Facing Mortality: Death in the Life and Work of Damien Hirst

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_Facing Mortality: Death in the Life and Work of Damien Hirst_

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by

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Dedication

To My Dad, Joseph Delikat, 1945-2006
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Introduction

Death is everywhere in the works of Damien Hirst. The artist’s concepts concerning death have been pervasive within his works and dialog throughout his career. Yet, this overt meaning has been diminished by more digestible and publicity-driven mainstream aspects of the artist’s career including fame, monetary success, brash behavior, and art market significance.1 The fact that Hirst’s art also speaks in a 20th century sensational vernacular that utilizes and comments on art as a commodity often overshadows the prominent universal message of death imbedded in his works.2 While Hirst clearly employs multiple objectives, the propensity to express death in his work is the foundation of his artistic voice that was formed, as he has time and again grappled with mortality in his work.

The suggestion that Hirst is, in part, an artist who creates from life experience runs contrary to popular belief. The most commonly held knowledge of the artist, both inside and outside of the art world, is that he mass produces shocking works that sell for huge sums of money and that his meteoric rise was orchestrated by a notoriously cunning advertising executive, Charles Saatchi.3 Saatchi began collecting work from Hirst in 1988, when the artist organized and curated a group exhibition in an abandoned warehouse with some of his classmates from Goldsmith’s College.4 The exhibition titled “Freeze,” included the work of Sara Lucas, Angus Fairhurst, and Gary Hume, and Hirst

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2 Ibid.
worked to garner visits from the most influential curators and collectors in the London art scene, including Saatchi. 

Saatchi continued collecting work from Hirst and a number of the students who exhibited in “Freeze.” Their works were shown at the Saatchi Gallery between 1992 and 1994 in a three part series titled “Young British Artists I, II, and III.” They were later included in a travelling exhibition titled “Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Gallery” at the Royal Academy in 1997 and at the Brooklyn Museum in 1999. “Sensation” garnered a staggering amount of publicity that was engineered by Saatchi and fueled by the unconventional and provocative materials used in the artist’s works. The subject matter and materials in the works exhibited ranged from Hirst’s use of animal carcasses, to Chris Offili’s use of elephant dung on a painting of the virgin Mary, to Marc Quinn’s use of his own blood in a sculpture, to Marcus Harvey’s portrait of a child killer, to Sara Lucas and Tracy Emin’s sexual content. Beyond the work, Hirst and his colleagues became a tabloid mainstay for their brazen attitudes, raucous partying, and all around scandalous behavior. It was through this exaggerated mix of hype, publicly, and art that this group of artists came to be infamously known as the Young British Artists (YBA’s) and it is within this context that Damien Hirst began his career.

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6 Sarah Kent, Shark Infested Waters: The Saatchi Collection of British Art in the 90s, 6.
7 Ibid, 268.
9 Ibid.
Although the media’s treatment of Hirst was overblown, he did earn this reputation as the enfant terrible of the YBAs and continues to perpetuate it through his audacious approach to art production and the market.\textsuperscript{12} As a consequence, the meaning of his work is largely considered through the lens of money, persona, and sensationalism, which overshadows the theme of death within his work. While Hirst has been forthcoming about the meaning of his work, with receptive interviewers and in publications he produces, mass interpretations and perceptions continue to have little or nothing to do with this original intent.\textsuperscript{13} His initial concept for appropriating “real” death in his now infamous work \textit{The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living} [Figure 1] stemmed from his formative philosophy when he first truly understood the meaning of mortality.\textsuperscript{14} The imperative was to bring this moment of realization that death is inevitable to the viewer. This concept was coupled with his desire to merge conceptual ideas with a realism with which his working class neighbors in Leeds could easily interact.\textsuperscript{15} In this study, I attempt to clarify the primary forces in Hirst’s work that can be traced throughout his career in terms of traditional responses to death in his life.

\textbf{Review of Literature}

Throughout Hirst’s career the critical press has had a strong tendency to discuss the artist’s work while simultaneously calling his art and his validity as an artist into

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{12} Martin Chilton, “Damien Hirst’s Spot Paintings: 1,365 and counting,” \textit{Telegraph}, June 12, 2013.
\textsuperscript{13} Rachel Campbell-Johnston, “Will they have the stomach for this?” \textit{Times} (London), September 27, 2000.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 12:02.
\end{flushleft}
question. A massive amount of coverage on Hirst’s work is centered on the use of animal carcases as a meaningless attempt to shock and the huge sums of money the works have garnered. Early articles that are representative of this approach are Fiammetta Rocco, “Profile: Lambs to the Laughter: Artist, Joker, or Showman?” from The Independent in 1994, and Sarah Lyall’s, “Is It Art or Just Dead Meat?” from the New York Times Magazine in 1995.\(^{16}\) Art critic, Jonathan Jones, who writes for the London-based Guardian newspaper, has covered Hirst throughout his career. Jones’ reviews range from finding value in the significance of Hirst’s works to calling him a dictator, a national disgrace, and a money-grabbing maker of kitsch.\(^{17}\) Artist and professor at Goldsmith’s College, University of London, Michael Craig Martin offers an effective refutation to writers who questioned the motives of the YBAs and Hirst by pointing out that in the beginning, the artists’ choice of materials was outlandish beyond salability, which points to the artist’s paradoxical relationship with the art market when their creative voice was formed.\(^{18}\)

The existing art historical literature on Hirst addresses the content of death in terms of how his works relate to specific genres that have addressed mortality throughout art history, but they are only briefly related to the artist’s biography in some instances.

\(^{16}\) Fiammetta Rocco, “Profile: Lambs to the Laughter: Artist, Joker or Showman?”, 19; Lyall, “Is It Art Or Just Dead Meat?”, 2.


\(^{18}\) Michael Craig Martin, “The Early Years,” in Damien Hirst, 38.
Art historian and curator Rudi Fuchs discusses universal elements of death in the diamond skull, *For the Love of God* [Figure 2], and places the work between ancient Aztec culture and Vanitas paintings. In “Minimal Baroque & Hymnes” Rudi Fuchs discusses how Hirst’s ability to find a tangible means to express death is similar to artistic expressions of faith and mourning during Renaissance through the Romantic period. Philosopher and art critic Arthur C. Danto’s writing “Medicine Cabinets: Art, Death, Sex, Society and Drugs” examines the origins of the series in terms of how Hirst’s work relates to timeless philosophical aspect of thinkers examining mortality. In the Tate Modern’s 2012 retrospective catalog curator and editor Ann Gallagher considers Hirst’s early studies with human and animal specimens in life drawing classes. Another article in the Tate catalog by writer and critic Brian Dillon notes a photo Hirst took as a teenager, *With Dead Head* [Figure 3], at a morgue with the head of a dead man and Hirst’s use of it in terms of shock, disgust, and hypochondria. Dillon marks this photo as the artist’s earliest memento mori and also relates Hirst’s work to the genres of Cabinets of Curiosities within the context of theatrical approaches present in his work.

While my study relies upon the scholars who have previously discussed death in Hirst’s work, it also utilizes a number of autobiographical and biographical publications, videos, and films that have been authored and co-authored, as well as published and

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20 Rudi Fuchs, “Minimal Baroque & Hymnes,” in Cornucopia (London: Other Criteria/Musee Oceanographique de Monaco, 2010), 13-21.
produced, by Damien Hirst through his company Other Criteria and Science Ltd. Therefore, this primary source material is controlled by the artist and offers information about his life experiences, perspectives on death, and artistic intentions. Important resources include sources are *Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life, I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, With Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now,* and *Nothing Matters.*

*On the Way to Work* is an autobiography that resulted from a series of recorded conversations with author Gordon Burn, who also co-authors a few texts with Hirst. Burn and Hirst’s writing “Is Mr. Death In?” looks into the meaning of death in Hirst’s work through the element of shock value with formal links to modernist art history, theory, and the subculture of which Hirst was a part (post-punk rock and 1990s Britpop culture). As I stated previously, death is everywhere in Hirst’s work, but is it being analyzed clearly?

**Contribution**

While the theme and meaning of death within Hirst’s works is obvious and primary source material is abundant, the secondary source material has not yet fully examined the reoccurring theme throughout Hirst’s career by analyzing specific works in relation to the events of his life, as my in-depth study does. Therefore, I consider Hirst’s own words as

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26 Damien Hirst and Gordon Burn, “Is Mr. Death In?,” *I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, With Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now,* 7-13.
a primary source that speaks to his artistic intent, along with the iconography within the works that express specific instances of death in his life. My study links to the art historical writings mentioned in the review of existing literature as they pertain to the iconography of specific works. It within this context that I am contextualizing Hirst’s biography throughout multiple series and tracing how his artistic voice and practices were formed in connection with his philosophy of death.

By proposing a reconsideration of Hirst from a biographical and iconographical perspective, my reevaluation provides a deeper understanding that exists within and informs the overall significance of the artist’s works. My study does not aim to displace the existing significance of the artist or his relation to the art market, but it fits into and attempts to inform the overall understanding of his contributions to the field.

Outline

The chapters present the theme of death in the artist’s career and serve as an argument to counter common perceptions of Hirst that displaced the obvious meaning in his works. Chapter one “Foundations of Damien Hirst’s Philosophy on Death and How This Shaped His Artistic Intent and Practice,” is loosely structured chronologically in tracing the artist’s early development and illustrates when his philosophy of death was factored into his early works. Hirst’s early conversations with his grandmother about death formed his awareness and they link directly to the theme as a driving force within his works. The materials Hirst uses in his work are seen as sensational and how he came to use specific materials in his work is directly tied to his experience with death. He created the first work in the “Medicine Cabinets” series, Sinner [Figure 4], depicting a
portrait of his deceased grandmother through the use of her remaining prescriptions from her medicine cabinet at the time of her death; this work marked the forming of his artistic voice. Again, while this aspect of choice of materials is a part of how the artist’s voice was formed, my study proposes that the primary force for the concept was the artist’s philosophy on death. Works included in this chapter are from Hirst’s series’ titled “Medicine Cabinets” and “Natural History.”

Chapter two “Artist’s Philosophy of Death Is Realized in His Works through Experience with Loss, Suicide, Addiction, and Self-Reflection,” is also loosely structured chronologically and focuses on life experiences that prompted the artist to contemplate and realize his philosophy of death further in the works. It examines Hirst’s experiences with addiction and mourning. Instances of understanding suicide through his works are depicted in 2006 during his joint show with Francis Bacon. When he created the works for this exhibition, Hirst examined the drug-induced suicide of Bacon’s partner, George Dyer.27 Shortly after these works were created, Hirst declared his own sobriety.28 In 2008, his friend and fellow YBA artist, Angus Fairhurst, committed suicide.29 These instances are clearly moments when the artist’s life experience with death directly forms content of his work. In spite of 2008 also being the year Hirst eliminated the commercial gallery dealer and successfully went straight to auction with 223 new works, it is the same year he stopped all production of his ongoing series and painted without the use of

assistants. The resulting paintings address the subject of his friend Angus Fairhurst’s death and reflections on Hirst’s own life and work. Based on these events and examples of work, I argue that while there are a multitude of perceptions during this period of 2006-2008, the primary force in the work is the artist’s relationship with death.

Chapter three, “Artist’s Philosophy of Death and Extremes of Commodification,” breaks with the chronological format and explores the issue of commodification in relation to Hirst’s philosophy of death. This chapter examines the mass production of approximately 1,500 “Spot Paintings.” The “Spot Paintings,” initially titled “Pharmaceutical Paintings,” link to the artist’s “Medicine and Pill Cabinets” through their commentary on prescription drug culture. The “Spot Paintings” are an ongoing series with the intention to imply endlessness, thereby avoiding death. This chapter also examines Hirst’s work For the Love of God. This infamous work was cast from a human skull and encrusted with 8,601 perfect diamonds. The work caused a spectacle because of the cost and the combination of a sacred symbol with decadence to an unfathomable degree. While the symbolism of death is overt, the piece also clearly centers around the monetary value. The work was notably conceived of by the artist when he began partially living and working in Mexico where he found a cultural home for his long held open relationship with death. The “Spin Paintings” and the merge of the series’ technique with mass-produced plastic skulls is also considered.

32 King, Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life, 32:20.
My study concludes, after establishing a better understanding of the biographical forces that are repeatedly engrained into Hirst’s concepts, with a look at the artist’s practices as a collector, gallery, and business owner that further illustrate his commitment to and financial reinvestment in culture.
Chapter 1: The Foundations of Damien Hirst’s Philosophy on Death and How this Shaped his Artistic Intent and Practice

Although Damien Hirst is most widely understood as a market-driven provocateur, what is less known is that he arrived at the premise of death in his work through personal experience. The artist’s contemplations of life and confrontations with death are descendants of great artists, thinkers, and philosophers throughout the centuries. His works speak from a universal place of existence shared by all humans. A notable difference for Hirst is that his works are attempting to evoke a universal philosophical premise, while also acknowledging the stakes that concern contemporary art in a post-Duchampian, post-Warholian century. Because Hirst’s approach to art is also keenly in dialog with this lineage of 20th century art, which incorporates the art market, advertising, commodity culture, and concerns for mass appeal, the meaning imbedded in his works that contains a personal consideration of death and therefore life is often misunderstood or cast aside.

Hirst’s core philosophy is an essential universal pursuit that values living with an awareness of one’s own mortality. This aspect of his work is often overshadowed by a portion of the artist’s successive objectives that involve fame, money, and debauchery fueled by a punk rock style of revolt. While those better known factors are also incorporated into the artist’s works and social conduct, they are part of the driving force beyond his work that finds its origin and foundations as a recurring topic of death in his

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33 Examples throughout history could include the proclamation attributed to Socrates: “the unexamined life is not worth living.” See also Masaccio’s Holy Trinity, where at the base of the monument a skeleton lies and beneath are the words, “What you are I once was; what I am, you will become.” In Being and Time, Heidegger’s idea is that an authentic life is one lived in the awareness one’s own death, as cited by Arthur C. Danto in Damien Hirst’s Medicine Cabinets.

34 The stakes of a post-Duchampian and post-Warholian century refer to art that also embodies an awareness of pop and advertising culture along with satire and ready-made use of materials.
works. By considering his life experiences and realizations about death through meaningful conversations, intense contemplations, and devastating loss, the subject of death within the artist’s works can be more clearly understood from a personal origin and seen as the impetus that prompts the artist’s way of working. In order to understand how his philosophical premise, that an awareness of death is authentically valued and rooted within his life, it is necessary to consider how the foundation of his personal experiences first began to serve as the foundation for his artistic voice.

As a young child, Hirst came to an understanding of the elemental basis of life and death.35 This understanding had a profound impact that shaped his perspective as a person and later as an artist. Hirst’s relationship with his grandmother was unique, especially due to the fact that he did not have a relationship with his birth father and only had the presence of a stepfather until the age of twelve.36 The artist defines their relationship as logical and realistic and alludes to her as a father figure and mentions discussing difficult things with her, including death, at a very young age.37 He recalls the first moment he grasped mortality through a conversation with his grandmother:

I must have been about seven; it dawned on me that there is nothing you can do about it; you are going to die anyway. I remember asking my grandmother, so if you don’t get shot, or hit by a car, or die of cancer, if you avoid all those things you are going to die anyway? She said: Yes, then you die of old age and I was like, bummer.38

37 Hirst and Burn, 22.
38 King, Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life, 18:09.
Upon his grandmother’s passing, Hirst received contents of her medicine cabinet. The background of his request to inherit the remains of his grandmother’s medicine cabinet was something he discussed with her during life. Hirst started working with the idea of sculptural encasements in 1988 during his studies at Goldsmiths College when he created this first work of the “Medicine Cabinets” series using the remaining contents of his grandmother’s medicine cabinet. Hirst has referenced this work as “taking a portrait of his grandmother through the drug packaging,” of the prescriptions she used. The artist essentially created the portrait by placing medications according to the location in the body that the medications treat. He titled the work Sinner, which came from The Clash track The Sound of Sinners. While the song sounds like a joyous gospel, it contains lyrics about prescription drug use and has been described as The Clash taking “a sideways look at organized religion and belief systems, pointing out inequalities.” Hirst has often characterized his relationship with his grandmother as close with conversations about life, death, and religion. The title of her portrait points to a song that perhaps resonated with the artist on the deep level of contemplating life that the two of them shared and that Hirst came to express through his art.

39 Danto, Damien Hirst’s Medicine Cabinets, 5.
40 Lyall, “Is It Art Or Just Dead Meat?”, 2. “Damien had occasionally talked of putting his grandmother in a piece of art after she died. The grandmother, apparently, got the joke.”
41 Hirst and Burn, On the Way to Work, 19. While Sinners served as the first medicine cabinet, the work grew into a series of twelve “Medicine Cabinets” that were named after the twelve songs on the Sex Pistols album, Never Mind the Bollocks; this work was named after The Clash track The Sound of Sinners (1980).
43 Danto, Damien Hirst’s Medicine Cabinets, 69.
44 The Clash, The Sound of Sinners, Epic Records, 1980. Lyrics from the song: “The winds of fear / whip away the sickness / the messages on the tablet / was Valium…/ After all this time / To believe in Jesus / After all those drugs / I thought I was Him.”
46 Nicholas Serota, “Interviews Damien Hirst, 14 July 2011,” in Damien Hirst, 93-94.
Thomas Crow points out that *Sinners* conveys a unique visual biographical marker, as the labels on the prescriptions show the addresses of his grandmother and the pharmacies in the city of Leeds where the artist grew up, this makes the work unlike any that follow in the series.\(^49\)

The act of Hirst requesting and later using his grandmother’s remaining prescriptions in his work is a personal act of an artist who formed his voice in college that predates any success driven sensationalism. With *Sinners*, the object has the appearance of a well-organized medicine cabinet from a doctor or pharmacist’s office combined with the interior familiarity of a medicine cabinet in the home.\(^50\) The sterile white background and ordered shelves of rows housing carefully placed boxes and bottles convey a stark aesthetic that becomes a trademark of Hirst’s style.\(^51\) In the lower right corner, a rectangular space features a plastic anatomy figure of a female. Her chest is wide open revealing the organs, and the head is split in two with the left side placed on the shelf just above, as though the anatomy tool of the human figure is open to be analyzed. Perhaps, it is revealing that in this portrait, his late grandmother’s anatomy is laid bare through the actual prescriptions that were used to treat her various illnesses prior to her death. With *Sinners* the artist adapted the everyday object of the medicine cabinet directly from life and filled it with the prescriptions. He appropriated a seemingly mundane object, the

\(^{49}\) Thomas Crow, “In the Glass Menagerie,” in *Damien Hirst*, 191. Following *Sinners*, the artist would update the prescriptions and in the works regularly to ensure that they had a fresh look in terms of the graphics and aesthetic of current drug packaging.

\(^{50}\) Ibid, 8. “Hirst describes a viewer who has some understanding of arranging medicines in actual medicine cabinets”…“the arrangement would make no clinical sense to someone who understood medicines.”

medicine cabinet, to consider the usage of prescriptions as both a symbol and literal representation of our aims to cure and protect the body.

A portrait made from the medications the artist’s grandmother used to stave off illnesses, therefore, becomes a representation of her desire to keep her body healthy and alive.\textsuperscript{52} Since it was made posthumously, the portrait might also signify that it was a failed attempt. Hirst states: “You can only cure people for so long and then they’re going to die anyway. You can’t arrest decay, but these medicine cabinets suggest you can.”\textsuperscript{53}

Hirst also relates the concept of prescription medications to discussions he had with his mother during trips to the pharmacy.\textsuperscript{54} He observed that while his mother understood little about the scientific function of the medicines she took, she held a trust in their capacity to heal.\textsuperscript{55} In contrast, when Hirst discussed art with his mother, there was a resistance to accept ideas. Hirst contemplated this belief within art and medicine; he stated: “I can’t understand why most people believe in medicine and don’t believe in art, without questioning either.”\textsuperscript{56}

The artist is working with the societal belief in medicine that stems from the extraordinary capacity of science and the pharmaceutical industry to treat illnesses and restore health, which in some instances, result in medicine’s ability to intervene between life and death for a time. Therefore, Hirst’s “Medicine Cabinets” series point to these

\textsuperscript{52} Danto, \textit{Damien Hirst’s Medicine Cabinets}, 5. This analysis derives from the above reference to \textit{Sinners} as a “portrait of his grandmother” and Arthur C. Danto’s statement that “his Medicine Cabinets constitute a constellation of still life’s that express and reflect the human body as a field of vulnerabilities and of hopeful medical interventions that have replaced the body as a narrative agent that artists must learn to depict in heroic stances.”

\textsuperscript{53} Dannat, “Damien Hirst, ‘Life’s Like This.’

\textsuperscript{54} Danto, \textit{Damien Hirst’s Medicine Cabinets}, 6.

\textsuperscript{55} Hirst and Burn, \textit{On the Way to Work}, 25.

\textsuperscript{56} Damien Hirst, \textit{Damien Hirst’s: The Complete Medicine Cabinets} (London: Other Criteria/L&M Arts, 2010), 123.
acts of utilizing prescriptions to maintain or restore health as a sign that the user invests a belief, be it conscious or unconscious, in the medicine’s ability to intervene by treating the illness. The medications offer relief from an illness, keep a health issue at bay, or even cure a condition – the patient therefore invests some level of belief in the pills’ ability to keep him or her healthy and therefore to keep them alive. In turn, these advances in science, through prescriptions, offer some sense of control over our inevitable mortality. The pills in Hirst’s “Medicine Cabinets” reference this aspect of the capacity of science and specifically the pharmaceutical industry has shifted our view of illness. These works become a symbolic set of pills that can provide a sense of control over our mortal existence.

Art historian and curator Rudi Fuchs points out that Hirst started creating art at a time when contemporary society began to experience advances in science not only to stay healthy to live longer, but to seemingly occupy themselves with trying to avoid death entirely:

We may still grieve for the dead in our time-honored ways, but in the contemporary world our obsession with death – and especially with not dying at all – has changed completely. That is the ultimate consequence of the spectacular progress of medical science and pharmaceutical research. As this has mostly taken place in Western social democracies that are supposed to care for the entire well-being of every citizen, the idea is emerging that ill health, and maybe even death, are somehow unjust. The reality of death is inconceivable in the mind of the living: the first shark already said so. Of course, this is also a fallacy, but read the papers, watch television: staying healthy and not dying have become overriding passion in contemporary society – as general and powerful a preoccupation as, in Victorian times, the people’s deep yearning to save their immortal souls. The compulsive concern for health – physical health – and the prevention of illness is a unique contemporary issue, consuming

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vast amounts of public money and attention. Health and wellness have become a new religion, the cherished subject of hospital soaps and reality television. That is the contemporary reality in which Damien Hirst began making his art.  

Hirst has often stated that in England, death is not talked about openly and is swept under the carpet. This view that society does not openly face our mortality is also supported in professor David Clark’s Sociological Review Monograph *The Sociology of Death: Theory, Culture, Practice* published in 1993 in which sociologist Anthony Giddens analyzed the relationship between death and high modernity and called for more studies on how death is contemplated in British society.  

In 1991, the artist’s childhood realization of mortality manifested directly through his infamous work *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. Hirst created this monumental work in the vein of his childhood realization that we are mortal. Within this work lies the artist’s straightforward intention to confront the viewer with the presence of death and absence of life within a contemporary gallery space.

*The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* conveys the stark, powerful, and enforcing reality of death through the carcass of a shark. The massive thirteen-foot tiger shark is contained and suspended within a tank filled with blue tinted formaldehyde, giving the suggestion of floating in its natural environment. With

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its jaw wide open, this magnificent creature embodies force even in this preserved state of death. The stark encasement conveys the confidence of a minimal aesthetic that allows the case to recede for an unencumbered viewing of the shark. Fear and awe come together in the presence of this fierce beast who met with certain death.

The reality of death contained in an enormous tank, expressed through the lifeless body of a once powerful shark, puts the viewer face to face with the creature’s mortality. Through the premise of the ready-made, Hirst took a found object, in this case a dead shark that was specifically hunted and killed for this task, into the realm of art for viewer contemplation. The found object that Hirst is using conceptually is literally the carcass of a shark, but it is the death of the animal that carries out the concept. Hirst is thereby using “real” death through this ready-made art object. The artist used the mortality of the shark itself as a mirror of our own mortality. This concept is deepened by the title of the work, which came from an essay that Hirst wrote in college on the work of Robert Longo; it was initially a statement that Hirst used to describe the idea of death to himself; he liked the way it expressed both absence and presence. This dichotomy of absence and presence as applied through the presence of death and absence of life aims to provoke contemplation within the viewer. Hirst acknowledges that the viewer needs to

63 Juan Antonio Ramirez, *Duchamp: Love and Death, Even* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1998), 26. Marcel Duchamp’s concept of the ready-made art object turned the artist’s act of choosing a ready-made found object from the world. Hirst adapts this tool to convey the concept of death, by using the existing death in the carcass of an animal.

64 Richard Fremantle, *Masaccio: The Complete Paintings of the Master of Perspective* (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1998), 17. Examples throughout history could include Masaccio’s *Holy Trinity*, where at the base of the monument a skeleton lies and beneath are the words, “I was that which you, are and what I am you will be.” As well as the genre of memento mori and Vanitas paintings that use symbols of death to evoke contemplation of mortality within the viewer.


66 Dillon, “Ugly Feelings,” in *Damien Hirst*, 21. “As a result, although Hirst is content for his objects and their titles to act as triggers to thought, he leaves all reasoning about what something is and what it might mean in the hands of the viewer, and relishes any contradictions that this might entail.”
be willing to engage in this level of inquiry with non-passive viewing: “I want the viewer
to do a lot of work and feel uncomfortable. They should be made to feel responsible for
their own view of the world rather than look at an artist’s view and be critical of it.” 67

Hirst’s intent is both to evoke and to provoke the viewer to think actively and engage
with the works.

The artist also stated that his mother taught him to face difficult things in life.

Hirst recalls: “I was taught by my Mom to confront the things you can’t avoid and
death’s definitely one of the big things.” 68 These formative life lessons developed into
his philosophical premise and artistic vision that values facing an awareness of death in
order to live more fully. Hirst stated:

I think I’ve got an obsession with death, but I think it’s like a celebration
of life rather than something morbid. You can’t have one without the
other … I mean; I don’t think death really exists in life. It’s that kind of
looking for it, and you can’t find it. I always want to slap myself on the
head and go: Hang on a minute, you’re dying – don’t get too smug. It’s
unavoidable…. Hopefully, thinking about it [death] makes you live your
life more fully. 69

Hirst arrived at using specific materials to support this artistic vision in a way that
is organically tied to the concepts he developed through his life experiences,
contemplations, and studio art practices. His studies in anatomy during his teenage years
in his hometown of Leeds included trips to the morgue. 70 This early connection to death
and his studies are often mentioned as an indicator of Hirst’s propensity for the macabre,
but as the artist’s earlier childhood recollections illustrate, his propensity began to form

68 King., 17:52.
70 Ibid, 34-36. Hirst discusses his studies at the morgue as a teenager.
long before, as his conversations at the age of seven indicate, and therefore prompted this line of inquiry. In an early interview with Gordon Burn, Hirst discussed his time working with the cadavers and his desire to know more about death: “When I was really young, I wanted to know about death and I went to the morgue and I got these bodies and I felt sick and I thought I was going to die and it was all awful. And I went back and I went back and I drew them. And the point where death starts and life stops, for me, in my mind, before I saw them, was there.”

Hirst goes on in that interview to explain how his working with corpses had a dual effect of both putting death at a distance and bringing it closer with an appreciation of life. He also explained that during these studies he would have to pick the cadavers and body parts up out of the formaldehyde. Considering this intimate way in which Hirst worked with corpses shows his interest in this form of study and illustrates how he arrived at using a form of ready-made death as the artist realized his artistic voice.

While Hirst was studying at Goldsmiths College and working on collage as a bridge between painting and sculpture; he had a neighbor, Mr. Barnes, who disappeared and who was a hoarder. When he went into his apartment and saw the accumulation of the man’s life through real objects, it occurred to him that he could use the real objects in his works.

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71 Ibid, 34-36.
72 Ibid, 36.
73 Ramirez, Duchamp: Love and Death, Even, 26. Referencing the initial concept of Duchamp’s ready-made in terms of Hirst’s adaptation using existing death.
74 King, Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life, 3:02.
75 Ibid.
Earlier in 1991, Hirst created the first work of the “Natural History” series, *Isolated Elements Swimming in the Same Direction for the Purpose of Understanding* [Figure 5], by taking two household wall cabinets and filling them with thirty-eight fish organized in six rows. This work was a developmental step for Hirst in figuring out his process as an artist, which would be more fully realized shortly after this work with *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*.

The organization of the fish gives off a sterile aesthetic. The characteristics of the fish themselves - shape, color, and texture - aesthetically inform the composition through variation. Different types of fish are placed next to, above, and below each other, with an overall clinical look that appears to have an organizing principal that is scientific. However, the organizing principle does not stem from any sort of species categorization, but from the visual and aesthetic realm.

Within the larger wall cabinet, each fish is contained in its own individual clear encasement and preserved in formaldehyde, making each an isolated element within the work. The cabinet on the left positions all the fish facing left, while the cabinet on the right positions all the fish facing right. With the multiple repeating rows of fish, this directional positioning gives the effect of the fish actually swimming in a school towards something, as a reminder that the title suggests that the fish are swimming “for the purpose of understanding.”

The artist’s form of the ready-made replicated the scientific arresting of decay of dead species/animal corpses by submersing them in a tank of formaldehyde.⁷⁶ For Hirst, this action is not merely a functional means of preservation so that he may put forth a

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⁷⁶ Adrian Dannatt, “Damien Hirst, ‘Life’s Like This and Then It Stops,’ *Flash Art* 169 (1993), 59-63.
dead species for contemplation, but the very act of halting the corpses decay mirrors his
dialog on humankind’s resistance to remain aware of our own process of decaying. Hirst
states: “some conservators at the Tate thought that I used formaldehyde to preserve
artworks for posterity, but in reality I used it to communicate an idea.”77 As Brian Dillon
states, Hirst’s works embody, “the literal presence of the fact of death.”78 Hirst’s idea
was to create artworks using animals as a conceptual dead zoo with his series titled
“Natural History.”79 In this dead zoo, the art object is no longer merely a symbol that
alludes to the desire to resist or face death, but it is a dead species itself placed before the
viewer with a title and form of preservation that serves to prompt the viewer’s
interpretation of the concept.80

The same year Hirst began integrating dead species into his works, 1991, he also
reprinted a photograph taken when he was a teenager studying at the morgue in which he
posed next to a severed head. He enlarged the photograph, printed it in an edition, and
titled it With Dead Head.81 This act of turning this specific pre-existing photograph into
an artwork further solidified the artist’s application of utilizing existing death, not only as
a material, but a topic to speak to his philosophical premise of evoking an awareness of
mortality through his artwork.

77 Hirst, I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, With Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now, 286.
creature to express the intention of the work’s title.
Hirst found conceptual art a natural fit. He then had the concern that conceptualism lacked the ability to communicate on a mass scale because the ideas were not “real.” As a conceptual artist, he points to an idea. As a working class boy from Leeds, he is concerned with communicating meaning within his work to his former neighbors and fellow construction workers. This desire prompted Hirst to seek a means of expression that reached beyond the language of contemporary art and to the general public. Therefore, by using “real” death through an object to depict the subject/concept he is referencing, he bridges the gap between contemporary/conceptual art and mass understanding.

Hirst’s philosophy that values an awareness of death and his way of carrying his concepts out in a manner that could be understood by the working-class people he grew up with illustrates his aims and further counters the purely sensationalistic perceptions of his work. His ability to craft an artistic voice that brought together his multiple objectives is referenced by Gordon Burn:

Without resorting to the “withdrawal of visuality” which was one of the operative strategies of Conceptualism, Damien, in a brief eighteen-month period 1990-92, produced a series of pieces which clearly announced the arrival of a young artist with a continuing and more or less comprehensive vision of existence into which everything must fit.

Burn’s observation speaks to the artist’s breakthrough in forming his comprehensive vision and artistic voice. This is a moment when Hirst figures out how to

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82 King, *Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life*, 6:35.
83 Ibid, 11:52.
84 Ibid.
85 Burn, “Is Mr. Death In?” 9.
express his philosophy of the awareness of death in his work, merged with an awareness of contemporary art practices and 20th-century art concepts.

Prior to the artist’s breakthrough series, “Medicine Cabinets” and “Natural History,” several realizations propelled Hirst fully into how his artistic processes would come to be shaped. When Hirst was working on the collage pieces inspired by Kurt Schwitters as a bridge between painting and sculpture, Hirst states:

One day I had a horrifying thought: it changed everything. I was looking at my collages: all these rotten little bits of wood, these decaying, discarded bits of rubbish on the floor, very close to death, I felt, in the formal arrangements I’d made, with bits of plastic and dirty tissues almost breaking apart. This is happening to me, I thought. It changed everything.

In the above statement Hirst’s philosophical premise of embracing our mortality is so engrained into the way he sees interactions within his life and art that the materials he was using came to represent his own death. Along with this, Hirst had a realization that his Schwitters-inspired collages were in dialog with a completely different time and cultural climate then he was creating within the late 1980s. He describes himself as suddenly “looking up” and seeing the world around him saturated with advertising and commodification as he devoured art history and realized he needed to strive for a way to embody it all.

In addition to the artist’s previous revelation of using real objects in his work, he was examining work by Marcel Duchamp, Andy Warhol, and Jeff Koons. These

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86 Nicholas Serota, “Interviews Damien Hirst, 14 July 2011,” in Damien Hirst, 91.
87 Hirst and Burn, “Is Mr. Death In?” in I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, With Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now, 9.
88 King, Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life, 6:42.
89 Ibid, 6:53.
aspects of Hirst’s developments are well documented; it is within these developments that
the artist’s way of working was driven by his philosophy and not a series of random
provocative acts.

Hirst’s concern to achieve a form of art capable of communicating with the
general public also ties to a desire for mass appeal. In an interview, Hirst was asked if he
was inspired by science museums, and he stated: “Yes, I love them: science museums,
natural history museums, anything that takes your mind off death, really, or focuses your
mind on it. I love all that hands-on stuff. It’s great when you feel that you’re being
entertained and also educated. I’ve always felt if you could do that with art it would be
great.”

His desire to create art with broader appeal again ties back to his aim for an art
that could be understood with the people he grew up with in Leeds, but this is also an
attempt to create art for the masses in general, which, in part, was also shaped by his
inspirations growing up. The artist acknowledges the difference between the influence on
society of the mass appeal of pop culture and that of fine art. Through a comparison of
the Beatles to Picasso, Hirst pointed to the gap in potential viewer engagement between
these two approaches of creative expression. While Hirst was absolutely inspired by
the merits of Picasso’s work, as a counter, he desired to have the reach of a pop culture
icon through an artistic language that had the ability to speak on various levels to art-
minded viewers and the mass culture alike, stating of the Beatles: “they had much more

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91 Amy Corry, “An Interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist and Damien Hirst 2007,” Science UK Limited,
92 Ibid.
influence on the people around them at the time, and they were struggling with truth in a much deeper way."\(^93\)

Hirst aimed to communicate with both the world of fine art and mass culture through his conceptual, yet realistic approach. The artist formed his voice and considered the stakes of the canon of art history by appropriating objects from life such as the medicine cabinets from our homes and the doctor’s and pharmacist’s office, sharks from the ocean, and brought them into the contemporary gallery space. By adapting these objects from everyday life, Hirst simultaneously attempted to communicate his ideas to mass culture alike as he built the foundation for his artistic voice in order to express his philosophical premise of an awareness of death.

Critics from the general public and art world alike, often cite the use of dead animals throughout Hirst’s “Natural History” series as a main point of contention that the artist purely aims to create a spectacle. Art critic Robert Hughes expressed his view of Hirst’s intention related to his use of animals in his art in *New York Times Magazine* in 1995:

> Just to wish to excite horror and shock by showing somebody a cadaver isn't necessarily a particularly interesting esthetic act…his works of art are meant to create a sort of environment for themselves, which is nothing other than sensational. I think the content of actual thought in Damien Hirst's work is pretty close to zero.\(^94\)

While a critic from *The Independent* newspaper in London also questioned the seriousness and intent of Hirst’s work through her article titled “Lambs to the laughter: Artist, joker or showman?” She stated:

\(^93\) Ibid.  
until the hype dies down, and a new enfant terrible is discovered to distract
the public’s attention, it will be impossible to judge whether his dead cows
go sour like fresh milk, or whether, like long-life, they will last. Anyone
willing to take a punt should consider making an investment in the arts.
Hirst’s cows and calf are still for sale. The price is 100,000 pounds.95

These excerpts are representative of the critical reception of Hirst’s “Natural
History” series. While Hirst is certainly a skilled showman and provocateur, when
considered through the lens of Hirst’s biography and how his artistic voice was formed
with a value for the universal philosophical contemplation of death through his art in a
20th century vernacular - the extremely obvious iconography of works, such as The
Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, run contrary to what
many critics write about the work.

When Hirst first conceived of The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of
Someone Living, it was still early on in his career and he quickly realized that is was an
expensive undertaking.96 It is not a cheap proposition to order a shark to be hunted and
killed, to have it preserved and shipped, to ensure proper preparations to continue to
preserve it and fabricate a tank strong enough to contain a shark submerged in twenty-
three tons of fluid. Advertising mogul and high-profile investor, Charles Saatchi funded
this expensive process.97 The fact that Saatchi paid for the work generated hype and
myth before it was even completed.98 Hirst certainly used the hype to his advantage; his
detractors approach this work primarily through discussions of money and separate it
from the validity of the how artist’s personal philosophical premise of death extended to

95 Fiammetta Rocco, “Profile: Lambs to the Laughter: Artist, Joker or Showman?”, 19.
96 Hirst and Burn, “Is Mr. Death In?” in I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, With Everyone,
One to One, Always, Forever, Now, 7.
97 Hirst and Burn, On the Way to Work, 19.
98 Ibid, 19.
this work.\textsuperscript{99} By the time the piece was unveiled, it was largely received as a symbol of spectacle and shock that highlighted the sensational implications of the artist’s persona.\textsuperscript{100}

The issue of Hirst’s persona overshadowing the meaning of his works began earlier in 1988, the same year he created the first of the “Medicine Cabinets” using the remaining contents of his grandmother’s prescriptions, he also organized and curated the group exhibition titled \textit{Freeze}.\textsuperscript{101} The \textit{Freeze} exhibition prompted a chain of events that ultimately propelled Hirst and his colleagues into stardom through the notorious group now infamously known as the YBAs. Hirst conceived of the \textit{Freeze} group exhibition while working at the Anthony d’Offay Gallery in London.\textsuperscript{102} He felt that the work of his colleagues at Goldsmiths College was comparable to the work he saw exhibited and being sold in London’s commercial galleries.\textsuperscript{103} Carrying out \textit{Freeze} was an early sign of Hirst’s entrepreneurial prowess. He gained access to a space to hold the exhibition and enough financial support to publish a catalog while garnering the interest of influencers within the London art world.\textsuperscript{104} Hirst knew that in order for the bulk of his fellow artists to stand a chance to break into the art world and gain any sort of recognition, they would have to create their own outlet, as the modest size of the London art market at the time

\textsuperscript{100} Sarah Lyall, “Is It Art Or Just Dead Meat?” \textit{New York Times Magazine}, 29. “Hirst generates a lot of fuss in Britain, where opinions about him range from cries of rapture to groans of disgust. He likes being the bad boy of art, and when he shows up two hours late to his chaotic studio in a rough Brixton neighborhood, he looks like someone who just jumped out of bed and ran out the door without bothering to shave or brush his longish, scraggly hair.”
\textsuperscript{101} King, \textit{Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life}, 9:35.
\textsuperscript{103} King, \textit{Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life}, 9:35.
\textsuperscript{104} Hirst and Burn, \textit{On the Way to Work}, 16. This also refers to Nicolas Serota, curator at \textit{Tate Modern}, and Charles Saatchi, the infamous advertising mogul turned art collector. Saatchi began purchasing Hirst’s works during this time. Their dealings later became a source of spectacle and overblown media focus.
could not realistically sustain such volume of influx. Hirst created a pathway into the contemporary art world not only for himself, but for his colleagues.

However financially successful and savvy Hirst was in this entrepreneurial regard, the aim to garner attention for his work and that of his fellow artists was an effort born out of a respect for their work. Hirst’s use of dead animals in a contemporary art context was outlandish beyond what could have been conceived of as sellable. This point was made by Michael Craig Martin, an artist and professor who taught Hirst at Goldsmiths College, and it brings up the paradox of Hirst’s complex relationship with the art market even when his creative voice was formed. Saatchi’s willingness to fund The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, could not have been expected; nor could the financial successes that followed. The materials and methods Hirst employed to carry out the concept of the work were outrageous in terms of contemporary art materials, and understandably, they elicited a sensational response. Negative reviews often criticize his non-traditional use of materials again as sheer tactics of pure spectacle and attribute his use of appropriation to his lack of technical skill. Hirst has openly acknowledged the validity of his lack of technical skills, but these views of his work are constructed without considering that the impetus for the concept stems from the artist’s early childhood realizations of mortality. These criticisms and generalized perceptions

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105 King, Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life, 9:29.
106 Martin, “The Early Years,” in Damien Hirst, 38.
107 Serota, “Interviews,” Damien Hirst, 14 July 2011,” 91. Hirst explains a constant struggle with the blank canvas and paint; he first turned to collage, as a bridge to creating sculptural installations form ready-made objects.
that disregard iconography and artistic intent are also conflated by the sums of money that Hirst’s works began to sell for.\textsuperscript{108}

On the discussion of art and money Hirst has stated:

A lot of people have problems with it [money]; questions of integrity somehow. But I’ve always thought that to be an artist and make something in your studio and wait for someone to look you up then come take it away, made no sense whatsoever. So I’ve always … like early on, I got a space and did a show and then … I find the money aspect of the work part of its life. If the art’s about life, which it inevitably is, and then people buy it and pay money for it and it becomes a commodity and manages to still stay art, I find that really exciting.\textsuperscript{109}

Hirst certainly has capitalized on the monetary aspect of his successful career, maybe even to a gluttonous degree. But as we see with the aim of \textit{Freeze}, prior to fame and fortune, the origins of this path also tied to an interest and belief in getting his work and the work of his colleagues in front of the art world because Hirst believed in the merits of their work. The media frenzy or headway that the YBAs accomplished could not have been predicted. On the terms of their art, Hirst and the YBAs were aligned to aim their work to be seen and considered. They expressed a post-punk rock and avant-garde attitudes, but their work and the considerations behind their methods were serious, and the catalog for the show elaborates on their commitment to their work.\textsuperscript{110} In addition, their subsequent successful careers confirmed that their work was viable to the art world and this speaks to Hirst’s vision as he accurately understood the capacity of their work.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{108} Fiammetta, Profile: Lambs to the Laughter: Artist, Joker or Showman?”, 19.
\textsuperscript{109} Hirst and Burn, \textit{On the Way to Work}, 16.
The fact that Hirst became wildly successful should not alter the meaning his work is rooted in, but criticism often fuels this bias.112 Beyond media headlines and scandal lies the meaning of the works and artistic intent. Fame is another aspect of the artist’s career, but for Hirst, fame also serves as an attempt to cheat death, stating: “Obviously it’s appealing. To be a star…. If you say it isn’t, you’re lying. Maybe that’s another way of coming to terms with death anyway.”113

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113 Hirst and Burn, *On the Way to Work*, 22.
Chapter 2: The Artist’s Foundational Philosophy of Death Is Realized in His Works through Experience with Loss, Suicide, Addiction, and Self-Reflection.

After the Freeze exhibition in 1988, Hirst began to achieve career and financial success. The artist continued to develop his voice through the use of non-traditional materials creating a visual language that spanned diverse series and kept his concern for the universal topic of mortality at the forefront of his work. During this period Hirst experimented with alcohol and drugs and crossed the line between recreational and celebratory use into addiction. This is compounded with the loss of family and friends which impacts his work and career decisions directly. His life experiences with these losses coupled with addiction, and self-reflection fueled further contemplation of the topic of death within his life.

In addition to his childhood and adult interpretations of prescription drug use aimed at curing illness and attempting to prolong life, by 1988 Hirst was also immersed in the post-punk era in London and was using alcohol and drugs for recreation.\textsuperscript{114} While the first medicine cabinet Sinners served as a portrait of his grandmother (discussed in chapter one), this work grew into a series of twelve “Medicine Cabinets” that were named after the twelve songs on the Sex Pistols’ album Never Mind the Bollocks.\textsuperscript{115} The book The Complete Medicine Cabinets contextualizes Hirst’s point of view within the London post-punk scene and current events from 1977, the year Never Mind the Bollocks was released, through 1989, the year the “Medicine Cabinets” series was completed.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114} Danto, Damien Hirst’s Medicine Cabinets, 5-9.
\textsuperscript{115} Amy Corry, Sinner; Danto, Damien Hirst’s Medicine Cabinets, 5; 69.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 5-9.
A short but poignant essay by Arthur C. Danto, titled *Medicine Cabinets: Art, Death, Sex, Society and Drugs*, examines the meaning of the series, the context of the post-punk era, and the counter culture to which Hirst subscribed.\(^{117}\) Danto addresses the contradiction of drug use in order to get “wasted or stoned” versus the use of “drugs as agents of healing.” Though seemingly contradictory, Danto concludes the commonality is that both uses are looking for a form of escapism: medicine to escape death and drugs to escape life.

In 1999, during a conversation with Gordon Burn, Hirst acknowledges his recreational drug use:

> Because it’s, like, all of my generation, all of us. I mean, arts about life, and drugs are not. They’re about getting out of it. People say, “Out of it.” It’s about “getting out of it.” It just seems fucking mad that … there’s no, like, “love and peace” with it any more. Not even any war and hate. It’s about “getting out of it.” I think I have a problem about death. But I don’t like dosing myself at all. I like taking drugs; I like getting out of it, definitely. But I do it, I definitely take drugs, when it’s getting difficult.\(^{118}\)

Hirst’s relationship with death intensified as his drug and alcohol use increased during his rapid career success. The artist was living on the edge between life and death in a very real way through his addiction. These experiences, compounded by his long-held philosophical considerations, brought him deeper into contemplations of death in his life and work.

Along with this desire to enter an alternate state of consciousness, the artist has recalled a number of incidences in which he engaged in dangerous behavior fueled by

\(^{117}\) Ibid.

substance abuse. There is a ten-year period at the peak of his success when “he would combine vast quantities of alcohol with cocaine then suffer blackouts.” There were a number of incidences in which Hirst engaged in dangerous, life-threatening behavior fueled by drugs and alcohol. A friend of Hirst’s recalled an incident in which he smashed a chair through a plate glass door to prevent Hirst from running through it as he was threatening to. During an argument with his partner Maia, Hirst once climbed out onto the balcony of their fourteenth-floor apartment and hung off the edge of it. He remembers thinking of it the next day and being terrified by his actions, because he knew he could reach that point again.

In 1995, Hirst was awarded the Turner Prize for new developments in contemporary art. The artist spent the entire twenty thousand pound award at a bar buying drinks for everyone in the establishment. He was so incapacitated that he did not remember receiving or spending the check. Hirst then contacted Tate Britain to inquire when he could expect to receive his award check only to be informed that he had in fact already received and spent it. Even in 2014, when Hirst began co-writing his

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121 Hirst and Burn, “Claridge’s 30.06.09,” 10-12.
122 Ibid., 10-12.
123 Ibid.
125 Nick Clark, “The £20,000 drinks were on Hirst – not that he remembered, having forgotten where he left his Turner Prize winnings,” Independent, May 12, 2003, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/the-20000-drinks-were-on-hirst--not-that-he-remembered-having-forgotten-where-he-left-his-turner-prize-winnings-8613067.html (accessed June 15, 2015).
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
upcoming autobiography, he admitted that there were events of his life that are simply gone from his memory due to drug and alcohol use.  

The level to which Hirst contemplated death related to addiction and suicide is evident in his exhibition alongside the works of Francis Bacon in 2006 at the Gagosian Gallery in London. Hirst has cited Bacon as an early and underlying influence and for his gallery pairing with Bacon, Hirst chose to create a work based on Bacon’s *Triptych, May-June 1973* [Figures 6].  

This work depicts the moments before and after the drug-induced suicide of Bacon’s partner, George Dyer. In 1972, Dyer had taken his own life on the opening evening of Bacon’s exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris. While creating this work, Hirst was engrossed in comprehending the mindset of a person who commits suicide. In an interview while discussing this work, Hirst mentioned reading a book on understanding suicide called *Night Falls Fast*, as he struggled to grasp the “tragedy when someone bows out in this way.” The depth to which Hirst might have been immersed in the pain of someone seeking relief through drugs, and subsequently through suicide, is evident in the work he created for the show.

Hirst’s *The Tranquility of Solitude (For George Dyer)* [Figures 7-8] heightens the sense of torment in Bacon’s depictions in every way. Bacon’s painting frames the scene of Dyer’s death through the bathroom doorway of the hotel room where his suicide took place.  

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128 Shakespeare: “Will Damien’s pickled brain...?”
130 Johnson, *Times Interview*, 4:04.
133 Peppiat, *Francis Bacon Studies*, 263.
moment of pain and suffering and the resulting death. The left panel depicts Dyer just before his death in agony, doubled over on the toilet with a needle in his foot. The right panel shows the stark reality of Dyer’s lifeless body doubled over on the toilet and sink. The center panel depicts the figure of Dyer at the moment of death in a transcendent state with a light bulb hanging overhead. There is a shadow of his body on the floor that reaches outside of the doorway and forms a distorted shape of a crucifixion.134

Hirst’s tribute encased Bacon’s scenes through the ready-made language from his “Natural History” series. *The Tranquility of Solitude (For George Dyer)* is an installation triptych made of glass and painted steel vitrines. Hirst used the corpses of flayed sheep in formaldehyde to represent the figure of Dyer. Hirst’s earlier use of a sheep in 1995, was titled *Away From the Flock (Divided)* [Figure 9] and was linked to his use of a lamb in *Away From the Flock*. Hirst references the use of lamb and sheep in religious terms of “Jesus being separated by death from the living,” and how this provokes a sense of sympathy and perhaps even empathy.135 Hirst titled the initial work after it was created when he “observed the tragic beauty” and how the work “addressed that failure of trying so hard to do something that you destroy the thing that you’re trying to preserve.”136 These sentiments may carry onto his selection of sheep specifically for this work in depicting the suicide of George Dyer.

While his use of sheep carcasses also pulled from a vernacular from which Hirst was, by this time, well accustomed to creating with, the work borders on the grotesque.

134 Abstractions of figures shadows occur throughout Bacon’s body of work.
136 Ibid.
As here, it references the real presence of death and yet conveys a sense of tenderness for the severe desperation of the act of a drug-induced suicide being committed. In the left vitrine, a sheep is seated on top of the toilet with jaw wide open implying a scream. A syringe is injected into the animal’s hoof and a light bulb hangs overhead as in Bacon’s painting. The right vitrine shows the sheep with head on sink after death in a dismal scene of a life defeated as a wristwatch keeps time on the sink.

The centerpiece replicates a crucifixion scene through a sheep cut in half hovering above a sink. Hirst may be referencing the shadow in Bacon’s center panel and the reoccurring use of the crucifixion throughout Bacon’s works as symbols of someone being harmed while others watch. This is in tune with a level of awareness of suffering and empathy. Hirst’s own experiences of substance-induced spectacles began to take on this aspect of people watching as he would unravel and spiral out of control in a drug- and alcohol-induced state.

Hirst’s show alongside the works of Bacon took place from May to June of 2006. By November 9, 2006, Hirst declared his sobriety and gave up alcohol, drugs, and smoking. The fact that such an important change occurs in his life after his contemplation of Bacon’s work referencing Dyer’s death could speak to the continually deep interchange between Hirst’s life and his art. This too is contrary to the commonly

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137 John Russell, *Francis Bacon*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 113. Art critic John Russell stated that Bacon’s use of the crucifixion in his works was “[a] generic name for an environment in which bodily harm is done to one or more persons and one or more other persons gathered to watch.”

138 Jardine, “I knew it was time to clean up my act.” *Telegraph*. In relation to the use of the crucifixion that John Russell outlines in Bacon’s work as a shorthand for “an environment in which bodily harm is done to one or more persons and one or more other persons gathered to watch.” Hirst recalls a similar experience: "I'd got off my head on drugs and drink and was lying by the campfire, really out of it. People were coming over, laughing and saying: 'Look at the state of him'. Most people mock you when you are down. Joe [Strummer] came over and put a duvet over me and a pillow under my head."

held perception of Hirst’s use of dead animals in his art with aims of a pure spectacle and pursuit of wealth.

Hirst has stated that as a sober person he had to relearn how to function in normal everyday life and social situations, but he also claims to have rediscovered his love of life in the process.\textsuperscript{140} This early period of sobriety spawned a new level of productivity for Hirst in a number of ways.\textsuperscript{141} While the artist mentioned experiencing a more focused mindset to run his massive art production, he also began painting without the use of assistants. Hirst had not painted by himself since college and shortly after he began his art production practice. His decision to return to painting reveals a shift during this period early in his sobriety. His painting practice continued for three years in Devon and later in Bali as he worked to develop his skills.\textsuperscript{142} The artist has acknowledged that a change in his art at this stage of his career was a risky move in terms of the market, but working on paintings himself held a genuine worth to him at this stage of his life as an artist who wanted to grow into the remainder of his career.\textsuperscript{143} Hirst stated: “art is always the map of a person’s life….I think it’s [the act of painting] all about trying to make sense of the world … there is no one looking at me. It’s become much more personal and it kind of works for me.”\textsuperscript{144} During this period, the act of a painter working alone seemed to engage Hirst as an artist in a different way than his mass-production and fabrication forms of creation. Hirst expressed a time of career- and self-reflection in this early period

\textsuperscript{140} Hirst and Burn, \textit{Nothing Matters}, 10.
\textsuperscript{141} Hirst and Burn, “Claridge’s 30.06.09,” 10-12.
\textsuperscript{142} Gordon Burn, \textit{Beautiful Inside My Head Forever}, 24.
\textsuperscript{143} Hirst and Burn, “Claridge’s 30.06.09,” 12.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, 12.
of sobriety. His life continued to form content for works and shape his approach to his art.

The iconography within Hirst’s paintings referenced works from his career such as shark jaws, backgrounds of spots, and skulls [Figure 10]. A new means of psychological expression seemed to have been born through Hirst’s paintings, as he revisited his previous philosophies on death that are formed in these works now by his own hand. He reflected back on his own life’s work at the start of this sober impasse as he struggled with his apparent lack of skill in his independent painting practice.

The imagery pulled from the artist’s own body of work and met with his life-long inspiration of Francis Bacon and symbolism from genres that the artist’s work has long been compared to such as Vanitas and Memento Mori. Hirst continually references Francis Bacon as an underlying influence for his raw, untrained, expressive nature. With this series of paintings Hirst heightened the psychological intensity with a move away from a clinical and stark aesthetic. Within this act, there was a notable step toward raw, literal depictions of pain and suffering and away from the conceptual realm of Hirst’s body of work. This also speaks to the artist’s roots, as he mentioned his high-school studies in Leeds which were focused on realism and a gestural approach to art that

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146 Thomas Crow, “In the Glass Menagerie,” in Damien Hirst, 192. Crow speaks to Francis Bacon’s influence on British artist’s in general and Hirst specifically, “…their projection of an implied body in states of distress, disorder and derangement, perpetuating a thematic world thought by many to have been planted in the British artistic psyche by Francis Bacon. A link back to Bacon comes authorized by Hirst’s frequent professions of indebtedness, which their shared preoccupation with aggravated flesh appears abundantly to support.”
expressed emotion, while his later studies at Goldsmiths College focused on conceptualism and the rigor of twentieth-century art theory.\textsuperscript{147}

In March of 2008, just two years into his sobriety and renewed painting practice, Hirst suffered the loss of his friend and fellow YBA artist Fairhurst by suicide. His death prompted severe contemplation for Hirst on every level and became the subject of his paintings. This loss also seemed to have played an influential role in Hirst’s decision to announce the end of his art-production practice. The two artists met at Goldsmith’s College and Fairhurst was a founding member of the YBAs. Hirst and Fairhurst shared a studio, organized exhibitions, and even collaborated on works together.\textsuperscript{148} As friends and colleagues they discussed aspects of their work, life and careers. They came onto the art scene together and they also crossed the line of recreational drug use to addiction together. Fairhurst’s suicide had a tremendous and lasting effect on Hirst and served as further impetus for changes in his art and career.

On the last night of his solo show in London, Angus Fairhurst hung himself in the woods in Scotland.\textsuperscript{149} There is a haunting correlation between Fairhurst’s suicide and that of George Dyer. Both were suicides that were purposely timed to coincide with important exhibitions in their lives. For Fairhurst, the premeditated timing of death

\textsuperscript{147} King, \textit{Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life}, 5:30.
\textsuperscript{148} Angus Fairhurst and Damien Hirst, Filmed by Gregor Muir, “\textit{A Couple of Cannibals Eating a Clown (I Should Coco)},” Estate of Angus Fairhurst courtesy Sadie Coles HQ and Damien Hirst and Science Ltd., London, 1998, http://www.damienhirst.com/video/1993/a-couple-of-cannibals, (accessed March 15\textsuperscript{th}, 2013). While dressed as clowns, Hirst and Fairhurst exchange instances of death while casually inserting a toot of a horn and spray of silly string amongst the gruesome details. The video takes place in a bar that is closed and is being restocked. In the background you can see and hear these mundane actions and sounds as their morbid storytelling continues. Hirst and Fairhurst drink and smoke throughout the piece, which is over twenty minutes long and alludes to endlessness, as the last frame is the sound of another story beginning.
\textsuperscript{149} Glover, “Angus Fairhurst.”
almost nodded to the timing of Dyer’s death, which Hirst had created from and intensely contemplated just two years prior. Media speculation on Fairhurst’s death centered on addiction and depression due to financial difficulties and a lackluster career that was overshadowed by the other YBAs, especially Hirst. Regardless, of the media perspective, it is evident that Hirst took this loss of his friend and colleague into serious consideration. It surfaced in his work through the *After Beautiful* series of paintings, which are a direct expression of Fairhurst’s suicide, and indirectly in his art production practice and market decisions.

In an interview with Hirst, Gordon Burn asked: “Did you feel – obviously before he killed himself – any aggression or sense of resentment coming to you from him [Fairhurst]?” Hirst answered:

> I felt a little bit… He did a work called *Man Abandoned by Colour* [1991]…. He’s jumping in the studio with a spot painting in the background. I shared a studio with him, but then I’d gone off, had kids and all that. I felt I’d drifted away from him in some ways. Then the last time I went to his house, he cooked me lunch. I took a spot painting round as a gift. And we were hanging out. We talked about his garden: he had big plans for it. I had lunch with him, just me and him. What we used to do when I drank was we would go out drinking and get battered, and carry on into the next day and the day after that…. I think he asked if I wanted to have wine at lunch, and I said no. And then we talked about the auction and just all the big money numbers and stuff, and then, at the end of the afternoon, I had to go off and he seemed a bit disappointed that I had to go off. And I remember thinking that I should have stayed.

Hirst acknowledged that Fairhurst had previously expressed his view of Hirst’s mass production of art with his reference to the “Spot Paintings” through *Man Abandoned by Colour* [Figure 11]. They also discussed his upcoming auction at

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150 Ibid.
151 Hirst and Burn, “Claridge’s 30.06.09,” 9.
Sotheby’s, “Beautiful Inside My Head Forever,” in which the artist went straight to auction with 244 new works.\(^{152}\) This auction altered the primary market by eliminating the commercial gallery dealer. The auction took place in September of 2008, just six months after Fairhurst’s death. In the summer leading up to the auction, Hirst announced that he was stopping mass production of all series.\(^{153}\) The perception is largely that this announcement was a ploy to drive up sales for the unprecedented auction of works that would no longer be produced.\(^{154}\) While Hirst clearly capitalized on the timing of this decision and announcement in relation to the auction, when considering the severity of events in his life that led up to this point, it is conceivable that part of the cause of his decision to end production and continue on the path of painting independently was weighted by the events in his life.\(^{155}\) In a span of just two years (2006-8), Hirst went from a successful career while living on the edge through addiction to regaining his lust for life through sobriety and beginning to paint himself and consider his life’s work and career in a different way, only to be confronted with the loss of Fairhurst to suicide.

The risk and honesty involved for Hirst when he began painting at the start of his recovery and when he painted emotional content that directly addressed Fairhurst’s suicide are genuine acts. During high points of his monetary success, he is willing to

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\(^{152}\) Michael Bracewell, “Beautiful Inside My Head Forever,” in Damien Hirst, 180-181.


\(^{155}\) Luard, *Two Weeks One Summer*, 77. Hirst’s production has since resumed. In 2012 in Bonami, *Two Weeks One Summer*, Hirst discusses working both in the factory atmosphere and painting alone: “I do both, but this way of painting is about loneliness or aloneness, or rather, being solitary. It’s about me as an individual and what it means to be human. It’s the endless spirit. It’s scary and comforting at the same time. Painting can lead you to your death but in a good way.”
question his own artistic prowess by painting works himself. These types of considerations are not part of the majority of general or critical perceptions of Hirst’s intentions. While the mass perception of Hirst’s auction-timed decision to stop production seems as though it were obviously a ploy to drive up sales, this equally strong trajectory of life events are tied to his works and career decisions.\textsuperscript{156} Therefore, it becomes plausible that part of his decision to end production was also rooted in the death of Fairhurst.

Hirst recalled a trip to the forest, where he contemplated the experience and environment of Fairhurst’s last days alive:

I had a friend who committed suicide last year called Angus, and he’s somehow wriggled throughout everything. He hung himself last year. I went bear hunting in Russia, which is a fucking nightmare. I didn’t kill anything. But I sat in the forest; it sucked, for fifteen hours in the forest with a massive Russian guy next to me. They send you off in different parts of the forest, so I’m sitting in the forest with a guy who didn’t speak any English, Russian, he’s holding the gun, and I just sat there, no bears came for about fifteen hours, you can’t piss, if you want to unzip you have to go like that [mimes quiet unzipping], because the bears hear everything. And I sat in the forest and it went from daylight to dark, from the day through the night, it rained a little bit, and then came back on again. What happened with my friend Angus, who hung himself, is he went in the woods in Scotland and he tried to do it one night, couldn’t do it, slept rough that night, and then the whole of the next day he sort of wandered around, and then did it the next day. So he’d had that whole experience of being in the forest and the first day I was there I started thinking about him and I didn’t like it. I tried to stop myself. And the next day when I was in the forest I thought about him constantly. It had nothing to do with the bear—just thinking about what he must have been like in that kind of environment, ’cause it was the same environment, and I realized that I’d never thought about it, never dealt with it myself. Because when someone commits suicide it’s horrible. It’s like you blame yourself and you try and avoid it and you don’t want to think about it. In the paintings there are a lot of figures in woods and a darkness, or the idea of darkness inside a

\textsuperscript{156} Bracewell, “Beautiful Inside My Head Forever,” in \textit{Damien Hirst}, 180-181. Bracewell makes a case that the sale is an artwork in and of itself and amplifies Hirst’s view of mortality through the function of democracy and capitalism.
person. It’s hard to understand. He’s somebody who pulled himself apart when we’re all trying to hold ourselves together. We’re all trying to hold it together. He made the rope. He made the rope himself. Fucking artists. It’s definitely like an artwork.\textsuperscript{157}

Hirst’s recollection of this experience shows how deeply Fairhurst’s suicide affected him and how far he would go to contemplate it. To have gone to the forest to experience what Angus’s last day was filled with is a heartfelt act that Hirst goes on to depict within his paintings. A series of works titled “After Beautiful Paintings” prominently feature Fairhurst in the woods. The overall darkness of blues and blacks pervade these paintings [Figure 12-15]. This palette occurs at the beginning of Hirst’s newfound painting practice, where he mentioned Picasso as a general reference.\textsuperscript{158} The inspiration of Picasso in terms of aesthetic and content within these works could also be likened to his “Blue Period,” the impetus of which was the suicide of his friend Carlos Casagemas.\textsuperscript{159}

In the triptych titled \textit{Never Gonna See You Again}, Hirst depicted Fairhurst’s death, which seems to reference the tragedy in the fashion of the Bacon/Dyer works while carrying personal symbolism. In the left panel Fairhurst is shown as a figure standing amongst the trees looking out at the viewer through the rain. Within the softly aggressive patterns of the woods and rain, smeared white paint seems to indicate the rope around his neck and hanging around his torso as if it were a scarf. The area of his forearms and hands are blurred, possibly in movement, perhaps suggesting the moment he grasped the rope to facilitate this tragic act. The center panel features a grave amongst

\textsuperscript{157} Boldizar, “Damien Hirst: New Paintings.”
\textsuperscript{158} Hirst and Burn, “Claridge’s 30.06.09,” 12.
\textsuperscript{159} Richard Wattenmaker et al., \textit{Great French Paintings from the Barnes Foundation} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 192.
the trees as white flowers grow out of the darkness. A large jar stands on top of the
grave; this seems to be a personal reference that perhaps has something to do with the
general idea of a vessel that contains something of meaning. The jar seems to be full,
with a blank label; a red string is tied around it. The red string re-appears in the right
panel tied around Fairhurst’s arm; his body is only half depicted as the rest of him fades
out in a blur of white paint amongst the woods and rain perhaps indicating he has left this
earth.

Hirst painted a number of small portraits of Fairhurst. Portrait of a Man I [Figure
16-17] features Angus’s head as though it is on a tabletop and severed in a way that is
reminiscent of Hirst’s notorious and much referenced 1991 photograph taken in a morgue
titled With Dead Head. In these works, it is almost as though Hirst linked his own
earlier realizations of mortality to the death of his friend. There is a rope over his head
with additional surrounding rope-like gestural marks, indicating the way in which Angus
committed suicide, as he looks out at the viewer with one eye clearly open. In the
background, we see a pattern of a grid that is similar in nature to Hirst’s “Spot Paintings,”
but in this case in the shape of a diamond instead of a circle. Hirst has discussed that a
number of the paintings were part of his process of coming to terms with Fairhurst’s
death, but the inclusions reference Hirst’s own works and the iconography suggests the
additional layer of the artist’s own reflection and contemplation were entangled with this

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160 The instance of the photo With Dead Head is often referenced to serve as an early trace of Hirst’s
propensity towards the topic of death. Controversy also surrounds it due to his jovial nature as
disrespectful to the person whose head is included in the photo. Another painting from this period titled,
Half Skull on Table [Figure 19] appears to relate to both the tradition of memento mori and the artist’s
teenage experience captured in the photograph, With Dead Head.
loss [Figure 18]. In *Nothing Matters, The Empty Chair* [Figure 19], the self and career references continue to merge throughout the triptych. The center panel features an empty chair, which signifies the loss in general and for Hirst in his personal and creative life specifically with the loss of Fairhurst, as well as Joe Strummer, from the band The Clash, who became a close friends of Hirst’s. Strummer was an idol of the artist’s and the two became close friends and Hirst has referred to him as a father figure.

Hirst’s self-created paintings were not well received, and they were also not recognized as genuine efforts and considerations tied to his life experiences. Jonathan Jones writes in the *Guardian* that Hirst is “an artist so wealthy and powerful that he can kid himself he is an Old Master and have the art world go along with the fantasy” and Jones calls the paintings “trivial and pompous slabs of hack work.”

In a conversation with curator Francesco Bonami upon the exhibition of these paintings in London, Bonami points out that Hirst painting now poses a problem for critics who wanted to dismiss him as a fraud, and not as an artist because of his use of materials and/or his entrepreneurial aspects and persona. Hirst replies:

> The idea that I’m not really an artist is interesting. People accept that society needs artists but at the same time they seek to prove that they don’t exist. It’s like with God: God’s existence or absence makes people very uncomfortable. If God exists, we have to behave or else…if God doesn’t exist, we can do what the fuck we want but then we have the problem of death…what’s happening after…scary fucking shit. It’s the same with the idea of an artist. If I am an artist people need to deal with me. If I am not they can dismiss me, but at the same time they have to deal with the

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161 Hirst and Burn, “Claridge’s 30.06.09,” 8.
163 Jardine, “I knew it was time to clean up my act.” *Telegraph*.
question about what I do: What then are we looking at? How can they avoid looking at the paintings, like death...How can we avoid it? Here again, we see how engrained Hirst’s impetus of death is within his works that he relates back to death when discussing the critical reception of his works. Regardless of Hirst’s level of skill in these paintings done by his own hand, it is clear that the content within these works openly referenced his experiences with loss and reflection. This time, the commentary of death is deeply raw and personal without the universal overlay and without the visual play between concept and formalism.

165 Luard, *Two Weeks One Summer*, 77.
Chapter 3: The Artist’s Philosophy of Death and Extremes of Commodification

Damien Hirst’s philosophy of death in his works manifested and grew into multiples and series early in his career. The studio practices that led to the mass production of his works is often seen as a pure tool of supply and demand positioned to satisfy the level of commodification Hirst’s art has achieved. While, in fact, the concepts that led to artist to the mass production of works initially began during his foundational years at Goldsmiths College and are also rooted in his studies and lines of inquiry that shaped his voice and positioned it between conceptual art and literal representation.

In Chris King’s film Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life, the artist discusses the concept and the process behind his series of “Spot Paintings” [Figure 20]. As a painter Hirst was grappling with the knowledge that there are an infinite number of ways to express a single idea and this was compounded with the fact that his skills of depiction were lacking as a painter. At this time, the artist also discovered that he had strong capabilities as a colorist and was inspired by the concept of an endless series as found in the works of Andy Warhol, Dan Flavin’s fluorescent light works, Robert Ryman’s monochromatic white paintings, and the works of Sol Le Witt.

It was within this context that Hirst arrived at the idea of creating works as a “conceptual painter that existed, but almost like a machine.” This approach of an artist painting like a machine, utilizing repetition, approaching the body of work as an endless series are deeply Warholian ways of working that Hirst appropriated and combined with

166 King, Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life, 8:00.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
his philosophy of mortality. Hirst stated: “with the “Spot Paintings” I just thought it’s about repetition, it’s about endlessness and, it’s about immortality….so I just thought well this should be an endless series.” For Hirst, the use of an endless series and repetition connects directly to his foundation as an artist through his philosophy on death, the artist stated:

You get some sort of security from the repetition of a series. If you say something twice, it’s pretty convincing. It’s more convincing than if you say it once. I think it’s also an implication of endlessness, which kind of theoretically helps you avoid death…. It’s almost like you’re cheating death. But it’s killing you…. People are afraid of change, so you create a kind of belief for them through repetition. It’s like breathing. So I’ve always been drawn to series and pairs. A unique thing is quite a frightening object.

Embodied in Hirst’s series of “Spot paintings” is this concept of a seemingly endless series in which repetition reigns across grids of colorful painted spots. Upon publication of The Complete Spot Paintings, 1986-2011, the series consisted of nearly 1,500 works. As curator Ann Temkin’s visual analysis declares that even the First Spot Painting “pointed at infinity” [Figure 21]. These aspects of the series that create a sense of endlessness and infinity through repetition is in line with Hirst’s commentary of death and the immortality of art itself.

171 Ibid, 8:57.
172 Obrist and Hirst, Interview, 1.
175 Luard, Honey (ed.), Francesco Bonami, and Manuela Mena. Two Weeks One Summer. London: White Cube, 2012, 85. In interview with Bonami, Hirst states: “That’s why it’s been great to do the spot show at Gagosian Gallery. That show is really what the “Spot Paintings” are about, an endless series representing immortality, but the immortality of art, not of me.”
The “Spot Paintings” are the conceptual realization of Hirst’s early foundations balancing between literal and conceptual forms of depiction as discussed in chapter one. Even though the aesthetic is colorful and in complete contrast to the overt aesthetic and literal representations of the “Natural History” and the “Medicine Cabinets” series, the concept of the “Spot Paintings” is also a commentary of death through prescription drug culture. The series was initially titled the *Pharmaceutical Paintings*.\(^\text{176}\) By 1991, just a few works into the series, with *Abalone Acetone Powder* [Figure 22], Hirst started titling these works after chemicals and prescriptions with only a handful of exceptions. He began taking titles for the paintings from *Biochemicals for Research and Diagnostic Reagents*, a chemical company’s catalogue.\(^\text{177}\) This concept of titling the works with the names of prescription drugs formed a direct correlation within the “Spot Paintings” [Figures 23] to the drugs in the “Medicine Cabinets” and “Pill Cabinets” [Figures 24]. Therefore, through the act of titling, the works philosophically tied back into the artist’s attempt to speak to the larger shared universal contemplation of mortality.

Visually, the “Spot Paintings” offer a painted, abstracted depiction of pills through their round shape and varying colors. Compared out of chronology, the work *Void* [Figures 25] consists of actual pills placed by color in a reflective stainless steel mirrored cabinet that maximizes the pills gel-like qualities and reflective shine. With *Void*, Hirst utilized the decorative elements of literal pills and created a visual formula through repetition, with the “Spot Paintings” he conceptually referred to the pills through


the titles and the decorative abstracted machine-like painted circle of the colored pills.

Hirst explained that he wanted “a scientific approach to painting similar to the drug companies approach to life … art is like medicine – it can heal. Yet I’ve always been amazed at how many people believe in medicine but don’t believe in art, without questioning either.”

Hirst’s “Spot Paintings” appeal to viewers and collectors alike on a surface level that at first appear to engage on a decorative level based on the “joy of color.” While this aspect feed into Hirst’s desire to create art for mass culture, the “Spot Paintings” operate through both this conceptual commentary on prescription drug culture, but also by creating an optical effect that is deceptively innocent and upon closer inspection turns into a disruptive aesthetic.

In the catalog, for Hirst’s exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, which featured 300 of the “Spot Paintings” throughout eleven galleries worldwide, Michael Bracewell acknowledges that the “aesthetic formula” requires viewer participation to break from the decorative level. Bracewell observed:

Evenly spaced on a white background – there resides an aesthetic formula that first enchants, and then, if allowed, arrests the viewer’s gaze. Dumb or dumber, the steady pulse of the spots creates a contemplative visual force field. It is as though both the gaze and the painting become magnetized, with the viewer caught up within the tension between their combative currents. It is a state close to happiness, yet something disturbs, at an almost covert, sub-sonic level – a sense of unease, like the imagining of the drone of vast machines in deep space. Perhaps it is

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something to do with a sense of time, or eternity, or the tip of agoraphobia into existential dread. ¹⁸⁰

Without the viewer’s willingness to engage in the “Spot Paintings” in order to break with this decorative level, the underlining meaning may not be clear, and certainly the artist’s commentary on death is not overtly apparent in these works. If a viewer were not familiar with Hirst’s entire body of work, it is feasible to simply be engaged with Hirst’s use of color and form, without contemplating the works potential references any further. As this study examines, mass perceptions of the artist is part of a reoccurring problem in which Hirst’s reputation consistently serves as a substitute for real considerations of the work itself and the artistic intent. Beyond that, potential for engaging with the intended meaning of the work can be derived through the titles or through the process of a more engaged visual contemplation that often produces adverse optical effects through prolonged viewing.

Hirst discussed the potential discomfort when viewing the Spots paintings in his writing for the catalog On Dumb Painting:

If you look closely at any one of these paintings, a strange thing happens: because of the lack of repeated colors there is no harmony. We are used to picking out chords of the same color and balancing them with different chords of other colors to create meaning. This can’t happen (within the “Spot Paintings”). So in every painting there is a subliminal sense of unease the colors project so much joy it’s hard to feel it, but it’s there. The horror underlying everything. The horror that can overwhelm everything at any moment. ¹⁸¹

Hirst uses the formal elements of color and shape optically to deny harmony by creating movement through the patterns formed by the spots and the white spaces

¹⁸⁰  Bracewell, On Dumb Painting, 2.
¹⁸¹  Ibid, 1.
between the spots. This act of creating works that first appear to be decorative, color, and non-confrontational to then use optics to deny harmony is a subversive act. Hirst’s “Spot Paintings” cloak meaning with colorful paintings that themselves became a highly sought after commodity: the idea that the “joy of color” is a guise for a deeper message could be considered a reference to surface day-to-day concerns that distract people from the seriousness and meaning inherent within life, including the fact that we are mortal.

Within each canvas, the spots are equal in diameter and distance from each other. On the canvases with the smaller diameters and greater number of spots, the colored lines sporadically form a pattern that suddenly fades or breaks and at times drops off the edge of the canvas through a white spot that disrupts the expected repetition of the grid. Repeated and evenly spaced lines between the colored spots secure a stark visual order. Hirst’s repeated use of the spots creates a pattern that suggests a false sense of control: just as patterns form, they give way, causing a collapsing effect into chaotic movements where the machinelike pattern is suddenly unpredictable.182

While there is a logic tied to Hirst’s philosophical premise that is visually observable within the painting through the titles and visual cues that reference pills, this mass-produced seemingly endless series created a convenient commercial avenue. Regardless of the viewer’s willingness to engage with the deeper layers of meaning, the level of successful commodification that was reached with this series is staggering.183

182 Bracewell, “On Dumb Painting,” 1. Bracewell mentions that the works “repel any attempt to find a place amongst them on which to focus … however one tries to negotiate with the meaningless or meaningful grids of spots, the pattern refuses to resolve.”
Although financial success is part of the artist’s objectives, when looking at this aspect from a slightly different viewpoint through a consideration of origin and intent, even in the case of producing multiples; the artist’s philosophy on death can be evidenced within the decisions to mass-produce and create an endless series.\footnote{Obrist and Hirst, Interview, 1.} When his works took on the form of mass production by assistants, the issue of commodification rose to the forefront of considerations of the artist’s works. Supply and demand was also certainly part of the artist’s purview working with commercial art dealers in both London and New York and through Larry Gagosian and longtime friend Jay Jopling.\footnote{Thompson, The $12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art, 13.} In The Complete Spot Paintings catalog, art critic, curator, and art historian Robert Pincus Witten calls the series and Hirst’s aims into question for his mass production and branding of the “Spot Paintings”:

Still above all the “Spot Paintings” convey an aura of the implacably sterile and immaculate – a shimmering metaphor of obsessive-compulsive behavior and unchanging perfection, hence as an index of death. It is a sensibility deeply foreign to the mutable expressions of life’s insistent messiness (though one to which the artist has been drawn in many other works, from the formaldehyde tanks filled with sliced animals to diamond-pave’d memento mori). Whether this focus is a true expression of the artist’s innate character or just a modish, vampirish trope that he, above all others, had reified remains an open question.\footnote{Robert Pincus-Witten, The Complete Spot Paintings, 1986-2011, CC.}

Even within Witten’s speculation of the artist’s motives in terms of the mass production of his work, the author still acknowledged the visual play on death effectively conveyed in the works. The question Witten raises on whether this “focus is a true expression of the artist’s innate character,” is representative of the lack of understating within criticism and mass perceptions of Hirst’s works that had not thoroughly
considered his body of work from the perspective of the artist’s biography that informs that iconography.

In 2005, Hirst began partially living and working on the Pacific Coast of Mexico in Zihuatanejo.\(^\text{187}\) There, the artist found a correlation between his philosophical premise and Mexican culture’s open relationship with death. Being immersed in a culture where death is embraced in a manner not found in Western society resonated deeply with Hirst. He discussed his work in the context of his stays in Mexico:

I’ve always made artwork that’s about death which has always sort of felt to me like it was about life, but people, you know, I remember people sort of thinking I was morbid and others saw a fascination with it. And then in Mexico I just found the brilliant way that they dealt with death. It’s so brutal they’ve got such a brutal historic past you know with such bloodshed the Mayans, the Aztecs, and Christianity that they’ve managed to make their mascot or cultural identity death. You know which is like a celebration of death. In England, you know, we sort of sweep it under the carpet it’s very difficult to deal with it people don’t like to talk about it and just, you know, you don’t talk about death, you know especially at dinner. Whereas in Mexico they’re having picnics in the graveyard, you know, they seem to walk hand and hand with it [death], it seemed sort of healthy, you know.\(^\text{188}\)

Mexican culture’s seemingly day-to-day awareness of death and celebration of it in homage to life aligned with the Hirst’s long held philosophical belief and premise for his works.\(^\text{189}\) There, the artist continued to work on his own paintings and continued to

\(^{188}\) Ibid.  
\(^{189}\) Hirst and Burn, “Is Mr. Death In?” in *I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, With Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now*, 21. In an in interview Burn asks Hirst: “When did death become the preoccupation it obviously is? Seeing people as disintegrating and decomposing even when they’re well and alive?” Hirst replies: “It sounds really pessimistic…. I think I’ve got an obsession with death, but I think it’s like a celebration of life rather than something morbid. You can’t have one without the other. I read something the other day that Marc Almond had written about Jacques Brel, or maybe Scott Walker, and it said that you listen to him, and he’s got this obsession with death. But every time it’s like a really complete celebration of life. I mean, I don’t think death really exists in life. I think the only thing that exists is an obsession with it. And an obsession with death is a celebration of life. It’s that kind of looking for it, and you can’t find it. I always want to slap myself on the head and go: Hang on a minute, you’re dying – don’t get too smug. It’s unavoidable.”
reference his life experiences with death and loss combined with iconic imagery that referenced his own oeuvre.

During this time, Hirst painted *Self Portrait, Mexico* [Figure 26], like the series of works the artist painted without the use of assistants, this self-portrait consists of a black and blue background of raw and heavy paint recalling the influence of Francis Bacon that has been present throughout Hirst’s career.¹⁹⁰ He painted his portrait on top of newspapers from Mexico, decidedly placing himself within the context of the culture.

In 2006, during his time in Mexico, Hirst also created a body of works for an exhibition titled “The Death of God – Towards a Better Understanding of a Life Without God Aboard the Ship of Fools” [Figure 27] at the Galeria Hilario Galguera, in Mexico City.¹⁹¹ Although the content of these works largely centered on death through religious symbolism, the works he created and included in this exhibition also spanned several of the artist’s previous series, indicating perhaps a time of continued reflection on his own oeuvre. When asked if he experienced a post-sobriety return to religion or if it was Mexican culture that sparked a return to his Catholic upbringing, Hirst stated:

> Is it Mexico, or did I go to Mexico because of it? I love the fucked-up Catholic brutality that they’ve got over there, all the blood, the Mayan stuff. It’s like Catholicism with blood. And I love the way they deal with death and walk hand in hand with it and all that. But you know, I don’t know if I went to Mexico because of that or if it comes out because of Mexico. But I definitely feel at home there.¹⁹²

This aspect of living and working within a culture that embraced death was a natural fit for the artist, and the next work that he conceived of in this environment aimed

¹⁹⁰ Hirst and Burn, “Claridge’s 30.06.09,” 12.
to transform the symbol of death into something extraordinary and audacious by any cultural standards. Hirst drafted the idea for his infamous diamond skull *For the Love of God*, while working in Mexico.\(^{193}\) With this work, Hirst utilized the most obvious and well-worn symbol of death throughout art history and ancient civilization, the human skull.\(^{194}\) *For the Love of God* is a platinum cast of a human skull encrusted with 8,601 perfect diamonds.\(^{195}\) The teeth inserted within the sculpture are the actual teeth recovered in the human skull the work was cast from; the skull belonged to a young adult male who was carbon dated to 1720-1810.\(^{196}\) The title of the work came from a phrase that Hirst’s mother used to use when reacting to her son’s outrageous ideas, tendencies, and behaviors.\(^{197}\)

In “Victory Over Decay,” Rudi Fuchs speaks to the universal elements of death inherent within *For the Love of God* and traces the works origins from the Aztecs to Vanitas paintings and explains how Hirst transcended the use of symbolic and religious attempts to make death ordinary, by making it something spectacular.\(^{198}\) The combination of a sacred symbol with material decadence to an unfathomable degree caused a spectacle within the art world and pop culture.

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\(^{196}\) Kausmally, Swain, and White, 17.


Critics’ coverage of *For the Love of God* focused on the exuberant cost of $23.6 million to create the work and the sale price of $100 million, which is the highest price ever paid for a work by a living artist.\(^{199}\) There are numerous rumors and accusations surrounding the all-cash sale of the work to an undisclosed investment group that is said to include Hirst and the art dealer Jay Jopling.\(^{200}\) Amid the flurry of commerce-centric coverage, the aspect of this work that marks the artist’s lifelong dialog with mortality recedes and often mocks Hirst’s universal theme altogether.\(^{201}\) The fact that the artist’s overt theme of death is so seamlessly merged with the artist’s overt commercialism is precisely what makes this work a high point for Hirst’s career. In the *Guardian*, longtime Hirst critic Jonathan Jones acknowledges *For the Love of God* is a frank commentary of the current state of the art world:

Contemporary art should reflect the contemporary world. Yes or no? If yes, the most honest work of art of the first decade of this century was obviously Hirst's diamond death's head. …it visually sums up the madness on the eve of an economic downfall. Art has turned into money – that is the truth behind the glass walls of modern galleries…Hirst has made that explicit – as an artist and as a businessman. I would rather have the tasteless forthrightness of his money-art than the bland pretence that, when we go and see the hot new show at a London gallery, we are anything else than spectators of financial transactions happening high above our heads… Artists, mainly, make their works with no reference to the market and their place in it. Is this not to participate in a spurious fantasy of cultural seriousness?...The exceptions are true pop artists who, like Warhol in his day, make the reality of art and its place in today's world visible. They make their money visible. These artists include Hirst and Tracey Emin…People love to hate such artists, while hilarious...

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\(^{199}\) Riding, “Alas, Poor Art.”


\(^{201}\) Riding, “Alas, Poor Art.” “Apart from their salability and the fact that many of these works are made by Mr. Hirst’s studio assistants (or his jewelers), what they have in common, White Cube tells us, is his exploration of “the fundamental themes of human existence — life, death, truth, love, immortality and art itself.”
overpraising their bland pretentious contemporaries. But then it's human
nature to shoot the messenger.\textsuperscript{202}

Jones’ insights pointed out Hirst’s ability to create work that speaks directly to the
reality of how the art market is driven and the climate of the society the work was created
within. Within this work the two most polarizing sides of the artist’s spectrum meet and
are juxtaposed for maximum return and effect: extreme commercialism and universal
mortality.

This aspect of Hirst’s mixing of extremes in his work coupled with a better
understanding of the biographical forces that are repeatedly engrained into Hirst’s
concepts, \textit{For the Love of God} represents a culminating moment for an artist who found a
home for his relationship with death within a culture. Mexico served as inspiration in
every way for Hirst to reach an extreme height within all aspects of the artist’s career; he
appropriated the ancient symbol of death through the cast of a real human skull and asked
himself: “what is the maximum you could throw against death?”\textsuperscript{203} His answer was an
obscene amount of flawless diamonds that brought the artist’s multiple objectives to their
pinnacle: an iconic symbol, money, spectacle, wealth, and brashness, all driven by the
primary force of his philosophy of death rooted in creating artwork that brings about an
awareness of one’s own mortality.

In 2008, Hirst adapted the symbol of the human skull for further commentary on
the current era through the mass production of 200 plastic skulls painted in the style of

\textsuperscript{202} Jonathan Jones, “Damien Hirst’s skull tasteless? That’s the point.” \textit{Guardian}, February 22, 2011,
(accessed November 27, 2016).
\textsuperscript{203} King, \textit{Damien Hirst: Thoughts, Work, Life}, 32:20.
his mass produced “Spin Paintings.” Hirst’s installation *Cornucopia* [Figure 28-29] was created for the exhibition titled *Statuephilia*, which featured contemporary artists responding to the British Museum’s collection. Hirst’s work was installed in what was once an 18th century library encasement in the Enlightenment Wing. Critic Jonathan Jones states: “His work [*Cornucopia*] is the only one that is actually about museums, collecting, and knowledge – it is a mad image of the death of Enlightenment.” In this case, Hirst merged his techniques of mechanical painting, mass production, mortality, and juxtaposed his established vernacular with the works, ideals, and approaches of Enlightenment period.

Curator Colin McEwan commented on how Hirst’s work “discusses skull imagery in Meso-American cultures, where the skull alludes to both death and life.” When speaking about the work, Hirst stated:

> There are many unanswerable questions in life aren’t there and death is one of them. I think the skull is a really great symbol cause it just doesn’t give you any answers…the kind of optimism and the hope associated with trying to decorate a skull you know it’s such a futile thing to make death more palatable when it’s, you know, totally unpalatable.

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Hirst’s imperative to address an awareness of our mortality through his work lies within the concept, again, tying together the universal discussion through ancient symbolism with a modern technique. The technique used in his mass-produced “Spin Paintings” [Figure 30] involved the use of a spinning device and pouring paint onto the paper or canvas. In this case the paint was applied in a similar design onto plastic skulls, marking a cross over between his use of the symbol with another one of his mass produced designs resulted in what Hirst called a “modern archeology.”

Hirst began experimenting with using the technique of a spinning mechanism with paint from a popular children’s game in 1992, as part of his explorations with color and the idea of being a conceptual painter. However, in contrast to the formulaic concept of the “Spot Paintings,” the “Spin Paintings” are left up to chance and the resulting aesthetic is one of capturing movement through paint. In 1994, Hirst began the series with Beautiful ray of sunshine on a rainy day painting [Figure 31], and decided that all the works in the series are titled with the first word ‘Beautiful’ and the last word ‘painting’.

In his interviews with Gordon Burn, Hirst discussed the “Spin Paintings,” stating:

I don’t like them much. No, I think the spin paintings are good. But they’re fucking overpriced. That’s all it is. They cost £500 to make. I could have sold them for a thousand quid, all through my career. They’re a miracle of technology. They give you a headache after a while, they make you feel sick. I tell you what it is, I really like making them. And I really like the machine, and I really like the movement. They movement sort of implies life. Every time they’re finished, I’m desperate to do

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211 British Museum, Statuephilia, 1:44.
212 Amy Corry, Beautiful ray of Sunshine on a rainy day painting.
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
another one. The moment they stop, they start to rot and stink. But it’s so much fun to actually make them.\textsuperscript{215}

Hirst’s provocative frankness about the art market side of his work is expressed right along with the philosophical implications he sees inherent in his work, in this case the movement of the spin machine formed the correlation with life and death for the artist. Within the artist and his works there is a continual mixing and merging of these universal ideas and commodification. Extreme commodification displaced universal meaning, yet the fact that they intentionally coexist in Hirst’s works, as they do in modern life, is the dynamic that propelled him to become the successful artist that he is. It is precisely because his work evokes conversation on multiple and contradictory levels that make his work indicative of our particular time period. The difference is that unlike so many commodities of this era that are made solely for mass consumption, Damien Hirst creates art that was born out of a universal, life affirming, substantive message, that results in some of the most expensive and audacious work of our time.

\textsuperscript{215} Hirst and Burn, \textit{On the Way to Work}, 221.
Conclusion

As this study examined, Damien Hirst’s artistic voice was shaped by personal life experiences that can be traced through his biography and subsequently through the iconography of his works. This significant biographical aspect of how the artist came to create exists within and informs the more widely held aspects of his career.

For approximately three decades Damien Hirst has created his art and enterprise across a spectrum that encompasses the 20th and 21st century concerns of the art-world and pop culture, all from the perspective that living with an awareness of our mortality has value. This universal pursuit embedded at the core of Hirst’s life’s work, should be properly considered within the overall significance of the artist.

By providing this basis for an unobstructed view into the genuine impetus behind the obvious philosophical meaning in Damien Hirst’s works, I encourage further study of how artistic intent and meaning become lost within widely held accepted perceptions that lead to misconceptions.

Beyond that in regards to perceptions of Hirst and his work in recent years, while maintaining his artistic practice and production he has continued and expanded the outreach of his cultural work as a collector, publisher, gallery and business owner. While some critics have expressed distain for Hirst’s additional cultural enterprises, through this work, the artist is essentially reinvesting his monetary resources to enrich the cultural landscape.\(^{216}\) The fact is that while Hirst continues to be widely known as the richest

living artist in the U.K., a large amount of the wealth he has earned from his lucrative career has been further invested into cultural businesses.\footnote{Meredith Galante, “Damien Hirst: The World's Richest Living Artist Has A Brand New Exhibition On 3 Continents,” \textit{Business Insider}, Jan. 16, 2012. http://www.businessinsider.com/damien-hirst-art-new-york-2012-1(accessed December 28, 2016).} Hirst is bringing a mix of vision and entrepreneurial spirit into these endeavors just as he did at the start of his career with the \textit{Freeze} exhibition in 1988 London, in support of his art and that of his colleagues at Goldsmith’s College.

In 2005, Hirst launched \textit{Other Criteria} [Figure 32], which is now comprised of a handful of small shops with an online component that showcases his and other artist’s works, book and merchandise. Hirst describes the intention:

\begin{quote}
What we set out to do was to make modern art approachable and attractive. \textit{Other Criteria} is all about working with artists to make things that they want to create and other people want to buy. It’s as simple as walking into one of the shops or clicking through the website, and buying something there and then. It shouldn’t intimidate anyone.\footnote{Damien Hirst, \textit{Other Criteria}, \url{https://othercriteria.com/uk/info/other-criteria}, (accessed January 18, 2017). About section statement.}
\end{quote}

In 2015, Hirst opened the Newport Street Gallery in London [Figure 33], the gallery features exhibitions from the artist’s 3,000 piece collection of art.\footnote{Newport Street Gallery, Press Release: “Newport Street Gallery to open with John Hoyland solo exhibition,” \url{http://newportstreetgallery.com/files/pdfs/159/press-release-hoyland-exhibition-june-2015.pdf} (accessed February 1, 2017).} Located in the south London neighborhood of Vauxhall, the gallery is free and open to the public, includes the restaurant \textit{Pharmacy 2}, and has helped to reinvigorate the cultural landscape of the neighborhood.\footnote{Johanna Thomas-Corr, “Voho chic: how Vauxhall is becoming London’s hottest art district thanks to Damien Hirst,” \textit{Evening Standard}, October 8, 2015, \url{http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/esmagazine/voho-chic-how-vauxhall-is-becoming-londons-hottest-art-district-thanks-to-damien-hirst-a3085546.html} (accessed February 1, 2017).} Hirst explains the impetus behind Newport Street Gallery:
I’ve always loved art and art deserves to be shown in great spaces, so I’ve always dreamed of having my own gallery where I can exhibit work by the artists I love. I believe art should be experienced by as many people as possible and I’ve felt guilty owning work that is stored away in boxes where no one can see it, so having a space where I can put on shows from the collection is a dream come true. Sometimes I still can’t believe that I’m lucky enough to actually own work by some of the artists who first inspired me and made me want to become an artist – like Picasso or Francis Bacon – but my favorite works by far are those by my contemporaries, and I definitely feel a responsibility to share them as much as I can. Newport Street is an incredible space with an amazing sense of history, and it’s a fantastic opportunity for me to wear a curatorial hat for a change, I couldn’t be happier.  

After having achieved a long successful career as an artist, the fact that Damien Hirst continues to broaden his work throughout multiple facets of the field, affirms his deep commitment to and love of art and culture.
Illustrations


8. Damien Hirst, Detail of *The Tranquility of Solitude (For George Dyer)*, 2006, Glass, painted stainless steel, stainless steel, sterling silver razor blades and scalpels, painted iron, silicone, acrylic, porcelain and chrome sinks, porcelain and bakelite toilets, porcelain tiles, chemical grout, plastic, painted pewter, Absolut vodka bottle, resin, glass syringe, stainless steel spoon, LED lights, Panerai watch, sheep and formaldehyde solution 89.8 x 67.8 x 38.4 inches. Image: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates for Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. Available at http://www.damienhirst.com/the-tranquility-of-solitude-f (accessed August 2, 2016)


**PRIMARY SOURCE**


**SECONDARY SOURCE**


Book outlines the making of the diamond skull from carbon dating, finding and casting of human skulls, teeth, and the cuts of diamonds. Book contains Rudi Fuchs article, “Victory Over Decay”.


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Campbell-Johnston, Rachel. “Will they have the stomach for this?” *Times* (London), September 27, 2000.


“The Sound of the Sinners, The Clash.” *SongFacts.com*,  


**ADDITIONAL SOURCES CONSULTED**


Builds speculation of Hirst’s failings based on 2012 Artnet figures and rumors causing split from Gagosian.


Clark, Nick. “The £20,000 drinks were on Hirst – not that he remembered, having forgotten where he left his Turner Prize winnings.” Independent, May 12, 2013. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/the-20000-drinks-were-on-hirst-not-that-he-remembered-having-forgotten-where-he-left-his-turner-prize-winnings-8613067.html (accessed May 5, 2012).


———. “Damien Hirst at Tate – A record breaker?” Times, September 17, 2012.


Additional Sources Consulted:

1994


**1995**


**1996**


**1997**


**1998**


**1999**


2000


2001


Published on the occasion of the exhibition sponsored by Christie’s – writings stem from Warhol as Pop Art key leading to Koons, Hirst.

2008


2011


2016