else. Commodity aesthetics and advertising are thus reactive in character; in order to pass as culture, they remain dependent on what has already been considered culture for a long time.«⁴⁷¹

»Somewhere else« is for Ullrich traditional culture such as art, literature, music, and film. In the same vein, Hirst used media coverage and illustrious provenience to charge his skull with value. The director of the Rijksmuseum, Wim Pijbes, expressed the following in connection with the presentation of the »Diamond Skull« in an interview titled »To what extent have marketing and publicity become art« towards journalists: : »Of course, there's always this aspect that if a high prestige museum puts a work in an exhibition, and makes a catalogue, that people will come. It will push the value of the work

⁴⁷⁰ Bolz 2002, p. 91.

⁴⁷¹ Ullrich 2006, p. 198.

of art. That's the system. When you write about it, the same happens.« A journalist answered, that it would not even matter, *what* they write. Pijbes did not contradict that.⁴⁷² The director of the Rijksmuseum admits to the fact that one can actually declare any work or thing to be art and that the museum context always adds significance, regardless of the work. In the future (after 2012) the »Diamond Skull« is planned to be the most important work in Hirst's own private museum in London, where it will be the only object one has to pay to see. Again, the *mise en scène* contributes to the importance and vice versa.⁴⁷³

The art performance »For the Love of God« raises a series of basic questions without answering them: Who can prove that it indeed cost £15 million? Who can prove that the platinum (hidden beneath the diamonds) and the diamonds and the teeth are all real? Do high material and production costs automatically lead to a high ideal value? How can one be sure that Hirst's work was actually sold for £50 million or even sold at all? How do you justify a price of £50 million? How do you measure the intangible value of an artwork and who decides what is (good/recognized) art? »For the Love of God« is a summary of the question, what is »real« or »original«, it deals with faith and confidence in the value of objects and how this value was created, in material and artistic terms.

The unique, the exemplary, the thing that Hirst does differently in comparison to all the aforementioned predecessors and influences, the art in the art action »For the Love of God« is that Hirst presents not only that value and meaning are generated but how, not only in the art market but in general.

e) Spot Paintings (Since 1986)

»Someday, the record of this exhibition [Damien Hirst – The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011] might be dug up by a young art historian [...]. They'll see that there was a massive show spread across every loca-

⁴⁷² R.J. Preece: Damien Hirst's diamond skull at the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam): Behind the scenes. To what extent have marketing and publicity become art? In: ADP magazine 1(1): Aspirations. 1 June 2009.

⁴⁷³ Rosie Millard: Damien Hirst in line to open his first gallery in Hyde Park. Evening Standard Online 15 June 2010.

tion of the most successful gallery of the time [Gagosian], entirely comprised of one of the most successful artists of the time [Damien Hirst], and that it was supported by some of the most illustrious voices money could buy. So I'm going to lay this down, just to clarify, so that nobody from the future gets confused: we hate this shit. Everyone hates this shit. These spots reflect nothing about how we live, see, or think, they're just some weird meme for the impossibly rich that nobody knows how to stop.«⁴⁷⁴

Blogger Will Brand, 2012

In his artist book »The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011«, which is a conceptual art joke within itself, Hirst lists 13 sub categories of his series Spot Paintings. The collaborations with Banksy are not included in these sub categories. They are listed separately as »Miscellaneous Spot works« along with cars or shoes with spots.

Hirst usually painted a grid of uniform⁴⁷⁵, single-colored circles (spots), often on clean, white canvases. The gap between the spots span the diameter of one spot. According to Hirst⁴⁷⁶ the colors of the spots are not repeated within a single painting – at least in most of the sub categories.

As early as 1986⁴⁷⁷, Hirst created prototypes of the Spot Paintings on boards but they lacked the regular grid of the later pieces and featured recurring colors instead of differentiated ones. Much later, in 2011, he made this prototype retroactively and unconvincingly a part of the series. Hirst painted another prototype Spot Painting on canvas, »Untitled (with Black Dot)«⁴⁷⁸, in 1988, at this time neither titled »Spot Painting« nor named after drugs. Hirst claims it is the only one that contains the color black. Very few Spot Paintings contain only one color, i.e. red or blue. For each new work Hirst

⁴⁷⁴ Will Brand: Hirsts Spotted at Gagosian. Artfcity January 4, 2012. <http://artfcity.com/2012/01/04/hirsts-spotted-at-gagosian/> (15 April 2016).

⁴⁷⁵ As a student, Hirst already made forerunners of the Spot Paintings. Those were irregular and non grid-like shared on the canvas. See Hirst/Burn 2001. Illustration, p. 121. Much later he made those part of the series, when he called his artist book »The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011«.

⁴⁷⁶ See: Hirst interviewed by Thümmel 1997, p. 252. See also Hirst 1997, p. 246.

⁴⁷⁷ Damien Hirst, Spot Painting, 1986, household gloss on board, 243.8 x 365.8 cm. Reproduced in: Ann Gallagher (Ed.): Damien Hirst. Exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery, London 2012, p. 31.

⁴⁷⁸ See <http://www.damienhirst.com/untitled-with-black-dot> (13.6.2014).

chose unmixed colors from a palette of 2,500 colors.⁴⁷⁹ One piece from 2011 contains 25,781 spots, each in a different color.⁴⁸⁰

Hirst actually started this (at first seemingly banal) series with two almost identical works entitled »Edge« and »Row« (figure 33) in his group exhibition *Freeze* in 1988; he applied both works directly onto the gallery wall.

In 1990⁴⁸¹ Hirst made further drawings and in the same year he continued painting them on canvas⁴⁸² and naming them with pharmaceutical names of medical drugs, which he read in the »Physicians' Desk Reference«⁴⁸³ or the »Catalog of Chemical Compounds« (issued 1990)⁴⁸⁴; both are commercial publications of information about prescription drugs published annually.⁴⁸⁵ The transfer from wall to canvas and the step from inspirational titles to associative structural series-titles marks the shift from the idea to a commercially available consumer product, from conceptual art to painting, from a diptych to a series. Hirst discusses the status of the painting as an object.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with Damien Hirst. In: British Council Visual Arts Department: *Damien Hirst*. London 1992, p. 20–21.

⁴⁸⁰ Press release for the exhibition »Damien Hirst: The Complete Spot Paintings 1986–2011«. Gagosian Gallery, 14 December 2011. http://gagosian.vaesite.net/_data/8861b-6e6e48eda96f504922bdb27d33.pdf (13.6.2014).

⁴⁸¹ See Hirst 1997, p. 234, 168.

⁴⁸² In Hirst, 1997, there are just two drawings listed but no Spot Paintings before 1991. See p. 234 and 168. In »The Complete Spot Paintings 1986–2011« on p.10 »Untitled (Double Canvas), from 1988, what seem to be the first Spot Paintings on canvas are featured.

⁴⁸³ See Thomson PDR (Ed.): *Physicians' Desk Reference*. 64th revised edition. Toronto 2010. See also www.pdr.net

⁴⁸⁴ Contradicting Hirst's quote (previous footnote) Robert Pincus-Witten stated in *The Complete Spot Paintings 1986–2011*, p. Bb that Hirst did use »the 1990 Sigma-Aldrich Catalog of Chemical Compounds«. Hirst's well-worn copy is pictured like a relic as well (p.Bb). Sigma-Aldrich never published a book of that title. The similarly titled Aldrich-Catalog Handbook of Fine Chemicals (1990/91) looks different, its' different editions have fine art paintings on the cover. Hirst's copy does not.

⁴⁸⁵ Damien Hirst: »[I]t was just an afterthought to name them after drugs, based on this book [Physicians' Desk Reference, n. UB], but I saw it and thought: I have just got to do all of them.« Hirst 2005, p. 113.

⁴⁸⁶ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 114.



Figure 33: Installation view of the Freeze exhibition, Hirst's first Spot Paintings: Edge and Row (household paint on walls), London 1988.

Source: Photograph © Ed Woodman © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights re-served, DACS 2012.

Hirst could only sell the 'prototypes' of the works done on the wall in 1988 as an abstract idea with certification. This transfer to canvases also made obvious the separation between an artistic idea and mass production⁴⁸⁷, moving from a process that is no longer executed by the artist, but rather by assistants.

The aforementioned change to using medical titles in 1991 seems both sudden and insincere, but can be justified because of the similarity of the spots to pills and medicine packaging. Variations within each painting in this series result from the different sizes and numbers of spots. The colored circles are between »*1 1/2 millimeter dots and one painting 7 foot-square*«⁴⁸⁸ tall, the space between them usually measures one spot diameter.

⁴⁸⁷ Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 233.

⁴⁸⁸ Hirst quoted in Scott Reyburn: Hirst Will Stop Making Spin, Butterfly Paintings, Drug Cabinets. bloomberg.com, 14 August 2008.

The number of spots varies as well, from at least half of one spot up to one million spots.⁴⁸⁹

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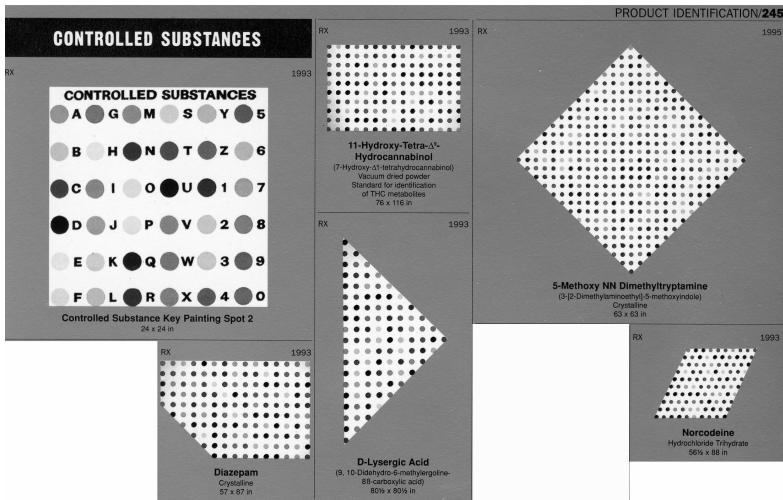


Figure 34: Hirst Spot Paintings (household paint on canvas), 1992 – 1997.

Source: © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. In: Hirst 1997, p. 245.

The shapes, including triangles, rectangles, and discs, and sizes of the canvases vary from a few centimeters to several meters in size. Occasionally a single color dominates the spots; it is usually impossible to tell whether bright or dark colors predominate; some are kept in shades of gray or in pale colors. Due to the grid-like arrangement and uniform size there is no obvious sequence or hierarchy within the spots. The grids may differ; besides the mostly rectangular grids, which are arranged parallel to the canvas, there are rare others that are reminiscent of mandalas or church windows, or that are arranged diagonally (figure 34).

⁴⁸⁹ Hirst stated he started a Spot Painting with a million spots in 2009 which might take 9.5 years to complete. See Ann Temkin: Colour Chart. In: Damien Hirst: The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011, p. Zz.

i) »One of a Kind« Work of Art or Mass Production? Hirst and Series

In 2005 the »Physicians' Desk Reference« contained 4,000 titles. Hirst follows the entries of this book (or the 1990 Sigma-Aldrich Catalog of Chemical Compounds) in alphabetical order as far as possible, with the intention of using all of them.⁴⁹⁰ By 2011 Hirst had created up to 1,500 Spot Paintings.⁴⁹¹

Unlike other well known series in art history – such as Monet's »Les Meules« – Hirst did not create a dozen or dozens, but more than a thousand Spot Paintings. The paintings mirror (consumer) society, reflecting the era of mass consumption through the assembly line production of paintings that are each somehow the same and yet different and unique; paintings in which the exact same thing (in this case the spot) can be seen en masse and each is the same (a spot) while each is also different and individual, created by individuals despite the visual negation of this fact.

One can understand this demonstratively exaggerated mass production as satire about art and the art market or the ironic, exaggerated over-fulfillment of the advice that art-market-artists stay with one idea:

»Production [...] is controlled – or at least greatly influenced – by private galleries; the type of work, the amount of it, the size of editions and the setting of prices. There is a strong presumption [...] that they should continue doing what they have become known for doing. Banks' cruel headline [...] »One Idea, Eight Years' – only picked upon [...] a general tendency in which constancy is a virtue. The idea is that if you keep plug-

⁴⁹⁰ There are exceptions to nearly all of the rules concerning the Spot Paintings, in this case there are two pieces of identical size called »Untitled« from 1995. See Hirst 1997, p. 244.

⁴⁹¹ See Reyburn 2008. »Someone told me there are 800 spot paintings [...] But I'm sure there are more than that." See also Manchester 2009. Thornton 2008 refers to 1,000 »Spot Paintings«. Hirst has talked about ending this series since the mid-nineties and constricted it after 2008, something he also announced publicly in the same year. See e.g. Damien Hirst: No Sense of Absolute Corruption. Exhibition catalogue. Gagosian Gallery, New York 1996, p. 11–13. Hirst himself talked about 6,000 Spot Paintings in 2005. See also Sotheby's: Damien Hirst. An Interview with Tim Marlow. Online video on Sothebys.com, August 2008. Warhol talked about ending series but never did. See Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 33. In 2012 Hirst showed a lot of his Spot Paintings in all eleven Gagosian Galleries worldwide at the same time, which were estimated to be 1,400 to 1,500. See Hagan 2012.

ging away a single trick for long enough, the buyers [...] will get it, and in any case it becomes recognizable and therefore accessible through its very familiarity. By insistent repetition, the artists in effect brand their work.«⁴⁹²

176 With this art market strategy, Spot Paintings become mass consumer-products⁴⁹³, bought because they are recognizable from experience and from advertising, regardless of personal affinity for them, »Hirst's [...] Spot Paintings [...] form part of an endless series. As simple as an idea in advertising, they yield impressive and alluring physical objects.«⁴⁹⁴

Hirst emphasizes the painting-aspect through the title of the series, which contains the word »Painting«. Although the title states that this is a painting, something unique that was created by the hand of one (or more) artist(s), in an age of mass production, Hirst produced hundreds of Spot Paintings with the help of his workforce of up to 160 assistants. Thus, the concept of 'unique' artwork is challenged. The frequent criticism of the press, that Hirst created his work (not just the Spot Paintings) mostly »not even himself«, voices the question of who generates art? And thus, what is art? Is art the idea or the execution (only monitored by the artist)? In »Untouched Condition« Gayford stresses that artists like Warhol and Koons, but also Rembrandt and Rodin, like any architect, did not produce many works themselves, but rather monitored the process. Those artists, like Hirst, often only gave the artworks the 'finishing touch'.⁴⁹⁵ So they are indeed »unique« artworks, but they look like consumer products.

ii) Hirst and the Tradition of Painting

How do the Spot Paintings, ie »paintings«, those old fashioned art objects, fit into »*the age of art as a commodity*«⁴⁹⁶? They are critical witnesses and helpers of Hirst's marketing⁴⁹⁷, quintessential for his art.

⁴⁹² Stallabrass 2006, p. 190. See e.g. Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 96.

⁴⁹³ Thümmel 1997, p. 234.

⁴⁹⁴ Stallabrass 2006, p. 166.

⁴⁹⁵ See Gayford 2006.

⁴⁹⁶ *Sensation*. Exhibition catalogue, p. 33.

⁴⁹⁷ Bankowsky in *Pop Life*. London 2009, p. 32.

Since the mid-1990s, he has talked about ending the Spot Paintings, but then he never has.⁴⁹⁸ Maybe he was inspired here by Warhol, who also always wanted to end some of his series.

This behavior neither confirmed nor denied the much vaunted 'death of painting'. Like Hirst, for Koons, painting is *the* artistic medium par excellence: »*A photograph for me does not have the same spiritual seduction, it does not have the same essence.*«⁴⁹⁹ To the question what made paintings more eternal Koons replied: »For one thing you have the support of the museum. And the framework of painting, and the support of the institution of museums, is in everyone, it's in the subconscious mind.«⁵⁰⁰ In 2010 Hirst answered similarly, when asked if there is an art after the finance crisis: »Painting! If doubt takes the upper hand, people come back to painting. It is the most secure. That is what's familiar.«⁵⁰¹

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Hirst followed this approach in particular in his photo-realistic series of actual close-ups, or microscopic images of cancer cells, which are based on photos. But like the Spot Paintings, those are photo-realistic hand-made paintings. They act as »*fetishes, paintings about fetishes and about painting as fetish and they offend and flatter simultaneously. There is a [...] [Spot Painting, n. UB] for every collector's taste if not perhaps pocketbook.*«⁵⁰²

The Spot Paintings are about the condition of painting, of the painter per se. Stallabrass called Hirst an »endgame painter« who creates colored objects in a row reminiscent of computer pixels⁵⁰³ in an era in which painting was purportedly dead or at least dying. The use of pure geometric primitives – color and form – »*myths of originality and authenticity*«⁵⁰⁴, which are so important for the art market, are pseudo-scientifically debunked, »abstraction's mystery« is eliminated.

⁴⁹⁸ See *ibid*, p. 33.

⁴⁹⁹ Bankowsky in: *Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue*. London 2009, p. 33.

⁵⁰⁰ Koons *ibid*, p. 33.

⁵⁰¹ Hirst in a German newspaper: »Liebs: Gibt es eine Kunst nach der Krise? Hirst: Malerei! Wenn die Zweifel überhand nehmen, kehren die Leute zur Malerei zurück. Das ist am sichersten. Das kennt man schon.« See Hirst interviewed by Holger Liebs: *Damien Hirst über Glauben*, SZ 11 April 2010.

⁵⁰² Bankowsky in *Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue*. London 2009, p. 32, 33. This quote about Richard Prince's series Nurse Paintings was transferred to Hirst.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 167.

⁵⁰⁴ *Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue*. London 2009, p. 54.

In contrast to Mikhail Matyushin⁵⁰⁵, Joseph Albers, and Piet Mondrian, Hirst neither actually reflects anything scientific nor develops orders of color and form further, this is just ironically »feinted«. Hirst creates mimicry of painting. Basically, the Spot Paintings are more an artistic concept-satire on paintings and their market than actually paintings, which are (despite or because of that) named or sold as paintings.

For Duchamp all paintings are readymades, as they are made using industrially produced individual colors today.⁵⁰⁶ Through his conscious juxtaposition of unmixed colors Hirst transfers this thought experiment into reality. The artistic, individual expressiveness remains in the manufacturing process of the painting, since he chooses the colors »according to his feelings«, but the quality of these emotions is not visible in the finished painting and could just as well be planned by a computer program:

»The first idea was just questioning ... painting. I came from that kind of background of Rothko painting: paint how you feel ... When I got to Goldsmiths I had a real problem with that kind of expressionism. Because I suddenly realized that it wasn't really working, but I still had the desire. So, I was trying to scientifically reduce that urge into something ... Thinking of a sort of unemotional machine that makes paintings. Trying to place all those expressive decisions made about colour into a grid to create a system where you could just paint how you feel because in the end it is pointless. It doesn't matter how you feel, they always come out happy ... They just looked brilliant so I just carried on making them.«⁵⁰⁷

Like mass advertising, Hirst's art should be understandable for all (albeit on different levels). One level is for the (potential) buyers/viewers who see the works in person at the gallery. Those viewers usually have a higher income and sometimes are more informed or better educated about art. The works address them directly and they can appreciate art historical allusions and appreciate the feeling, for instance, of standing opposite real dead animals in formaldehyde. Possibly, these rich collectors might even have a safe behind a

⁵⁰⁵ Russian artist Matyushin's tables and illustrations about the interaction of color, shape, and sound for a German exhibition entitled (in German) »Relativitätstheorie in der Farben/ und Formenlehre. Organische Kunstkultur« (1914-1924) look similar to Hirst's Spot Paintings.

⁵⁰⁶ Quoted in Stallabrass 2006, p. 165.

⁵⁰⁷ See Hirst 1997, p. 98.

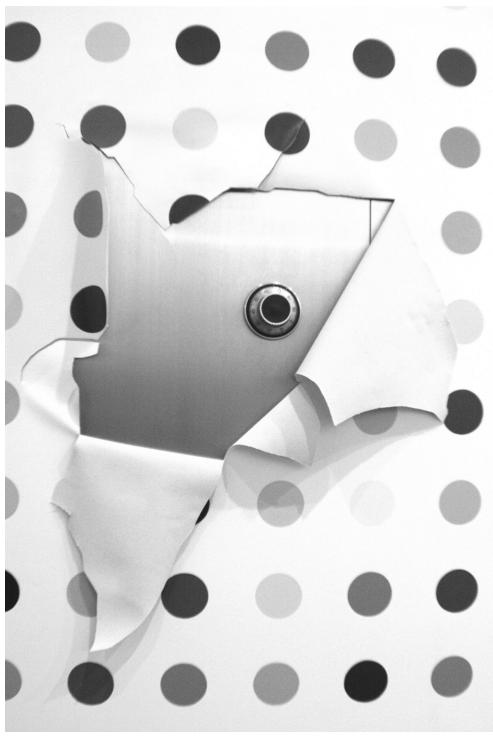


Figure 35: Elmgreen & Dragset, *The real money behind.* [Detail] (canvas, paint, safe doors, lock), 160x143x3cm, 2010.

Source: © Elmgreen & Dragset. *Anne Dessen: exh. Second hand. An Exhibition of Works within the look-alike permanent collection of the Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris.* 2010. Photo: UB.

wallpaper-like Spot Painting, like in the artwork (figure 35) by Danish-Norwegian artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset: »The real money behind« (2010). Referring to Hirst's financial success on the art market, this work revealed what is behind the spots – similar to »Keep It Spotless (Defaced Hirst)«, which is analyzed in the following chapter, namely, the commerce, which is addressed in the title. Expressions like »cash spot« or »spot business« also fit here. Hirst provides allusions for the aforementioned (potential) buyer/viewer who is educated in art history in the Spot Paintings: they recall artworks, for instance by the late Francis Picabia, but especially from the 1960s and 70s by Poul

Gernes or Thomas Downing, John Armleder⁵⁰⁸, François Morellet⁵⁰⁹, Larry Poons⁵¹⁰, or Gerhard Richter's color chart paintings (figure 36), in which he used color samples, a tool of industrial painters, to generate paintings »automatically«. First, Richter worked at random, then he used mathematics to determine colors and their arrangement on the canvas:

»Richter produced the first in his series of grid paintings in 1966 in which he replicated, in large scale, industrial colour charts produced by paint manufacturers. As with his photo-paintings, the use of found material as a source removed the subjective compositional preferences of the artist, however, the Colour Chart Paintings took this a step further, eradicating any hierarchy of subject or representational intent, and focusing on colour to create an egalitarian language of art.«⁵¹¹

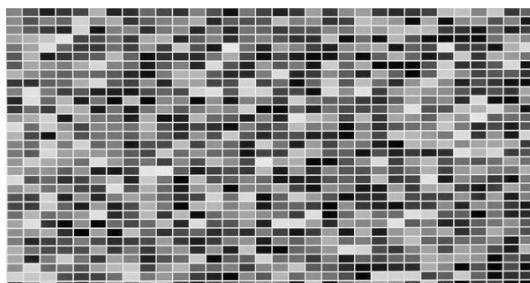


Figure 36: Judge, 1024 colors (paint on canvas), 254 x 478 cm, 1966.
Source: © Gerhard Richter. <http://arttattler.com/Images/Europe/England/London/Serpentine20Gallery/Gerhard%20Richter/Richter03.jpg> (Viewed March 1, 2011).

⁵⁰⁸ Charles Thompson provides a good overview on various potential forerunner works from recent art history. For the Spots he names Armleder, Downing, and Richter. See Charles Thompson: The Art Damien Hirst Stole. *3am-magazine.com* 14 September 2010.

⁵⁰⁹ See Anne Dressen: Exhibition catalogue. Second Hand. An Exhibition of Look-alike Works within the permanent collection of Musée d'Art Modern de la Ville de Paris. 2010, p. 11.

⁵¹⁰ Hirst in Haden-Guest 2008, p. 155.

⁵¹¹ Serpentine Gallery: Serpentine Gallery Presents Major New Work by Gerhard Richter: 4900 Colours: Version II [Press statement]. Quoted in *artknowledge-news.com*, 25th September 2008. Ivona Blazwick and Charles Hall already drew attention to the parallels to Richter's Color Chart Paintings in the (unpaged) catalogue of Hirst's ICA solo show in 1994.

Richter called his Color Chart Paintings generally »1024 Colours« or something similar, Poul Gernes and John Armleder titled theirs »Untitled«, and Thomas Downing »Grid # 8«, all expressing comparable, then-contemporary, ideas of mechanical art democracy – what you see is what you get. Their concept art sought to demystify and democratize art. Ultimately, however, they often created elitist art for a small group of wealthy and well educated collectors.⁵¹² While these artists tried to wipe out individual style and content, these works (as well as Hirst's outwardly) bear similarities to advertising and graphic design – with the difference being that Hirst's spots are enriched with additional post-modern ironic ingredients. He denies, however, references to other artists such as Richter⁵¹³: »They have nothing to do with Richter or Koons or Bridget Riley or Albers or even Op. They're about the urge to the need to be a painter above and beyond the object of painting.«⁵¹⁴ Cooper however, depicts Hirst's epiphany with his Spot Paintings as follows:

»[C]oming across by chance an image of Gerhard Richter's 1024 Colours (1973), a geometric colour chart of straight-from the-tin commercial gloss, Hirst conceived a way forward. The picture he had seen was in a book that had recently arrived at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, where he worked as a picture-mover to earn the money to pay his way through art college. Graham Gussin, a Chelsea art student who also worked part-time at the Dering Street dealers, remembers Hirst staring and staring at the picture in the book, before saying of Richter: 'What a free man!'«⁵¹⁵

Hirst painted only the first five Spot Paintings himself, just those five paintings feature barely visible puncture holes in the center of the colored circles that were made by dividers.⁵¹⁶ In the later Spot Paintings made by Hirst's assistants, all individual production traces were erased. Here a parallel can be seen with the aforementioned design of pills (and their packaging). His helpers worked exactly according to Hirst's requirements, like machines, without leaving streaks and blotches.⁵¹⁷ According to Hirst the traces of production illustrated the hand-made in the ones he painted himself. In those made by Hirst's assistants, those traces would interfere with the perfect, but

⁵¹² Stallabrass 2006, p. 61.

⁵¹³ Elsewhere Hirst refers to Richter, though. See Napoli 2004, p. 116.

⁵¹⁴ See *ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ Jeremy Cooper: *Growing up. The Young British Artists at 50*. Munich/London/New York 2014, p.26.

⁵¹⁶ See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 119.

⁵¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 69.

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*Art Director: George Zippato
Creative Director: Ron Arnold
Photographer: Diane Padys
Copywriter: Carol Turturro
Client: Dannon*



Figure 37: George Zippato, Ron Arnold, Diane Padys, Carol Turturro, print advertisements for Dannon.

Source: *Art Directors' Annual Vol. 65, March 1987, p. 882.*

sterile impression.⁵¹⁸ His attempt to make the hand of the creator invisible and to create an »*unemotional machine to make paintings*«⁵¹⁹ is reminiscent of Richter and the Écriture automatique of the surrealists.⁵²⁰ Dada, believed that the destruction of high art would lead to something better, Hirst, however, does not.⁵²¹ Instead, he integrates high art into his art-commerce, in the same way that Hirst also integrates the high art that was once criticized by Dada, which in turn has also become high art, as well as the principle of l'art pour l'art, which believed in the destruction of commercialism for the betterment of art. This becomes evident especially through the visual reference to the color figures adopted by Richter (even if in detail they actually are not such color figures), which provide a promising indicator of an »infinite« variety of consumer products (figure 37). The consumer chooses a color, the consumer artist Hirst always subjectively chooses new color combinations from the same ready-made »color palette«. The spots are reminiscent of this classic painting tool, as well as the circles of color in water color paint boxes. Instead of Hirst's subjective and individual choice, he could also have used a computer program. The result could hardly be visually distinguished, which is demonstrated by Hirst as well.

iii) Drugs, Medicine (Cabinets) and Candy

»We enter the art gallery as though into a pharmacy, looking for remedies nicely packaged for admissible [sic] illnesses.«⁵²²

George Bataille, 1930

The aspect of mass production and the pseudo-scientific-microscopic is shown in the schematically assigned medical titles that refer to science and

⁵¹⁸ See *ibid*, p. 119.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 98.

⁵²⁰ See Manfred Hilke: L'écriture automatique – Das Verhältnis von Surrealismus und Parapsychologie in der Lyrik (The relationship between surrealism and parapsychology in lyricism) von André Breton. Frankfurt/Main 2002.

⁵²¹ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 155.

⁵²² George Bataille in »L'Esprit moderne et le jeu des transpositions« (The Modern Spirit and the Play of Transpositions), in *Documents* I (1930), no. 8, pp.

49–50; *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, p. 271 and 273. English translation see Yves-Alain Bois, Rosalind Krauss: »Formless. A User's Guide. New York 1997, p. 52.

medicine, to which also the »official« name of the Spot Paintings points: Pharmaceutical Paintings.⁵²³

Although the Spot Paintings are abstract and relate to abstract painting, they evoke very concrete things from reality, through both title and form. The evenly rounded shapes of the spots are reminiscent of geometric, clear medicine packaging, their design (figure 38), and the legal or illegal drugs they contain, especially pills (figure 41).



Figure 38: Medical Packaging by Nobivac™ Lyme.

Source: © Nobivac™ http://www.intervetusa.com/binaries/Dog-w-Cape-dots-logo-275x27_tc_m130-182853.jpg (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).



Figure 39: Colorful pills in blister pack. No. 2174097.

Source: © Shutterstock. http://image.shutterstock.com/display_pic_with_logo/56867/56867/1163605191,1/stock-photo-of-package-Color-pills-2174097.jpg (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

In fact, these packages contain similarly clear geometric forms and colors (often in combination with clinically pure white coloring) like things that Hirst exhibited in his »Pharmaceutical Cabinets«. For the

first time in 1989, he lined up different colored and shaped consumer products in these cabinets, for instance real medical packaging (figure 39) or later (reproductions of) pills, cigarette butts, or diamonds that provide a similar visual impression as the spots – clean and industrially produced. He also had these rows of things painted photo-realistically in oil on canvas (figure 40), like the spots. The grid-like structure of the spots is reminiscent of blister packaging for pills (figure 41) and of the often white shelves in supermarkets or pharmacies. Similarly, the spots recall consumer products lined up in department stores (figure 41), an association which is even clearer in Hirst's cabinets (figure 39). The untouched quality that invites the viewer to purchase, the clean, the alluring, the *embarras de richesses* and the freedom of choice are reflected in Hirst's abstract Spot Paintings. The spots are floating; the shelves or grids are invisible, which gives them a magical quality that is

⁵²³ See Manchester 2009. Because of the fact Hirst himself and most other publications talk and write about Spot Paintings, this publication uses that denomination as well.

evident even in his animals in formaldehyde, or that is represented by the living flies in »A Thousand Years« and in the Butterfly Paintings as well.



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Figure 40: Hirst, Nothing is a Problem for Me (glass, steel, MDF and medicine bottles), 182.9 x 274.3 x 30.5 cm, 1992.

Source: © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. In: Hirst 1997, p. 215.

In the Spot Paintings, Hirst refers to industrial design and advertising in a positive and ironic way. He overzealously celebrates their clear, simple, positive, colorful packaging design modeled on constructivism and Bauhaus. Even the visual impression of the packaging produces a positive feeling of reliability, security, and trust, which act as intensifiers of consumption for/in the minds of (drug) consumers: »Product packaging is now largely advertising space. It seeks to attract the attention of customers and assists in finding the goods. As a 'silent salesmen' packaging makes self-service possible.«⁵²⁴ In addition to the packaging, the Spot Paintings are about medical drugs. In the correct dosage, pills may promise a cure, but they may have negative side effects and in the wrong dosage they may be dangerous. In English »drugs« can refer to medical ones, but also to mind-expanding and illegal drugs. Hirst's colorful spots are reminiscent of ecstasy pills or the blaze of

⁵²⁴ König 2008, p. 249.

color that can be activated by taking ecstasy. The geometric equality and regularity with which the spots are distributed over the entire canvas results in a slightly psychedelic effect in larger Spot Paintings (as in paintings of Bridget Riley), because the eye can hardly focus.

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Figure 41: Hirst, Thirteen Pills (oil on canvas), 121.9 x 91.4 cm, 2008.

Source: © Damien Hirst. In: exh. Damien Hirst – Requiem. Pinchuck Art Centre. Kiev 2009, unpagged.

Through the over-fulfilling perfection of representation, the Spot Paintings can be read as a reminder of speciousness. Hirst refers to both legal and illegal synthetic drugs and their design (figure 43) also in a positive way. As the artist admits he consumed both legal and illegal drugs for years⁵²⁵, a didactic approach here (»Drugs are dangerous«) is too simple because of the ironic contrasting effect. Drugs and drug consumption are also celebrated as beauti-

⁵²⁵ See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 103-106.

ful, colorful, and joy giving. »*The spot paintings are an unfailing formula for brightening up people's fucking lives.*«⁵²⁶, Hirst said. Here the discrepancy between the titles, recalling prescription (and therefore potentially dangerous) drugs contrast with the seemingly ever-bright and positive colors of the spots, a juxtaposition which also expresses the ambivalence of consumption. With »well-behaved« cynicism Hirst flirts with pseudo-ironic, pubescent pop elements.



Figure 42: The New Fred Meyer on Interstate on Lombard (Photography), 2004.

Source: lyzadanger. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/lyza/49545547/> (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

As stated earlier, Hirst used a black spot only once in an early painting as black is a dark negative color he tried to avoid for the Spot Paintings. The pharmaceutical industry seems to think the same. Journalist Meike Mai saw one Hirst's pill cabinets and had the idea to interview a leading pharmacist Siegfried Throm:

»[Mai:] Do black pills exist?

[Throm:] 'Brilliant Black' as a dye is even allowed. But would you swallow a black pill? Drugs should be pure, you associate that with white.

⁵²⁶ See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 119.

[Mai:] Only because most pills are white?

[Throm:] No, white is also the cheapest.«⁵²⁷

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Figure 43: Smarties advertising.

Source: © Nestlé. Miracles-inc.com. http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_rzq49UFit1I/S7AxoUMpNI/AAAAAaAAAACo/dZycgQE7LrM/s1600/Smartieseurope.jpg (Retrieved: March 12, 2011).

In addition to any kind of drugs, the paintings could potentially also be associated with sweets and their packaging. Hirst compares his spots with Smarties⁵²⁸ (dyed hard candy coated chocolate lentils), which are often presented on a white background (figure 43) as well. The book cover of this study shows an homage to a Hirst Spot Painting made from Smarties on a frosted cake for a Smarties PR event for children in London in 2008. As a child, Hirst allegedly had to have his stomach pumped because he mistook colorful medical pills for candy.⁵²⁹ Through the ambiguous appearance of the spots, Hirst blurred the boundaries between healthy consumption and stimulants. He shows their similarity in appearance, their effect on the viewer, as well as their respective bright and dark sides. Consumption of illegal drugs and candy can clearly be categorized as excess consumption. But medical drugs may also belong to essentials if they are used to save lives. Hirst demonstrated in

⁵²⁷ Pharmacist Siegfried Throm interviewed by Meike Mai: »Weiß sind sie am billigsten«. In: Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin No. 26, 29 June 2012, p.19.

⁵²⁸ See Liam Gillick's interview with Damien Hirst. In: Gambler. Exhibition catalogue. London 1990, unpagued.

⁵²⁹ See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 119.

his Spot Paintings that the borders between essentials and non-essentials are fluid and subjective.

The colors of Smarties and of medical pills do not correspond to their taste or content, »neither the agents nor the fillers [of medical pills], mostly lactose, calcium carbonate or starch from corn, rice or potatoes, do.«⁵³⁰ In the same way, the different colors of Hirst's Spots do not indicate any particular meaning.

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iv) Reality and Ritual

As he did in many of his series, including those with the dead animals, Hirst tries to bring the sterile and factual as well as reality »into the picture« in his Spot Paintings, to connect art and life ironically – this time through the use of white, pristine canvases (ie pure material) and ordinary household paint, »Another parallel is the play with the domestic, largely highlighted through the use of household paint, which sets up mocking parallel between the paint on the canvas and the paint on the wall on which it will be hung, and a knowing reference to easel painting as decoration. Hirst's spot paintings are made with ready mixed household paint.«⁵³¹

Hirst used readymade (that is, untampered) household paint reminiscent of commissioned works of facade and sign painters and of paint-boxes. Even mixing colors would contradict the principle of the machine-made, the clinically pure. Hirst says the devaluation of the means – he demonstratively uses no oil paint – that the idea is more important than the »cheap« execution. The Spot Paintings »look« mass produced in quantities but »are not«, thus they are suggestive of being both. Nothing is as it seems and everything is as it seems with Hirst. The pills in his cabinets are not real.⁵³² The spots are not really produced industrially. Both merely refer to reality, with the difference being that the paintings are full-fledged consumer products like medicines, besides the fact that they both promise various sorts of »healing«.

⁵³⁰ Siegfried Throm interviewed by Meike Mai, SZ Magazin no. 26, 29 June 2012.

⁵³¹ Stallabrass 2006, p. 164.

⁵³² This is allegedly a problem to do with international customs. See Napoli 2004, p. 41. Elsewhere Hirst claims the real pill would rot after a while. See Hirst 1997. The pills are made e.g. from painted bronze, artificial resin or plaster.

Hirst expressed in his series the Spot Paintings the potentially infinite⁵³³ (like the plots of daily soaps), which makes the ritual so important for people. What was once the ritual of the Sunday church service, gave way to the consumption of long-running television series, or the collection of series, like the one of butterflies, or paintings. Like the consumption of cigarettes of a particular brand (in Hirst's works at first always Silk Cut for the reasons mentioned earlier, later only Marlboro Light), the repeated consumption of a drug that is legal or illegal can also be seen as a 'calming' ritual, which descended originally from old indigenous American religious rituals.⁵³⁴ »*Art is like medicine, it can heal. Yet [I have, note: UB] always been amazed at how many people believe in medicine but don't believe in art, without questioning either.*«⁵³⁵ The Hirst universe often expresses comparable ideas/concepts/themes in the various product lines of the brand Damien Hirst. The message that Hirst sends with the cigarettes in cabinets also applies to the pill-like spots, both in a way the ultimate ambivalent consumer product: »*Cigarettes are such clinical forms. They are like pills. They have purity before you smoke them. They're expensive, dangerous.*«⁵³⁶ The infinite, the ritual, which both religion and tobacco promise, can also be found in the production and sale of products of mass consumption⁵³⁷, in the machine-made visual appearance of the Spot Paintings:

»I like the way the [spot] paintings look like they could have been made by a big machine – the machine being the artist of the future. The reason I play snooker or pool is because it enables me to try to behave like a machine. A machine could play snooker flawlessly. People trying to be machines, machines try to be people. Snooker has a similar but three-dimensional feel to the paintings.«⁵³⁸

Spot Paintings simultaneously represent the luxurious and the cheap: The chic aesthetic of pool tables and cigarettes, the strikingly simple design and color of billboard ads, the expensive, only affordable for the rich luxury good »Spot Painting«, but also the cheap use of household paint instead of oil, the mass of paintings that were more produced than painted without

⁵³³ Cicelyn in Napoli 2004, p. 22.

⁵³⁴ See Knut-Olaf Haustein: Tabakabhängigkeit. Hamburg 2008, p. 2-5.

⁵³⁵ Hirst 1997, p. 246.

⁵³⁶ Ibid, p. 67.

⁵³⁷ Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 93.

⁵³⁸ Hirst 1997, p. 246.

many required skills characterize the Spot Paintings and in that way make them synonymous with what is exaggeratedly referred to as »yuppie art« in the present study.

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v) **Yuppie Art for 'Over the Sofa'? – Spot Paintings in Movies**

As in YBA the »y« in yuppie (young urban professional) represents a »young« that is already dated/aged today: the term »yuppie« for young career-conscious city dwellers came to the UK and the U.S. in the 1980s, which is called the yuppie decade, since this time produced many successful business people. Also the computer boom and later the New Economy boom of the 1990s continued this trend. Yuppie life revolved around consumption, the term yuppie is often associated with arrogance, selfishness, and economic ruthlessness. With the latest economic and financial crisis since the fall of 2008 the yuppies might have lost their character as a metropolitan »dominant culture«.

YBAs and yuppies are now in their 50s or older, part of the establishment, and sitting in boardrooms draped with »yuppie art«, like Spot Paintings for instance. The negative interpretation of »yuppie art« described above is succinctly conveyed by the use of Spot Paintings in two feature films in recent years. One appeared in the British superhero comedy »Kick-Ass« in 2010⁵³⁹, where the penthouse headquarters of the villain; the brutal, ruthless drug lord D'Amico; is decorated with several artworks, all of which symbolize violence and/or wealth. Next to »Self« (the blood head of YBA artist Marc Quinn) and pictures of a Warholian pistol and his dollar and pound signs in neon, we find a Spot Painting (figure 44) from Damien Hirst. All works represent the character of the ex-yuppie D'Amico, who uses art without understanding clearly, purely as a way to show off. The art was purchased with impure means such as violence and drugs.

⁵³⁹ See 94th minute in »Kick-Ass« (director: Matthew Vaughn). GB 2010. 117 min.



Figure 44: Kick-Ass (feature film, directed by Matthew Vaughn). UK 2010.
117 min.

Source: Screenshot of 94th Minute.



Figure 45: 99 Francs (feature film, directed by Jan Kounen). France 2007.
139 min.

Source: Screenshot of 38th Minute.

The Spot Paintings also smack of something that is on its way out, much like the hedonistic consumerism of the 1980s and 90s, the paintings have aged with their creator.⁵⁴⁰ The slightly pejorative, ironic term 'yuppie art' assumed wealth and power, while also suggesting superficiality and lack of taste in art.

Yuppie art collectors see art rather as investment and status symbol, than actually as »inspiring« and »good« art. The press often reproaches (subtly) the buyers of Hirst's art with this suggestion as well. Hirst is well aware of this interpretation of his works and the ones of other former YBAs; he alludes to

⁵⁴⁰ The atmosphere of this time is notably described in Brad Easton Ellis: American Psycho. New York 1991 and (for Germany) in Florian Illies: Generation Golf. Berlin 2000.

that ironically in the previously cited British art market satire »Boogie Woogie« from 2009. He was responsible for providing it with works of art.

In »99 Francs«, a movie satire about consumerism and the wasteful world of advertising of the 1990s, there is a Spot Painting in the office (figure 45)⁵⁴¹ of the greasy, successful, high-flying copywriter and cocaine-addicted yuppie Octave. He is the Damien Hirst of the 1990s: both were acclaimed creative young high-flyers, who loved to consume a lot of cocaine and go all out at excessive parties. The Spot Painting was properly chosen, due to its simplicity and coloration it stands out in the movie like an advertising graphic on a wall.

The fact that the Spot Painting hangs in an advertising agency and that it looks like a color chart – it could be applied art – draws attention to Hirst's use of the location.

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vi) The Handling of a Location – White Cube and Museum

Like any readymade – and the Spot Paintings recall those – Hirst's art needs the gallery space with which it communicates, otherwise it is not necessarily recognizable as art. As stated in Thümmel, American artists have questioned the white cube since 1970.⁵⁴² In contrast, the white cube became widely accepted in the UK at the earliest in 1985.

Hirst's London gallerist called his gallery »White Cube«. For Hirst, the 'neutral' white gallery space is never really neutral, instead he is always aware of the white cube. The first Spot Paintings were still part of the gallery space, with the spots painted directly onto the white wall. The white background mirrors the white cube of a gallery. Hirst's art represents the 'hedonistic' use of paintings; they are made for the commercial sale space »gallery« or the minimalist-oriented penthouse of a rich collector/consumer with high ceilings and plenty of space »over the sofa.« »Art that has to be in a gallery to be art isn't art.«⁵⁴³ The anti-YBA artists group, the Stuckists, accuses Damien Hirst and others: »The Stuckist is opposed to the sterility of the white wall

⁵⁴¹ See 38th Minute in »99 Francs« (director: Jan Kounen). France 2007. 139 min. It is not obvious if it is a poster or a painting.

⁵⁴² See Thümmel 1997, p. 214-215.

⁵⁴³ Billy Childish, Charles Thomson: The Stuckists. Manifesto of 4 August 1999.

gallery system and calls for exhibitions to be held in homes and musty museums, with access to sofas, tables, chairs and cups of tea.«⁵⁴⁴

In fact, Hirst's Spots reflect the white cube *and* the 'human' art environment described by the Stuckists, because they are also reminiscent of living room wallpaper or wrapping paper. The prop character or the active participation in an art happening, which is more obvious in the rest of Hirst's art, is less evident in the Spot Paintings because of their more subtle references to materials and location (or their 'stage' for Hirst's *mise en scène*), but due to their initial appearance directly on the white walls of a white cube, this »prop« aspect is also evident. Museum and gallery are two locations for Hirst's performance of the Spot Paintings.

Hirst seems to view the museum as a temple for things of alleged eternal value that generates pseudo-religious feelings.⁵⁴⁵ On the one hand, he rejects it, because it appears obsolete in the postmodern age, however, on the other hand, he seeks the proximity of public institutions and plans to own a museum for his art and his collection. In the Olympic year 2012 Hirst also had his first major retrospective at the Tate Modern.⁵⁴⁶ How much he is attracted by traditional art venues and, at the same time, how much he seeks to serve as provocateur by contrasting his works with those venues, was evident when he chose the traditional London Wallace Collection for his Blue Paintings in 2010 or the traditional Amsterdam Rijksmuseum for the 'Diamond Skull' in 2008.⁵⁴⁷

vii) Faith in Medicine and Advertising

»The high Priesthood of secular medicine has replaced the church as the source of salvation.«⁵⁴⁸

Damien Hirst

The white of the Spot Paintings refers not only to the location, but also to the white of the »demi-gods in white« (a German expression for arrogant

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ See Thümmel 1997, p. 212.

⁵⁴⁶ See Farah Nayeri: Hirst to Get First U.K. Retrospective at Tate for Olympic Year. Bloomberg Online, 3rd March 2011.

⁵⁴⁷ See Hirst interviewed by Liebs 2010.

⁵⁴⁸ Hirst quoted in Hans Dickey: Künstlerbücher mit Fotografie seit 1960. Hamburg 2008, p. 211.

doctors), to the germ-free and thus healthy and the (would-be?) trustworthy white of many electronic consumer products in kitchens or bathrooms – here advertising strategies, the scientific and the medical of the »Pharmaceutical« paintings echo here: »A copy of the colors in operating rooms give the [electronic, n. UB] device a medical antiseptic atmosphere. The white aura appears as an emanation of its perfect purity.«⁵⁴⁹

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With this supposedly sterile, clean, industrial look the artist indicates that even pill boxes advertise the product they contain, especially if they want to seem ostensibly serious, discreet, and trustworthy. Hirst celebrates/ comments on faith in medicine and/through advertising. »I started them as an endless series ... a scientific approach to painting in a similar way to the drug companies' scientific approach to life. Art doesn't purpose to have all the answers; the drug companies do.«⁵⁵⁰

With the simple and credible appearance⁵⁵¹ of medical drugs Hirst also celebrates/comments on the religious element, which is inherent in science, especially in medicine. Like religion, medicine pretends that, in this case by taking a pill, one (at least for awhile) becomes immortal.⁵⁵² »Medical drugs are presented as a life-prolonging, death-neglecting illusory world, [...] medicine strikes as a consumer-friendly, colorful and basically still unreachable and unavailable illusory world [...].«⁵⁵³

Science tries to optimize and extend life⁵⁵⁴, religion promises eternal life, going beyond the earthly one.⁵⁵⁵ The seemingly exotic names of drugs sound like ritual incantations or prayers in Latin.⁵⁵⁶ The development of medical drug names is quite expensive.⁵⁵⁷ Thus they provide confidence in a magical, quasi-religious healing, although the consumers (often) do not understand them. Hirst also transfers here a marketing strategy from consumer culture:

»Many advertising slogans in Germany are purposely phrased in English or French, for example, because the companies know not only that the consumer will understand, but also that a slogan in a foreign language

⁵⁴⁹ Ullrich 2006, p. 88.

⁵⁵⁰ Hirst 1997, p. 246. Similar Hirst quote in Napoli 2004, p. 162.

⁵⁵¹ See Napoli 2004, p. 162.

⁵⁵² Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 103.

⁵⁵³ Thümmel 1997, p. 235.

⁵⁵⁴ See Mario Codognato in Napoli 2004, p. 26.

⁵⁵⁵ See *ibid*, p. 26.

⁵⁵⁶ See *ibid*.

⁵⁵⁷ Siegfried Throm interviewed by Meike Mai, SZ Magazin no. 26, 29 June 2012.

will be perceived as ambiguous, scintillating, and exotic; existing in a kind of limbo that opens up a larger associative space. In reference to Kant it could be said that it is more a matter of conveying a certain significance but not a definitive meaning.«⁵⁵⁸

196 The last sentence of Ullrich's quote concisely summarizes the principle of influence and reflection of consumer culture in all of Hirst's works.

In »Pharmacy« (1992) Hirst faithfully re-created a whole pharmacy: »The Pharmacy is like a cathedral of our times, where new, redemptive simulacra, new idols of healing, are celebrated and exhibited.«⁵⁵⁹ Often visitors believed they made a wrong turn and entered a real pharmacy instead of a gallery.⁵⁶⁰

Despite Hirst's verbal refusal to refer to art history, references to it are obvious. Maybe these references were mediated by the style of advertising, which was also influenced by Bauhaus, constructivism, and conceptual art. The visual appearance and titles advertising medicine packaging and pills that influenced the Spots are more subtle than other forms of advertising because these products are shrouded in an air of guaranteed seriousness because they are exclusively available in pharmacies as prescribed by a doctor. This is comparable the absolution of a priest in a church and with the behavior of art dealers in a renowned gallery. As evidenced by medical scandals, however, there is no guarantee that medicine will at the very least do harm, as in the case of Contergan⁵⁶¹, and no guarantee that doctors actually always have the good of the patient in mind or that they do not prescribe medicines based on factors like packaging, personal interest, or bias when some drugs may have a cheaper alternative or may be unnecessary. Faith in context with medicine can be important/promote healing:

»The placebo research shows again and again: Large injections work better than small, painful ones, those which leave a bruise are better than a small prick now and again. Colorful pills work better than colorless. And all this applies even more if the active agent is nothing more than sugar.

⁵⁵⁸ Ullrich 2006, p. 43.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 29.

⁵⁶⁰ See Napoli 2004, p. 29.

⁵⁶¹ See *Tagespiegel*: Grünenthal zahlt 50 Millionen Euro für Contergan-Opfer. *Tagesspiegel Online* 8 May 2008.

The price also has an enormous influence. Expensive pills work better than cheap ones, even if the content is identical.⁵⁶²

Hirst transfers this placebo-marketing principle of faith in medicine (packaging) to his art, »seeing is believing⁵⁶³. Spot Paintings in general do not just deal with pharmaceutical advertising, they also contain specific references, for example to the pharmaceutical company Bayer, whose logo is found not only on the back of Spot Paintings as Hirst's 'company's stamp'⁵⁶⁴ but also several times on the Sotheby's exhibition catalogue.⁵⁶⁵ The artist replaced the company's name in its famous logo with his last name, but maintained design and font.

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This goes beyond Hirst seeking a specific reference to a pharmaceutical company's trademark. The logo itself interested him: »Am I a sculptor who wants to be a painter, [...] or a cynical artist who thinks painting is now reduced to nothing more than a logo?⁵⁶⁶ He is also aware of the logo-like nature of the Spot Paintings irregardless of medical allusions. Hirst cites the smooth, perfect, high-gloss surface of billboards (Fig 76 and 82), the »graphic punch of billboard imagery⁵⁶⁷, which he sees as the artistic influence of the present, and which he names not only when asked about his inspiration for the Spot Paintings.⁵⁶⁸

Hirst created motifs inspired by commercial art that seem to be intended for (T-shirt) design and were later used as such, as in the case of the Spot Paintings or the »Diamond Skull«. Spots appeared in various advertising formats in the past 20 years, for instance in several television commercials for GO!, a now defunct British budget airline, as well as in the logo of the British Council, the billboards of Kids Company, and ads for Hyatt's hotels:

⁵⁶² Werner Bartens: Das Jaulen der Mediziner. SZ Online 8 May 2010. See also Markus Grill: Kranke Geschäfte: Wie die Pharmaindustrie uns manipuliert. Hamburg 2007.

⁵⁶³ This old proverb goes back to 1609: »Seeing is leeving« in S. Harward MS (Trinity College Cambridge, p. 85.

⁵⁶⁴ See illustration on Sothebys.com: Lot 34. Auction Red. New York. 14 February 2008. http://www.sothbys.com/app/ecatalogue/ecat.do?dispatch=displayImageViewer&image_number=2&lot_id=159428855&SIZE=smaller (Retrieved: 1 March 2011).

⁵⁶⁵ See Sotheby's 2008.

⁵⁶⁶ Hirst in Thornton 2008. »[Hirst] would like to transform himself into a trademark. « Eduardo Cicelyn in Napoli 2004, p. 18.

⁵⁶⁷ Wood in Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 54.

⁵⁶⁸ See Hirst 2001, p. 119.

»In Apotryptophanae the spots, fifteen up and fourteen across, scatter the gaze, like the handfuls of pills thrown over Keith Allen in Hirst's video for »Country House' (1995) and hit by fellow Goldsmiths graduates, Blur, that was to be an anthem for Britpop. Spots are, of course, a ubiquitous tool in graphic design [...]. Yet, thanks to Hirst, the 1990s contracted a peculiar epidemic of candy-colored measles, from wrapping paper [...] to the exterior of the Tate Boat, designed by Hirst himself. In exploiting the juncture between art and popular visual culture, he succeeded in branding an era.«⁵⁶⁹

As a student Hirst used, as previously mentioned, the Art Directors Annual as an inspiration. Maybe he was familiar with promotional graphics like figure 37, which originates from that annual. Like in the Spot Paintings, differently colored areas are placed on a white background. Hirst, however, does not depict products, but rather reduces this idea to innuendos and creates a product (design) himself. Hirst retroactively influenced advertising. He would not only threaten advertising companies and other creative people who allegedly stole his ideas⁵⁷⁰, with a lawsuit, he was also sued himself, because he adapted the ideas of others. This becomes apparent in the Spot Paintings. Hirst considered suing GO! Airlines because in an advertising campaign around the turn of the millennium they used spots, which appeared to be similar to his.⁵⁷¹ Conversely, for instance, the American Thomas Downing or the Dane Poul Gernes created, as mentioned, series of paintings in the late 1960s that are visually and conceptually hardly different from Hirst's Spot Paintings.

Another level of meaning (in addition to the one for the (potential) buyer/viewer) addresses the general public, the absent-minded observer, who, in contrast to Benjamin's concentrated observer, views Hirst's works – in fact more like advertisements – solely via the media; photo, film, print, or television.⁵⁷²

Like a good logo or advertisement, his art also works in today's consumer society: in glossy catalogues, on billboards, but also in black and white, small and grainy, or on a phone's camera, the Spot Paintings are always easily

⁵⁶⁹ British Council: Damien Hirst. Website of 2006. (Retrieved: 9 March 2011).

⁵⁷⁰ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 278.

⁵⁷¹ See Tom Sutcliffe: What the ornament business owes to Hirst. The Independent Online, 26 October 2010.

⁵⁷² See Stallabrass 2006, p. 133.

recognizable, as are the formaldehyde works: »The reproduced work of art will, to ever increasing degree, become a reproduction of a work of art that was designed for reproducibility.«⁵⁷³

The downside of easy reproducibility and recognition is evident in the fact that the Spots recall, like many of Hirst's early works from his student days, wallpaper or fabric design. Therefore they have been accused of arbitrariness and commercial art⁵⁷⁴ and are hence often perceived as being open to attack and unreliable. Hirst in turn meets these criticisms by glamorizing or ironically over-fulfilling them and actually providing a variety of products with Spots in his shop; beer bottles, shoes, and watches are all available. The Spots act like an artist's signature. Like a trademark logo, all this is also associated with an increase in prices.⁵⁷⁵

Here, too, Hirst blurs the boundaries between art, applied art, and design. The familiarity of glossy pictures and their promise of salvation is celebrated while at the same time using conflicting titles to create a feeling of unease.⁵⁷⁶

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viii) Over-Identification with the Viewer

The principle of the potential over-identification (the term was coined by the Slovenian theorist Žižek) with supposed wishes of buyers, kitsch elements, or high-gloss finish is reminiscent of the music band/artist group Laibach, which at the time of communism in Slovenia in the 1980s, through their over-identification with totalitarianism, exposed according to Žižek »the obscene superego of the system«⁵⁷⁷: »Laibach's method is extremely simple, effective and horribly open to misinterpretation. First of all, they absorb the

⁵⁷³ Benjamin 1936, p. 24.

⁵⁷⁴ See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 107.

⁵⁷⁵ A branded product is more expensive than a no-name, generic product, just as a signed work of art costs more than an unsigned work. See e.g. Stallabrass 2006, p. 278.

⁵⁷⁶ See Stallabrass 2006. He is commenting on the photographer Henry Bond, p. 134.

⁵⁷⁷ Slavoj Žižek: »Why Laibach and NSK are not Fascists« (1993). In: Inke Arns (Ed.): Irwinretroprinzip, 1983 - 2003. Frankfurt/Main 2003, p. 21.

mannerisms of the enemy, adopting all the seductive trappings and symbols of state power, and then they exaggerate everything to the edge of parody.⁵⁷⁸

The same can be said about Hirst and his handling of consumption. In contrast to Laibach, who had to defend themselves repeatedly against allegations of fascism, Hirst's real attitude toward consumption is not entirely clear. However, his text »*Why cunts sell shit to fools*«⁵⁷⁹ heavy-handedly suggests that his exaggerated over-fulfillment of consumer desires is a part of his art. Nevertheless, he feels good in the role of the »cunt«, who sold »shit« to »fools«. As early as 1992, Hirst stated that only the exaggerated makes sense: »Usually things only make sense, what they are exaggerated.«⁵⁸⁰ He said this in connection with the Spot Paintings, which at that time only numbered 64.

As a true child of his time, Hirst reacts by creating the severely oversimplified Spots, stressing alterations in viewer behavior. The art viewer used to look often, long, and precisely at a few pictures in the museum (and in life). The modern viewers are so familiar with the flood of images on television and the internet; they consume a large number of images in a short amount of time: »The public is extremely visually educated because of the complexity of advertising in the last 30 years. [...] People are incredibly visually educated through being sold things.«⁵⁸¹

Much of the current flood of images is of commercial nature; Hirst and other YBAs use »*material from mass media a lot of people cannot help but know about*«⁵⁸², according to Stallabrass. Benjamin distinguishes between a critical and appreciative viewer. People can either become accustomed to art; everyone is a casual expert in photography, film, and television⁵⁸³; or people can actively and consciously experience art. The masses seek distraction, – they want to consume – art demands viewer's concentration⁵⁸⁴, Benjamin wrote. The aforementioned Stuckists however, tout the following: »*The surroundings in which art is experienced (rather than viewed) should not be artificial and vac-*

⁵⁷⁸ Richard Wolfson: Warriors of weirdness. Daily Telegraph Online. 4 September 2003.

⁵⁷⁹ See Damien Hirst: *Why cunts sell shit to fools*. In: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 82-85.

⁵⁸⁰ Interview with Damien Hirst. Exhibition catalogue. »Young British Artists«. Saatchi Gallery. London 1992, p. 20-21.

⁵⁸¹ Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 218.

⁵⁸² Stallabrass 2006, p. 4.

⁵⁸³ Ibid, p. 46.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 70.

uous.»⁸⁵ For them, the less conscious, more appreciatively-consumerist art experience is tied to the place of the museum, or its mise en scène (or staging) as a home and integral part of life, as opposed to purely intellectual, conscious, active but »quixotic« experience of art in the white cube. This attitude is contrary to the common perception of the museum as a place that is removed from life, where art is kept »germ-free« without the original context of, for instance, a church. This contradiction can possibly be resolved, as the British Stuckists might still think of the densely draped old museums in London equipped with colorful curtains. But other critics have more so spaces in mind that are reminiscent of the white cube.

This modified »point of view« goes hand in hand with the conception of »celebrity«: self-promotion, style, and image became more important in shaping identity. The more images (and for instance actors) are viewed reproduced on photos and film, the more important the cult of celebrity becomes, preserving the original aura of art. This applies not only for the artist and each individual but also for museums and galleries, which are now managed like corporations. According to Stallabrass advertising becomes like art and vice versa⁸⁶, for which the Spot Paintings are the best example. Glossy magazines are designed artistically. Their photographers, for instance Helmut Newton, are classified as artists. Conversely, the viewing of contemporary art and culture today has become an activity that is inextricably linked to buying, like mass media and advertising⁸⁷: Hardly a museum lacks a shop, a fact emphasized for instance by Banksy in his film »Exit Through The Gift Shop«.

In 2005 this probably prompted Hirst to set up the company Other Criteria⁸⁸, which is like Keith Haring's Pop Shop in the 1980s, to sell Hirst art and merchandise (such as those of other artists) in three shops in London and New York. There he sells art prints, posters, prints of Spot Paintings, postcards for a British pound, exhibition catalogues, »Diamond Skull« T-shirts, et cetera. Hirst is an artist-entrepreneur who himself ensures the sale of his art, often thwarting his galleries and auctioning his works directly at

⁸⁵ Billy Childish, Charles Thomson: The Stuckists. Manifesto, 4 August 1999.

⁸⁶ See Stallabrass 2006, p. 155.

⁸⁷ See p. 88.

⁸⁸ With Hirst's then finance manager Frank Dumphy and his old school friend and longtime assistant Hugh Allan. See <https://www.othercriteria.com/info/about/> (Retrieved: 20 May 2010).

Sotheby's – one of its branches in London, located directly next to Sotheby's. In his art Hirst reflects the principle of »brands not products«, which, as mentioned, is practiced by large corporations such as Nike or Coca-Cola.

Hirst's artist brand, staged in a kind of over-all-performance, includes the Spot Paintings as kind of franchised goods »produced« by assistants.

5) Banksy and Damien Hirst

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»Street Art was the Asbo [anti social behaviour order]-generation offspring of Damien Hirst and the Young British Artists movement: a hyper active, media-savvy take on Graffiti culture. It reveled in subverting the rules of the art Establishment, with the anonymous Banksy sneaking his own guerrilla exhibits into galleries and museums to see how long they would remain in place.«⁵⁸⁹

The New Statesman

Damien Hirst and Banksy are two of the best known representatives of both British and contemporary art in the last two decades; Hirst since the 1990s as the leader of the Young British Artists (YBA), and Banksy as a representative of the first decade of the 21st century and Street Art. As the above quote suggests, a direct connection can be made from the YBAs to Street Art or, respectively, from Damien Hirst to Banksy.

a) Street Art – The Rise of Banksy

This chapter deals with the London art scene after 2000, with a clear focus on Street Art, with its most prominent representative Banksy, who at least quantitatively took over the art headlines of British newspapers and the position of the successor of the art enfant terrible of the Naughties, Damien Hirst:

»The most controversial and popular young British artist of the century so far did not go to Goldsmiths or indeed any other art college, is not supported by Charles Saatchi despite the collector's reported avid interest and has never had his work deconstructed in polysyllabics by Brian Sewell. His canvases are bought for tens of thousands of pounds by the most illustrious rock stars of our age but the majority of his art is public, produced with no assistance from- indeed often the tacit disapproval of – the local authorities.«⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁹ Alice O'Keeffe: Keeping it real. New Statesman Online 30 October 2008.

⁵⁹⁰ Steve Beale: First Against the Wall. In: Arena Magazine January 2004, p. 152. Steve Beale was the founder of Sleazeration (1996-2003), a lifestyle magazine

Beale, a journalist, who wrote these lurid lines in a lifestyle magazine in 2004, interviewed Banksy who stated that he thinks the YBAs to be »quite amusing«⁵⁹¹ Clarke mentions Banksy's interest especially in Damien Hirst.⁵⁹²

What began, in retrospect, with Hirst's »Freeze« exhibition is after 2000 typical of the London art scene. This art world focuses on social events such as exhibitions and private viewings, or their after-party at a club or pub. Student and more off space exhibitions often consist solely of private openings and such exhibitions are not primarily attended by collectors and gallery owners, but rather by the Künstlerbohème.

In the 1990s, after the 'private view' under Hirst's leadership, Groucho Club in Soho and pubs in Hoxton in the East End in particular were very busy, until about 2002 when Hirst gave up alcohol and drugs. In particular, a variety of smaller and larger galleries that showed contemporary artists opened in Hoxton and Shoreditch. In 2000, Jopling's White Cube Gallery, which represented many famous YBAs at the Hoxton Square, moved there as well. Since the 1990s, artistic gentrification by creative people of all kinds led to the growth of the prestige and attractiveness of the night life and a consequent rise in rent prices both in the East End and in the Docklands. That is why the next generation of artists continued to move outside, to the north and east, Hackney, Dalston and Brixton for instance, where the game began all over again.

Not long before the new millennium, a mid-1970s Bristol-born, former Graffiti style writer, who signed his illegal works with the pseudonym Banksy moved to London. In the appendix of this analysis, one can find his short biography, in which the known sources about his career were combined for the first time. In his hometown, Banksy was known since about 1994 through his illegal spray painting, which he circulated since 2000 in London and then internationally. Banksy started working in the aforementioned gentrified neighborhoods Hoxton and Shoreditch, where he soon made his name known. There, he organized (often »illegal«) exhibitions and traveled to other cities, where he participated in group exhibitions and presented his

that employed also Banksy's future photographer and manager Steve Lazarides. Beale left in 1999 to work at a British media company on magazines including The Face and Arena. All three magazines ran stories about Banksy. In 2015, according to his LinkedIn profile Beale works for Steve Lazarides: »business director at Lazarides Gallery Group«.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, p. 153.

⁵⁹² Robert Clarke: *Seven Years with Banksy*. London 2012, p. 54-56.

work in big urban metropolises, including Hamburg, Paris, Berlin, Melbourne, New York and Los Angeles.

In 2000, Banksy met Damien Hirst in London, and was soon promoted by him. »Damien Hirst has given [...] [Banksy] an endorsement, and he's been flown out to New York to paint Hotel rooms and to the Costa del Sol to jazz up a lap-dancing complex.«⁵⁹³

This quote suggests that, at that time, the already established and successful Hirst gave the emerging Street Artist Banksy a recommendation, probably because he valued his work: »[Banksy] received a trail of commendations. 'Fucking fair play' was the response of Damien Hirst [...]«⁵⁹⁴ wrote the Bristol venue as early as February 2000. The young »underground« artist Banksy meets the ten years older, art market guru Damien Hirst. The latter rented out a studio to Banksy in the East End. As in the chapter entitled »Keep It Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« describes in more detail, both artists created at least three works together in 2007 and 2012.

However, there were (and maybe still are) certainly points of friction between Banksy and Hirst. In an interview in 2003, Banksy responded to the question of whether he wanted to be part of the art establishment: »I don't know. I wouldn't sell shit to Charles Saatchi. If I sell 55,000 books and however many screen prints, I don't need one man to tell me I'm an artist. It's hugely different if people buy it, rather than one fucking Tory punter does. No, I'd never knowingly sell anything to him.«⁵⁹⁵ This quote is a critique of the art market, but also indirectly of Hirst, who is, in the public perception, Saatchi's most prominent »discovery«. Even in 2015, Banksy sees Hirst at least as well in a critical light: »I didn't want to include Damien Hirst, the show doesn't need his validation or any of the baggage that might come with his name. But when you're organising an art show at the seaside and you know there's a sculpture of a beachball hovering on a jet of air above fifty sharpened steak knives – well, you have to include it. That piece is so poetic and technically intriguing. This show is packed with a lot of exciting new artists it would be profoundly depressing if the stand-out artist was Damien

⁵⁹³ Cf. Mitchell 2000, p. 69.

⁵⁹⁴ Nige Tassel: Graffiti Guerrilla Banksy [Interview]. In: Venue Bristol vol. 463. Februar 2000, p. 26.

⁵⁹⁵ Simon Hattenstone: Something to spray. Guardian, 17 July 2003. Banksy repeats his refusal of Saatchi for instance in his interview with Beale 2004, p. 155.

Hirst. But you can't argue with the piece. It's bigger than what you think of him, or what you think of the art world, or even what he thinks of himself. It's a perfectly realised piece of work.«⁵⁹⁶

It is not known how Hirst and Banksy first met. Both, however, had contact with known members of the British music scene. Banksy was friends with fellow Bristol-born trip-hop greats such as Massive Attack and Portishead and Hirst with Britpop band members of Blur and Pulp, with whom he studied. In 1995 Hirst directed a Blur music video. He also had a top ten hit in the UK charts with Blur's bassist Alex James as pop band Fat Les 1998. The cover of Blur's last studio album »Think Tank« (2003) was designed by Banksy. Both Hirst and Banksy, however, had worked earlier as designers of record covers: Hirst, already famous as an artist, in 1994 for well-known musician Dave Stewart, who also wrote a song about him. Around 1999 Banksy, still unknown, worked for the record label »Wall of Sound«, for which he designed about ten record covers, and prior to that, for Hombre Records, Bristol. Record covers are advertising and packaging for the consumer product music. Hirst's art, like Banksy's, is very much influenced by advertising and popular culture, or in fact interwoven with it. As a student, Hirst was inspired by a publication that reprinted advertising graphics such as posters or magazine advertising. Banksy designed advertising flyers, like many Street Artists who worked in the creative business in (not only) London around 2000, »The largest group of street-art subculture consists of young adults [...] who meanwhile study Communication Design, Graphic Design, Illustration or similar (or have already finished) and now placard or spray paint paste-ups, logos, lettering or characters in the streets.«⁵⁹⁷

Ad-men and Street Artists are often the same people, who at least complete a similar training and place their works on the same walls and surfaces in public spaces. They are competitors who influence each other, not only with respect to the most visible ways, but also content, visual style, and media used. Banksy again and again alters slogans or phrases that are known in advertising, as »Fuck off * (* Terms and conditions apply)« or »Now 10% more CRAP«.

Banksy's »Turf War« exhibition in 2003 was also seen by Hirst, who, probably in the same year bought his first work by Banksy, which he showed

⁵⁹⁶ Banksy in <http://dismaland.co.uk/interview/> (15. September 2015).

⁵⁹⁷ Julia Reineke: Street-Art. Eine Subkultur zwischen Kunst und Kommerz. Bielefeld 2007, p. 105.

in 2006 with two other Banksys in »In The Darkest Hour There May Be Light«. The year before, he bought the largest part of Banksy's exhibition »Crude Oils« as well. The fact that a globally successful and established artist and Turner Prize winner shows the illegal street-art artist Banksy in an exhibition alongside greats such as Bacon, Koons and Warhol, can be understood as a positive recognition of Street Art by established Gallery art, although it also gave Hirst a platform to present himself as a visionary philanthropist in the role of an art collector and patron like Saatchi.

The recognition process of Street Art was continued in 2008 with the Cans Festival, organized by Banksy and Tristan Manco, with 40 of the best known Street Artists painting walls under Waterloo Station, and the modern Street Art exhibition at the Tate, the first of its kind on such a large scale a few weeks later. Three of the six Street Artists who were allowed to create monumental temporary works in the context of this exhibition on the outer walls of the Tate Modern, are/were represented by the Lazarides Gallery: Blu, Faile, JR, all successfully exhibited before in commercial art galleries. Lazarides was a longtime friend, photographer, and (from 2001 until late 2008⁵⁹⁸) agent of Banksy.

After Banksy's very successful solo exhibition in Bristol in 2009, which surprised a provincial museum with a stream of more than 300,000 visitors (the largest YBA exhibition at the renowned London's Royal Academy did not have many more in 1997, which at that time represented an absolute record) and after his Oscar-nominated Street Art Documentary in 2010, the great American art museums finally decided to honor Street Art with a big group show. »Art in the Streets« at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles opened its doors in April of 2011 and could also be seen in 2012 at the prestigious Brooklyn Museum in New York. One room was designed by Banksy.

For Street Art's recognition within the art market, not only was aesthetic-critical analysis and presentation by the art establishment necessary, but also, to a large extent, its' financial success. »When a thing is current it creates currency,« wrote McLuhan. Especially since Banksy's »Barely Legal« show in 2006, the international press talks about record sales of Banksy canvases, both on eBay, where his illegal templates »stolen« off the road were auctioned, and by major auction houses such as Bonham's or Sotheby's. The

⁵⁹⁸ Ellsworth-Jones 2012, p. 172.

record sales of sometimes several hundred thousand pounds sterling for Banksy's works ironically raised the reputation of Street Art, which is often critical of consumer culture and the establishment. Those Banksy art works at auction are usually works from the secondary market that he sold cheap ten years before – a fact that is usually overlooked. For Banksy, the great financial success of »Barely Legal« and the concomitant explosion of media attention, which led to increasing hostility and accusations from members of the Style Writing Graffiti and Street Art subculture, had a strong effect. The otherwise tirelessly producing Banksy (see Appendix: Banksys exhibitions and events) took an exhibition-break of almost 20 months and obviously had an existential crisis.⁵⁹⁹ The majority of the British press, such as the art critic JJ Charlesworth, criticized Banksy and other Street Artists for their financial success: »More often than not [Banksy's Street Art, note UB] is discussed by journalists in relation to sales prizes, the underlying implication being that it's some kind of elaborate rip-off.«⁶⁰⁰

This point of criticism connects Banksy and other successful Street Artists to Hirst or with abstract or conceptual art in general, of which similar allegations are often made.

b) The Spectacularization of Art

Something else that increased at the same time as Banksy and Street Art in London after 2000, were the artificial events, in particular the presentation of art. One can see Hirst's 'Freeze' and the first Saatchi Gallery as the beginning of this trend. Blazwick described the road to the latter as an adventure. The dramatization of the exhibition-situation has its equivalent in the run-down underground atmosphere of the abandoned warehouse in London's docklands of the »Freeze« exhibition. The dramatic aspect of coming to an art exhibition in the early 1990s was also described by Stallabrass. Saatchi and later the YBAs, wanted to show art in unusual spaces and converted mostly ex-commercial spaces to galleries and used them as a contrast and to protest against the 'stuffy' galleries in Cork Street. At the same time, the lack of arts

⁵⁹⁹ See Banksy in an Interview with Lauren Collins: Banksy Was Here. The invisible man of graffiti art. *New Yorker*, 14 May 2007.

⁶⁰⁰ Cedar Lewisohn: *Street Art. The Graffiti Revolution*. Tate Modern. London 2008, p. 120.

funding from Thatcher's government forced artists to choose such spaces for financial reasons and to make necessity a virtue. The beginning of the increasing commercialization of art is apparent in the choice of venue at that time. The first Saatchi Gallery was, significantly, previously a paint factory, the YBA exhibition spaces were mostly warehouses. The English term warehouse emphasizes (stored) consumer goods and reminds us of the German »Warenhaus« (department store) – the German translation of warehouse (Lagerhaus) puts in contrast a focus on storage (of wares).

In 2000, Banksy staged an illegal exhibition under a bridge in the now bohemian London district Shoreditch. For his »Turf War« exhibition in 2003, he chose a warehouse in east London. The exact location was revealed just shortly before – to make the event more »exciting«. Banksy's other exhibitions can also be seen as overall happenings, in which the artworks comprise one part of the artistic experience. Hirst and Banksy bore the signs of their era: the artists could not wait for or trust the decrepit public institutions who were afraid to experiment and innovate because of increasing privatization and impending subsidy cuts. Artists and spectators had to follow a 'self-optimization constraint', each one has to become a 'Me, Inc.', an artist-entrepreneur who has to be and control everything: creative artists, curators, distributors, press and public relations, and sometimes even art collectors.

»The effect of the new art and its form of display was a decided shift of power away from art-world professionals in the public sector (institutional curators and academic writers) to the artists themselves, their dealers, freelance curators and the mass media.«⁶⁰¹

Banksy and Hirst are aware of living in a society of consumption spectacle, so they increase the event-part, »all that jazz« of the artwork, making it an inseparable and principal part of the artwork. »*The best pieces were often those that found some way to respond to the environment.*«, wrote Stallabrass about the YBAs.⁶⁰² This statement also applies to Street Art and, in particular, to Banksy and other Street Artists whose art expresses a commentary on the physical and social location of the art in the same way that the circumstances of the installation / manufacturing forms a large part of the artistic statement and the quality of the artworks.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ Stallabrass 2006, p. 61.

⁶⁰² Ibid, p. 50.

⁶⁰³ See Sybille Metze-Prou und Bernhard van Treeck (Ed.): *Pochoir. Die Kunst des Schablonengraffiti*. Berlin 2000, p. 119.

Not only the exhibition-situation reflects the new commercialization of art, but at the same time, the production of art and most artists' homes/studios are as well. In London, for instance, the former industrial area of Hackney Wick became an artist colony⁶⁰⁴:

»The art business is an informal niche-economy '(Isabelle Graw); regulated working conditions are rare, self-exploitation is the rule. That nests of art production often sprang up in industrial areas was not random — there where the assembly line factories with time clocks once made their home, now the post-industrial creativity-precariat has spread out, in the form of small hand-craft enterprises, sometimes running 24 hours a day, because sleep is a luxury, and the next Biennial is waiting. »⁶⁰⁵

Art, the artist himself, and even the viewers have become commodities, which is evident in art and its production and exhibition venues. It reflects the world around the artists, which is influenced by consumer culture. While today's society (not just in London) is more so a consumer society than the educated middle-class society it had been in the 19 and early 20 century, this continues to influence our perception of both art and artists:

»The civil society made the artist, but made him distant from the market and misanthropic, as an idealistic poor wretch, to be knighted in a museum sometime after his death. [...] This legend of the *artiste maudit* [italics in original] still nourishes today's market criticism, which reproaches artists for their [particularly financial, note UB] success.«⁶⁰⁶

Both Banksy and Damien Hirst exhibit artistic positions that are often contrary to this view of art and artist, a fact that is most clearly observed through their dealings with the subject of consumption.

⁶⁰⁴ »From Chelsea to Camden Town, Clerkenwell to Shoreditch, arty-farties have a neat nose for squirrelling out the gentrified burbs of the future, but with even Dalston gone posh, where's a penniless artist to suffer now? The Wick.« Tom Dyckhoff: Let's move to ... Hackney Wick, east London. In: The Guardian Online 27 September 2008.

⁶⁰⁵ Holger Liebs: Mal gewinnt man, mal verlieren die anderen. SZ Online 17 May 2010 [SZ, 26 November 2008].

⁶⁰⁶ Holger Liebs: Mal gewinnt man, mal verlieren die anderen. SZ Online 17 May 2010 [SZ, 26 November 2008].

c) »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« (2007)



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Figure 46: Banksy, Hirst, Keep It Spotless (Defaced Hirst) (household paint and spray paint on canvas, signed and dated on the back), 214 x 305 cm, 2007, private collection.

Source: © Banksy, Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

»Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« from 2007 is a horizontal rectangular painting from the series »Pharmaceutical (Spot) Paintings« by Damien Hirst that Banksy altered, with Hirst's approval, for a charity event in February 2008 in part by adding his stencil »Maid« previously used several times on the street (figure) and elsewhere⁶⁰⁷ in 2006.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁷ Banksy's named this stencil »Maid« on his website.

⁶⁰⁸ »Keep It Spotless is a Damien Hirst Pharmaceutical (spot) painting which Banksy has defaced.« See Sotheby's website: (Auction) Red. Lot 34.



Figure 47: Banksy, Maid. (Stencil), London [facade of the White Cube Gallery 2006].

Source: Banksy.co.uk (Retrieved: 28 July 2006).

The analysis of »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)«, a work on canvas which was designed by Banksy and Hirst together, bridges this analysis of both of their artistic positions with special regard to their treatment of consumption. This particular Spot Painting, which Banksy changed with a stencil and spray paint, also serves as an example of Hirst's series of the same name. This interpretation focuses on Banksy's contribution, primarily because Hirst's interaction with Banksy is reduced to the fact that he merely allowed Banksy to work on and with his Spot Painting. Hence Banksy references Hirst but not vice versa, a fact, which nevertheless reveals new and different aspects of the Spot Paintings.

In the foreground, we see the larger than life figure of a maid, wearing an old-fashioned black knee-length dress with 3/4 length sleeves and a white apron. Banksy creates the illusion that the painted canvas behind her is being lifted up to reveal a wooden frame at the back. In this three-tiered illusion, the maid appears to be tipping the contents of the dustpan behind the paint-

ing while holding up the curtain-like canvas with her left hand. The »curtain« is Hirst's Spot Painting, which the slightly stooped young woman »lifts« with her left hand. Behind it, the painted wooden frame, executed by Banksy in *trompe l'Œil* (comparable to that of the Flemish baroque painter Gysbrechts), is visible along with the (also painted) back of the canvas. In addition, a broom stands on the edge of the picture frame. The maid looks furtively over her right shoulder, her mouth slightly open in concentration.

The title »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« refers to both Damien Hirst's series Spot Paintings and the name of the commercial website of a large window cleaning company near London.⁶⁰⁹ But even without this knowledge the title evokes associations about advertising slogans for clear skin or detergent. Another company name and logo could have influenced Banksy and Hirst. »Bristol Maid«, founded in 1951, a big South English »company focussing on design, manufacture, distribution and support of medical furniture and equipment«⁶¹⁰ which features a stencil-like image of a maid in its logo. »Bristol Maid« sounds like »Bristol made« – Banksy and Hirst where both born in Bristol. A cleaning maid refers in both the company and »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« to the medical cleanliness of products or Hirst's Spot Paintings.

Such advertising messages for consumers are quoted ironically and caricatured as dishonest and trite, while their catchy and also simple clarity is admired and imitated. Banksy takes this on in 2012, by adding »Sorry! the lifestyle you ordered is currently out of stock« and clumsy graffiti to another of Hirst's Spot Paintings.⁶¹¹ At the same time this can be seen as an ironic comment on the subversive and seductive power of ad slogans, a trend that is

⁶⁰⁹ See <http://www.keepitspotless.com/> (Retrieved: 21 September 2009). This company has existed for more than 15 years and could have inspired Banksy or Hirst with its' advertising slogan.

⁶¹⁰ [Http://www.bristolmaid.com/page.asp?id=abtOffer](http://www.bristolmaid.com/page.asp?id=abtOffer) (Retrieved: 21 September 2014).

⁶¹¹ In addition to »Keep It Spotless« (2007) and »Improved Spot Painting« (2009), Hirst and Banksy collaborated at least one more time, in 2012. Hirst mentioned it in an interview with Sean O'Hagan in »The Observer«, on 11 March 2012. Like in the case of »Maid« Banksy re-used an illegal street stencil (2012). He fittingly attached the consumption-critical work to an empty billboard on an unfinished and abandoned construction site for a building. For a photo of Banksy's Street Art stencil see <http://www.ukstreetart.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/polar3-460x306.jpg> (12 June 2014). In Hirst's artist book »The

reinforced by the title. In his Spot Paintings, Hirst also refers to the aforementioned positive, smooth, high-gloss finish of advertising posters and the products advertised.

214 It can be said that all of Hirst's regular Spot Paintings – not just »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« (figure 46) – feature demonstratively »immaculate« execution, but at the same time they are but blemishes or stains – spots – on a clean, white surface. This contrast can be found both in the title and in Banksy's »extension« in the form of his precisely executed »Maid«. »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« implies that something is perfect, and that it should remain so. Banksy presents his »Maid«-stencil in other versions, each on a crisp white painted canvas or a real wall. He showed it in his »Barely Legal« show in Los Angeles as a painting and he sprayed it illegally outside the White Cube Gallery in London. So the innocent and pure »white« is not only on the outside wall, but also a part of the location's name (see figure 47). Hirst's spots remain spots, as Banksy's precise and detailed executed »Maid«, who removes dirt, remains illegal Graffiti or recalls such – if or because the viewers know Banksy's Street Art works and (illegal) operations.

The lowering of the curtain draws attention to the materiality of the painting. Hirst's Spot Painting is perceived and interpreted by Banksy as a separate reality. Banksy shows the canvas frame, so he points to the fact that it is »just« a painting. Therefore calling attention to the object itself and the manufacturing thereof. »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« was auctioned on 14 February 2008 for a surprising 1.87 million U.S. dollars to an unidentified telephone bidder during the anti-AIDS charity art auction RED, an event initiated by Hirst and the famous rock singer Bono⁶¹² (and organized

Complete Spot Paintings« (2011, p. 815) it is called »Cinochomeranic Acid (2007)« by Hirst/Banksy. As Banksy used his stencil 5 years later for the first time, date and title are almost certainly just the title of the work Hirst gave Banksy *before* he altered it with partly readable graffiti and slogan. The graffiti says »All city« (meaning a writer in New York in the 1970s whose works are everywhere. Maybe the other letters, a »T«, an »x« in an »o« and a »c« refer to the tagger »Toxic«, who had to go to court in 2011, where the prosecutor told the jury: »he's no Banksy«. Banksy referred to Tox in a few street pieces after that. See Caroline Davies: 'Tox' graffiti artist convicted of criminal damage. *Guardian Online*, 7 June 2011, and Lee Moran: Banksy uses 'tag' of jailed graffiti artist Tox as latest artwork appears on London street. *Daily Mail*, 24 June 2011.

⁶¹² Banksy mentioned Bono already in an interview with Beale in 2004 as a supporter of his art. See Beale 2004, p. 153.

by the auction house Sotheby's and Hirst's New Yorker gallery Gagosian). The estimated price (250,000 to 350,000 U.S. dollars) was only about one-sixth of what it actually sold for.⁶¹³

One year before, Banksy had given a photograph of another illegal version of his »Maid« to Bono for publication, although the latter already filched it (without Banksy's permission) for his anti-AIDS campaign: Using the »Maid« apparently to show the West's reluctance to deal with important issues such as AIDS in Africa.⁶¹⁴ The West's behavior was reminiscent of the well-known saying »sweeping it under the carpet«. Banksy denied such a concrete interpretation.⁶¹⁵ This is nevertheless applicable to »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« because Banksy later put this artwork in the service of the anti-AIDS campaign.

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According to Bono, the maid is a stooge or representative of »the West«, or the Western industrial nations, on whose behalf she clears away unpleasant things, or problems such as AIDS, as if they were »dirty« or at least invisible. The maid furtively removes dirt and hides it behind a curtain, apparently because she is too lazy to properly dispose of it. Her peeping look shows she works against the will of her »master« or that she is doing something wrong. The »master« would therefore be the world and the developed nations, which should take care of problems such as AIDS. Instead of AIDS, the dirt could stand for environmental destruction, corruption, torture, or similar topics. In any case, capitalism and (excess) consumption are indirectly attacked as well, when the question is posed as to why the maid or the West would act against their responsibility: »Greed«, to consume even more?

The answer of the work is »*plakativ*« (German expression for »striking«, literally translated »like a billboard poster«), an adjective that recalls the influence of advertisements featuring such easy clichés. The term »spot« can also be understood in the sense of »commercial«. Banksy's »black-and-white attitude« stencil is literally a »cliché«, an expression derived from the printing

⁶¹³ See Red is called »*The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria*« Lisa Zeitz: Die erfolgreichste Benefiz-Auktion aller Zeiten. F.A.Z. 16 February 2008. No. 40, p. 44. See also Sotheby's website: (Auction) Red. Lot 34.

⁶¹⁴ See Arifa Akbar: Banksy takes to streets to highlight Aids crisis. Independent Online 16 May 2006.

⁶¹⁵ Maxine Frith: Charities praise RED edition of 'Independent'. The Independent Online 18 May 2006. See also Dan Carrier: Banksy clears up the mystery of his chambermaid in Chalk Farm. Camden News Journal 18 May 2006, p. 3. A scan of this article was temporarily on Banksy's homepage.

term »set-off«. Hirst's Spots are also designed with technical aids like dividers. Both working modes suggest something simple, schematic, effective, easy, and often reproducible, which can be used to make money, as is the case with a mass consumer product. Nevertheless, this consumer product, the painting »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)«, is and undoubtedly wants to be (at least superficially) a tool in the good cause of the fight against AIDS.

Hirst's artwork in the series of »Pharmaceutical (Spot) Paintings« reacts in this regard to the subject of the auction, in that there is a painting that is inspired by drug design, names, and packaging, auctioned to raise money for (at least ostensibly) the fight against a disease.⁶¹⁶ Art cures the world. Also, the charity event united Banksy and Hirst in »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« insofar as both were pursuing an explicitly political statement here, which is normal for Banksy⁶¹⁷, but unusual for Hirst.⁶¹⁸ In fact, the rather apolitical artist Hirst could be accused (not entirely wrongly) of using charity events as advertisement for himself and his artwork, that is exploiting charity: *The auction was »[t] he most successful charity auction ever« to date. Already »AIDS charity events in the 1980s proved to be unusually effective advertising and marketing strategies.«*⁶¹⁹ The problem of AIDS, which is »unprofitable« for the Western industrialized nations, becomes, according to this slightly cynical view, at least indirectly »profitable« for celebrities like Hirst:

»The celebrity draws a commercial benefit from charity events. He gets photographed, polishes his image, sponsors court him. He demonstrates his membership in the class of charity-qualified celebrities. All this is important for his reputation, his popularity, his contacts and at the end of the chain, for example, the amount of remuneration for his endorsement deals.«⁶²⁰

The artwork, which was influenced by advertising slogans and the visual appearance of advertising was promptly also used by advertising, namely by the

⁶¹⁶ Best bid got a pharmaceutical cabinet by Hirst that contained drugs against AIDS. See Zeitz 2008.

⁶¹⁷ Johannes Stahl would say: not everything that could be seen as political is meant to be political. See *id.* 2009, p. 88. But his point of view is just based on visual content. The act itself is political even if the visual content is not obviously political, like in the case of the maid.

⁶¹⁸ Hirst avoids oral or artificial statements about topics of everyday politics. See Liebs 2010.

⁶¹⁹ Mark C: Taylor: Duty-Free-Shopping. In: *Shopping*. 2002, p. 47.

⁶²⁰ See Marc Schürmann: *Runter vom Teppich!* In: *Neon* February 2009, p. 35.

previously mentioned company Smarties, which Hirst named as association/inspiration. In 2008, the food artist Prudence Emma Staite created her version of »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« out of Smarties (figure 48) for an advertising campaign for this consumer product.⁶²¹

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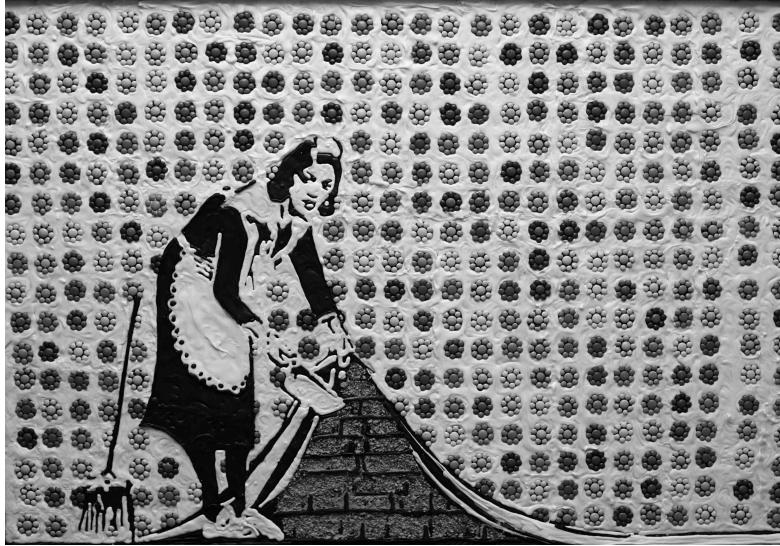


Figure 48: Staite, Banksy Keep It Spotless (Defaced Hirst), chocolate lentils on canvas, 2008.

Source: Frank PR, London, picture rights by Nestlé and Prudence Emma Staite.

The one-sided interpretation of Bono's commitment regarding AIDS paints the maid alone in a bad light, a view that Banksy contradicts when he talks

⁶²¹ See Daily Mail Online: Tasteful art: Food artist recreates famous works using Smarties. Daily Mail Online 16 April 2008. Staite recreated a different version of »Keep it Spotless« available only in digital form on the internet. It shows a brick wall instead of the backside of a canvas and is most likely based on a photo of a Banksy-maid on canvas for his Barely Legal exhibition in 2006 that was combined with a different Spot Painting by Hirst most likely with the help of Photoshop, most likely by a fan. A photo of this digital brick-Maid was »Taken on January 26, 2008« according to the flickr-page of »eddie dangerous«, that is a few weeks before the Sotheby's auction. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/eddiedangerous/2221103007/> (26 June 2014).

about his »Maid«: »*People are always complaining Graffiti makes the place look untidy. I wonder if that still applies to Graffiti which is actually doing some tidying up.*«⁶²² Even if »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« is no longer Graffiti, it is reminiscent of it anyway. Banksy's name evokes this for the viewer and the same stencil has already been used several times illegally.

Furthermore, in the auction catalogue, the subtitle of »Keep it Spotless« is »defaced Hirst«. The term »defaced« is more often used for scribbles or spray paint on walls than for canvases, but draws attention to the unusual fact that a Street Artist has »defaced« a »recognized« artist. The artwork merges with the brand name – like in Naomi Klein's »brands not products«⁶²³. Banksy's comment refers more to the production process than to what is portrayed and/or to their interconnectedness. On Hirst's side, not his Spot Painting itself – one of hundreds – is unusual, but the fact that he, as an established artist on the level of other major players in the art market such as Peter Blake, Jeff Koons, and Georg Baselitz, collaborated with the underdog and illegal sprayer Banksy. This gives Banksy a boost, positioning Street Art or Graffiti next to renowned gallery art, while at the same time giving Hirst credibility and attention among a new, younger audience who could be potential future buyers. Hirst's outdated »*enfant terrible*« image received a fresh infusion of »street credibility«.

Like other Hirst works analyzed here, the artistic merit in »Keep it Spotless« must be understood as a symbolically loaded act with performance character. Furthermore, the painted curtain points to a performance, the maid stands in front of a *mise en scène* contemporary *trompe l'Œil* as if on a stage – in analogy to the title one might say: Spot on! This view is supported through the »illusionist« presentation of »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« in the gallery space, where the »Maid« and the lower canvas frame stand directly on the floor.

Though she does it secretly and ineffectively, the maid removes rubbish. Banksy, who also creates Street Art, or negatively formulated, he stains walls, uses this »cleaning« Graffiti to also discuss the question of whether Graffiti is art or rubbish, and what makes it different from Hirst's art. To answer this question, a brief look at a second, similar collaboration of the two artists is helpful.

⁶²² Banksy quoted in Carrier 2006.

⁶²³ Klein 2000, p. 21.

In »Improved Spot Painting« from 2009 (figure 49) Banksy painted a rat dressed as a house painter or construction worker that is about to paint very inaccurately over parts of the Hirst-specific color circles of another Spot Painting with grey paint. The rat treats Hirst's spots like illegal Graffiti in a public space and paints over them, to »improve« them. The term »illegal spots« is often used in connection with Graffiti and has a strong local connotation. The maid in »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« and the rat in »Improved Spot Painting« both stand on the bottom of the canvas and pause, as if they are doing something clandestine or even illicit. This secretive »attitude« causes the viewer to question who is giving the rat his marching orders, and whether the rat is working independently or is officially authorized to carry out this work. For his illegal work on the street, Banksy often uses the disguise of a construction worker to divert attention from his actions⁶²⁴ and rats are also considered to be his characteristic feature and his alter ego. Therefore, the rat could be a Street Artist in disguise. His »uniform«, which identifies him as a worker, implies, however, that the rat was commissioned by officials to paint over the spots. The fact that he paints over the spots so sloppily, however, seems to indicate that he is not a professional painter but rather a construction worker.

The larger setting remains unclear: Hirst's Spot Painting and the fact that it is a painting in a gallery indicates an indoor space, a museum or gallery, the white background to a white cube. The plot, however, indicates an outdoor space. The same rat shows up in other Banksy works, where it paints over Graffiti (figure 50), or a character that is reminiscent of Picasso's style (figure 51). Maybe Banksy knew that Picasso also drew Graffiti, which he saw on the streets of Paris and even left some in Montmartre as he told the photographer Brassaï in 1945.⁶²⁵ The photographer had already documented Graffiti in Paris before 1933 and published photos and thoughts about the art theory of Graffiti in the surrealist magazine *Minotaure*, which

⁶²⁴ Banksy was photographed without noticing it doing Street Art dressed as a roadman in 2007. See Daily Mail: Caught in the act: First picture of guerrilla graffiti artist Banksy. Daily Mail online 31 October 2007. He also advises to dress like a roadman in »Wall and piece«. Banksy 2005, p. 238.

⁶²⁵ See Brassaï: Gespräche mit Picasso. [German Original 1960, French version 1964] Hamburg 1985, p. 136.

had a big influence on the new discovery and appreciation of Graffiti.⁶²⁶ Banksy's rat with the paint roller treats Hirst, Picasso, and Graffiti equally. That the rat paints over all of them raises each to the level of recognized contemporary art. On the other hand, the rat treats each as scribbles defacing a wall. Here Banksy again calls art authorities into question, who or what is classified as art or scribbles or defacement?



Figure 49: Banksy, Improved Spot Painting (painting), Banksy Versus Bristol Museum Exhibition 2009, emulsion, matte, household gloss and oil paint on canvas, 34 x 58 in (863.6 x 1473.2 mm), (2 inch spots), 2009.

Source: © Banksy and Damien Hirst and Science Ltd.. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

The maid's infringement against her master can be read (as opposed to Bono's interpretation) as a personification of quiet, clandestine resistance against authorities, which is connected to Graffiti or Street Art, regardless of what is sprayed or written (simply through the self-authorized act) that challenges entrenched power structures, and thus can be seen as political.

⁶²⁶ See Brassai: Du mur des cavernes au mur d'usine. In: Minotaure 3/4, Paris, 1933, p.6.



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Figure 50: Banksy Rat with Roller (spray paint and emulsion on canvas), 61 x 79 cm, 2006.

source: <http://www.brooklynstreetart.com/theBlog/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/brooklyn-street-art-banksy-rat-with-roller-2006-whole-in-the-wall-show.jpg> (Retrieved 12 March 2011).



Figure 51: Banksy, Banksy, Rat with Roller (pencil / colored pencil drawing), 29.5 x 21.9 cm.

Source: <http://www.artificialgallery.co.uk/banksy/rat-with-roller-original-drawing/> (Retrieved 12 March 2011).

Although the »Maid« can be interpreted as a generally active opponent of authorities or concretely possessing a passive ignorance towards AIDS, Banksy arguably had more of the prior, active interpretation in mind, especially when one considers his other, often very positive, working-class protagonists, who are always actively changing something.

Similarly, the previously described process of applying as well as the production costs of Street Art in comparison with their effect can be interpreted as critical of consumption:

»A big part of the thing is the fact that I've only ever used card [board, n. UB] that was for free. I can get a can for 60 p, that's good for 30 Stencils, and then the cost of a couple of disposable blades and that's it. It's really important to me that you can have a huge street campaign that could get you famous in a month if you went nuts, and it would cost you about a tenner [...].«⁶²⁷

In the early days at least, Banksy considered gallery art a waste of money and resources. Unlike Damien Hirst, Banksy emphasized the material worthlessness of the means of his art, which demonstratively should be *not* a financially valuable consumer product; but instead should criticize this type of art »valuation«. Most anti-commercial Street Art like the »Maid« (as described previously in the form of photographs) became, despite its sometimes anti-consumerist content, a consumer product. Still, Banksy viewed her as an example of »more democracy in art«:

»In the bad old days, it was only popes and princes who had the money to pay for their portraits to be painted [...]. This is a portrait of a maid called Leanne who cleaned my room in a Los Angeles motel. She was quite a feisty lady.«⁶²⁸

The fact that a maid became portrait and picture-worthy can be seen in the tradition of realism in the 19th century. With »popes and princes«, however, Banksy refers to times before that. At the same time, with his Street Art version of the »Maid«, he emphasizes the relationship between power, wealth, and art, which is called into question in terms of content (by showing »on-

⁶²⁷ Shoki: A Chat with Banksy [Interview]. In: Big Daddy Magazine Edition 07/2001. Unpaged.

⁶²⁸ Banksy quoted in Carrier 2006, p. 3.

ly« a maid) and of form, because Street Art can neither be converted directly to cash nor is it consumable.⁶²⁹

The facial features of the maid suggest African or South American roots, which can be seen as a reference to the often poor or disadvantaged situation of immigrants in industrialized nations: the servants from the »Third World« are exploited by the masters from the »First World«, on the one hand as their resources in the Third World countries, such as diamonds, coffee, and rain forests are turned into profit by the West, and on the other hand in a personal way, since illegal immigrants often face slave-like labor conditions. All this can be more broadly understood as a critique of consumer society, thus the »maid« is more the victim than the perpetrator. In addition, her African features specifically »fit« the »AIDS in Africa« problem.

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For (at least ostensibly) a non-profit project, the »most commercial« artist in the world, Damien Hirst, and the »anti-commercial« Street Artist Banksy joined forces to create a joint work that demonstrates this paradox. Banksy does not just refer to Hirst, but also to Hirst's status as a figure in the art world. Critics may argue that »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« is just a second-class work because it was designed »only« for a charity, for which artists do not usually »squander« their best work. But it is the other way around. The repetitive nature of both Banksy's stencils and of Hirst's Spot Paintings, the repetition inherent in the hundredfold reproduction of series of spots, led to the representative unification of Banksy's stencils in the form of the famous »Maid« and Hirst's Spot Paintings in »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« – both are franchised products designed for reproducibility, combined to make something unique.

This is to date the most expensive of Banksy's works and also one of the most expensive of Damien Hirst's Spot Paintings. As previously mentioned, Hirst's share was to provide his work for this collaboration. With »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« Banksy and Hirst united each of their brands for an advertising campaign for the benefit of both. As the late Andy Warhol created art with the young, ambitious, artist Keith Haring⁶³⁰ in 1983, an

⁶²⁹ Banksy's critics would counter he advertises on the street for himself, his prints and books. If this line of thought is pursued further there would be no non-commercial art.

⁶³⁰ Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 68.

artist with Graffiti roots; or as he promoted Basquiat⁶³¹; Damien Hirst also needed Banksy (as already mentioned) to provide him with fresh blood and to assert his celebrity status even with »re-growing« art consumers. Hirst oscillates between the artist Warhol and the collector Saatchi because he works not only with other artists but also collects and buys art by Banksy or, for instance, his Street Art colleague Paul Insect. Banksy also promotes artists. For example, Banksy promoted artists by extending invitations to participate in the Cans Festival in 2008, which he directed.

A similar principle from advertising is called cross-promotion.⁶³² In cross-promotion, at least two advertisers (Hirst and Banksy) communicate with one another and transport a consistent message (»Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)«) for target groups that are relevant for both; in the present case, the (young) art world. In the pop music industry, to which both artists repeatedly relate, this strategy is common.⁶³³

In addition, a trend is thereby reflected that set a precedent especially since Warhol: He was not only an artist but also an entrepreneur, model, editor, (film) producer, et cetera. In the 1960s the artist and his ware turned into a commodity⁶³⁴, an all-round product, or in Warhol's oft-quoted words: »*Good business is the best art.*«⁶³⁵ Yet even more consistently, the former cotton broker Jeff Koons pursued this trend, as did Keith Haring with his Pop Shop in the 1980s. From about the 1980s onward big commercial companies no longer only wanted to be the largest in their field, they also wanted their own radio station, newspaper company, theme parks, consumer products, books and music⁶³⁶; following the motto »*If you aren't everywhere you are nowhere*«⁶³⁷ From then on, large corporations pursued the idea of producing and promoting brands rather than products, which were out-

⁶³¹ See Martin Walkner: Andy Warhol Collaborations. In: Cathérine Hug, Thomas Mießgang (Ed.): *Street & Studio. From Basquiat to Séripop.* Exhibition catalogue. Kunsthalle Vienna. Nürnberg 2010, p. 296-301.

⁶³² Klein 2000, p. 145.

⁶³³ Similarly Madonna (active since the early 1980s) honored the two young female singers Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera with a high profile scandal kiss in 2003. Magazin Stern: Madonna küsst Britney und Christina. Stern Online 18 September 2003.

⁶³⁴ See *Pop Life.* Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 13.

⁶³⁵ Quoted *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶³⁶ Klein 2000, p. 147.

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

sourced to suppliers⁶³⁸, while corporations now just manufactured a unique brand image.⁶³⁹

Consumption and the consumer product are seen here as the point of confluence between art and life sought by Dada and Fluxus artists. The 1960s brought »pop into art« and the 1980s brought »art into pop«. Haring's Pop Shop is, according to Jack Bankowsky, a masterpiece that combined art and commerce, »art and publicity«, art and life.⁶⁴⁰ Haring renounced the mediator between art and life by selling his art directly. Hirst did the same in his »Other Criteria« stores (starting in 2005), where he sold works from over 80 artists, including his own pieces. As in the case of the Pop Shop, anyone could buy art there. Like Haring, Hirst also offered some items quite cheaply.⁶⁴¹ Thus Hirst realizes and enacts the democratization of art through consumption. Since 2002 even Banksy and his company POW (Pictures on Walls), founded with Steve(n) Lazarides, has sold Banksy's prints and those from other Street Artists online and later as a shop/gallery.

By applying marketing and advertising strategies Hirst and Banksy use techniques that grab the audience to promote (Banksy) or refresh/assert (Hirst) their own reputation and, in this way, »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« emphasizes the state of artwork as a consumer product.

In his collaboration with Hirst, the gallery artist, Banksy, the Street Artist, also criticizes the commercialization of public spaces, even though »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)« is not Street Art by definition but its content references Street Art.

⁶³⁸ See *ibid*, p. 3

⁶³⁹ See *ibid*, p. 4.

⁶⁴⁰ See Bankowsky in *Pop Life*. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 29.

⁶⁴¹ See Cullinan in *Pop Life*. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 68.

d) The Location Reference – Street (and) Art

»The city is no longer the politico-industrial zone that it was in the nineteenth century, it is the zone of signs, the media and the code. By the same token, its truth no longer lies in its geographical situation, as it did for the factory or even the traditional ghetto. Its truth, enclosure in the signform, lies all around us.

It is the ghetto of television and advertising, the ghetto of consumers and the consumed, of readers read in advance, encoded decoders of every message, those circulating in, and circulated by, the subway, leisure-time entertainers and the entertained, etc.«⁶⁴²

Baudrillard

In »Improved Spot Painting« (also implicit in »Keep it Spotless (Defaced Hirst)«) Street Art/Graffiti is explicitly used to criticize the commercialization of the public space. If a Picasso, Graffiti, and a Hirst are on the same level, then the work propagates the opinion that what is called (or recognized as) high art is completely subjective. The »unenlightened« street workers would also paint over Picasso, if his work were affixed to the »wrong« place, like on the street. This work criticizes the categorical removal of Graffiti from public spaces, even though it might possibly have artistic value. Either those who pay for it or those who are »in power« may normally shape a public space as in the case of advertising: *The corporate hijacking of political power is as responsible for the mood as the brands' cultural looting of public and mental space.*⁶⁴³ This is not about the usual thesis of advertising critics who see people as stupid and malleable, this is more generally about the impact on public spaces, democracy, and cultural freedom.⁶⁴⁴ What the average Joe sees on the street should either stimulate consumption (advertising), inform passers-by (signs), or serve an artistic purpose (mostly sculptures) – which were approved and paid by the public sector and always comply with the client at least in a way:

⁶⁴² Baudrillard 1978, p. 21. Translation: <http://lpdme.org/projects/jeanbaudrillard/koolkiller.pdf> [accessed October 2014]

⁶⁴³ Klein 2000, p. 340.

⁶⁴⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 303.

»The difference between transmitters and receivers, between producers and consumers must remain total, for in it appears the real form of social power today.«⁶⁴⁵

According to Bolz the modern market is »the invisible architect of our cities. [...] The city is no longer aesthetically visualized through the art of the architect, but rather the statistics of empirically calculated consumption. [...] Thus, the map turns into a topological simulation system that calculates numerically measurable factors: risks, resources, costs, consumer behavior, migrations, etc.«⁶⁴⁶ In particular, the city is split into »brand zones«, and shopping becomes »a key variant of tourism«.⁶⁴⁷ »[In the city, n. UB] shops provide customers with brand-name products, which act as signals to the others, a sign of recognition and understanding even outside of such temples of consumption. The urban space, the forum that serves as the primary space for public encounters, has been long since either replaced or completely taken over by shops.«⁶⁴⁸

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Legal public art is mostly uplifting, cheerful, and/or abstract in a »nice«, non-offensive way. Provocative art can or should only be provocative, where viewers expect it, especially in appropriate places, such as art museums, galleries, and exhibitions:

»Don't artists create bombs? Indeed, spray bombs; for example, they create explosive compositions with immediate effect or with long fuses. Where are explosive compositions defused? Answer: in art halls, museums, and galleries – shrewdly and cleverly devised spaces devoid of taboos: HERE, dear artist, is the place where you may express yourself, this is your location, your own little spot!«⁶⁴⁹

Here, viewers are prepared for the idea that they will be »neatly« provoked in a controlled environment; to a certain point they even expect a provocation. One can insinuate that this officially approved and funded art only represents and propagates the opinion of the powerful. Tongue-in-cheek, the »little people on the street« should remain passers-by, running from A to B and spending as little time on the street as possible, so they have more time to

⁶⁴⁵ Baudillard 1978, p. 23.

⁶⁴⁶ Bolz 2002, p. 116

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 116

⁶⁴⁸ Max Hollein: Shopping. 2002, p. 15.

⁶⁴⁹ Quoted in »Zurich Sprayer« Harald Naegli: Mein Revoltieren, mein Sprayen. Zürich 1979, p. 174.

increase the gross domestic product, or to fulfill their primary duty as a citizen – to consume: »The real street, in this scenario, is sterile, a place to move through not to be in. It exists only as an aid to somewhere else – through a shop window, billboard or petrol tank.«⁶⁵⁰

If artists are artistically active without a contract, the result is usually uniformly branded as vandalism. Thus, Street Art/Graffiti is, on the one hand, deprived of the characterization as art, on the other hand, this artwork is persecuted as an attack on the general public interest, and thus on the alleged collective will.

Although gray concrete blocks are no longer considered by many urban planners to be a simple, clear contemporary_solution, but rather »eye-sores« or »architectural sins«, a breeding ground for neglect and misery, they are still not allowed to be »defaced«_illegally, even though they could possibly thereby become more »human«. The majority of Graffiti artists, like Blek Le Rat, himself a trained artist, do not spray on »beautiful« or aesthetically designed areas: in fact, Graffiti and, even less so, Street Art, is found on churches or historic buildings only in exceptional cases, as these structures were often already built in a »decorated« way, i.e. with ornamentation.⁶⁵¹ This fact draws a connection between ornamentation and Street Art. According to Hans Sedlmayr, architectural ornamentation creates a connection between people and things⁶⁵², to some extent humanizing architecture. Just like Street Art, ornamentation serves no direct, purely functional, financially measurable purpose, but rather an indirect one, for which the term »edification« is still not enough. Not the function, but the human, not the pure consumption, but the social, architecture's ornamentation should extend the invitation to linger.

⁶⁵⁰ Reclaim the Streets London quoted in Klein 2000, p. 323.

⁶⁵¹ Street Artists like Blek disapprove this completely. See Pochoir 2000, p. 77.

⁶⁵² See Hans Sedlmayr: Die Revolution der modernen Kunst. Hamburg 1955, p. 46.

By now some rethinking (thanks to Banksy) has taken place in this regard. In London⁶⁵³, Bristol⁶⁵⁴, et cetera, for instance, local officials recognized that Street Art might also be something worthy of protection in the community, which, like a historic building, is part of the urban landscape, and thus part of the residents' identity. Because it is now commercially exploitable, Street Art is now a landmark, a place of interest, which is suddenly worthy of protection:

»Even some quarters in Berlin have now become an open air museum. Increasing numbers of tourists flock to the trendy neighborhoods, where there is plenty of conspicuous rebelliousness to admire. As good as nothing is scrubbed clean anymore, instead, agencies now offer Street Art walking tours. Sites like goarthberlin.de promise real »Berlin scenes« for 85 Euros, »on bicycle by request«. The sneaker giant Adidas has developed a Berlin Street Art app for the iPhone. And on property websites, homeowners advertise apartments in trendy neighborhoods with Street Art already on the building façade.«⁶⁵⁵

Banksy uses his Street Art to criticize general commerce – that is, a solely profit-driven interest – not only in the content of his art, as in the examples above, but also, in fact particularly, in the form of his work on the street. By the non-commercial, illegal placement of his Street Art, Banksy agitates against advertising and commerce in public spaces and for freer, not only purely commercial handling. Banksy's incorporation of a power line in »Very Little Helps« or of the Ikea towers in »Ikea punk« show that Street Artists can and should playfully incorporate the urban landscape, like skateboarders⁶⁵⁶ or break-dancers do.

Banksy's illegal placement of Street Art, his constructive disruptions, which all feature a motif of interruption, allow (in this struggle for definition

⁶⁵³ Banksy's »IKEA Punk« was voted to remain and declared worthy of being taken care of by 90% of those surveyed in the London suburb of Sutton. See Leanne Fender: Entire Banksy mural removed by Croydon-Beddington wall's owners. Sutton Guardian Online 11 November 2009.

⁶⁵⁴ One of Banksy's illegal works was officially declared an alternative landmark of Bristol in 2007. See BBC News Online: Alternative Landmark of Bristol. BBC News Online 18 September 2007.

⁶⁵⁵ Adrian Picksh in: Das Ende der Straße. In: Der Freitag. No. 20. 20 May 2010, p. 26.

⁶⁵⁶ Brad Downey interviewed by Patrick Nguyen and Stuart MacKenzie (Ed.): Beyond the Street. Berlin 2010, p. 335.

of dominance in the street) room for possible new interpretations, to make architecture, these petrified symbols for cultural and social values, again public. »The antisocial pose is a form of social membership« Peter Womack writes about satire in English Renaissance drama. Also the satirist Banksy is »a judge and a criminal«⁶⁵⁷ at the same time.

⁶⁵⁷ See Peter Womack: English Renaissance Drama. New York 2006, p. 89-91.

6) Artistic strategies for Dealing with Consumer Phenomena (Conclusion)

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»The methods and special effects of modern shopping – the endlessness, the excessiveness, the over abundance, the crafted fireworks of colors and shapes, the emphasis on superficiality and the ease of decipherment find resonance in their classification, fascination, beauty and perfidy not only in our media society but also in the art of the time.«⁶⁵⁸

Max Hollein, curator

Which attitude does Hirst take towards consumption? What strategies does the artist use to escape leave the consumer cycle? How does Hirst make an issue out of capitalism in his art? Generally speaking, Hirst exaggerates the radical secularization of our society.

On a superficial level, citing other works, sometimes almost to the level of being parasitic, Damien Hirst's content engages with general, timeless themes such as death, religion, love, or norms and value(s) – abstract concepts that are independent of current political, socio-cultural backgrounds that »somehow always« fit. Thus, as in the case of multinational and global brands, his product presentation is universally applicable.⁶⁵⁹ Hence Hirst's art remains often commonplace, vague, and superficial, reflecting the culture of consumption. What Ullrich says of consumer products can be transferred to Hirst's art as well:

»But where do the things that products have to offer go beyond familiar chains of association? [...] The fact that most manufacturers are content to create a screen onto which many different consumers may project their lives and interpretations, should already suffice as an answer to this question [...]: Most narratives die after the second and third associations.
«⁶⁶⁰

Hirst seeks to avoid judgement in his art. He created works to last by using materials and motifs that should outlast the present age – his art tries to be the opposite of ephemeral art. Hirst pretends in his art that it would survive

⁶⁵⁸ Max Hollein in Shopping. 2002, p. 14.

⁶⁵⁹ Klein 2000, p. 116.

⁶⁶⁰ Ullrich 2006, p. 196-197.

in a time in which the fact that nothing lasts forever is common knowledge. The artist deals with a phenomenon described by Bolz: »The more modern, that is differentiated, collaborative work-sharing, and therefore unclear society becomes, the greater the desire for unity and wholeness [...]« at least for the individual or for the (potential) buyer/viewer:

»Instead of living embedded in a self-assured family or clan that lasts over generations and acting as a part of the whole [...], he [man, n. UB] is himself – though quite small – a whole. [...] Independence and self-determination therefore result, not insignificantly, in a reduced chance to exist beyond one's own biological life.«⁶⁶¹

Consumer culture attempts to fill this hole by using wholeness-givers with proven integrity. Similar to the consumer culture, Hirst ironically emulates unity and dependable wholeness in his art for the viewer, drawing particularly from the imagery and inscribed value of other areas, such as religion, medicine, and advertising, in his words: »I look for impulses, levers, triggers for my art and find them in science, religion, and art.«⁶⁶²

»Modern design and marketing, supported by numerous sciences, have brought it to the point that it can be said that things have the same capabilities as works of art have had for two hundred years: they pave the way for memories, fictionalize the world of everyday life, transform identities, open perspectives for the future.«⁶⁶³

Hirst moves in the opposite direction and applies the achievements of public relations, advertising, marketing, design, psychology, sociology, and consumer research to help to create art that appears to be mechanically perfect.

Hirst appears to only show consumption phenomena, without taking sides. That is, he pretends to emphasize merely that the shown phenomena are worth seeing, but not whether what is seen should be evaluated as good or bad. In this way Hirst makes himself simultaneously an observer, critic, and supporter of our consumer expectations. Through his symbolic and decidedly sensational presentation of consumer products he shows that in a

⁶⁶¹ Ullrich 2006, p. 26.

⁶⁶² Hirst interviewed by Holger Liebs: Damien Hirst über Glauben. SZ. 11 April 2010. Hirst re-translated from German: »Ich suche nach Impulsen, Hebeln, Auslösern für meine Kunst und finde sie in Wissenschaft, Religion und Kunst.«

⁶⁶³ Ibid, p. 193.

consumer society »between the symbolic and the spectacular [...] no distinction [is] possible [...].«⁶⁶⁴

Hirst creates not only art, but also ironic luxury items and status symbols. The artist pokes fun at the one-sidedness and the cliché of typical, critical consumerism platitudes – even in the case of his own works.

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Damien Hirst shows man's relationship to things in the way he defines himself as an artist by the possession and consumption of things. He must not (or only in very rare cases) represent people in general, because as human beings, their hopes, desires, and fears are reflected in Hirst's things, his art/consumer products, sometimes quite literally: »Often the question can be posed; who is the consumer and who is the product – or whether both worlds have been one for quite some time now?«⁶⁶⁵ In a contemporary consumer society man himself has become a work of art or an object of consumption, a self-branded »me, inc.«. As in the case of the machinations of Gunter von Hagens, sometimes after death the human body itself becomes (albeit dressed up by science) a consumer product.

»So people adopt strategies of the brand manufacturers and conversely provide themselves as projection screens, which offer the fulfillment of the visible wishes that are currently most vivid. They become simultaneously consumer products and consumers, although as the latter they are always waiting for a better deal [...].«⁶⁶⁶

Viewers of Hirst's art see the reflection of their humanity, their desires, and their expectations in his works. The death of the old ideologies in the Western world has left capitalism as the sole meaning-bearer : »[...] today external grounding or anchoring forces are offered neither by religion nor by the nation, neither the family nor the revolutionary idea. This makes the emergence of consumerism as a substitute for religion understandable.«⁶⁶⁷

Quite a child of post modernity, Damien Hirst is no longer just an observer and seismograph of his time, who saw the death of the author and the the end of ideologies, but he participates in his time and he becomes complicit in it as »[i]n a system without meaning there is no more innocence«⁶⁶⁸.

⁶⁶⁴ Baudrillard 1978, p. 10.

⁶⁶⁵ Max Hollein in Shopping. 2002, p. 14.

⁶⁶⁶ Eva Illouz in Die Tageszeitung, 26 April 2004, p. 13. Quoted in Ullrich 2006, p. 55.

⁶⁶⁷ Bolz 2002, p. 98.

⁶⁶⁸ Baudrillard 1978, p. 11.

By meticulously, quite contrary to the principle of *l'art pour l'art*, meeting potential consumer demands, which at least superficially include both consumer wishes and consumer criticism.

Hirst's consumer-paradise-like illusion has the threat to be dismissed as kitsch, as mechanical »starry-eyed idealism« or do-goodism in the current post-modern consumer society of a buyer/viewer who knows every trick in the advertising and sales books. The artist counters that with different types of alleviation or stabilization the the much-cited »break« that is often achieved by irony, (de-) placement, over-identification, or a controlled »shock«.

a) Hirst's Illusion of Consumer Paradise

i) The Controlled »Shock«

Hirst exploits classic kitsch motifs and appeals to »the feeling«, the old longing for a perfect world, unclouded optimism and sweetness, to be satisfied visually. Like Warhol and Koons he creates art that should primarily be pleasing (also the masses) and it therefore often balances on the edge of kitsch and art.

The knowledge that Hirst used real dead animals is inherent in the act of consuming his work, as is the knowledge that Banksy attached his artworks under illegal and adventurous circumstances, something that provides also Hirst's works with authenticity through little, controlled »shocks.« In particular »kitschy« images of animals can already be found in Koons' work (Hirst's predecessor). Koons reaches this controlled »shock« through »wrong« material (a Balloon Dog made of steel), unusually large size (a »puppy« sculpture more than 12 meters high), and discrepancy with the location (»Gazing balls« in a museum).

Reality comes into play in the case of Hirst. However, the associations shift from »sweet« fairytales and children's illustrations to serious issues of life and death. Strictly speaking, the controlled »shock« that Hirst's art might trigger can also be seen as a postmodern version of kitsch adapted to the present. His art satisfies kitsch and, at the same time, pretends to be the opposite. Ultimately, he wants his art to be both pleasing and easily consumed. So the artist tries to solve a common problem of consumer culture: »Comfort

*gained, pleasure lost.*⁶⁶⁹ Also, consumer products should always be both exciting and appeasing, because »[w]hat is not recent enough, is boring – what is too new is strange.«⁶⁷⁰ Hirst thus reflects consumer society and advertising, the purely consumerist »sister« of art, by using negative advertising, i.e. provocative shock strategies.

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Hirst's animals have to be dead, as his art is material, salable, consumable like corned beef. This materiality, salability, potentially eternal element of art is ultimately important to Hirst.

ii) Over-Identification and Irony

Hirst does more than just play along with consumer society and the media, he over-identifies with the 'totalitarianism' of consumption to explicitly demonstrate the superego of capitalism. These methods of ironic over-identification (or over-affirmation) as described by Žižek, which are certainly susceptible to misinterpretation, can just as easily be understood as the opposite, over-identification, total identification with the art market and its rules. Ultimately, it cannot be proved either way as to whether Hirst (or Koons and Warhol) glorify consumer society or make it a subject of irony in an over-affirmative way. Since he created works that allow conflicting interpretations, both interpretations apply simultaneously. »*The results have been accused of kitsch, and raise questions of whether he is mocking or celebrating the culture of consumerism.*«⁶⁷¹

The concept of irony through emphasis and over-identification is a strategy of fine arts to deal with immanent contradictions that arise from the fact that works of art cannot be classified divorced from their creators with blanket terms like 'good' plus art or 'bad' plus commerce, kitsch et cetera. The opposite, a purely biographical interpretation is equally impossible, but perhaps an intermediate stage allows for interpretation, namely that an artistic persona created by the artist, who is related to the work itself can be seen as (the real) work of art. Subtle criticism of consumption coupled with supererogatory commercial viability is an irreconcilable contradiction, which

⁶⁶⁹ See Bolz 2002, p. 89.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁷¹ This quote was aimed at Koons and in this context was transferred to Hirst. Simon Bolitho: Jeff Koons. tate.org.uk 2008.

Hirst and Jeff Koons or (already in concept) Warhol unite in their overall concept of their aura by means of ostensible or real irony. Like Koons, Hirst linked the two realms of consumption and art in his persona in a provocative way, despite their seeming incompatibility because of the art theology of *l'art pour l'art* and despite the fact that they are often disclaimed by the art world. »For a long time, it was part of [...] the winning formula of modern art to devoutly obscure the commercial side of its existence, it not outright deny it [...].«⁶⁷²

Irony prevents Hirst from being too flippant in his artistic statement. It is always present in Hirst's work but more subtle and partly unrecognizable as interwoven with the concept of over-identification. Hirst's admonishments appear only when sought out. Consumption remains for Hirst ultimately always just speciousness, a false offer for the viewer that remains perpetually unattainable.

b) Images of Images

The concept of appropriation, acquisition, or annexation is not only central to the art of Duchamp and Hirst, but also for the relationship between art and consumerism that represents our time so well, to fancy and to want. Duchamp's anti-art used seemingly worthless or cheap and ubiquitous objects/consumer objects to visualize through provocation the arbitrary production of value (not only) in art. Although his readymades, at the time they were created, were meant provoke and be unsalable, Hirst works provoked (because of the drive to be avant-garde as well as the continuous bombardment of the modern viewer with the new – information or images) to initially be considered at all, and finally, to be bought – both became inseparable in a consumer society. Today however, Hirst's primary provocation is that he makes his art so salable. Duchamp has now become accepted, particularly through his »anti-game« he gained credibility a place in the art canon, Hirst is still working on it.

Like Koons and Warhol, Hirst also considers pop culture as seen through media consumption not only as equal, perhaps even superior, to the so-called high culture, but also primarily quite simply as contemporary. This,

⁶⁷² Walter Grasskamp: Konsumglück. Die Ware Erlösung. Munich 2000, p. 116.

however, does not mean that both high and low culture could/should/must not (also) be viewed in a critical light, quite the contrary. Each ironic parody confirms the status quo, just as it calls it into question. Hirst is, to put it bluntly, a court jester of a consumer society in which he wants to exist in his own way. Inspired by the kitsch-pope Koons, the cynic Hirst crowned himself as consumer king of the art world.

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Damien Hirst did not initially become known and 'important' with the help of the large, traditional art institutions, but rather through the mass media – print and TV. His art, designed for media reproduction, is immediately eye-catching in the media. It works in a shop window and conveyed through the media both verbally and on photographs. It is visually so easy to consume because it exploits and reflects the rules and laws of the media.

But Hirst wants to forego »profane« issues like media consumption in his work and instead devote himself to the great themes of life; death, faith, love, and hope. He does so, however, in a visual language common to him (and to the contemporary potential buyer/viewer), a language tremendously influenced by advertising and consumer culture. The ever-eager Hirst, always striving for eternalness, omits explicit media consumerism critique. Implicitly his media consumption (like that of the viewer) on a formal level is often served by formal allusions, but again only in the form of a diagnosis of the quantitative and qualitative dominance of our media consumption. The viewer can see this as criticism of consumption, but in the original meaning of the word criticism, where a rather neutral first inventory is followed by pros and cons of the criticized subject. Hirst is proud of his diverse consumption of media and pop culture and his glorification of these through emphasis in his works calls viewers to do the same: to follow in his footsteps and consume.

c) (Dis-) Placement and Staging

Hirst (dis-)places his art objects – he brings other realities into traditional art spaces. Through his (dis-)placement of consumer objects, props, or whole »stages« in an art context, Hirst presents consumerism, if one wants to see it this way, as often unthinking; faith in medicine and science, faith in religion or capitalism, in financial value, kitsch, the supposedly beautiful, collecting – consumption is questionable for Hirst. He also celebrates »want-

ing and owning«, and also shows that this can certainly fill the viewer with meaning (albeit not always correctly and not forever).

A form of (dis-)placement appears also in the pastoral scene. This occurs today in the urban setting according to Stallabrass, who transferred the results of Empson for pastoral literature on Young British Art:

»[T]he outlook embodied in pastoral has been turned from the rural to the urban, particularly to the landscape of the inner city. [...] Pastoral is plainly an art that is about common people but not for or by them. But insofar as it is an attitude of the rich, it involves them in a double view of the poor: both that the rich concept that they have better powers of expression that they can bring to full consciousness and representation the unconscious virtues of the poor, but at the same time [...] the poor may have an advantage over the rich.«⁶⁷³

To Stallabrass, Damien Hirst, an artist with working class background, is a pioneer of this trend: »Indeed one way to look at this renewal of pastoral in British art is to see its originary move as being to shift the site of pastoral from the countryside to the inner city; and again, Damien Hirst serves as the usher, with his metaphorical murder of the rural idyll.«⁶⁷⁴

He stages his artworks to a degree, where the *mise-en-scene* is more dominant than the staged work itself. Thus he reflects contemporary consumer culture. Hirst transfers and stages »pharmacies«, »churches«, »operating theaters«, »natural history museums«, or »art museums« in galleries and art museums. These settings/»pharmacies«, »churches«, »operating theaters«, »natural history museums«, or »art museums« are easily consumable spectacles or shops in the same way that art galleries are never free from commercial interests. By transferring »value« to a different location, an art venue, he demonstrates the theatrical, the made-up, the actually (at least also) dressed up for consumption nature inherent in both places, both in the actual and associated locations. Both venues are trying to hide behind their supposed objectivity, but are blatantly unmasked by Hirst.

⁶⁷³ Stallabrass 2006, p. 250-252.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 253.

d) Brands not Products

The artistic idea is first revealed in the aura of the artist, similar to a registered trademark. It gains power through the artist's signature on the art object, etched or burned-in like a brand or, to stick with the brand metaphor, as a logo:

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»The name of the brand promises the security of quality, it guarantees that the user will not be disappointed. Symbolized by the logo that traces back to guild signs, to labels of origin, it functions just like a crest.«⁶⁷⁵

By the magic touch of the master (which can also be seen ironically) an everyday object becomes art even in the time of Duchamp. Bolz compares the logo to the notion of the totem, which he handles in a way similar to the icon:

»The totem differs from everyday objects in that it has the ability to function as an image that fascinates, that evokes the emotions that are bound up in it. In the system of consumerism, it is the logo that acts as the totem crest. The goods of modern markets can be read as a kind of secret code in which social life is religiously encrypted.«⁶⁷⁶

Even without a signature Hirst's art is easily recognizable, since he creates/created iconic images or so effectively uses/used those of others that they are primarily associated with him in the media. This shift of Benjamin's aura of the artwork to the persona of the artist is due to the fact that Hirst's ideas are designed for reproducibility, they become art only with the quantity of their reproduction. This distinction also reflects the contemporary tendency to consider not the individual work, but the artist as a »total work of art«, a gesamtkunstwerk, in which the allegedly 'personal' attitude (about art as a consumer product), image, aura, or brand is more important and ultimately more artistic than the individual artwork. Such individual works are often parts of a series and can only be grasped as intrinsically imbedded in a larger context, which ultimately can be described only with that 'aura of the artist'.

The artist works with series or motif series, which represent and reflect the concept of »brands not products« within the artist's established brand. This branding concept has become increasingly important for consumer society since the 1980s and is something that was started by corporations and grew to become internationally prevalent. Here intangibles like aura, name,

⁶⁷⁵ Bolz 2002, p. 121.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 114.

brand awareness and brand image are created and sold as consumer products. Under the label of Damien Hirst, pseudo-individual and pseudo-mechanical works of art can be produced in outsourced production lines partly built on an assembly line. These works are declared to have financial and/or artistic value, or they are »sanctified« at least in part independently of their own relevance simply because of their contact with the »star« (in whichever way), with the brand Hirst or Banksy (or both, for example in the case of cross promotion). This is partly confirmed and accepted by Hirst, partly rejected, and partly reflected back on society in an ironic or angry way.

It becomes clear in Hirst's works, that his aforementioned intentions are reaching their limits: his works, often perceived as glorifying consumption, have become symbols of our hedonistic and wasteful times, embodying the pride which goes before the fall, the financial crisis of 2008, and thus perhaps unwillingly becoming poster children for the criticism of consumption. The same can be said of consumer culture:

»People also overestimate the power of design, marketing, and science, as if someone wanted to impute that it could be determined in advance, what a thing would cause. Even the most sophisticated »Cue Management« leaves enough space not only for flops, but also for positive surprises. Conversely, art is anything but free of calculations and some things that a recipient perceives as secret or inexhaustibly ambiguous are just a result of a clever use of well-proven effects..«⁶⁷⁷

An art like Damien Hirst's, which reflects consumer culture, especially the associated audience and consumer locations, always exploits yet contains the disadvantages of this culture as well. Therefore this culture is confronted with similar allegations as consumer culture: »Only when consumer products hold a semantic density, which is comparable to art and high culture, will consumerism have lost its strongest argument – the charge of banality, obscenity, superficiality – and be silenced.«⁶⁷⁸

Hirst uses Warhol's commercial-art concept and less-so (though still) also Warhol's formal instruments. Hirst also used serial arrangements, something used by Warhol as early as the 1960s, which echoed commercial product lines, sold under the Warhol »brand«, and were produced in his factory. Like Warhol, Hirst utilized a few techniques and motifs exhaustively in different variations and potentially infinite series for decades, making them his

⁶⁷⁷ Ullrich 2006, p. 194–195.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 199.

own, even his trademark, regardless of whether or not he invented them. Hirst, like Warhol, creates luxury art, which is easily identifiable as a »Warhol« or a »Hirst« even by a layman. Like Warhol, Hirst created the foundations of his series in just a few years as a young man. Since his commercial breakthrough came early in his life, Damien Hirst had enough time to »cannibalize« his self-made icons in every possible variation in an ironic, self-referential, or commercial way (or all at the same time). Here, too, a similar strategy exists in product marketing, which, in particular, has been successfully implemented by large brands or companies with a single product, such as Coca-Cola for decades: »[E]ven if no new inspiration emanates from an object, it can still be successful because most people do not only want to experience adventure and change, but also familiar sentiments in slight variations over and over again.«⁶⁷⁹

Not one particular work, but the overall concept »Andy Warhol™« or »Damien Hirst™« is bought or regarded as »the artistic«, something which is only evident on each work (sometimes even not at all) through the signature, the consecration with the 'aura of the master'. Warhol and Hirst produced reproductions without originals.

Even Jeff Koons stated that it is possible skip the traditional wait for »nobility« through art history, by copying both art history and its mechanisms, even creating mass-produced (consumer/consumable) art 1999 before the museums, through the official channels of neat provenance-development, did this. Koons instead applied methods of marketing, advertising, or public relations to his work (or partially turned them into his main artistic ingredient): Whatever is seen as the center of attention at the end – the exhibition – must above all have great room for interpretation, everything else is accomplished by the artistic mise-en-scene of this particular association shell. Hirst took up this game that was established by Duchamp and Warhol with a sophisticated Koons flair, gave it an update, and pushed it to new heights.

Where Koons differs from Hirst is in what they ultimately put on stage, what they want to sell us: »The market value of suffering and death exceeded that of pleasure and sex, [...] that was probably also the reason that Damien Hirst, years before Jeff Koons, gained sole dominance of the word's art market.«⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁹ Ullrich 2006, p. 47.

⁶⁸⁰ Michel Houellebecq: Karte und Gebiet. Köln 2011, p. 360.

Koons' self ascribed goal is to deliver (potential) buyers/viewers from their fear of kitsch, to indulge their need for the banal without guilt and shame.⁶⁸¹ His readymades, inflated in terms of material, production, and size, made of naive and banal kitsch and advertising stand opposite Hirst's found objects, which he borrowed from supposedly serious science (history), credible religious iconography, and traditional precious materials or, in some cases, advertising that borrows from all three as well. Hirst's equally stereotypical association shells leave the original templates looking less credible, more commercial, yet leave the artworks looking more valuable; Koons' situation is reversed, although when examined in detail, tendencies in the other direction are observable for both artists, respectively.

e) Advertising

»Second-screen snapshot dramas« (»Sekundenbild-Dramen«)⁶⁸², a term Michael Diers coined for advertising graphics, describes the image and text language to which Hirst refers. He explicitly adapts stereotypes, for instance slogans, clichés, and visual strategies from marketing, advertising and graphic design. Hirst celebrates these last three and appropriates them, only partially putting them in a different, ironic context. His artistic style increasingly resembles the easily consumable, not just visual catch-phrase-language of advertising.

By a local shift of context, Hirst subtly points out that even areas that seem unfit for advertising, either because of their form or content, do just that, like the commercial sister of medicine, the pharmacy, or even a museum. The clear, clinically pure and spotless surface of pharmaceutical packaging subtly advertises a product that generally veils (as many objects of art do as well) the fact that it is (also) about commerce, not just about health or *l'art pour l'art*. Hirst declares the attitude of the consumers towards art and medicine as questionable, but he also encourages it. For Hirst advertising is quoted formally as an »illegitimate sister« of art, with regards to content, even while he keeps it at an ironic distance in his content.

⁶⁸¹ See Koons interviewed by Anthony Haden-Guest. In: Angelica Muthesius (Ed.): Jeff Koons. Köln 1992, p. 29.

⁶⁸² Michael Diers: Fotografie, Film und Video. Beiträge zu einer kritischen Theorie des Bildes. Hamburg 2006, p. 246.

With Warhol and mass media (that simultaneously inspired him and caught on) art that reflects and was influenced by consumer culture became a mass consumption product. Hirst forced the same for his artworks – albeit with less widespread appeal than Warhol. Both of them earned accusations of commercial sellout. The act of dealing with the subject of consumption, in whatever way, often seems punishable from the perspective of art criticism.

In the way that he deals with consumer culture, Hirst reflects the Pop Art of Warhol, who wedded commerce with art and whose images changed contemporary art of the 20th Century by challenging accepted definitions of aesthetics, the role of art, and concepts of originality and reproduction of his time.

f) The Viewer-Buyer and Collector as Perfect Consumer

»To me it's about using the public as a readymade. It's about the public – what their dreams and ambitions are. To me Andy (Warhol) presented Duchampian ideas in a manner the public was able to embrace.‘ Koons has said, ‘Where I differ is that Warhol believed you could penetrate the mass through distribution and I believe you continue to penetrate the mass with ideas.‘⁶⁸³

Jeff Koons, 1991

Hirst's works, meticulously executed by assistants and trimmed to be consumer products, seem to be immediately, substantially ascertainable not only on photo, but prove to be spotless in in-person close-up view to the smallest detail. They communicate primarily with gallery visitors, who should look at the artwork in the original and then acquire it. Communication with viewers of images of his works that are published in the media seems to be secondary.

In a consumer society, the alliance between art and commerce represents the long requested postulated connection between art and life, an old idea that was pursued particularly in the 1960s and 70s by Situationists, Fluxus, and conceptual artists, who were also rather critical of consumer culture and who influenced Koons and Hirst. Since it is difficult for most contemporary art viewers who are dominated by consumer culture to differentiate be-

⁶⁸³ Koons interviewed by Anthony Haden-Guest. In: Angelica Muthesius (Ed.): Jeff Koons. Köln 1992, p. 24.

tween »liking and wanting« or somewhat exaggerated, to differentiate between art and life, the creation of museum shops was, according to Grasskamp, almost inevitable: Such a shop »compensated for experiencing the untouchable, canceled the inability to purchase« and responds to the fact that one can expect of »the visitor only a certain number of museum rooms until he is again in a passage of purchasable and touchable things.⁶⁸⁴ Artists such as Hirst and his precursors Warhol and Koons realized this and reacted to this buyer/viewer behavior by creating art not for the museum, but for the museum shop or gallery, which is closer to life.

In order to examine the connections relevant to consumer culture between pertinent art historical precursors and the two artists discussed here, it is also necessary to consider their sales strategies in more detail, as both areas have become inseparable. The Shop, founded by Haring in the 1980s, inspired Hirst's »Other Criteria« chain of stores. Consumption is the great equalizer – both Haring's and Hirst's shops had/have products available across all price ranges.

The fact that this anti-elitist idea of a store that acts contrary to the traditional art market was developed by Haring, someone who fits between »folk art« graffiti and (high) art, and not by the »art market artists« Warhol and Hirst is not without reason. The connection between goods and art, and art and life is conversely reflected in Hirst through phenomenon of contemporary consumer culture: presenting goods increasingly in an artistic way and art more as a commodity, while simultaneously questioning both concepts and their boundaries. Moreover, the observer (in the present study usually referred to as (potential) buyer/viewer), positioned between art and consumerism, personally moves closer to being/ the state of a human »gesamtkunstwerk« and a consumer product. Therefore, also the 'distracted' mass media consumer who has to constantly look at things *en passant*, and the 'collective', classic, bourgeois, 'l'art pour l'art' viewer merge only in front of a work of art, which can be bought like a product as well. Along the same lines, Grasskamp wrote:

»In the past the concentrated examination of a work as a group only took place in front of a painting or in a concert hall, whereas today this group consideration would more likely take place in front of a department store shelf, in a brand outlet, or in a museum shop, always with an eye on one's

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 151-152.

own wallet. The general director of the art museum in Vienna wrote in a promotional brochure that the items in the museum shop »stimulate the imagination«: the same has been said of art for at least two hundred years.⁶⁸⁵

The (potential) buyer/viewer in every art store, gallery, or auction house is also reflected in these artworks, sometimes even literally, when polished gold frames work as a mirror that reminds potential buyers that they are part of a group of people here, who »worship a golden calf« together and idolize art as a consumer product, as an investment, or as a fetish. The (potential) buyer/viewer thus becomes part of Hirst's artwork. Koons' works served as inspiration for Hirst's mirror effects that create connections with other works in the same showroom. The (potential) buyer/viewer leaps to the same level as the works of art that are in the same showroom. Hirst's art happening/auction art is reflected in works and their titles, they are competing with and against each other for the attention of the highest bidder. This reflection has, in addition to the commodification of art consumers, simultaneously the ironic aspiration of closing the gap between art and life by means of consumption.

Hirst's motives, which are always variations of similar things, refer to the activity of collecting through the serialism of his art and the allusions that are typical of his oeuvre, which he uses as a marketing strategy to increase consumption: »In the meantime it is often suggested to consumers that they are actually collectors. It is sufficient to add the words »limited edition« to the package and, with them, the promise of an increase in value. [...] This is an equally reliable method of stirring up »Habenwollen«, or the feeling of »must-have«, much like in the competitive environment of an auction [...].⁶⁸⁶

Orchestrated art auctions geared towards the media and the active creation of series or collectibles are methods that Hirst not only uses to increase sales but also to reflect consumer culture, so that not the work itself, but its presentation and staging justifiably often count as the truly artistic in Hirst's art: The theatrical, mise-en-scene presentation of what is in fact just any old consumer product or art object in order to charge it with a symbolic value⁶⁸⁷,

⁶⁸⁵ See Wilfried Seipel: Zum Geleit. In: Kunsthistorisches Vienna (Ed.): Shopprodukte. Vienna 2005, p. 2.

⁶⁸⁶ Ullrich 2006, p. 190.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 122.

with »purposefulness without purpose«⁶⁸⁸ or »significance with no meaning«⁶⁸⁹ is a common method taken from advertising and marketing.

For Hirst art is an active editing of the art market, which he both exposes and helps to shape. He turns to the principles of the art market. Hirst flooded it with many new works, while at the same time reducing his own offering by allowing series to end. He also intervened in the market by the direct sale of his Golden Calf without going through a middle man, using a work complex that simultaneously conquered new markets while earning him new viewers and buyers.

The art market functions for Hirst as a medium for aesthetic changes. Thus Hirst was on the cutting edge: Many successful mobile apps had the same objective – »Cut Out the Middle Man«. At a distance of now nearly a decade it can be said that Hirst has not changed the art market in the long term, for example by other blue chip artists also cutting out the middle man, but that he and his art a(u)ction foresaw that the art market for contemporary art is far from coming to maximum capacity before it might collapse.

Also in terms of the changed perception of art the collector assumes a pioneering role:

»A collector can only make his mark as an expert in matters of art only through buying a work of art; no arguments or theories are necessary to make someone understand its' inherent value. The price replaces the reasoning behind judgements of taste or value, the act of consuming [...] takes the place of reception.«⁶⁹⁰ As an ideal form of the (potential) buyer/viewer, an important collector raises the reputation and thus the value of all the other works of the collected artist, who, in turn, creates series for the collector on a large scale. Demand is not dictated by a limited supply from Hirst but rather solely by the price. More will be produced as demand necessitates because Hirst's images no longer incarnate or embody an idea, but rather illustrate the idea in a way that is reproducible at any time.⁶⁹¹

⁶⁸⁸ Kant quoted *ibid*, p. 69.

⁶⁸⁹ Ullrich 2006, p. 48.

⁶⁹⁰ Ullrich 2006, p. 191.

⁶⁹¹ Stallabrass 2006, p. 101.

g) (Im-)Material Things

Hirst's art, charged with actual material value in an artistic way, reflects the flight of contemporary beings towards material values, seen as the »last bastion« of credibility, authenticity, and value or perhaps a substitute for such different values. These are constructs that, particularly in the postmodern present, have been/are being played with (though already to some extent in the art of Duchamp or Warhol), the importance of which have continued to increase in both art and life since then. These constructs seek to narrow the gap that grew since the »end of ideology«.

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Gold and diamonds have a very long history as carriers of value, not only because they are very rare. Hirst exploited/utilized this credibility advantage in his works to his own purposes: He attempts in this way to illustrate that (his) art deserves not only the same amount of credibility, but in fact more credibility than the materials he uses because the material value only serves to enhance the brilliance of the meaningful possibilities of art.

To actually find out whether Hirst used valuable materials, one would have to destroy his seemingly precious, relic-like art and undertake a more detailed examination. His works deal on the one hand with the emblematic statement of the material, on the other hand with the confidence in »authenticity«.

»It is clear that the examination of the materiality of art leads the specific institutional framing to some paradoxes. In some cases protected by the glass of the display case, but always with a warning sign. The categorical statement is not to touch the objects. We have to believe the testimony of the caption. Material here is only observed at, not touched. We cannot sense its heat, cannot check its weight. The promise of authenticity of materiality cannot be verified in art.«⁶⁹²

Hirst uses money as a medium of expression in his art, but primarily indirectly. His art oscillates between art and money, much like jewelry; Hirst's art and the consumer product jewelry consist of valuable materials that combine financial and ideal added value: »In other cases, it is a high price in particular that fills the product with more promise. Customers refer to this high price as a confirmation of the power/potency that is latent in a product. Taken to the extreme – as in the case of jewelry or art – the commodity appears to be a

⁶⁹² Schneemann 2002, p. 278.

symbol of money or, even more remarkably, as an enhancement/enhanced form of money.«⁶⁹³

Such products, which include Hirst's art, »outdo and surpass, in a mix of utility and fictional value, even the fantasies that are evoked by money.«⁶⁹⁴ The question of where one puts his trust is today rather a question of if one »buys« something, both in the literal sense and figurative sense, if they believe something. Thus, the role of money in a consumer society is brought to light – a role that is fundamentally different from its original: »As soon as the more urgent needs have been met, money is no longer just a functional currency, but rather just as much a stimulant as a loaded brand name product. A brand name article must then be individually so highly evolved that it can stand a chance against the trump-card, money.«⁶⁹⁵

This is precisely what Hirst attempts to generate artificially/artistically. Combined with religious props in his art, he points to the close link between money and religion, which is expressed as follows by Bolz: »Benjamin consistently construed banknotes as icons of capitalist religion. This makes completely tangible the meaning behind the fact that 17th century emblems re-turned in the 19th century as consumer goods. As a pure expression of their exchange value, bank notes also pose as allegories.«⁶⁹⁶

According to Weber, capitalism was initially integrated into religion and according to Benjamin, it eventually replaced it, Hirst is likewise threatened because of his ambivalent integration of money into his art. 'Money has challenged art, or already replaced in the eyes of many: »The universal symbolism of money is threatening to religion, not as the dramatic and diabolical temptation of Mammon, the golden calf (after all the devil is the dialectic opponent of God; he also requires faith), but rather quite the opposite »in its quiet, rational way as a substitute'.⁶⁹⁷

As a young artist, Hirst began in part with Arte Povera materials. Through the course of his career, he moved toward increasingly valuable materials – with the emphasis on the material as a theme throughout. Hirst's animal or human matter are also perceived by the viewer as motif as well in a motivic way. His images are collages made up of material-»pictures«.

⁶⁹³ Ullrich 2006, p. 64.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 61.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 60.

⁶⁹⁶ Bolz 2002, p. 66.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 71-72.

Both the means of design for (rapid and repeated) reproduction and the final optics of Hirst's art factory echo mass production. On the one hand, these are cited for practicality and efficiency, on the other hand they are indicative of something else: the paradox between product and artwork, or more specifically inherent in the type of art that looks industrial but at the same time seemingly one of a kind/unique. This condition reflects the role of contemporary art between glossy designer consumer object and the timeless unique piece created by the hand of an artist. »And where is the desire for value and preciousness? Jeff Koons fulfills this desire for us and offers us precious porcelain. [...] The artificially constructed as-if-kitsch offers reflective superficiality, which mirrors the guilt and shame of this desire back at us in golden frames.«⁶⁹⁸

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Hirst has parallels to Duchamp's later works, the appreciation of which began to grow, not accidentally, in the 1960s, the Pop Art era. Although the first consumer objects that Duchamp transformed into art by signing them are lost and only survive as intangible memory, replicas, made (not coincidentally) in the 1960s, which again carry the original spirit through Duchamp's signature, are now estimated as similarly precious to other comparable world-class art. Duchamp's artistic gesture finally manifested itself in replicas and became also financially valuable. In his case collectors do not buy the artwork itself, only its shadow, relics, the memory of an unsalable gesture. This essentially also applies to the majority of Hirst's works, in the same way shown, in that the works are more performance props disguised as works of art in the gesamtkunstwerk Damien Hirst.

In the 1990s Schulze coined the term Erlebnisgesellschaft (»event-society/thrill-seeking society«), which is characterized by a shift from the value of consumer products in their use and status.⁶⁹⁹ Duchamp anticipated this »emperor's new clothes« principle in art. Hirst's art is also charged with emotional and mythical value, it draws in art and advertising from other areas, which are already charged with value: Hirst joins forces, as mentioned, with the respectability of science, the advance on secular credibility of religious iconography, the age-old valuation of precious materials or of money to charge his works artificially/artistically with meaning and with value as well as to comment on art. Likewise, Duchamp made both his *objets trouvé*,

⁶⁹⁸ Schneemann 2002, p. 288.

⁶⁹⁹ Gerhard Schulze: Die Erlebnisgesellschaft. Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart. Frankfurt/Main 1992, p. 427.

through his signature, and the »Mona-Lisa Postcard«, reproduced millions of times, through a mustache, into art again. Hirst demonstrates ironically that it is indeed possible to create artificially/artistic (at least monetary) value through a symbolic or actual transfer – he does just this for the sake of discussion. He also cynically presents the belief in (the above elements from other areas and) the respective production by representatives of science, religion, and money as highly questionable and ultimately void. He shows that these people (as he himself also does using their means) ultimately want to sell something.

Hirst's art promises the impossible: unlimited mythical (interpretation) possibilities that include and exceed money, 'cultural capital' in two senses:

»Like jewelry, art promises to have similar wild card qualities as money. Art has been the only area in the last two hundred years whose value has been determined not by its usefulness but rather its »purposefulness without purpose«. Since the late 18th century, texts on art philosophy have shown a preponderance of adjectives like »inexhaustible«, »multifaceted«, and »inscrutable« to describe the particular characteristics of art – its indeterminacy.«⁷⁰⁰

Hirst is a child of consumer culture much closer to that than to the classical canon of art. In Duchamp's time, this consumer culture was still in its infancy and served merely as a low level foil, as a provocation. Duchamp, Hirst, and the consumer culture are therefore confronted with similar allegations:

»Critics of consumer culture may object that art is but »truly«_mysterious and inexhaustible, while branded products [as well as Damien Hirst™, n. UB], by contrast, represent mere fakes, metaphysical-backdrops without substance. But they overlook the fact that art already functions as a healing entity for several more generations than even the oldest and most prestigious brands._Furthermore, art benefits from an advantage in credibility because not only have the marketing department and advertising agency signed off on an image, but whole hosts of philosophers, art teachers, and gallerists have worked together to agree upon a unified profile after the work of art got a certain amount of attention. Nevertheless, the image that has emerged is just as directed by desires, and also often by commercial interests, as the image of a fine/classy name brand.«⁷⁰¹

⁷⁰⁰ Ullrich 2006, p. 114.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., p. 116.

Consumption art, on the other hand, which oscillates between art and consumer culture, and consumer culture reflects art and uses its' rhetoric, can therefore also be confronted with similar allegations or denied artistic character. As is often the case, however, also here the productive question is what everything is and for whom something could be art more so than what it actually is. In Hirst's case, questioning the staging of the brand Hirst is much more fruitful than analyzing a single work.

Hirst created not only the brand Damien Hirst, but also, as previously mentioned, uses value creation strategies of consumer culture in his art: the materials and views about faith in science and faith in the value of valuable materials or ancient art, which he incorporated into his art, do in fact have traditional »value« for the majority of people. Baudrillard traces comparable phenomena back to the »end of history«⁷⁰², that left a void at the same time as consumer culture arose.

»The phantasms of a sunken history coalesce in this void, in which the arsenal of incidents, ideologies, and retro-fashions gather – not so much because people believe in it or base any sort of hope in it, but rather simply to provide for a revival of the time in which there was at least history or at least violence [...] or at least the risk of life or death.«⁷⁰³

These times full of value that at the time of Duchamp were in part still present yet somehow also a foil, are merely quoted by Hirst in a symbolic and ironic-nostalgic manner, analogous to the consumer culture; also »[t]he consumer culture is [...] at a level that one might, with Hegel, call »symbolic.«⁷⁰⁴, says Ullrich. An art reflecting this consumer culture (as in the case of Hirst) like consumer culture (that influenced its time significantly in terms of content and form) often does not exceed an ironic-critical or affirmative (distorting) mirroring of signs. As part of a consumer society today, it might also be difficult for the contemporary viewer to accept/understand Hirst's (anti?) consumer culture works as art – like the works of Duchamp, who in his time used the bourgeois 19th century, coined by the art academies, as a contrast/imaginary background for his work.

⁷⁰² Francis Fukuyama: The end of history? In: The National Interest. Summer 1989.

⁷⁰³ Baudrillard 1978, p. 50.

⁷⁰⁴ Ullrich 2006, p. 202.

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