

# ***Damien Hirst***

## ***Artist or Businessman?***



### **Lesson Objectives**

#### **Your Final Task:**

- Write an article about Damien Hirst
- Prepare a cultural mediation session for students in Secondary school.

#### **Intermediary Objectives**

- Gather information about Damien Hirst and his art
- Build up vocabulary related to Damien Hirst and his art
- Describe artworks
- Review the passive voice

## Your Mission

As Visual Arts students, you have been asked to prepare a cultural mediation session on Damien Hirst for *Art for All*, an organisation specializing in art mediation for secondary school students.

*Art for All* is currently promoting a programme on contemporary artists, which includes in-school mediations.

Here is the mission statement from *Art for All*:

*"The objective of the programme is to introduce secondary school students to contemporary art and art movements, and to raise awareness of the power of art as a form of social cohesion. It also aims to introduce students to the realities of the art market."*

You will be working in a team with fellow students. You are expected to gather relevant information and design a cultural mediation session, which you will present to the director of *Art for All*.

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## I- Introduction to Damien Hirst's artworks

### Objective:

Getting to know artworks by Damien Hirst

### 1- Focus on his artworks

- Prepare a description of the artwork assigned to your group.
- Analyse the artwork (title, context, content & meaning, composition & form)
- If necessary, do some research on the artwork
- Give your opinion (feelings, arguments, etc.)
- When finished, each member of the team should share their ideas with someone from another team who studied a different piece.

### 2- Home, Sweet Home

<https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/229/2952>

Take notes on Damien Hirst's inspiration, Damien Hirst's common motif, his quote and his pop-up book.

Sum up what you heard on your online notepad and call the teacher for feedback.

## II. Miraculous Journey

1. Watch the (nearly) silent video footage of Damien Hirst's work entitled the Miraculous Journey.

Take notes about what you see and feel.

Share with the rest of the class.

What does Damien Hirst say about his artwork?

2. Damien Hirst on Miraculous Journey

- a. Do the pre-listening activity on cursus.  
Write down the phrases / collocations you hear and make sure you understand them.
- b. Listen to Damien Hirst talk about his sculpture Miraculous Journey and answer the questions:
  - Where did he get the inspiration for his sculpture?
  - How long has he worked on the project?
  - What reactions does he like about his art?
  - Why did he make the sculpture monumental?
  - Why is it special?
  - What comments does he make about his exhibition taking place in Qatar?

## III- Damien Hirst - his Life, his Art and Controversial Reputation

1. Fast facts

Life and Work of Damien Hirst, Controversial British Artist (extract)

by Bill Lamb, November 28, 2018

<https://www.thoughtco.com/damien-hirst-biography-4177855>

Write a paragraph using the prompts below, using as many verbs as you can in the right tenses

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Fast Facts: Damien Hirst

- Born: June 7, 1965 in Bristol, England
- Education: Goldsmiths, University of London
- July 1988: second year at Goldsmiths College, organiser of an independent student exhibition, Freeze, in a disused London Port Authority administrative block
- Since 1999, accused of plagiarism 16 times
- Creator of controversial, sometimes shocking artwork.
- In July 2021, NFT project, named The Currency: 10,000 unique hand-painted dot-covered works on paper, each one corresponding to a non-fungible token.

## 2. Research More facts and ideas about the artist

### Objective:

You are going to build up knowledge on Damien Hirst and write an article about him.  
You are going to practise your reading, speaking and writing skills.

Each team member is going to do some research on a different aspect of Damien Hirst's life and work. Choose from the following list:

- His biography
- The Young British Artists and the Frieze exhibition
- His spot paintings, 2012
- His 2017 Venice Biennale exhibition: Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable
- His Mandala series, 2019
- 2020 Paris exhibition in the Cartier Foundation: Cherry Blossoms
- His latest experiment with NFTs, "The Currency"
- The controversies surrounding his artworks: plagiarism, outsourcing, the use of animals in his art

You can read **one of the articles** provided at the end of the booklet (p8-20) or choose another article on the Cursus page. Please, indicate the reference in your notepad.

- Sum up the different ideas from the article and share those ideas with your team members.
- Make a list of collocations from the articles that you consider useful to discuss Damien Hirst.
- Then, prepare a coherent outline to write your own article (synthesis)

## 3. Debating

### Objective:

Improving speaking skills and using newly acquired knowledge

Choose a role, use your notes and discuss the following question:

*Given that Damien Hirst often borrows ideas from other artists and gets the help of assistants to do his artworks, can he be considered a real artist?*

### **Roles**

- Role 1: The chair of the debate (asking questions, giving the floor to the guests, recapping, etc.)
- Role 2: An artist who thinks Damien Hirst is a fraud
- Role 3: An art dealer who thinks Damien Hirst is a fabulous and innovative artist
- Role 4: A museum goer who questions some aspects of Damien Hirst's art

## IV- Language focus

### 1. Vocabulary focus

#### a. **Part 1 – Matching Exercise** (homework)

Go to cursus and do the vocabulary matching exercise. The vocabulary comes from some of the articles. Note down the collocations you find.

#### b. **Part 2 - Memory Game**

Pair up to make two teams.

You are given a pack of cards to play a memory game.

Before playing, match all the pairs and try to memorise them. Then, place all the cards face down. Turn over two cards at a time and try to create pairs by matching one end of the collocation with the other. The team with the most pairs at the end wins.

Once you have completed the activity, give your teacher some feedback. Say how you felt about the game: was it useful, fun, boring, difficult, or easy?

### 2. Pronunciation focus

Work on the following sentences.

Indicate the word stress on the words when necessary (words with two syllables or more). Then, decide where the schwa sound occurs (see phonology booklet p2 & 3 if necessary)

- a. It's the first naked sculpture in the Middle East
- b. Damien Hirst organised an independent student exhibition in London.
- c. It embodies the fascination around mortality
- d. The YBA's choice of subject matter and perceived lack of artistic skill makes their work post-modern.

### 3. Grammar focus

Answer the following questions in your collaborative notepad:

- a. How do you form the passive voice? When do we use this form?
- b. Go through the article you studied and find one or two instances of the passive voice.
- c. Translate those examples into French.
- d. Make sentences with the following prompts; use the same voice:

1.Damien Hirst / know

2.Leonard Da Vinci / Celebrate (for)

3.Maurizio Cattelan's solid gold toilet / steal

4.A painting at the Centre Pompidou / stab / museum goer

5.An Italian painter / arrest / connection with forgery ring

- e. Translate the following sentences

1. On dit que Damien Hirst a copié d'autres artistes.
2. Sa sculpture «Miraculous journey » a été recouverte très vite après l'inauguration en 2013 pour cause de travaux.
3. Ce qu'on appelle Britart est un collectif de jeunes artistes britanniques qui a été fondé dans les années 80.

## **V- Damien Hirst – A brand?**

In 2008, Germaine Greer (famous feminist writer) wrote in the Guardian,

“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.”

Discuss this quote with your partners and write down an account of your discussion - Explain the quote in detail and say if you agree or not with Germaine Greer on the different aspects of her quotation.

## **VI- Art Mediation – introducing art to secondary school students**

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As Visual Arts students, you have been asked to prepare a cultural mediation session on Damien Hirst for *Art for All*, an organisation specialising in art mediation for secondary school students.

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Here is the mission statement from *Art for All*:

*"The objective of the programme is to introduce secondary school students to contemporary art and art movements, and to raise awareness of the power of art as a form of social cohesion. It also aims to introduce students to the realities of the art market."*

You will be working in a team with fellow students. You are expected to gather relevant information and design a cultural mediation session, which you will present to the director of *Art for All*.

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### **Step 1**

Questions you should deal with before you prepare your visual:

- What is your objective in this mediation?
- What art piece are you going to choose to achieve this objective?
- What do you expect of your audience during the session?
- How can you boost their participation?

### **Step 2**

Design an activity (or several) that helps you achieve the objective you have defined.

### Step 3

Now that you've prepared your cultural mediation session, present it to the director of *Art for All* to receive feedback.

Make sure

- to check you have the necessary vocabulary to present your work
- to check how to pronounce difficult words
- to talk spontaneously (no reading / don't worry too much about grammar mistakes)
- to share speaking time (1 minutes each minimum)
- to take your time and explain things clearly

### Grading Criteria (/12)

<b>Ideas / activity (ies)</b> Clear objective / Creativity / Relevance	4 pts
<b>Pragmatics</b> (verbal and non-verbal communication, clarity of outline, etc.)	2 pts
<b>Grammar and syntax</b> Verb forms / determiners / prepositions / etc.	2 pt
<b>Vocabulary</b> Related to topic	2 pts
<b>Phonology</b> Pronunciation / fluency	2 pts



Virgin Mother

## Document 1 (A2)

### **Damien Hirst's Early Life and Career**

Damien Hirst (born Damien Steven Brennan) was born in Bristol and grew up in Leeds, England. He was later described by his mother as a morbid child, interested in grisly and gruesome images of disease and injury. These subjects would later inform some of the artist's iconic works.

5 Hirst had several run-ins with the law, including two arrests for shoplifting. He failed numerous other academic subjects, but he succeeded in art and drawing. Damien attended the Jacob Kramer School of Art in Leeds, and in the late 1980s, he studied art at Goldsmiths, University of London.

10 In 1988, in his second year at Goldsmiths, Damien Hirst organized an independent student exhibition titled *Freeze* in an empty London Port Authority building. It was the first significant event organized by a group that would become known as the Young British Artists. The final version of the exhibition included two of Hirst's iconic spot paintings: multicolored spots on white or near-white backgrounds painted by hand with glossy house paint.

<https://www.thoughtco.com/damien-hirst-biography-4177855>

### Questions

Use your own words to answer the following questions

- 1- What do we learn about Damien Hirst's life before he was famous?
- 2- What happened in 1988 ?
- 3- Write a definition for « the artist's iconic works ».
- 4- Make a list of vocabulary (collocations) from the text that is useful to talk about Damien Hirst and his career.

## Document 2 (A2+)

### **Damien Hirst Admits 'All My Ideas Are Stolen Anyway'**

The artist claims that he was taught 'don't borrow ideas, steal them' by Michael Craig-Martin at Goldsmiths

Frieze

26 Apr 2018

The secret's out. In a new filmed conversation with artist Sir Peter Blake, Damien Hirst has admitted: 'all my ideas are stolen anyway'. Hirst also said that the idea behind his spot paintings may have come from the American abstract painter Larry Poons.

5 The artist claims that while studying art at Goldsmiths, he was taught 'Don't borrow ideas, steal them' by Michael Craig-Martin, who perhaps had in mind the quote 'good artists copy; great artists steal', commonly attributed to Pablo Picasso. 'That was when you realize you don't have to be original' Hirst said. 'Nothing is original – it's what you do with it', Blake adds.

10 Several pieces by Hirst, who won the Turner Prize in 1995, are alleged to have borrowed ideas from work by other artists, though Hirst has always denied plagiarism.

The most recent case concerns his 'Veil Paintings' which several Australian art professionals say are deeply influenced by the work of female Aboriginal artists, including the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye. Hirst says that the paintings draw on the work of Pierre Bonnard and George Seurat instead.

15 Hirst's exhibition 'Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable' at the Palazzo Grassi, Venice, last year, also came under fire by critics saying that certain pieces were guilty of cultural appropriation. In particular, his artwork *Golden heads (Female)* (2016) was said to appropriate a bronzehead from 14th-century Ife, an ancient city in what is now Nigeria.

### Questions

Use your own words to answer the following questions

- 1- What do we learn about Damien Hirst in this short article ?
- 2- How does he respond to critics ?
- 3- How do you understand the quotation by Pablo Picasso : « Good artists copy ; great artists steal » ?
- 4- Make a list of vocabulary (collocations) from the text that is useful to talk about Damien Hirst and his career.

## Young British Artists

The Young British Artists (YBAs) are a loosely-affiliated group who met in London in the late 1980s and participated in two of the most shocking exhibits of the late-20<sup>th</sup> century: Freeze (1988) and Sensation (1997). The group is known for their entrepreneurial spirit, their use of shock tactics, and their wild partying - especially during their 1990s heyday. The most financially successful YBAs are now some of the richest artists in the world, and remain brash and incredibly media-savvy - their choice of subject matter and perceived lack of artistic skill makes their work postmodern, but has been widely criticized in the media.

### 10 Key Ideas

The YBAs are notorious for their willingness to shock audiences with gratuitously violent imagery, brazen use of pornography, and their desire to push beyond what many consider the limits of decency. Derogatory UK tabloid press coverage was an important component of their success, as it was all most people knew of the group.

15 The works of the various YBA artists are characterized by their open approach to process and materials, something that can be attributed to the structure of the B.A. Fine Art program at Goldsmiths College where many of them studied. Their courses abandoned the traditional segregation of artistic training into painting, drawing, photography, and sculpture classes in favor of mixed studios.

20 YBA works fit well with the many postmodern experiments that dominated the art of the 1980s and 1990s in both Europe and America. Postmodernism is characterized by the breakdown of distinctions between high and low culture, the use of appropriation, a rejection of fine art materials, and a focus on spectacle. All of these elements can be found in the works of YBA artists.

<https://www.theartstory.org/movement/young-british-artists/>

### Questions

Use your own words to answer the following questions:

- 1- What characterizes the Young British Artists and their art? (give as many details as possible)
- 2- What have they become ?
- 3- Define what postmodernist art is.
- 4- Make a list of vocabulary (collocations) from the text that is useful to talk about Damien Hirst and his career.

## People Are Furious With Damien Hirst For Not Making His Own Art

Business Insider, Megan Willett

12 Jun 2013

There are nearly 1,400 of Damien Hirst's "spot" paintings in existence. The artist has only painted around 25 of them himself. So who made the other 1,340 or so paintings, which regularly sell for tens of thousands of dollars? They were done by Hirst's coterie of assistants — a well-known fact. Even so, he told Reuters last year that "every single spot painting contains my eye, my hand, and my heart." And they all contain his signature.

Damien Hirst was once the art world's golden boy. His conceptual art was snapped up for millions by art collectors, showcased in museums, and taught in art history classes.

But he has also been lambasted by famous critics like Roberts Hughes, who once said of Hirst's famous shark suspended in a tank of formaldehyde: "One might as well get excited about seeing a dead halibut on a slab."

And for many, his art has become a symbol of selling out, with concepts that either shock or disgust and only appeal to rich art collectors with questionable taste. But the real reason Hirst is such a sore spot for many in the art community is that he doesn't physically create most of his own work.

His \$78 million diamond-encrusted skull was made by royal jewelers Bentley & Skinner. The artist's stuffed shark was produced by MDM Props of London, a theatrical company. And his famous spot paintings were, of course, painted by his assistants. Why? Because he couldn't be bothered to do the work himself. Hirst once said he didn't paint his own spot paintings because, "I couldn't be f\*\*\*ing arsed doing it," according to The Guardian. He's even gone so far as to recommend his assistants' work over his own: "The best person who ever painted spots for me was Rachel [Howard]. She's brilliant. Absolutely f\*\*\*ing brilliant. The best spot painting you can have by me is one painted by Rachel," he once said, according to Artlog.

Hirst sees the real creative act as the conception, not the execution, of art. As the progenitor of the idea, he is therefore the artist. Of course, he's not the only artist who feels this way. Andy Warhol had a factory. Mr. Brainwash has a factory. Jeff Koons has a team of assistants, too. Virtually all of these men admit to little talent and a bunch of ideas. But no one is quite as annoying about it as Hirst. "I can't wait to get into a position to make really bad art and get away with it," he told The Times UK in 2003. "At the moment if I did certain things people would look at it, consider it and then say 'f off'. But after a while you can get away with things."

Since 2009, a third of Hirst's works have failed to sell at auction, and those that have been sold were for 30% less than in 2008. Turns out, you can only "get away with things" for so long.

### Questions

Use your own words to answer the following questions:

- 1- Why has Damien Hirst been criticized ? (be precise)
- 2- How has he responded to criticism ?
- 3- Explain the last sentence in the article: « Turns out, you can only « get away with things » for so long. »
- 4- Make a list of vocabulary (collocations) from the text that is useful to talk about Damien Hirst and his career.

## Damien Hirst's Butterflies- from Tea-trays to Mandalas

Daily Art Magazine,

By [Isla Phillips](#)

Published on September 24, 2019

**Damien Hirst – a prominent Young British Artist (YBAs) and now a billionaire – creates sculptures, paintings and drawings. In all of these forms his work challenges the boundaries between art, science and religion. [Mandalas](#) is now open at the White Cube Mason's Yard, London (20 September – 2 November 2019). The show explores questions of death, life and beauty and puts at the centre one of Hirst's favourites motifs – the butterfly.**

Most people know Hirst because of his *Natural History* series. These artworks present bodies suspended in formaldehyde, creating a “zoo of dead animals.” Hirst's questioning of biological existence and death takes a literal form with *Mandalas*.

### The Mandala

Mandalas are geometric designs that aid the viewer's meditation. They try to represent a microcosm of the universe – Hirst is not an artist who shies from daring ideas. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain or Shinto traditions all use Mandalas. This means that the *Butterfly Mandalas* (in contrast to the *Kaleidoscope paintings*) link to Eastern rather than Western traditions.

Hirst's new *Butterfly Mandalas* are large scale concentric paintings featuring one of his most well known motifs, the butterfly. The Mandalas, on huge glossy canvases, are concentric patterns of hundreds of butterfly wings. The predominantly circular pieces are incredible in their intricacy. The complex detail becomes more mesmerising as a result of the particular colour palette of each piece.

### Butterflies: a Hirstian Motif

The butterfly retains its form in death and so it embodies the fascination around mortality. The Greeks used the butterfly to symbolise the soul and in Christian imagery the butterfly is an image of the resurrection. So, it is no wonder that butterflies fascinate Damien Hirst, who has described the butterfly as a “universal trigger.”

“Hirst's prolonged exploration of the life cycle of the butterfly ... is one of the most thoroughgoing and many-sided conceptual projects sustained by any contemporary artist.”

*Butterfly Mandalas* literally gloss and pin back fragility. Stuck into bright and popping household gloss paint the butterflies become eternalised. Each Mandala draws the eye to the single, small, butterfly at their centre. The viewer is forced to meditate upon the bodiless butterfly and all the ideas that it suggests.

Their wings have been dissected from their bodies, but are placed to give an impression of their former corporeality. Like the background paint, the colours of the wings shine bright. Exaggerating this, the uniform placement of multiple butterflies (each ring the same species) heightens the sense of idealised beauty. Some of the butterflies are very large and obviously rare. Alongside these are more common admiral butterflies;

altogether the wings in their mandala arrangement become transfigured into something extraordinary.

45 The *Mandalas* exhibition is not overtly shocking. It doesn't do anything too wild – like 2016's *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* (which was described as “art for a post-truth world”). Nonetheless, the *Mandalas* are totally Hirst and totally captivating.

### Questions

Use your own words to answer the following questions:

- 1- What are the artworks shown at Damien Hirst's current exhibition? Give details.
- 2- What themes does Damien Hirst explore in his art ?
- 3- What is the reviewer's perception of the artworks ? Exemplify your answer with lines from the text.
- 4- Explain « art for a post-truth world » (lines 44-45) and a « universal trigger » (line 28).
- 5- Make a list of vocabulary (collocations) from the text that is useful to talk about Damien Hirst and his career.

## B2

Read the article and answer the following questions. Use your own words.

- 1- Why is Damien Hirst's show in Venice different from others ?
- 2- Explain in your own words what is ironic about Hirst's fame in 2017 ?
- 3- What have been Animal rights organisations' reactions to Hirst's use of animals in his art ?
- 4- What do you think of Hirst saying : "Cut us all in half, we're all the fucking same,"? Do you understand what he means ? Do you agree?
- 5- One more quotation!  
Damien Hirst said one must "kill things in order to look at them."  
Do you agree ?
- 6- Make a list of vocabulary (collocations) from the text that is useful to talk about Damien Hirst and his career.

### **How Many Animals Have Died for Damien Hirst's Art to Live? We Counted.**

Nearly one million, by our conservative estimate.

Caroline Goldstein, April 13, 2017

Damien Hirst is back. More than a decade after he last made headlines, the artist has a new exhibition at François Pinault's Palazzo Grassi and Punta Della Dogana in Venice with a new body of work that delves into the imagined story of an ancient collector and the shipwreck that consigned his treasures to the bottom of the sea. One of the many noteworthy elements of the show? It doesn't contain the unusual art material that has powered Hirst's most famous work: the dead bodies of animals.

Ever since his explosive entry to the British art scene with his 1990 masterpiece *One Thousand Years*—a vitrine featuring a rotting cow skull that breeds maggots that become flies that meet their end from a buzzing bug zapper above—Hirst has made mortality the great theme of his oeuvre. He deploys real cadavers in gallery settings to confront viewers with the implacable fact of death. As the market for Hirst's work grew to astronomic heights, capped off by his \$200 million Sotheby's sale in 2008, his memento-mori works took on an increasingly ironic edge, as if to underscore that money can't buy the one thing everyone craves: not to die.

But what of the animals who laid down their lives for the privilege of partaking in Hirst's grand conceit? Over the years, animal rights groups have regularly inveighed against the artist, with the group 100% Animalisti targeting his Venice show even before it opened by depositing 88 pounds of manure on the steps of the lavish exhibition site. Certainly there have been many, many animals who have passed through the abattoir of Hirst's studio.

We at artnet News have decided to tally how many.

The admittedly partial data amassed here is derived primarily from the extensive catalogue of works and exhibitions on the official Damien Hirst website. Considering the numerous teeny beasties involved, it's a daunting task—you could call this project "The Physical Impossibility of Counting All the Dead Bugs." Throughout his career, Hirst has sourced his materials through a variety of methods and from a variety of sources, including Australian

shark-hunter Vic Hislop, the London-based taxidermist Emily Mayer, and London's own fabled Billingsgate Fish Market. Some of the animals were dead before Hirst came around, while others met ends tailored to their artistically-conceived resting places. They are all united by their final resting place: the domain of the thanatotic artist. "Cut us all in half, we're all the fucking same," Hirst said in conversation with writer Gordon Burn.

Here is our estimate of the size of Hirst's menagerie, divided into categories of different critters.

#### *CUDDLY FARM ANIMALS*

SERIES: Mostly "Natural History" (1991–2014)

VICTIMS: 13 sheep, 7 Holstein Friesian cows, 5 baby calves, 4 bulls, 3 baby horses (with protruding horns to resemble unicorns), 2 pigs, 1 brown bear, and 1 zebra.

BODY COUNT: 36

This series encapsulates almost the entirety of Hirst's career and demonstrates his belief that one must "kill things in order to look at them."

#### *SEA CREATURES*

SERIES: "Natural History" (1991–2014); "Fish in a Formaldehyde Tank" (1994); "Beautiful Inside My Head Forever" (2008)

VICTIMS: 17 sharks, 668 individual fish of at least 38 varieties

BODY COUNT: At least 685

#### *CREATURES BLESSED WITH THE GIFT OF FLIGHT*

SERIES: "Fly Paintings and Sculptures" (2002–2008); "Butterfly Colour Paintings" (1989–2009); "Entomology Cabinets and Paintings" (2008–2012); "Kaleidoscope Paintings" (2001–2008)

VICTIMS: 850,000 houseflies plus 111 generations; 45,000 insects of more than 3,000 species; 17,000 butterflies of the Own and Heliconius species; 5 birds.

BODY COUNT: 912,005

#### *MISCELLANEOUS REMAINS*

SERIES: "Natural History" (1991–2014); "Innocence Lost"; "Lost Love/Love Lost" (2000)

VICTIMS: 46 pork sausages, one diamond-encrusted human skull, 624 internal organs from 8 cows, 16 cow skulls, 41 fish skeletons, one gilded woolly mammoth skeleton.

BODY COUNT: 729

#### **GRAND TOTAL: 913,450**

"It's amazing what you can do with an E in A-Level art, a twisted imagination, and a chainsaw," Hirst declared, accepting the Turner Prize in 1995. Indeed.

For the methodology, please check the online article (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/damien-whats-your-beef-916097>)

## C1

Read the article and take notes to sum it up.

Then make a list of collocations useful to talk and write about Damien Hirst's work

### Damien Hirst and the Art of the Deal

He might be Britain's richest artist, but with each attempt to monetize his talent, Hirst's originality as a conceptual sculptor becomes an ever more distant memory.

New York Times, By Scott Reyburn  
Jan. 21, 2022

LONDON — “He’s a talented artist, but this? *Really?*” said Alan Baldwin, an art collector, looking down recently at a fluffy black sculpture of a spider with bow legs and googly eyes. Back in 1992, three years before winning the prestigious Turner Prize, its creator had astounded the art world by displaying a real 14-foot tiger shark embalmed in a tank of formaldehyde.

“Damien’s having a laugh,” added Baldwin. “He’s wasting his talent.”

Baldwin and his wife, Antonietta Quattrone, didn’t think much of Damien Hirst’s pre-Christmas exhibition of 16 “Pipe Cleaner Animals.” Billed by the artist as “big and fun and playful” and on display in the new ArtSpace gallery at Claridge’s hotel in central London, some cost up to \$350,000.

But they were much more enthused when they collected the purchase that had brought them there: “You ain’t there to hide,” number 720 from the 10,000 unique watermarked, microdotted and hologrammed spot paintings that Hirst’s assistants had made for “[The Currency](#),” the artist’s latest experiment in messing with the art market’s notions of price and value.

Each image in the series was sold for the modest price of \$2,000, but buyers had to choose between taking a physical painting, [or an NFT](#) that can be traded on cryptocurrency platforms. Baldwin and Quattrone were among just 5 percent of buyers who had opted for a painting, Hirst’s manager, Joe Hage, said in December.

“We just wanted to have an original piece,” said Quattrone. “Our grandsons understand NFTs, but we don’t.”

The “Pipe Cleaner Animals” and “The Currency” were just two of more than 10 exhibitions and projects that the hyperproductive Hirst and his assistants created last year. This year has kicked off with “Forgiving and Forgetting,” Hirst’s first New York exhibition since 2018, running at Gagosian’s West 24th Street showroom through Feb. 26. Although Hirst might be Britain’s wealthiest artist, at 56 he is no longer the force he was in the market.

In 2008, his works raised \$268 million at auctions; in 2021, his auction sales had shrunk to \$24 million, according to the Artprice database. A new generation of wealthy collectors and speculators is more interested in buying works by younger emerging names. And with each attempt to monetize his artistic talent — whether through paintings, prints or NFTs — Hirst’s originality as a conceptual sculptor becomes an ever more distant memory.

On a recent December afternoon, a mile east of Claridge’s, Hirst was in his cavernous studio in a former parking garage, surrounded by big abstract canvases in various stages of completion. Two new “Reverence Paintings,” in which veils of gold flecks float ethereally over a white pointillist ground, were ready to be packed up for the forthcoming Gagosian show. That exhibition also includes marble sculptures from Hirst’s grandiose mock-archeological “Treasures From the Wreck of the Unbelievable” project, first unveiled during the 2017 Venice Biennale.

“My whole career can be seen as a history of painting. I loved Goya, Bacon. I adored Soutine. I just wanted to be a painter,” Hirst said in an interview, wearing paint-splattered overalls. “I was always a bit frightened by it all, worried about my ability, my talent.”

Hirst instead found fame and made most of his fortune by encasing flies, sharks, farm animals, cigarette butts and medicines in vitrines. The trademark spot and spin paintings he produced in the 1990s and early 2000s were made by teams of studio assistants.

But for the last 15 years, Hirst has been doggedly painting on his own. After what he and most critics agreed was a false start trying to paint figuratively [in the manner of his hero Francis Bacon](#), Hirst returned to the neo-pointillist abstraction he first explored as a student at Goldsmiths college in London in the late 1980s.

Sequestered in his studio during coronavirus lockdowns, Hirst used this painting technique to make 107 riotously colored canvases of flowering cherry blossom trees. A selection of 29 of these were exhibited at the [Fondation Cartier in Paris last year](#).

(The show moves on to [the National Art Center in Tokyo in March](#).) Reviews were mixed. Jonathan Jones, an art critic at The Guardian, who regards Hirst as a great sculptor, but a “[lousy](#)” painter, dismissed the exhibition as “another pumped-up lockdown antidote.” It nonetheless drew 170,000 visitors over a six-month run.

The “Cherry Blossoms” have also proved to be one of Hirst’s best-selling lines. According to Hage, the manager, Hirst retained some of the “Cherry Blossom” paintings for his personal collection, but all 80 or so works brought to market were sold before the Fondation Cartier show opened, for between \$750,000 and \$3.5 million each, by Gagosian and White Cube, the artist’s dealerships and by Hirst’s own company Science Ltd.

“We could have sold many, many more,” the gallerist Larry Gagosian said by phone. “People were literally begging to buy these paintings.”

Gagosian recalled thinking that Hirst was “an extraordinarily original and innovative artist from the get-go, right after I saw the shark,” adding that Hirst was also “a very smart businessman, as Warhol was.”

Andy Warhol, in his book “[From A to B and Back Again](#),” famously pronounced that “business” was the best art. He also identified “business art” as the “step that comes after art.”

Hirst joining in the [mania for NFTs](#) was certainly smart business. He produced “The Currency” project with HENI, an art services

business founded by Hage. They grossed about \$18 million from the initial sale, and, according to Hage, are collecting a further 5 percent of the proceeds from NFT resales.

“I’ve got about 2,000 people online constantly talking about ‘The Currency.’” Hirst said. “It’s trading all the time: It goes up and down, it’s got value one minute, and not the next.”

“It’s like being in a cult, and I’m the cult leader,” he added.

But Hirst’s lucrative fascination with flower paintings and financial value systems has turned him into a very different artist from the provocateur who in 1990 mesmerized the art world with “[A Thousand Years](#),” a vitrine filled with breeding flies being zapped above a severed calf’s head.

Ivor Braka, a London-based private collector and dealer, acquired Hirst’s mordant motorized formaldehyde piece, “[This Little Piggy Went to Market, This Little Piggy Stayed at Home](#),” at Hirst’s first Gagosian show, in 1996, for about \$150,000. Not long afterward, he sold the sculpture to Charles Saatchi, who included it and “A Thousand Years” in the landmark 1997 “[Sensation](#)” exhibition in London that introduced Hirst to a wider audience.

“Damien was one of the most radical artists of postwar Britain, both as a sculptor and as a thinker,” Braka said. But Hirst’s subsequent strategy of “making the maximum amount of money in the shortest time was not the greatest decision,” he added.

Under the guidance of a previous manager, the accountant [Frank Dunphy](#), Hirst became a global brand. He negotiated huge cuts from his galleries, collaborated with his dealer White Cube in 2007 to put a [diamond-encrusted skull](#) on the market for close to \$100 million and then bypassed the gallery system altogether the following year by [selling 223 works in a \\$200 million Sotheby’s auction](#), just at the moment when the global financial system was about to crash.

That \$100-million skull, called “[For the Love of God,](#)” was Hirst’s ultimate test of whether artistic and financial value could be the same thing. It now languishes in storage in Hatton Garden, London’s jewelry district, Hirst said, owned by him, White Cube and undisclosed investors.

Hirst added that he still feels frustration about the way potential buyers had shied from an artwork made from platinum and diamonds, when they were happy to pay millions for canvases smeared with pigments. “Everyone buys into the fact that paintings cost nothing to make, but can sell for an infinite amount. Why can they believe in that, but not the other?” he said.

But what projects like “For the Love of God,” “The Currency,” and even a \$200-million Sotheby’s auction have shown is that Hirst, while striving to emulate his student heroes as a painter, is also still, at least in his mind, a conceptual artist. It’s just that he’s now thinking conceptually about money, instead of animals and death. As the critic Hal Foster pointed out in the immediate aftermath of that watershed 2008 auction, the [market](#) has replaced formaldehyde as Hirst’s medium.

Julian Stallabrass, an art history lecturer at the Courtauld Institute in London and the author of the 1999 book, “High Art Lite: The Rise and Fall of Young British Art,” has followed Hirst throughout his career. He said he saw an important distinction between Warhol and Hirst as “business” artists. “The odd thing about Hirst is that at some level he believes the schtick about life, death, love and great art,” said Stallabrass.

“He is the perfect meritocratic neoliberal artist, for whom there is no contradiction between being all about the money and holding to traditional notions of genius,” Stallabrass added.

Where the lasting value in all this lies will be history’s guess.

## C1

Read the article and take notes to sum it up.

Then make a list of collocations useful to talk and write about Damien Hirst's work

### **The YBAs: The London-based Young British Artists**

by Rose Aidin

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"Young British Artists" (or YBAs as they swiftly became known) is now something of a misnomer. For this group of artists can no longer be described as young—they are mostly now in their fifties—and they are very international, and barely share a common style. Yet this small group of London-based artists, who came to prominence in the nineties, changed the international art world. The YBA phenomenon directly contributed to the climate of acceptance of modern and contemporary art in the U.K. which enabled the success of Tate Modern when it opened in 2000. The YBA remain a powerful force in the international art world today.

I first encountered the Young British Artists as a freelance journalist covering the arts for the mainstream press in the late nineties. By then art was no longer confined to single column reviews in remote arts pages, as it had been for decades. Instead, contemporary art was splashed over front and features pages. The Tate's annual Turner Prize for contemporary art had become headline news, with the award ceremony broadcast live on television, and for an intoxicating time, London was the center of the international creative world—all thanks largely to the YBAs.

#### **So who and what are the YBAs?**

The YBAs were a loose and disparate group, very much associated with London in the 1990s and the period of increased pride in popular British culture dubbed "Cool Britannia." YBA artists included Jake and Dinos Chapman, Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Sarah Lucas, Chris Ofili, Marc Quinn, Sam Taylor-Johnson, Mark Wallinger, and Rachel Whiteread. Many of the artists had studied together at Goldsmiths College of Art in London, which had abolished the traditional separation between art forms (painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking) and focused on conceptual art, however there is no one single YBA style or approach. The work can be shocking, conceptual, or even traditional in its formal features: the principal link between the YBAs was social and attitudinal.

The majority of the artists came from non-establishment backgrounds, had grown up with Margaret Thatcher as prime minister and, perhaps as a result, had acquired an entrepreneurial, "can-do" approach to art and life. Then in their twenties and thirties, these artists were often glamorous and generally loved to party, and the nineties art world—and "Cool Britannia"—was happy to give them free rein.

#### **Damien Hirst, *Freeze*, and Charles Saatchi**

So how did the YBAs come into being? Damien Hirst was de facto ringleader of the YBAs. In 1988, while studying at Goldsmiths College, Hirst curated and promoted a "pop up" exhibition in an empty warehouse of work by him and his peers, entitled *Freeze*. Charles Saatchi, an advertising titan and art collector, bought work from Hirst's *Freeze* show and from the fledgling artists' representatives. In 1992, the phrase "Young British Artists" was first used by *Art Forum* magazine to describe the group, and when Saatchi exhibited their work at his 30,000 square foot space in a converted paint factory in North London that same year, he entitled the show *Young British Artists*. And so a new movement was born. The work was new, fresh, and exciting: immediately accessible to the public, yet also with high art resonances and references.

#### **The most expensive fish without chips**

Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* of 1991, a shark suspended and preserved in a tank of formaldehyde, looked sensational in the Saatchi Gallery's

warehouse-style setting in the 1992 *Young British Artists* exhibition. *The Sun* tabloid newspaper ran a story about the piece entitled “£50,000 for fish without chips?” and “the shark” became an icon of nineties art and culture. As a result, Hirst was shortlisted for that year’s Turner Prize, and in 1995 was awarded the prize, which was presented to him by Charles Saatchi. The YBA star was firmly in the ascendant.

Hirst’s Turner Prize exhibition included *Mother and Child Divided* (1993), a cow and calf cut in half and preserved in a vitrine of formaldehyde. The work caused outrage among the animal-loving British public. Hirst commented, “I remember what Warhol said: you don’t read your reviews, you weigh them.” He might well have added another of Warhol’s aphorisms: “Making money is art. And working is art. And good business is the best art.”

### **YBAs at the heart of the establishment**

It was Charles Saatchi again, master of both presentation and media coverage, who positioned the YBAs firmly in the mainstream of popular culture with the 1997 exhibition *Sensation*, which filled the Royal Academy in London with 110 works by 42 artists from Saatchi’s personal collection. It was the year that Princess Diana died and Tony Blair became Prime Minister. The country was ripe for a change. The YBA’s column inches became column miles: the exhibition was visited by 285,000 people, almost half of them aged under thirty. A new audience and climate had been created for modern art. Contemporary art was now at the fore of public consciousness.

### **The path to Tate Modern**

Until Tate Modern opened in 2000, London was the only major European city without a public art gallery for modern and contemporary art. Britain was resolutely philistine about the visual as epitomized by a controversy in 1976 triggered by the display of Carl Andre’s *Equivalent VIII* (1966) as a recent acquisition at the Tate Gallery in Millbank (now Tate Britain). *The Evening Standard* referred to the sculpture as a “pile of bricks.” Public outrage and protest focused on the expenditure of “tax payers’ money” on this Minimalist work made of manufactured bricks. Evidently, much needed to change before a museum of modern art would be welcome in London. Private funds would be required in order for public collections to acquire modern and contemporary art, and ultimately to support a London museum dedicated to its display.

In 1984 the Tate’s annual Turner Prize for new art was founded with the long-term goal of creating an open and understanding climate for modern and contemporary art. By the mid-nineties, thanks to the nominated Young British Artists’ high profile and pulling power, the Turner Prize had become a major annual event, with record-breaking numbers of visitors to the Tate’s exhibition of short-listed artists, and its gala dinners and prize-giving ceremonies avidly attended and covered, with the likes of Madonna presenting the prize. The purpose of the Turner Prize was accomplished, thanks in great part to the YBAs, and the public made ready for the opening of Tate Modern.

### **“Art is power”**

When Tate Modern (a museum dedicated to modern and contemporary art) opened in London in May 2000, its launch party for 4,000 people was the hottest ticket in town, and broadcast live on the BBC. “Everyone” was there, yet it was the Young British Artists who had done so much with their talent, energy and glamour to bring the art world’s focus to London for the first time in centuries (and to create a climate of acceptance for contemporary art), who provided the stardust. The YBAs ensured that Tate Modern’s opening party was the place to be and the museum was an instant success, with visitor numbers vastly higher than anticipated.

<https://smarthistory.org/yba/>