a) The »Natural History« Series

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

Damien Hirst, 2012

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

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

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


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

189 See Thümmel 1997, p. 121.


191 Ullrich 2004, p. 6. This quote was reframed by the author to Hirst. Ullrich spoke about the contemporary artist Mark Dion, who like Hirst (Ullrich talks about Hirst in the same paragraph) used preserved animals. Dion, like Hirst, also called a series »Natural History«.
With zoological and medical techniques Hirst pursues »scientific mimicry«\(^{192}\) in order to evoke »speculation around and beyond scientific explanations, whereby [...] [Hirst’s prepared objects, note UB] take on post-modern conceptions accordingly, and present less so the character of pieces of evidence than pieces of »doubt«.\(^{193}\)

With the help of assistants, Hirst himself initially preserved other animals in formaldehyde, mainly farm animals such as cows, pigs or sheep. Later (until 2009\(^{194}\)), this task fell solely to the helpers, who executed his instructions. Hirst showed not only complete animals, but also items like skinned cow heads or animals divided lengthwise, whose halves are each presented in freestanding showcases. He stresses that he gets all the animals from slaughterhouses, zoos, or similar facilities after they are killed for other purposes or naturally deceased, that is, they did not die »for the arts«.\(^{195}\) However, they are often manifestations or mediums of human violence, even if they did not die at the hand of or for the artist.

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

In 1997 Thümmel contributed the first art-historical analysis of this series in her PhD thesis »‘Shark Wanted’ – Untersuchungen zum Umgang zeitgenössischer Künstler mit lebenden und toten Tieren am Beispiel von Damien Hirst«.\(^{197}\)

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\(^{192}\) Wenzel 2005. [p. 4]

\(^{193}\) Ibid. [p. 5-6]

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


She only briefly touched on the consumption aspect of the Natural History series, probably because at the time Hirst’s works and their reception did not (yet) play such a dominant role. The shift in perception of Hirst’s works that was less so characterized by phrases like »death« or »provocation« and more so handled in light of financial records has only occurred since about 2004, at which time he sold the facilities of his closed fine dining restaurant »Pharmacy«, which he designed himself, for 11 million British pounds.\footnote{See BBC News Online: Hirst restaurant sale makes £11 m. BBC News Online 20 October 2004.} Since that time, the titles and materials that Hirst used shifted significantly toward topics that have to do with money and value, reaching a first high point with »For the Love of God« in 2007.

Animals displayed in a Natural History Museum are not presented as if they are dead (i.e. lying on their backs with their tongues hanging out), on the contrary, they are displayed in such a way as to look as alive as possible. Hirst directly refers to and even exceeds both this scientific standard as well as mode of presentation and therefore presents both as potentially deceptive.\footnote{As previously mentioned, preserving animals in formaldehyde was already a dated historical method, replaced though other techniques in 1991, as Hirst started his series. This is just known to experts as well as the fact that it was never normal to preserve animals that big. See Thümmel 1997, p. 121.} Many works in the »Natural History« series featuring animals were prepared so skillfully that they look incredibly lifelike and more like a three-dimensional photo – an animal caught in the moment. This also applies to the »Golden Calf« (figures 5 and 6), which is dealt with here. In this case, due to the calf’s closed eyes, its state of being is left in the dark somewhere between life, frozen moment, »sleep«, or the »brother of sleep«, death: »Suspended between life and art, Damien Hirst’s images find no peace«.\footnote{Ibid, p. 16.}

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

In contrast to a photo, which re-presents, thus granting the viewer distance through mediation, Hirst’s work provides the viewer with little distance, merely the glass of the display case separates the viewer from the formaldehyde cadavers. According to Meschede the initial shock of the viewer in reaction to the dead animals will be conquered and transformed into amazement, because the glass of the display case creates a quarantined area that contains the horror within its clear walls, separating the quarantine-room of the case
from the room in which the viewers find themselves\textsuperscript{200}, broaching the issue of interior and exterior. Hirst appreciates the fact that glass can be dangerous/cutting, both solid and fragile, something that simultaneously keeps the viewer away while granting them the chance to see right through it.\textsuperscript{201} The cold, hard, man-made rectangle of the display case also highlights the paradox between the soft, organic creatures, which almost invite the viewer to pet them, and the fact that they are dead, appalling, disgusting, creepy, and scary.

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{201} See Napoli 2004, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{202} A similar sentiment is expressed by Ullrich 2004, p. 3: »Vermutlich fällt es doch gerade wegen des fehlenden Blicks [des toten, verarbeiteten Tiers, Anm. UB] leichter, Tiere in handlich verpackten Stücke, also als Filet, Kotelett, Keule etc., zu kaufen und nicht als Kalbsköpfe oder komplette Hühner.«
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{204} Hirst 1997, p. 298-299.
with it the idea that a chemical material replaces the millennia-old act of creating art with brush, colour, hammer and chisel. With formalin we combine the idea of preserving a thing in a durable condition, one of the main tasks of art, especially in the form of portraits that are meant to live on. So the chemical substance with its potential preserving property becomes a symbol of remembrance and passed-on tradition.«

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

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

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

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205 Ziegelmeier 2009, p. 249.
207 Rosenberg 2011, p. 2.
ARTnews magazine declared 1992 as »The Year of the Shark«, in 1994, the Saatchi Gallery published »Shark Infested Waters,« and Thompson published »The $ 12 Million Stuffed Shark« in 2008, according to Rosenberg. In other contexts, Lawson describes bloodthirsty sharks as a symbol for the consumer: »When blue Sharks are caught [...], curious fishermen have cut open their stomachs to watch how the smell of their own blood triggers a feeding frenzy so that they gorge on their own entrails. There we have it. Our attitude towards the planet. We are so hooked on consuming that we have been destroying the planet and ourselves.«

The fact that the millionaire Saatchi sponsored the work in 1991, led to the association that Hirst has created an ironic portrait of his notorious patron and collector, who was repeatedly accused of using art mainly as an object of speculation and therefore was a typical representative of his hedonistic time. Appropriately enough, the scientific name of sharks is Selachii, which has a striking resemblance to Saatchi.

»Saatchi fictionalized by the Saatchi Collection is – a gorging consumer of art, swimming remorselessly up the Thames, toward the Tate Modern.« Even Wu equates Saatchi with Hirst’s shark: »As a corporate executive Charles Saatchi is indeed the very epitome of the enterprise culture of the Thatcher decade. Like the cold-eyed Shark in the work of his protégé, Damien Hirst, he has been swimming freely in the waters of the Thatcherite free market.«

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

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

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209 Lawson 2009, p. 103.
212 Chin-tao Wu: Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s. London 2003, p. 301.
in transparent containers formulates and contextualizes a critical analysis of consumer society. Hirst uses materials on a level that is both literal and symbolic, oscillating continuously between the two and reconstructing the relationships between individuals in an existential context.«

This quote from Codognato must be supplemented with the information that Koons’ vacuum cleaner display cases are not only understood as a »critical analysis of consumer society«, but in fact also as a celebration of it, as is the case with many of Hirst’s works as well. Further influences include the minimalism of Donald Judd, Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, Jannis Kounellis, and Duchamp’s readymades. 

»Damien Hirst is a bit pop, a bit minimalist, and a bit conceptual.« Hirst himself repeatedly cites Bacon’s paintings as an influence for his display cases. Bacon often used frames of painted lines to isolate his injured human creatures and masses of flesh, something that Hirst in some cases tried to directly translate into his art showcases. While Bacon paints emotions, Hirst only cites them.

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

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

216 Ibid.
217 See ibid, p. 15, 19.
b) »The Golden Calf« (2008)

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

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

221 Allegedly François Pinault won the bid. He is the owner of the auction house Christie’s and a longterm collector of Damien Hirst. See Mike Brennan: Damien Hirst: Beautiful Inside My Bank Account Forever. modernedition.com September 2008.
»The Golden Calf« is a dead young bull with pure white fur, standing upright in a glass display case filled with formaldehyde. His eyes are closed. A golden disc is attached to his slightly bowed head with two gold clasps and his hooves and horns have been replaced with 18 karat gold replicas. The steel frame of the horizontal rectangular glass display case is beset with polished gold plates and stands on a man-high plinth of mottled gray Carrara marble.

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


See Maev Kennedy: Golden calf, bull’s heart, a new shark: Hirst’s latest works may fetch £65 m. The Guardian Online 28 July 2008. The plinth is a part of the artwork and was auctioned with it. Admittedly (arguably for lack of space) only the glass case was available for viewing in the Sotheby’s show.
repeats what the viewer sees. Much in the same vein, his »Twelve Disciples«, hinting at the disciples of Jesus, are twelve skinned cow heads in formaldehyde. This work alludes to Jesus' disciples only in the title and the number of objects in the work. In the booklet for »The Golden Calf,« Hirst preemptively quotes the famous Biblical passage with which art historians would associate the work in which the concept of the golden calf originates:

»1. And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not was become of him.
2. And Aaron said to them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.
3. And all the people break off the golden earrings, which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.
4. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be they gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.
5. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron maid proclamation, and said, Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord.
6. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Exodus, the Bible, Chapter 32.«

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

226 For this hint I am grateful to Rebekah Jonas.
(a bull) bound to a post and pierced with arrows in »St. Sebastian Exquisite Pain«, following the legend of Sebastian.

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

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

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

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

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


\[229\] Exodus 20:1-5: »You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them[…].«
gin Europe. However, Hirst’s »Golden Calf« is not aggressive, but rather passive and vulnerable because his eyes are closed and his front hooves almost float, contrary to the apparent massiveness of his body, they seem to hardly touch the ground (like in other works of the series) (figure 7). Both the title and subject refer to the Bible, however; »worshiping the golden calf« has long been a figure of speech.

![Image of Hirst's Golden Calf](source: Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

232 Bolz 2002, p. 94.
spective. His reputation as an artist is a result of his commercial exhibitions. Hirst wants to sell. He produced his series with an army of assistants in the hundreds, reminiscent of Warhol’s Factory.\textsuperscript{234} Therefore, in the following, the term (potential) buyer/viewer is used to describe those who view Hirst’s art, as the the artist listens to and responds to a lot to his (potential) buyers/viewers.

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

In both cases, Judas and Midas, it’s not about religion but about the dangerous consequences of riches, in this case, betrayal and death. If Hirst addresses wealth in his works, he speaks partly of himself, the artist, accused of betraying art, who has supposedly sold out, however, of whom people also favorably say that everything Midas touched turned to gold, which led to his death. Midas and Judas also appear in 13 further golden and silver paintings in the auction.

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


\textsuperscript{236} Hirst 1993. IV S. 62. Elsewhere he said: »Metaphor seems to me false and I don’t see the work as false.« Hirst 1993, p. 132.
This becomes clear upon closer inspection of an (instructional) drawing of «The Golden Calf» (figure 8). Hirst’s inscription «don’t go worshipping false idols!» refers to the third commandment. Hirst satirized that fact, however, by adding a line from the famous 1990’s number-one hit song «Waterfalls»: «don’t go chasing waterfalls!» In this song a mother says «Don’t go chasing waterfalls, please stick to the rivers and the lakes that you’re used to» to her drug using son, who gets infected with HIV because he did not follow her advice. In a postmodern way, Hirst connects the advice from God «do not go worshipping false idols!» with the advice of a mother in a pop song. These two figures, depending on one’s worldview, may provide moral
life support on the same level. This either enhances the messages of each, or devalues their statements as empty truisms. »The Golden Calf« is therefore influenced as much by pop culture as it is by religious iconography.

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

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

i) Material Matters – Animal, Gold and Showcase

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

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238 See the chapter Butterfly Paintings...
239 Wenzel 2005. [p. 2.]
240 Ullrich 2004, p. 5.
With the use of a dead calf Hirst brings to mind that slaughter is always a brutal and shocking act, even if it serves the purpose of food consumption or the protection of human life. Human survival is now rarely at stake when animals are slaughtered. Most animals are killed for pleasure or luxury reasons, their death has »recreational value«, or provides meat or products for consumption. The viewer is usually only aware of this in explicit situations such as bull fighting. In the case of bull fighting, as with »The Golden Calf«, a male bovine guarantees leisure entertainment with his death, something that is also considered for art today: »When you go into a butcher’s shop and see how beautiful meat can be and then you think about it, you can think of the whole horror of life--of those stupid things that are said about bullfights. Because people will eat meat and then complain about bull-fighting covered with furs and with birds in their hair.«²⁴¹ Hirst’s role model, Francis Bacon, said.

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

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

²⁴³ Ibid, p. 186.
²⁴⁴ Damien Hirst quoted in Thümmel 1997, p. 100.
²⁴⁵ See Ibid, p. 100.
²⁴⁶ Ibid.
presents our ambivalent relationship with animals. They appear in Hirst’s art more as commercially produced readymades than as living beings. Duchamp’s and Warhol’s readymades were mass-produced items such as detergent boxes or bottle holders, but not formerly living creatures. The cow can be used as a synonym for perverted mass production and consumption respectively: for the alienation of man from nature.

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

This relationship is illustrated by the human consumption.

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

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

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

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

248 Ullrich 2004, p. 5.
249 Cicelyn in Napoli 2004, p. 22.
seum are disgusting). Hirst is interested in the ambiguity of farm animals, without ascribing value: »Animals become meat. That’s abstract.«\textsuperscript{250}

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{250} Hirst 1997, p. 299.
\textsuperscript{251} See Stallabrass 2006, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{253} See ibid, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{254} Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{255} See Stallabrass 2006, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{256} »Als Giftstoff ist der Kitsch aller Kunst beigemischt.« Theodor W. Adorno: Ästhetische Theorie, p. 355.
the day the Lehman Brothers investment bank became the largest corporate failure in American financial history, and thus the poster child for the ensuing and ongoing financial crisis.\footnote{See Sam Mamudi: Lehman folds with record $613 billion deb. MarketWatch Online 15 September 2008.} Although Hirst could neither predict the outbreak of mad cow disease nor the dawn of the financial crisis, one can still say that his works reflect the zeitgeist, which is dominated by terms like profit maximization or consumer society, where so many »worship a golden calf.«\footnote{For the Süddeutsche Zeitung Hirst is a symbol of the crisis. See SZ 10/11 April 2010, p. V2/8.}

In addition to the calf, gold is the dominant component of the »Golden Calf«. Hooves, horns, and the sun disc are cast in pure gold, the steel frame of the cabinet is covered with gold figures. Unlike paintings of a golden calf, actual gold is used and not just shown. In the same way, the calf is really there, not just pictured. Because hooves and horns are casts, they are the parts of the »Golden Calf« that represent the golden cast of the whole animal described in the Bible. As a cast the gold still represents/pictures the hooves and horns, and thus representatively the whole calf. Gold is as a rare, precious, and imperishable material synonym for »preciousness, purity, aural effect and meaning at the same time«\footnote{Schneemann 2002, p. 276.}. Those (like Hirst) who create a golden calf, or (as the viewer) »worship« it, or as often quoted and shown »bow down before the golden calf« unduly worship power, represented by the bull, and material wealth (gold).

As Aaron gathered the Israelites’ gold earrings in the Bible, Hirst brought in millions by selling his art, which only then allowed him to cast and erect a golden calf, to which the viewer/potential buyer could pay their respects. Hirst demonstrates that they (like Hirst himself) commit a ’little' blasphemy and that they worship a golden calf by visiting the gallery, both literally and figuratively. For Benjamin, the art »collector always retains something of a fetish-worshiper [...] and [plays] a part in its cultic force through his ownership of the artwork.«\footnote{Benjamin 1936, p. 22.} As Thümmel noted, »the exhibition visitors will be confronted with their role as observers, because they are confronted [...] suddenly with the question of what they really wanted to see, why they have come.«\footnote{Thümmel 1997, p. 75.} With the absence of a human in the work Hirst ad-
addresses the relationship of the viewer with the work because the viewer assumes this role in the work himself/herself.

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

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

At the same time this unusual shift from Arte Povera materials to their exact opposite represents a perpetual crisis of art: The opposing positions are l’art pour l’art on one side and the purely material focus on financial, profit-oriented art market on the other. Hirst says that for him art can heal like a religion and that art and aesthetic value have a higher value than money.265

Throughout time, art has been in the service of the powerful, in earlier times, the church and nobility were the primary sponsors of art in order to promote religious and secular power. Even earlier artworks were part of religious rituals, cult works. In the same way that the importance of religious influence has receded in modern times, so too has the church been replaced as the primary contractor for artists. Artists today, if they want to live off their art, are faced with the dilemma to either create art for wealthy collectors or for (mostly state) institutions such as museums.

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

or aesthetic value, art or life? Hirst says that every object is worth as much as someone is willing to pay for it.\footnote{See Hirst in Jessica Berens: Freeze: 20 years on. Guardian Online 1 June 2008.}

The sun disc on the head of the calf is also made of gold. In the booklet two possible predecessors for Hirst from pop and consumer culture are shown, which have such a disc. One is a film still from the Cecil B. De Mille epic-film »The Ten Commandments« from 1956, the other is by the Christian digital kitsch artist Ted Larson from 2006.\footnote{See Sotheby’s: Damien Hirst. Beautiful Inside My Head Forever. Exhibition catalogue. London 2008. Ibid. Booklet »Golden Calf«, p. 14, 24. Maybe Hirst’s understatement shows popular low art as prototypes for the Golden Calf to consciously subvert intellectual or deeper meanings as he often does in interviews.} Both representations are taken from pop culture and compared to other recent golden calf representations. Both contain a mixture of Christian iconography and old Egyptian depictions of the female mother goddess Bat or Hathor, who is also depicted with cow horns and a sun disc (figure 9). She is sometimes called »the cow of gold«\footnote{E. Naville: The XIth dynasty temple at Deir el Bahari. Vol. III. London 1907-13. Pl. 9 B, 31 quoted in Bonnet 1952, p. 279.} and was married to the sun god Re. Hathor was the goddess of death, goddess of love, peace, beauty, dance, art, and music.\footnote{See Hans Bonnet: Lexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte. Hamburg 1952, p. 277-282.} She can possibly be seen as a forerunner of the Biblical golden calf\footnote{Joachim Hahn illuminates pro and contra of ancient Egyptian influences on the biblical calf. See id.: Das »Goldene Kalb« : die Jahwe-Verehrung bei Stierbildern in der Geschichte Israels. Frankfurt 1980, p. 314-326.} and is connected with ancient Egyptian sun god Aton, depicted as a sun disk, who is considered the first monotheistic God.\footnote{See Bonnet 1952, p. 59-71, especially p. 66-67.} According to Freud, this helped to develop Jewish monotheism, as Moses acquainted the Israelites with the »spiritualized religion of Aton« on their exodus from Egypt.\footnote{See Sigmund Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé: Briefwechsel, p. 223. Quoted in Assmann: Thomas Mann, p. 190.
With the sun disc Hirst also provides (in addition to gold and the art-historical aspects of the Golden Calf) a further art historical allusion for the classically educated. His pop quotes are, analogous to references meant for art historians, addressed to other, perhaps younger, viewers who were more likely educated by television.

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

Unlike a relic, however, the cabinet, as well as the animal, can be replaced at any time, as was the case for example for »The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living«. A cabinet is like a reli-

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274 See Carol Vogel: Swimming With Famous Dead Sharks. NY Times Online 1 October 2006. Hirst states he would often still work on pieces after he sold them to a collector.
quary, a glass coffin for the dead animal: »We get put into boxes when we die because it’s clean, and we get put into a box when we are born. We live in boxes.« This quote illustrates that the formaldehyde animals should be seen as a metaphor for the human condition and the display cases for houses or living environments. For farm animals and humans, the case is like a cage, a small cage like in a laying battery.

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

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

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

276 See Codognato in Napoli 2004, p. 32.
277 See Ibid, p. 185.
tations and consumer behavior. The display case functions as a small shop window in the gallery, much like the gold frame on a large display window mirrors the gallery, which itself is basically a shop designed to sell consumer products, that is works of art.

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

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

281 Stallabrass 2006, p. 190.
284 Benjamin 1936, p. 23.
285 See Stallabrass 2006, p. 181. This might be more common in the UK as most museums are free and financial turnover is just possible through a museum shop or temporary exhibitions.
286 Benjamin 1936, p. 23.
context that bridges art viewing and a sales exhibition, a quasi-religious and almost literal dance around the golden calf. This becomes clear upon examination of the audience, which actually takes part in this dance. These visitors stand in stark contrast to the audience who view Hirst’s works primarily in the form of (photo) reproductions. The exhibition is also about a »Midas« audience as potential buyers, who must be both rich in order to be able to buy a Hirst and also familiar with the joys and dangers of wealth. The audience at the time of economic crisis is familiar with Hirst’s allusions to religion (like the »Golden Calf«) in this art auction exhibition, but is not overly religious, rather ascribing to other values, such as the commodity value of the artwork, which Hirst also challenges. Dietrichsen writes about this Hirst exhibition:

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

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

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

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

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

288 The color of Hirst's glass box frames often correspond with the content.
289 For a detailed analysis of Hirst’s »Twelve Disciples« see Ziegelmaier 2009.
294 Other versions e.g. the one of Poussin (pictured ibid. p. 22) show instead of a plinth usually a column with the calf on it.
As is (possibly) the case with the glass display case, the base increases and ennobles the calf, it strengthens its dramatic, theatrical, and quasi-religious presentation. In contrast to the cabinet, it is not an integral part of the work, which can be seen from the fact that there are unauthorized pictures without base.\(^{295}\)

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

Like in the case of the spot, spin, or Butterfly Paintings, when he created »The Golden Calf« Hirst made a conscious decision not to paint or, in this case, to translate a traditional subject of paintings into a sculpture. Hirst usually operates between the second and third dimension. As he himself has repeatedly emphasized, he is a »sculptor who wants to be a painter'.\(^{296}\) The English language does not distinguish between the German »Skulptur« and »Plastik«. This difference must be explained with adjectives like hewn or moulded in connection with sculpture. Hirst does only moulded sculptures, in German »Plastiken«. He 'translated' works of his painter-idol Bacon into 3D. His Diamond Skull is a ruminant reflex citation of Dutch Memento Mori still life paintings, in the booklet for the »Golden Calf«, he »helpfully« anticipated future interpretations by art historians and highlighted the relationship between his work and significant works of art from artists like Botticelli and Poussin, lending (self-appointed) credibility to his contribution to the cannon. Bernini did the same with his statue of Saint Laurence, a hitherto oft painted subject\(^{297}\): Bernini neither has to depict Laurence's tormentors nor does Hirst have to depict the archers in »St. Sebastian« or the worshipers of »The Golden Calf«. The effect is thus more immediate, dramatic, and theatrical because the viewer is closer to the action, and has to take the role or at least the perspective of the thief or idolater.

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\(^{295}\) See Sotheby’s 2008. Golden Calf. [Cover].

\(^{296}\) Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 206.

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

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

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

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


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


\(^{302}\) See Ben Lewis: The great contemporary art market bubble. Video. 2008. 90 min., see also Stallabrass 2006, p. 190.
campaign Hirst managed to reach many new buyers and to accurately choose the right time to launch the largest art auction by a living artist to date, right when, with a bang, the world economy collapsed. On the same date that Lehman Brothers Investment Banks went bankrupt, September 15, 2008, »The Golden Calf« was sold for £10.3 millions to an unknown, private telephone bidder\textsuperscript{303}, a sum that roughly split the gap between the assessed value of eight to twelve million. This was the highest price to date for a single work by a living artist that was ever achieved at auction.\textsuperscript{304}

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{303} Arguably it was the owner of the auction house Christie’s, François Pinault.
\textsuperscript{304} See Arifa Akbar: A formaldehyde frenzy as buyers snap up Hirst works. The Independent Online 16 September 2008.
able things are presented or directed by advertising or opinion forming organizations such as museums with scientific standards (or authorities in general). He shows that our viewing of art and the world is in part determined by »outdated perceptual processes and assessment pattern[s]«, that have to be challenged or that are losing their validity. These include not only religion, but also the belief in the healing promise of abundant consumption.

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

Tate Modern curator Nicholas Cullinan commented similarly:

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

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

307 See Germaine Greer: Germaine Greer Note to Robert Hughes: Bob, dear, Damien Hirst is just one of many artists you don’t get. Guardian Online 22 September 2008.
309 Farah Nayeri: Hirst to Get First U.K. Retrospective at Tate for Olympic Year. Bloomberg Online 3 March 2011.
Whoever we agree with now depends on how narrowly or broadly we define »art« and involve morality. Lewis’s essay concludes: »not everything done by a great artist is art, let alone great art.« 311 Similarly, not every piece of art that has been denied its artistic character by an art critic should be discounted as »non-art«. Lewis insinuates that Hirst is greedy, but forgot that the fact that the exorbitant asking price was not only met but exceeded is equally as questionable as the price tag. The comparison with Stockhausen312 is not wrong, Hirst was also met with similar outrage after a comment about 9/11.313 Both claim to have been misunderstood.314 The facts themselves are less problematic than the reasoning behind Lewis’ denial of the artistic character behind the art auction/happening, namely that Hirst was greedy. Insinuating that Hirst was merely motivated by greed is as easy as it is superfluous. Both the negative light in which Lewis frames the event and the positive light in which the interview paints the situation give too much weight to the motivations and expectations of the artist. The question is rather what Hirst’s art provides? To follow Lewis’ argument, we would only care about what the artist does, not the message that reaches the viewer, giving the authenticity of the artist more weight than the authenticity of the artwork. This heated debate confirms the significance of the art auction/happening around the Golden Calf both in our time and in art history.

311 Ibid.
312 Stockhausen: »Also was da geschehen ist, ist natürlich – jetzt müssen Sie alle Ihr Gehirn umstellen – das größte Kunstwerk, was es je gegeben hat. Daß also Geister in einem Akt etwas vollbringen, was wir in der Musik nie träumen könnten, daß Leute zehn Jahre üben wie verrückt, total fanatisch, für ein Konzert. Und dann sterben. […]« MusikTexte 91, p. 76.
313 Hirst: »The thing about 9/11 is that it’s kind of an artwork in its own right. It was wicked, but it was devised in this way for this kind of impact. It was devised visually.« Quoted nach Rebecca Allison: 9/11 wicked but a work of art, says Damien Hirst. The Guardian Online 11 September 2002. Banksy said something similar in an interview: »September 11 was an amazing spectacle, very symbolic. In terms of terrorism nothing has ever come close. No amount of bombing people in little holes in Afghanistan will ever compare to that.« See Banksy interviewed by Jim Carey: Creative Vandalism. Squall Magazine. 30 May 2002.
c) **Butterfly Paintings (1991 – 2008)**

Damien Hirst created the series Butterfly Paintings (figures 12 and 13) between 1991 and 2008. All objects in this work group are painted with monochrome paint and each painting features at least one dead butterfly (or their wings) with numbers up to the hundreds. Dead butterflies of different types and sizes were pressed into the wet paint. To a large extent, Hirst used colorful butterflies and in most cases the various insects do not overlap or intersect. Butterfly Paintings are collages that resemble Rauschenberg’s combine paintings. Like those, they connect paintings with pasted relief-like three-dimensional elements. Butterfly Paintings vary by title, size, color, and shape\(^{315}\) of the canvases, as well as additional attached elements and number, variety, size, and arrangement of the butterflies (or butterfly wings).

Hirst’s Butterfly Paintings evolved from his initial installation »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11) from 1991.\(^{316}\) In a two-story former travel agency, strategically close to the renowned contemporary art gallery Anthony D’Offay (where Hirst worked as a student) in central London, visitors to Hirst’s first solo exhibition could view the complete life cycle of various tropical butterflies. The air-conditioned upper floor featured flower-boxes, bowls with sugar water food, and white canvases with pupated caterpillars glued on, from which Malaysian moths hatched during the exhibition, subsequently flying around, mating, laying eggs, and dying.\(^{317}\) A vacant store, a place to purchase consumer goods, became a temporary gallery, a shop for art. The cocoon-like space above artificially created life that thrived – temporarily. Below, one could – for a limited time only! – buy colorful, monochrome canvases or consumer products with dead butterflies on them. Upstairs the close relatives of the artistic subjects were still flitting around; alive, mating, and dying. In a figurative sense, the social butterflies; the short lived, affected, snobby, trendy members of the London art scene; consumed Butterfly Paintings while the literal tropical butterflies consumed sugar water from the same kind of bowls that downstairs served as receptacles for cigarette butts, consumed at a party.

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\(^{315}\) Canvases of Butterfly Paintings are usually rectangular or round, but also have more unusual shapes like hearts, ovals, et cetera.

\(^{316}\) See Thümmel 1997, p. 34-35.

When asked whether there were parallels between the show and «Charles Saatchi with young artists, getting to them when they’re unknown and cheap, collecting them and watching the value rise,» Hirst said, «As far as I’m concerned, that’s a perfect reading of it. I mean, I was aware of butterflies and
collections, and art collectors." Although Hirst often tells interviewees what they want to hear, the citation shows that the installation was already read as a satire on the art market in a contemporary context 20 years ago.

Hirst sold the Butterfly Paintings separately in the basement and developed, using the same principle, the first twelve independent Butterfly Paintings in 1994/95. They all have a few whole butterflies spread unevenly across the canvas. One can describe the series of paintings as a commercially viable spin-off of the installation »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11), a principle derived from marketing and advertising. The same applies to the Spot Paintings and Spin Paintings which originated as site-specific art happenings and evolved into series. Even the art happening »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« developed from the success of the auctions around Hirst's Pharmacy restaurant and his Red charity auction, where Hirst became aware of the media potential to make an auction into an art performance.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

321 For historical explanations about butterflies see Hermann Levinson and Anna Levinson: Vögel und Schmetterlinge als Erscheinungsform der menschlichen Seele. – Ein zoologischer Streifzug durch die Kulturgeschichte. – Naturwissenschaftliche Rundschau 58/ 2005, p. 531-536.
322 See chapter on Fly Paintings.
lels to images, such as paintings. Both are relatively flat and almost two-di-
mensional and some moths, by operating mimicry and mimesis to deter
predators, actually form warning or camouflage patterns, such as a leaf, the
bark of trees or the eyes of a larger and more dangerous animal.\footnote{See e.g. Klaus Lunau: Warnen, Tarnen, Täuschen. Mimikry und andere Überlebensstrategien in der Natur. Darmstadt 2002, p. 64-65, 15-116.} So Hirst
 glued »images« onto images (monochrome paintings) and in so doing,
blurred the lines between depiction and reality like in his Natural History
series.

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

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{325} Hirst emphasises no animal was harmed or killed for his art. See Hirst quoted in Vogel 2007.
and looks more like the lead in Gothic church windows. In the same vein, the titles of the Butterfly Wing Paintings contain religious references such as names of cathedrals, psalms, or other terms that can be associated with religious contexts.

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


The diptych »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys« from 2006\(^{330}\) (figure 12) consists of two equal-sized circular plain white framed canvases, one of which is painted a monochrome pink, the other one is light blue. Each features 18 butterflies of varying size and color stuck to the canvases. Their 'all over' arrangement seems to follow no symmetry. In addition, scalpels, razor blades, and box cutters are attached to the canvas surface. The colored butterflies are also supposedly perfect, a sign of luxury, beauty, and current, despite the fact that they are dead.

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


\(^{330}\) This work was shown 2006/07 at the [post] YBA group exhibition »Aftershock: Contemporary British Art 1990-2006« organized by the British Arts Council in the Chinese cities Guangzhou and Beijing.
The different size and shape of the butterflies on the paintings also stand simultaneously for unity and diversity. Notwithstanding the title, the butterflies, at first glance, are not overpowering or even dominant, but rather the monochrome colors of the canvases dominate. Using the same colors of pink and light blue and with similar titles Hirst created the Spot Painting diptych »Blue For Girls And Pink For Boys« in 1996, a canvas with each only pink or only light blue spots. In 2008 he executed a triptych, »Happy, Boys, Girls«, again a Butterfly Painting. The blue screen is reminiscent of a summer sky, where the butterflies seem to cavort, but they stand out better against the slightly lighter pink background of the other canvas, reminiscent of the color impression of rose-

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

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

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

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

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334 See ibid, p. 161.
336 See Napoli 2004, p. 129.
337 Lawson 2009, p. 147.
man-made contrasted with or god-made (nature). The different blade types can be associated either with medicine, science, and saving lives in the case of the scalpels or with aspects of daily life, such as the razors and other blades.

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

The consistently overly-positive titles of the asymmetric Butterfly Paintings – all of those created around 1995 include the word 'love' – are reminiscent of trivial texts of easily consumable pop songs. The title »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Girls, Like Boys« refers to (title and) chorus of the pop song »Girls and Boys« by British band Blur from 1994.»Looking for girls who are boys who like boys to be girls who do boys like they’re girls who do girls like they’re boys« which Hirst does not quote exactly, but rather paraphrases, like someone trying to sing along with the fast, mumbled lyrics of a song where only the words »boys« and »girls« are easily distinguishable. A non-literal interpretation of the song text allows the artwork to be viewed in a more general way.

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

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

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

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

Other Hirst titles are also borrowed from pop songs like the aforementioned »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11) or »Hello Space Boy« from 1995, »I Can See Clearly Now« (1991) and »My Way« (1990/91). With allusions to songs and their music videos Damien Hirst refers to pop-culture, which is a consumer culture. The pop quote for contemporary art addresses the culturally educated viewer, like the Bible or Ovid quote earlier: the artist shows connections to what is commonly known, what shapes our lives.

Many pop songs have catchy melodies and lyrics that easily stick in memory, like adverts. Therefore, they are often used or made popular in advertising or vice versa. The titles of Hirst's works are reminiscent of comic books, B-

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


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

343 See Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 97. Stallabrass remarks people today don’t read mythology, the Bible, or Dante anymore. See Stallabrass 2006, p. 304.
movies\textsuperscript{344}, or stories behind well-known songs\textsuperscript{345}, as well as aphorisms, fragments of pop songs, and advertising slogans that are ever-present in the cultural landscape and memory; just as natural and familiar as pink for girls and blue for boys.

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

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

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

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

\textsuperscript{345} The blood graffiti »Helter Skelter« in Hirst's vitrine »Pursuit of Oblivion« from 2004 points to the Beatles-Song of the same title, which arguably inspired Charles Manson to commit his bloody deeds. Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{346} See Hirst 1997.
ii) »Devotion« (2003\textsuperscript{347})

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

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

\footnote{\textsuperscript{347} See picture in Napoli 2004, p. 185.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{348} See Romance in the Age of Uncertainty. Exhibition catalogue. White Cube, London 10 September until 19 October 2003.}

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

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

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

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

> In the modern, fleeting consumer society, increasingly the swarm [italics in original] takes the place of the group [italics in original], which is equipped with leaders, authorities governed by hierarchy, and a pecking order. […] Swarms are unburdened of the responsibility of securing the
tools of survival, they come together, drift apart, and come together again and again, each time led by a new force, led by different impulses, and attracted by constantly changing and moving targets.«

For Bauman each person consumes on their own even if they consume in the company of others. Thus consumption is a very solitary activity. In the same way, Hirst’s Butterflies are lonely together, as evidenced by their spatial separation from each other. Such consumer-swarms can be found, for instance, at the openings of new IKEA stores, in the case of the publication of a new Harry Potter book, or at a summer sale, where people try to catch a bargain. Butterflies are therefore often used in advertising and design. Fashion designer Alexander McQueen, used butterflies for many patterns and designs (figure 14). Like Hirst, McQueen’s (among others) fashion oscillates between art, design, and consumption, even if a designer tradi-

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350 See ibid, p. 102.
tionaly creates products not »art«. Both use butterflies for their »product lines« and Hirst, the artist, also designed clothes based on his paintings. The light, carefree but at the same time profound motifs can also be found in McQueen’s poster. Three years after Alexander McQueen’s suicide in 2010, his label collaborated with Hirst to create 30 limited edition scarves in 2013, nearly all of them with Butterfly Painting motifs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

352 Bauman 2009, p. 102.
concerts; consumption rituals of otherwise more or less alienated individuals in a consumer society. Moles and Thomas’ photos of pre-arranged masses from the 1910s (figure 15) are one example of a work similar to the Wing Paintings. In »The Human U.S. Shield« a few hundred people were literally exploited for propaganda purposes.353

The title »Devotion« establishes a Christian religious reference, which is supported by the shape of the canvas, which resembles a Gothic rose window of a church. Even »Girls, Who Like Boys, Who Like Boys, Who Like Girls, Like Boys« recalls Christian devotional images by the fact that it is a diptych. Here the religious reference, however, goes no further than the formal allusion. Butterfly Wing Paintings such as »Devotion« relate much more to Christian iconography, which in its last phase reached a »Mannerist« phase by 2008, when instead of just associative titles like »Devotion,« »Absolution,« or »Forgiveness« (as in 2003) Hirst created »replicas« of actual church stained glass windows with butterfly wings and/or named them after verses from Biblical

Figure 15: Mole and Thomas, The Human U.S. Shield (gelatin silver print), 32.5 x 26.4 cm, 1918.

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 16: Hirst, Superstition [installation view]. New York, 2007.
Source: Photographed by Douglas M. Parker Studio. © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012.

Each painting contains a »collection«, a collage of up to several hundred butterflies. The work itself is collectible, and this is exacerbated by the fact that it is part of a series which in turn is part of several other Hirst series. A series always implies that each variation seeks to produce an aesthetic effect not only individually but also in combination with other Butterfly Paintings, ie, by rows, repetitions and variations of the same subject matter, theme, or system of both constant and variable elements or principles.
Hirst’s butterflies remind viewers of butterfly collections (figure 17) that became popular in the Victorian era. On the one hand these butterfly collections were associated with industrialization and the alienation of man from nature, but on the other hand they are also synonymous with an increase in an often destructive scientific interest in nature and natural phenomena. Around the same time in 18th century Europe, the first decorative butterfly collages arose. These must be understood as precursors of Hirst’s Butterfly Paintings.356 The connection to this religious, one might say uptight age that imprisoned all feelings; the human, the primitive, the savage, and the imperfect, to view it with insulated-voyeuristic eyes, is found in the display cases in the emerging »zoo and museum culture«. Hirst himself speaks of the presumptuous claim of the Victorian era: »[T]he Victorians going out into the world and killing all the animals and bringing them back. In the Natural History Museum, it is like they have got millions of items […] It is all pickled and pinned. […] How arrogant to say, let’s get the world and bring it home to us. Let’s have zoos.«357

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

Blazvick called Damien Hirst’s art »Victorian«[^358], an adjective that does not fit the work of Dubuffet, an artist influenced by surrealism and related to Art Brut, who also created collages of butterfly wings[^359] (figure 18) in the 1950s, which were presented in a style that was both childlike and naive, for example in the form of faces. These can be seen as precursors of Hirst Butterfly Paintings[^360]. Dubuffet rejected what he learned and saw from the history of art. Hirst, however, purposely sought out such innuendos, he referred to medieval stained glass windows or to Victorian butterfly collections[^361], dishing them out on a silver platter to help legitimize his work.

In Victorian era architecture many buildings were built in the neo-style and featured stained glass windows like the ones later quoted by Hirst. This is true not only for the many Victorian churches, but also for the »cathedrals of science« the museums of the 18th and 19th century, such as the Natural History Museum in

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[^358]: See Blazwick, 2010.
[^360]: See Thümmel 1997, p. 45.
[^361]: Since the time of romanticism, debates grew in 19th century German literature about phenomena of nature in general or, more precisely, about butterflies. See Heinrich Heine: Der Schmetterling ist in die Rose verliebt; Christian Morgenstern: Ein Schmetterling fliegt über mir; Eduard Mörike: An Clara (Im Weinberg), Citronenfalter im April; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Der Schmetterling; Johann Gottfried Herder: Liebes, leichtes, luft'ges Ding, Schmetterling; Friedrich von Schlegel: Der Schmetterling.
London, built in 1860 in the Romanesque-Byzantine style, such museums are visually reminiscent of church buildings. As early as the late 19th century department stores were, according to Zola, »cathedrals of consumption«.\textsuperscript{362} Benjamin’s comments are similar, calling the Parisian shopping arcades of his time »temples of the capital goods«.\textsuperscript{365} Hirst refers to churches, museums, and department stores and draws a line connecting the religious Middle Ages to modern consumer society.

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

\textsuperscript{363} Quoted in Bolz 2002, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{364} Quoted by Wallis in Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{365} Stallabrass 2006, p. 88.
Figure 19: Gilbert & George (Shitty) from »Shitty Naked Human World«. (Photography), 338 x 639 cm, 1994, Stedelijk Amsterdam.

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

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

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

368 Ibid.
369 See Thümmel 1997, p. 175.
such a common cosmic view in the present, but also the remaining desire for it. By using real cows or butterflies Hirst’s »pieces of doubt«\textsuperscript{370} show his desire for reality.\textsuperscript{371} Wonder cabinets contrast »artful creations of nature« with art by people. »For Damien Hirst, however, the presentation of the natural object has become the artistic activity itself.«\textsuperscript{372} Hirst’s »natural objects«, his cows and butterflies, were produced/raised/cultivated especially to meet the needs of human consumption. These product-like creatures are themselves already positioned somewhere between nature and consumption. This quote by Thümmel from 1997 has to be updated: For Damien Hirst the presentation of the »consumer product art« is itself an artistic activity. This consumer product also includes his »natural objects« (that have become a trademark) as a self-reminiscence.

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

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

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{371} See Thümmel 1997, p. 175.
\item \textsuperscript{372} See ibid, p. 176. See Bredekamp 1993, p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{373} See e.g. the title of the YBA exhibition of the same name, organized and promoted by a mogul of the advertising industry.
\item \textsuperscript{374} The terms »Kunst« (art) and »Wunder« (miracle, wonder) were used interchangeably. See Beßler p. 15.
\item \textsuperscript{375} See Napoli 2004, p. 198 and Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 97.
\item \textsuperscript{376} Stallabrass 2006, p. 30.
\item \textsuperscript{377} See Hirst 1997, p. 118. See also Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 245.
\end{itemize}

https://doi.org/10.5771/9783828867727-79

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

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

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

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

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

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

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379 This might be connected to the fact that people generally have a better working knowledge of mammals than of butterflies.
self-referential methodology shows that Hirst’s series are already established as a brand or product known like an icon, they quote each other. The (potential) buyer/viewer is thus part of Hirst’s happening. He/she knows for instance that the silhouette of a skull in a Spin Painting or the diamonds in a Butterfly Painting both allude to »For the Love of God«.

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

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

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

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

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

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380 Thümmel 1997, p. 119.
381 Ullrich 2006, p. 190.
or exploited. He depicts collectors as the better art viewers, also analogous to the consumer culture:

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

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

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

### iii) Fly Paintings and Sculptures (1997 – 2008)

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

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382 Ullrich 2006, p. 191.
serving the insects. In 2002 it was followed by a series of new, technically improved Fly Paintings that had very negative titles compared to the exuberant positive ones of the Butterfly Paintings: All were named after diseases and pests such as »plague« or »AIDS«.

Flies feed on decaying organic materials, as hunters or parasites of other insects. They are food pests and settle on dead bodies. Fly Paintings also remind viewers that man himself is consumed after his death by flies and other insects. Some larvae, such as Hydrotaea are used by forensic scientists to determine the time of death of corpses. Flies are found in some cities often in large numbers where food waste spoils. The black Fly Paintings always remind of the dark side of consumption: waste, death, and destruction.

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

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384 See Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 94.
387 Exodus 8:16
Flies were also pests in Greek mythology: people offered sacrifices to the fly catcher god Myiagros before they offered sacrifices to Zeus and Athena.\textsuperscript{388}

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

As is also partly in the case of the Butterfly Paintings, the Fly Paintings reveal their true nature (literally) first and foremost in a personal close-up view (figure 21). Photographic reproduction (figure 22) and the view from a distance first show only black colored, although slightly shimmering, canvases, reminiscent of Malevich’s Black Square. Hirst’s works are thus consumer objects per se; the physical presence of hundreds of dead insects, which can only be experienced or at least fully and uniquely experienced in the personal close-up view, is opposed to Banksy’s ideas-art dependent only on photographic reproduction. Again, this shows the consumer-product-character of Hirst’s art. In order to experience it in all facets, one has to own

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

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

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

The short life of a (butter-) fly is similar to the consumption of a cigarette. What remains are stubbed out butts and dead butterflies, which Hirst exhibited together in »In and Out of Love« (figures 10 and 11). Like flies in »A Thousand Years« a human has two options: consume and/or die, or first one, then the other, or one dies by abundant consumption (from cigarettes, too much meat, or pills for instance). In this vein, Hirst designed a limited edition of Camel’s »artists’ pack« of cigarettes with a detail from a red Butterfly Painting in 2000.

In the Fly Paintings Hirst discusses the pre-conceived notions of the (potential) buyer/viewer: that flies are repugnant, although they are very similar to butterflies, which are considered to be attractive. Still, although it is basi-
cally an almost identical subject (winged insects on canvas), the colorfully-positive Butterfly Paintings were sold in large quantities, while the Fly Paintings on the other hand were not. »Critics tend to celebrate the flies as the coolest newer development in Hirst’s Œuvre, likening them to Yves Klein blue sponge paintings and noting their wry contribution to the »death of painting«. Not surprisingly, they don’t command top dollar as non-connoisseurs tend to think they’re revolting.«

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

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

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

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

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


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

401 According to the FDI it is called Premolar 14.


d) »For the Love of God«398 (2007)

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

»For the Love of God« was first shown in Hirst’s solo show »Beyond Belief« at the White Cube Gallery in June 2007.404 Since then, in 2008, it was
presented in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam\textsuperscript{405} and in 2010/2011 in the Palazzo Vecchio, Florence\textsuperscript{406}, and is the core of Hirst’s own (at the time of this study planned) museum in London.\textsuperscript{407}

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

\textsuperscript{405} The exhibition ran 1 November until 15 December 2008.
\textsuperscript{406} See Art Daily: The Diamond Encrusted Skull by Damien Hirst on Display at Palazzo Vecchio. artdaily.com 30 November 2010.
\textsuperscript{408} Hirst used this title as well, see his quote in the interview by Anthony Haden Guest: Damien Hirst – fresh from auctioning of more than 200 pieces of his work. In: Interview Magazine December 2008, p. 157.
the importance of the material for the reception and summarizes its main carriers of meaning – diamonds and a skull.

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

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

The motif of the skull appears in Hirst’s art as early as the late 1990s, mostly as part of a (human) skeleton, and from then on increasingly in various series and media, from 2005 onwards to the late Spin Paintings (such in the »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« Exhibition in 2008), and in most

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410 »Hirst plans […] a red and black spin painting […] with a human skull in the middle […].« Jo Tuckman: The bell tolls for Hirst’s tried and tested work. The Guardian 24 October 2005.
Blue Paintings from 2006 to 2009. This was followed by photo-realistic representations of skulls, as well as a miniature version of the »Diamond Skull« in 2011 made from a cast of a baby skull also inlaid with diamonds called: »For Heaven’s Sake« in 2008.\footnote{See Madeleine O’Dea: Damien Hirst’s Opening at Gagosian Hong Kong. Art-info.com 21 January 2011.}

»For the Love of God« is generally considered to be a sculpture. In the present study, however, the thesis is pursued that the artwork represents instead the mise en scene of the »Diamond Skull«. This thesis is based on the assumption put forth by Bankowsky, Gingeras, and Wood mentioned in the previous chapter, that the »Beautiful Inside My Head Forever« auction as a whole should be considered a work of art. This is supported in a way by the fact that potential role models from older and newer (art) history that used (dead) heads or something similar were rather used as props in rituals or art happenings. Secondly, as shown, the impact and attention that this work was given was associated primarily with the information that »For the Love of God« cost £15 million to produce and was (allegedly) sold for £50 million – even if (partly) to the artist himself: Hirst’s gallery had obvious difficulties in finding a buyer. The Art Newspaper reported this, stating the highest bid amounted to merely 38 rather than £50 million\footnote{Glen Owen und Polly Dunba: Did Damien Hirst really sell diamond skull for £50 m? Daily Mail Online 9 September 2007.}. Hirst’s gallery hastened to report that an »anonymous consortium« of buyers had purchased the skull for the asking price of £50 million.\footnote{Linda Sandler: Hirst Sells Skull for $100 Million, Manager Says. Bloomberg.com 27 August 2007.}

Later it was revealed that the consortium consisted of Hirst himself; his financial manager, Frank Dunphy; his gallery owner, Jay Jopling\footnote{Cristina Ruiz: Diamond skull will go to auction if it fails to sell, says Damien Hirst. The Art Newspaper Online 20 October 2008.}; and the Ukrainian millionaire and (Hirst) collector, Viktor Pinchuk. Allegedly the sum was paid in cash, however; there are no documents, leading to speculation that no money exchanged hands at all.\footnote{John Pancake: The Art World’s Shark Man, Still in the Swim. The Washington Post 10 May 2009.}

According to Hirst, the title »For the Love of God« was influenced by an outcry from his mother: »For the Love of God, what are you going to do
When she heard what he was doing with the skull, she obviously did not approve, a reaction that sparked her outcry.

With this autobiographical hint Hirst satisfies a need of art critics and viewers who often ask: What did the artist want to tell us? What influences prompted him? Hirst plays this game, it is part of his skull-performance, to deliver autobiographical and art historical background (the Aztec skulls, Memento Mori, as I will comment on later) himself because, in addition to price and name of the artist, this information is a further mark of quality. Hirst turns out to be »artful arranger [...] of the modular components of our projections.«

Hirst himself provides more unrequested (autobiographical) allusions that »legitimize« his works, as he fills in his background with diamonds: » [Damien Hirst] runs through a standardized biography of the artifact – his mother serving on a jewellery stall in Leeds’s covered market; his childhood realization of the stones’ totemic significance: pure beauty as ultimate wealth; his acknowledgement of what others might think«

This autobiographical approach may show Hirst’s close connection to things and their value at an early age. In connection with his biography it would be worth mentioning that young Damien came into conflict with the law because he stole things, which can be interpreted as testing the boundaries of wealth and morality.

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Figure 25: Skull with mosaic Mixtec-Mexica (human Skulls, Turquoise, lignite, iron pyrite, shells and leather), 1500, 19.5 x 12.5 x 12cm. British Museum.

Source: UB.

»For the Love of God« consists not only of the skull, but also its materials, title, provenance, and its price tag of £50 million in connection with a supererogatory mise en scene media campaign. Proper justice is not given to »The Diamond Skull« if it is merely rated as a clever marketing campaign, in the way that the mass media in particular couched it. It is useful, however, to glean the perception that it is more of an art happening in which the object is the focus, rather than seeing the object merely as a sculpture. This is evident from the fact that no publication can keep from naming the price and circumstances of his »sales« in conjunction with the work.

A purely moral and critical examination of the work in the tradition of l’art pour l’art would submit that »For the Love of God« is trivial. However, since this work challenges (or reduces to absurdity) »the old ideals of educa-
tion, socio-critical power and moral purification», this cannot hold completely true either. The approach taken here attempts to combine the two positions, as »the dilemma of the reduction of art to the golden morality is as great as the reduction to its resale value.« So let us first play along with Hirst’s game.

In (art) history, human and/or animal skulls covered with valuable materials were often used in rituals and art happenings, »[A]cross cultures and times, people subconsciously consider the Skull the home of humanity. It is where our words come from and our emotions are shown. And what better a way to embrace that for eternity than to inlay it with precious jewels and metals?«

Hirst indicates that he was influenced by an »Aztec turquoise skull« from the British Museum. This may have been »Skull with Mosaic«, dating from about 1500 (figure 25), a human skull covered with precious stones, not diamonds, but turquoise, lignite, pyrite and shells. In Aztec religious rituals, this skull was bound around one’s waist with a leather belt. It represented the god of warriors, rulers, and sorcerers; Tezcatlipoca, which can be translated as »Smoking Mirror«. By specifying such an influence Hirst presents his work in a timeless context, which serves to charge the work with additional meaning. The roll of the Aztec skull as a prop in a ritual is applicable to »For the Love of God« as well. This becomes clear upon examination of further objects, very similar in form that could be possible precursors. Medieval relics are also religious, this time Christian precursors of »The Diamond Skull«, such as the diamond-encrusted skull of Saint Eutyches (figure 26) that is kept in the Franciscan Church in Salzburg. A skull represents concretely a deceased person and abstractly death itself. In the case of the relic of St. Eutyches, the precious diamonds reinforce the impact and importance of the (supposedly) real bones of the saint. Conversely, in the case of »For the

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422 BBC News Online: Hirst unveils £50 m diamond skull. BBC News Online 1 June 2007.
424 Ibid.
Love of God« the skull and the idea of Memento Mori are perhaps just an earthly body for the idea of a £ 50 million piece of art.

Figure 26: Skull of Saint Eutyches (about 378 to about 454) Franciscan Church in Salzburg.

However, the skull was not really presented with a price tag. Its mis en scene oscillates between the presentation of consumer goods and the presentation of art. The lack of a price tag in luxury stores, however, indicates the influence of art displays on the presentation of luxury goods. What Ullrich writes about displays of luxury goods is also true for the 'Diamond Skull':

»The goods are presented as exhibits: individual exempted, illuminated like a treasure, presented as unique. [...] At best the pieces will not be noticed as goods. To remain true to the contrast, one might recognize in this a Catholic version of consumption, this dealing with things is reminiscent of the veneration of relics. The single product – a shoe, a purse, a
watch – it epitomizes the brand as a whole. In it is the exemplary marriage of everything that belongs to its image.«

As a Christian relic, the skull of Saint Eutyches could be worshiped without diamonds, whereby these gems only reinforce and emphasize sentimental value. However, without the valuable materials, »For the Love of God« would be just an ordinary, anonymous skull.

In addition to the turquoise Aztec skull, Hirst also mentioned; years later (in 2012); seven real human skulls pasted with semiprecious stones by Steven Gregory as precursors to »For the Love of God«: »They were sort of inspirational for me for the diamond skull.« Hirst bought them all and showed the skulls of this London-based sculptor in 2006 in his exhibition of his Murderme collection at the Serpentine Gallery. Although Hirst used the material »recipe« as Gregory and the Aztec turquoise skull, his »For the Love of God« was meant to communicate different issues. Gregory’s skulls are more humorous. In combination with their comically grotesque glass eyes, the semiprecious stones function more like a skin that seems to bring the dead head back to life in an odd, macabre way. Hirst’s Fly skull »Fear of Death (Full Skull)« does not show any teeth like »For the Love of God « or Gregory’s skulls do. Without the teeth in »Fear of Death« the grin, the humor, the positive lightness and the hint to life disappear almost completely. But a little bit of it stays as the open jaw in »Fear of Death« still mimics a grin. Despite its bright grin and all the precious and shining materials »For the Love of God« is still a skull with a morbid connotation. Gregory’s skulls are much more decorated objects with black humor and the Aztec turquoise skull was allegedly a prop in a ritual. But »For the Love of God« hovers between art, object, and ritual. It is a piece of concept art about materialism.

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By his own assertion, Hirst was inspired to use the tear-shaped pink stone by the cartoon character Targ the Mighty. On his forehead Targ carries the »rose of Sirius« (figure 27).

427 Hirst interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist in exhibition catalogue. Beyond Belief. 2007. Unpaged. This superhero was created by Alan Grant in 1977. His first
Figure 27: The Mighty Targ (cartoon character), since 1977.

Through this, Hirst also provides an allusion to commercial pop culture, bringing in even »deeper« allusions. The »rose of Sirius« and Hirst’s pink diamond are strikingly similar to the so-called third eye, which plays a role in many cultures and religions and which is also known in human anatomy as light-sensitive pineal gland that is located behind the forehead.\(^428\) In Hinduism, for example, there is religious blessing sign (figure 28) called tilak(a) (in English: sign, mark), a red dot, worn by men and women on the forehead.\(^429\)

\(^428\) Damien Hirst

\(^429\) A tilaka could denote religious affiliation and appears usually on the forehead but also on other parts of the body.
Like the sun disc of Hirst’s »The Golden Calf«, which is attached to the head at a similar position, the pink diamond can also be viewed either as additional commercial embellishment or as any number of (religious) interpretations.\footnote{In connection with consumption it is necessary to mention the bindi. There is a smooth transition from the religious tilak mentioned here and the more decorative bindi which is just worn by women. Bindi means point or drop, which could be seen analogous to the drop-like diamond in »For the Love of God«. In the past it meant a woman was married, today is is more just decoration. The drop on the forehead was a religious sign and became a consumer product.} In »For the Love of God« it serves as a strong visual feature that is reminiscent of pop culture characters as well as of religious signs of yore, which today serve more as an embellishment. At the same time the religious association of the diamond provides a connection to the word »God« in the title.
In addition to the ancient Aztec cult, Hirst also cited the Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead, see figure 29) on 2 November in Mexico as a potential influence on »For the Love of God«. On this most important Mexican holiday, which stems from pre-Christian traditions celebrated at the end of the harvest time, the dead come to visit and celebrate with the living in a happy reunion complete with music, dancing, and good food, according to ancient Mexican beliefs.

The Mexican treatment of death may seem strange to Western cultures, since death is not treated as a taboo there. It is regarded not as something to fear, but rather something to always meet with good humor and cheer. Even natural parts of the landscape in Mexico such as La Calzada del Hueso (The Bone Paved Road) and La Barranca del Muerto (The Death Gorge) have been harmoniously associated with death. Death is everywhere and a part of everyday life. This is particularly evident in the time leading up to and directly following the Dias de Muertos, when the Calaveras skeletons made of pa-

Figure 29: Candy Skulls, 2010.
pier mâché, plaster, or sugar (figure 29) appear in all sorts of everyday situations, placed in streets and shops. Hirst, who has a second home in Mexico, staged his »Diamond Skull« with a similarly macabre mix of death and irony (the grinning skull) and bright ostentatious-optimism (the diamonds): »I think that the way that I deal with death is a bit Mexican. In England people hide or shy away from death and ideas about it, whereas Mexicans seem to walk hand in hand with it,« [...] Hirst said, a week before the country celebrated the departed on the Day of the Dead. »In that way I feel a bit liberated here.«

»For the Love of God« also contains elements that are both macabre and kitschy. This irony is appropriate for the masses and is reminiscent of the rituals of these Day of the Dead sculptures. Hirst, however, is more interested in value itself and the artificial creation thereof than in Mexican folklore, although he welcomes the reference.

In 19th century European art, the skull was used by Van Gogh, Ensor, and Cézanne, and later by Schiele, Munch, Picasso, Dali, and Dix: »Although its form recurs in the paintings and sculptures of Western art – from the danses macabres and ars moriendi of the Middle Ages to Baroque iconography – what prevails in art is life and its positive values. Death is not the main subject in art: it is overshadowed by life.«

Paparoni’s statement is echoed in Hirst’s skull, although his handling of the skull is more reminiscent of Warhol: »One of the first artists [in the 1970s] to emphasize this subject [of the skull, n. UB] was Andy Warhol who, by presenting it as if it were an x-ray, underlined its power as a mass image, not dissimilar in form to a commercial logo or an advertising poster.«

In advertising, popular culture, or consumer culture, there are dozens of examples of skulls. Since the 1980s both the hip hop and heavy metal scenes for instance have been adorned with skulls from materials that are at least meant to look valuable. In the media, film, and theatre, skulls made of precious materials are used as a synonym for value or worth in combination with a dark, but thrilling mystery. In 2008, the movie hero and adventur-
archaeologist Indiana Jones chases after a crystal skull. Furthermore, many other adventure movies capture the allure of skulls with titles like »Curse of the Golden Skull« (2005), »Pirate Kids II: The Search for the Silver Skull« (2006) or »Nancy Drew: Legend of the Crystal Skull« (2008). A 2010 poster for the opera »La Traviata« (figure 30) shows a skull made of diamonds, which refers to the terminally ill former high-class prostitute Violetta. A British television marriage drama from 1989 is also called »Diamond Skulls«. So Hirst used a clichéd depiction of diamond skulls from pop culture. In the end, it was important for Hirst to give his art happening a face.

Hirst refers to Warhol not only in content and the logo-like handling of the skull-motif, but also conceptually and in form. In the case the diamonds, Warhol served as the godfather. Similarly ambivalent direct precursors are Warhol’s »Gems«; screen-prints from 1979, each showing a diamond, created with paint that had been infused with diamond dust, causing the prints to shine brightly under phosphorescent light. Hirst similarly produced diamond dust silkscreen prints of photos of »For the Love of God« that have

Figure 30: La Traviata (promotional poster), Munich 2010.

been displayed in art exhibitions next to Warhol’s dollar sign.  

Even though Warhol used valuable materials and the mise en scene in the gallery space to effectively celebrate the consumer object »diamond« and its splendor, it was Hirst who took it a step further and significantly increased material costs, sales price, quasi-religious exhibition-situation, and staging for the press and the public, which became the real subjects of his artwork. Hirst also depicted less than Warhol did, he actually showed real diamonds, a platinum cast, and teeth from a real and genuine a skull, instead of only referring to these objects with diamond dust and screen printing.

»For the Love of God« is also in line with newer traditions such as the work of Duchamp, who created the »Tzanck Check,« a (bogus) financial document, which has now considerably more financial 'value' than the 115 U.S. dollars for which it is made out. He gave it to his dentist Tzanck, an art collector, to pay his bill. This extremely detailed, hand-drawn, arduous, albeit bogus, document, marked »ORIGINAl,« explores the relationship between art and money as well as the relationship between individual, hand-made versus machine-made art. Just as the paper money and checks we use in everyday transactions are fiduciary and do not embody any value themselves, Duchamp’s checks destroy any illusions we may still have had about the intrinsic value of art. Instead, its value is based on a discursive context which initiates the production of belief.«

In 1958, Yves Klein used a title: »Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility« to charge an empty space with meaning. He sold these 'white spaces' for 20, 40, 80, and 160 grams of gold. The buyer had to throw half of the gold in the Seine and burn the receipt. Klein got the other half. In 1961, Manzoni sold 90 cans (allegedly) containing 30 grams of his excrement for the market rate for 30 grams of gold. Both Klein’s white spaces and Manzoni’
excrement metaphorically realize the alchemical efforts of old and turn worthless materials into »gold« by artificially charging them with financial and/or sentimental value.

The above examples of 20th century concept art share with »For the Love of God« a (sometimes ironic) message about the relationship of viewers/buyers to objects, in particular their confidence in the financial and/or aesthetic value of art. There is not so much an object in the center of reception, but a (commercial) activity, or the relationship and interaction between the artist and the (potential) buyers/viewers. Hirst, however, deliberately shrouded »For the Love of God« as a sculpture.

Although his »Diamond Skull« is often interpreted in terms of the idea of Memento Mori as well as the allusions to (newer and older) art history, these associations are in fact the insinuation that Hirst intends, meant to infuse the project with meaning, but in reality not central to the statement he is trying to make. This also applies to the words »Love« and »God« in the title. Hirst writes in 1997: »God and love are just dumb words to go in between people and fears, or to connect people to other people.«

These words in turn are association shells connected with the artwork and these emotive words can be extremely meaningful or meaningless, depending on the individual viewer’s background – a phenomenon also observed in the field of advertising. As early as 2006 Hirst held an exhibition in Mexico with a similar title: »The Death of God«. Both titles again smack of »significance with no meaning«. An examination of many of these associative titles, however, reveals their randomness, which is ironically demonstrated by their deliberately contrived alleged depth. »The Love of God« also sounds almost like »The Laugh of God«, which is the title of an artistic and ironic response to »For the Love of God« by Polish artist Peter Fuss in 2007. This Hirst parody, made of inexpensive substitutes, sought to point to the precarious situation of many Polish migrant workers in Britain, who serve as cheap labor.

The British artist Laura Keeble (born in 1977), someone who is close to the Street Art scene, also created a parody of Hirst’s »Diamond Skull«: a skull

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encrusted with cheap imitation stones, which she placed in a glass case on top of a garbage bag in front of the White Cube Gallery in order to stage a photo titled »Forgotten Something?« (figure 31) on the last day of Hirst’s exhibition with the skull.\footnote{See artasty.com: Interview with Laura Keeble. artasty.com 2007.} This discarded skull plays on Duchamp’s ready-made »Fountain«, which also landed in the garbage, in the same way that Fuss’ »answer work« emphasizes the gap between art and value as well as between the object of art that is declared as an art performance in a consumer culture:

»The Damien Hirst »For the love of God« was for me, all about the experience and trying to contemplate standing in a room with an object that is worth £50 million, the security and theatricals of it all. When I created the skull install I wanted to take away the theatricals, the value, the experience that I had and see what the skull would look like without all the theatre. How would that reflect the experience I had? What questions would it raise? It was the only way I could envisage a realistic-like placement outside of security etc for the skull.«\footnote{Keeble quoted on artasty.com: Interview with Laura Keeble. artasty.com 2007.}

Figure 31: Keeble, Forgotten Something? (Installation), London 2007.
Also her painstakingly produced skull was primarily a prop in an art performance, a fact which she also notes about Hirst’s »Diamond Skull«.

Figure 32: Gregory, Trust in Me – Skulker – Old Carou – A nod’s as good as a wink - You Know my Resistance is low – Where’d you get Them Peepers? Strut my Stuff (7 human skulls, encrusted with (semi-) precious stones), all 7 works from 2003.


From Hirst’s direct artistic environment, there are two potential sculptural role models for the »Diamond Skull«. But both have little in common with Hirst’s art happening other than in a visual way and therefore do not need to be described as ‘essential’ role models. Since 1993 the British sculptor John LeKay (born 1961) has regularly produced crystal skulls that have been influenced, according to LeKay, by ancient Mayan skulls.444 In 1993 his works were shown alongside Hirst’s in an exhibition in New York and LeKay stated in 2007 that he inspired Hirst to create »For the Love of God«.445 LeKay does not use a real skull or parts of it, like the sculptor Stephen Gregory (born 1952) did. Seven of these real skulls encrusted with various materials

444 »This is the very first one that was inspired by an ancient Mayan crystal skull. […] I showed this paradichlorobenzene crystal skull with in the project room at the Cohen Gallery in 1993.« John LeKay quoted on http://www.johnlekay.com/John-LeKay.GALLERY.htm (Retrieved: 27. November 2009).
such as semiprecious stones created by Gregory from 2003 onward (figure 32) are part of Hirst’s own collection.\textsuperscript{446}

All these examples have much in common with »For the Love of God« in form. But production costs, resale value, and production media in these cases play a comparatively negligent role when held up against the diamond skull.

In »For the Love of God« Hirst examines the object in terms of its originality. Damien Hirst has to fight plagiarism allegations again and again, like the aforementioned accusation from LeKay. Hirst expressed his opinion on the matter as follows:

»Before I went to Goldsmiths, I sort of tried to be original. But then there’s just so much in the world, and so much of it is derivative. Everything comes from somewhere […]. At Goldsmiths we were kind of freed. You don’t have to worry about that! If it looks good, it is good. […] It’s an amalgam, a mish-mash of everything you’ve ever seen before. If you are constantly creating things you are getting loads of ideas from everywhere. I think there’s only one idea and that was fucking painting your hand red in blood and stamping it on the cave wall. And then, after that, we’ve all just ripped that off and copied it. But what I think is probably different about our generation is that we never felt the need to be original. That kind of frees you up to do what you want.«\textsuperscript{447}

If »For the Love of God« is about the object of the skull rather than its artistic performance, LeKay’s or Gregory’s works would have received much more attention.\textsuperscript{448} Even before »The Diamond Skull« Hirst made a skull out of silver »The Fate of Man «(2005), which did not receive any real special attention. The effect of the skull only makes sense if you look at it as an art performance, such as Beuys’ »peace hare« (German »Friedenshasen«) at the documenta 7 in 1982, in which the artist melted down a valuable historical copy of the imperial crown of the Tsar Ivan the Terrible. With the proceeds from the destruction of this historical symbol of domination and power, he created a sculpture using a common Easter baking form, which he eventually sold

\textsuperscript{446} See: In the darkest hour there may be light. Works from Damien Hirst’s Murderme Collection. Serpentine Gallery. Exhibition catalogue. London 2006. UNPAGED.

\textsuperscript{447} Hirst interviewed by Haden-Guest 2008, p. 155.

for 777,000 German Marks. This price was calculated using exactly double the assessed value of the crown according to the weight of the materials and Beuys used the proceeds to plant 7,000 oak trees in Kassel.449

When taken to the (absurd) extreme, comparing the material value of the oil paints and canvas used in a Picasso painting with the retail price of the painting of £140 million, the price of »For the Love of God« is actually quite inexpensive as the material costs to make the sculpture, £15 million, were much higher than those of a painting. Hirst reflects the zeitgeist, by putting the value of an artwork in such close relation to its' production value. In conjunction with the lessening relevance of religious and ideological meaning in the post-modern consumer society, art has suffered from the perception that there is »nothing new« and that the »author is dead«. In this context, at least the material things, that is money, remain »believable« as carriers of meaning. Ultimately, however, a banknote is just a piece of paper and the practical value of gold and diamonds is limited.450 However, as long as a large number of people believe in their exchange value, these things remain charged with meaning. A financial crisis like the present shows, however, that this meaning and trust in money is not always based on reality.

For Hirst »[m]oney is a tool. It works like a key and you run into a problem, when the tool is over worshiped.«451 In some circumstances however, the opposite is true, that art is the medium of money, or that one at least cannot tell the difference between the value-»currencies« money and art anymore. »Somethings worth what anybody else is prepared to pay for it,«452, Hirst said in the same context. This also applies for non-financial moral or aesthetic value. Ullrich speaks of indeterminacy.453 Art will be charged for something infinite, which – in the words of Friedrich Schiller – was so written, » We know that, the same set of circumstances can move different people in entirely different ways, and even the same individual’s response will be different at different times.«454

450 Hirst mentions something similar in Napoli 2004, p. 236.
451 Hirst in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 82.
452 Napoli 2004, p. 236.
454 Ibid.
Therefore, as soon as urgent needs are met, which is the case in a consumer society, »money is not only an instrument of payment, but a similar stimulant as a charged brand. A brand even has to be specially developed to compete against top-joker money.«

Hirst has created just such an object that oscillates between branded goods, art, and money. Hirst says, »A lot of artists have problems with money. I have had a lot of problems coming in terms with money. For me I have to believe that art is a more powerful currency than money.« For him the ideal value of art surpasses the financial one.

In the same way, Ullrich speaks of the refinement of money through art: »In other cases it is the high price, which charges a product with the promise of more potential. Customers interpret it as evidence of power that is inherent in a consumer item. In extreme cases – such as embellishment or art – the product appears as a symbol of money or, even more remarkably, as an enhancement thereof.«

This spiritual significance is extremely important and will be created not only by monetary value, but, on the contrary, by the nature of presentation. Hirst emphasized in several interviews that he was afraid to create something of value that looked like a worthless imitation: »I was very worried for a while, because if it looked like bling — tacky, garish and over the top — we would have failed. But I’m very pleased with the end result. I think it’s ethereal and timeless.«

In addition to Hirst’s aforementioned possible role models from art history, the role of bling has to be mentioned. Even if Hirst was trying to avoid that description for his skull, he was not entirely successful, something which was most likely unintended. In the American hip hop scene the term represents (often) fake, pretentious, tasteless trinkets that are intended to advertise the status and wealth of the wearer. Bling is derived from the sound that is accompanied with the effect designed to signify a particular brilliance in television commercials. Ullrich also draws a line from this advertising light

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455 Ullrich 2006, p. 60.
457 Ullrich 2006, p. 64.
flash to the presentation of consumption in the tradition of religious iconography:

»Thanks to a flash of light the advertised product should stick in the viewer's mind as something that is particularly fresh and brilliant. It is often unclear whether the light is a reflection off of a glossy surface or an immanent energy emanating from the product itself. In both cases the characteristics of purity and novelty – two of the primary characteristics of virginity – are associated with the product, something with makes it unnecessary for the graphic designers to strive for clear and plausible staging. [...] So a wreath of light around the product being advertised connects back to the old tradition of halos.«

The term refers to the bling of the (hip hop) culture of consumption, which measures prestige mainly on the size of the wealth being flaunted. Even if the wealth, the high price, in the case of the »Diamond Skull« is true and if it may also not look cheap, it still remains a symbol of consumer culture, which can be understood according to one’s respective socio-cultural background positively and negatively.

Ullrich speaks in connection with the bling-flash of virginity, purity and newness. His example is taken from cosmetics advertising. The diamonds on »For the Love of God« seem like a parody of a face cream that shines perfectly, apart from the fact that it adorns a skull. Thus, in grinning »face« of the skull, the viewer looks in turn at himself, 'his future and his focus on consumption»:

»The break through of theatricality into everyday life, what we talk about when we talk about the post-modern, shows that we have lost the fear of illusion and simulation. Even towards themselves, people develop a theatrical ratio. The Americans talk of self-fashioning. What they mean is that questions of existence are now handled aesthetically. Life becomes the stuff of artwork, it is a permanent self experiment, in which consumption is considered as a high art.«

In the eye of the beholder the distinction between ideal and material value is blurred: the enormous cost of the artwork, a book published just about this one brand-new object accompanied by an essay of a renowned art historian (Rudi Fuchs), a public relations campaign, and finally a quasi religious mise en scene in a gallery space:

460 Ullrich 2006, p. 87.
»The space is black, devoid of light upon first examination. One enters in a group of ten visitors like the Kaaba of the Art-Mecca London. Caution, do not push. Quiet, please. Some of the visitors, shuffling, seem to stumble, bump into each other. It takes a while for the eyes to become accustomed to the light source in the center, the object in its glass case, beams of light shine down from above, transfiguring it into the celestial.«⁴⁶²

Although this glass box does not belong to the work such as in the case of the formaldehyde cabinets (and is therefore missing from unauthorized photos), but it is part of the staging. Everything that was said in the previous chapter about glass, windows, and the guided viewing of consumer objects applies here, too. The »Diamond Skull« was issued strategically as the 'draft horse' of Hirst's solo show »Beyond Belief«, like he used the »Golden Calf« as the show-piece, which got most of the space in both the press release and advertising and has furthermore been given the most media attention.

The artist generates strategic 'meaning', which lets the viewer question his own measures of value, their development and the impact of advertising on these measures of value:

»If anyone but Hirst had made this curious object, we would be struck by its vulgarity. It looks like the kind of thing Asprey or Harrods might sell to credulous visitors from the oil states with unlimited amounts of money to spend, little taste, and no knowledge of art. I can imagine it gracing the drawing room of some African dictator or Colombian drug baron. But not just anyone made it – Hirst did. Knowing this, we look at it in a different way and realize that in the most brutal, direct way possible, For the Love of God questions something about the morality of art and money.«⁴⁶³

As Dormant aptly states, the piece is about the morality of the art market itself, and thus about the morality of excessive consumption in general. »It is an ultimate status symbol, a challenge and an irony. The most plutocratic of oligarchs would hesitate for a moment before signing a cheque for £50 m for a brand new work of art, straight out from the studio. This is a joke on the

⁴⁶³ Richard Dorment: For the love of art and money. Daily Telegraph Online 1 June 2007.
theme of »For the man who has everything’ – a death’s head by one of the most celebrated living artists.«

Hirst creates the ultimate art-consumer-product with the aim to push the limits of the market and the public opinion of ‘value’. By showing that he is able to »get away with it«, he shows the spirit of the (almost) limitless spending for consumer products, which had its temporary end with the financial crisis in 2008: In the year that the market for contemporary art reached record highs in the hundreds of millions in 2007, Hirst created the most expensive work by a living artist, the »Diamond Skull«. »Damien Hirst’s diamond-encrusted Skull from two years ago now looks like the perfect artifact to draw the line between the excess of the recent past and the frightful times coming our way.«

The sparkling-evil grin of the skull also refers to the hard times to come, the financial crisis. It expresses a general pride in unreflective consumption that goes directly before a fall. In the 2009 recession Hirst painted oil paintings with his own hands, rather than splurging on production costs into the two millions and producing hundreds of works on the assembly line by his up to 160 employees, he even dismissed a number of employees. But as early as 2007, the moral side of art had been addressed to a small extent – again in connection with the material, the cost of production, and the purchase price rather than the depicted content: Hirst stressed that the diamonds were not so-called blood diamonds from poorer areas in Africa, which are often mined through the exploitation of local people or in other cases, the profits from which are used for the purchase of weapons. Hirst too is aware of the political responsibility, namely that the high financial value of the »Diamond Skull« can have serious consequences: »That’s when you stop laughing […] You might have created something that people might die because of. I guess I felt like Oppenheimer or something. What have I done? Because it’s going to need high security all its life.«

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464 Martin Gayford: Give me the money: Damien Hirst’s 50 m [pounds sterling] skull is a refreshingly self-conscious example of the way that artists transform base materials into lots of money. In: Apollo July-August 2007.
465 Stryker McGuire: This time I’ve come to bury Cool Britannia. The Observer 29 March 2009.
However, also the «clean and tidy» consumer-product-production can be morally objectionable because, according to Dorment, excessive wealth always raises the question of social responsibility:

»This is something I’ve often wondered about when I read of the fantastic prices private individuals pay for works by Picasso, Klimt and Warhol. How do these people sleep at night, knowing that the hundred million they just spent could have endowed schools, built hospitals, eradicated diseases and alleviated hunger? Don’t they think about the morality of pouring so much wealth into something as dead as a diamond necklace, a painting, a private jet?« 467

The work raises the question of »failure to render assistance« in favor of a consumption item. Who is ultimately the guilty party, he who bought or he who sold? Hirst writes in his catalog essay »why cunts sell shit to fools«: »It’s your fault. You’re buying it.« 468

In the title, he distributes the »guilt« evenly among the artists and gallery owners (cunts), who sell art (shit) to collectors (fools). The aforementioned quote also shows that in »For the Love of God« it is the (potential) buyer/viewer, who has to take the responsibility that Hirst rejects, this is also made clear in a quotation by the art critic Will Self:

»When, on the way to Hatton Garden, I’d suggested to Hirst that some people might find it crass, this unprecedented condensation of wealth, in the light of so much human suffering for a want of a few quid, he muttered gnomically, 'Dunno, mate, it’s unavoidable really I mean, I think it offers people hope.' But the following day he sent me a text message: 'When you asked me yesterday about all the money that was spent on the Skull when people are starving, I was just thinking that people don’t really mind money being spent on beautiful things, it’s ugly things that are a problem and there are plenty of ugly f***ing buildings in the world that cost way more than the Skull.'« 469

This quote is interesting as Hirst at first seemed embarrassed to answer, and thought about it until the next day. Hirst’s later objection breaks down insofar as buildings have at least some practical use, they are not mere consumer goods. Hirst’s theme is here »supply and demand«, which he makes a subject of irony or the so-called snob effect.

467 Dorment 2007.
469 Self 2007.
The high prices of a Picasso or a Van Gogh are (also) driven by their ongoing importance and reception within a canon of art as well as the ennobling effect of their provenance. The reputation of these works originated and grew over decades and centuries. Hirst negates this value process in »For the Love of God« as demonstrably questionable and possible to deny. Hirst casts doubt on this process of creating meaning even if (or perhaps because) he himself draws on this process through media staging, allusions to art history, and a high selling price. This is clearly seen in the quick, yet top-class provenance of the skull, which rose in fame due to its media coverage and the reputation of its creator. In 2008 and 2010 Hirst’s skull was shown as a powerful symbol in traditional art venues, as the centerpiece of an exhibition curated by Hirst with classic Memento Mori works from the museum’s own collection, which emphasized its position as a »future classic« in the context of art history. One can compare the Rijksmuseum and the Palazzo Vecchio with brand-name places like the car-city Wolfsburg or Niketown: some are artificial cities, others are brand pilgrimage sites of companies which in turn combine religious, consumerist, cultural, and artistic aspects, »Such artificial cities in the city are not retail spaces, but scenes of a religious staging of the added value of the spiritual. Brands occupy ideas to eventually replace them. «

Just like brands, Hirst wants his works to occupy ideas, with the aim to replace them or to discuss their potential substitutability. »Instead of creating new issues or design variants, the consumer culture parasitically draws on emotionally charged content from somewhere else. Commodity aesthetics and advertising are thus reactive in character; in order to pass as culture, they remain dependent on what has already been considered culture for a long time.«

»Somewhere else« is for Ullrich traditional culture such as art, literature, music, and film. In the same vein, Hirst used media coverage and illustrious provenience to charge his skull with value. The director of the Rijksmuseum, Wim Pijbes, expressed the following in connection with the presentation of the »Diamond Skull« in an interview titled »To what extent have marketing and publicity become art« towards journalists: »Of course, there’s always this aspect that if a high prestige museum puts a work in an exhibition, and makes a catalogue, that people will come. It will push the value of the work

of art. That’s the system. When you write about it, the same happens.« A journalist answered, that it would not even matter, what they write. Pijbes did not contradict that.\footnote{R.J. Preece: Damien Hirst’s diamond skull at the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam): Behind the scenes. To what extent have marketing and publicity become art? In: ADP magazine 1(1): Aspirations. 1 June 2009.} The director of the Rijksmuseum admits to the fact that one can actually declare any work or thing to be art and that the museum context always adds significance, regardless of the work. In the future (after 2012) the »Diamond Skull« is planned to be the most important work in Hirst’s own private museum in London, where it will be the only object one has to pay to see. Again, the mise en scene contributes to the importance and vice versa.\footnote{Rosie Millard: Damien Hirst in line to open his first gallery in Hyde Park. Evening Standard Online 15 June 2010.}

The art performance »For the Love of God« raises a series of basic questions without answering them: Who can prove that it indeed cost £15 million? Who can prove that the platinum (hidden beneath the diamonds) and the diamonds and the teeth are all real? Do high material and production costs automatically lead to a high ideal value? How can one be sure that Hirst’s work was actually sold for £50 million or even sold at all? How do you justify a price of £50 million? How do you measure the intangible value of an artwork and who decides what is (good/recognized) art? »For the Love of God« is a summary of the question, what is »real« or »original«, it deals with faith and confidence in the value of objects and how this value was created, in material and artistic terms.

The unique, the exemplary, the thing that Hirst does differently in comparison to all the aforementioned predecessors and influences, the art in the art action »For the Love of God« is that Hirst presents not only that value and meaning are generated but how, not only in the art market but in general.

e) Spot Paintings (Since 1986)

»Someday, the record of this exhibition [Damien Hirst – The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011] might be dug up by a young art historian [...]. They’ll see that there was a massive show spread across every loca-
tion of the most successful gallery of the time [Gagosian], entirely comprised of one of the most successful artists of the time [Damien Hirst], and that it was supported by some of the most illustrious voices money could buy. So I’m going to lay this down, just to clarify, so that nobody from the future gets confused: we hate this shit. Everyone hates this shit. These spots reflect nothing about how we live, see, or think, they’re just some weird meme for the impossibly rich that nobody knows how to stop."  

Blogger Will Brand, 2012

In his artist book »The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011«, which is a conceptual art joke within itself, Hirst lists 13 sub categories of his series Spot Paintings. The collaborations with Banksy are not included in these sub categories. They are listed separately as »Miscellaneous Spot works« along with cars or shoes with spots.

Hirst usually painted a grid of uniform, single-colored circles (spots), often on clean, white canvases. The gap between the spots span the diameter of one spot. According to Hirst the colors of the spots are not repeated within a single painting – at least in most of the sub categories.

As early as 1986, Hirst created prototypes of the Spot Paintings on boards but they lacked the regular grid of the later pieces and featured recurring colors instead of differentiated ones. Much later, in 2011, he made this prototype retroactively and unconvincingly a part of the series. Hirst painted another prototype Spot Painting on canvas, »Untitled (with Black Dot)« in 1988, at this time neither titled »Spot Painting« nor named after drugs. Hirst claims it is the only one that contains the color black. Very few Spot Paintings contain only one color, i.e. red or blue. For each new work Hirst

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475 As a student, Hirst already made forerunners of the Spot Paintings. Those were irregular and non grid-like shared on the canvas. See Hirst/Burn 2001. Illustration, p. 121. Much later he made those part of the series, when he called his artist book »The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011«.
chose unmixed colors from a palette of 2,500 colors. One piece from 2011 contains 25,781 spots, each in a different color.

Hirst actually started this (at first seemingly banal) series with two almost identical works entitled »Edge« and »Row« (figure 33) in his group exhibition Freeze in 1988; he applied both works directly onto the gallery wall.

In 1990 Hirst made further drawings and in the same year he continued painting them on canvas and naming them with pharmaceutical names of medical drugs, which he read in the »Physicians’ Desk Reference« or the »Catalog of Chemical Compounds« (issued 1990); both are commercial publications of information about prescription drugs published annually. The transfer from wall to canvas and the step from inspirational titles to associative structural series-titles marks the shift from the idea to a commercially available consumer product, from conceptual art to painting, from a diptych to a series. Hirst discusses the status of the painting as an object.

482 In Hirst, 1997, there are just two drawings listed but no Spot Paintings before 1991. See p. 234 and 168. In »The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011« on p.10 »Untitled (Double Canvas), from 1988, what seem to be the first Spot Paintings on canvas are featured.
483 See Thomson PDR (Ed.): Physicians’ Desk Reference. 64th revised edition. Toronto 2010. See also www.pdr.net
484 Contradicting Hirst’s quote (previous footnote) Robert Pincus-Witten stated in The Complete Spot Paintings 1986-2011, p. Bb that Hirst did use »the 1990 Sigma-Aldrich Catalog of Chemical Compounds«. Hirst’s well-worn copy is pictured like a relic as well (p.Bb). Sigma-Aldrich never published a book of that title. The similarly titled Aldrich-Catalog Handbook of Fine Chemicals (1990791) looks different, its’ different editions have fine art paintings on the cover. Hirst’s copy does not.
485 Damien Hirst: »It was just an afterthought to name them after drugs, based on this book [Physicians’ Desk Reference, n. UB], but I saw it and thought: I have just got to do all of them.« Hirst 2005, p. 113.
Hirst could only sell the 'prototypes' of the works done on the wall in 1988 as an abstract idea with certification. This transfer to canvases also made obvious the separation between an artistic idea and mass production, moving from a process that is no longer executed by the artist, but rather by assistants.

The aforementioned change to using medical titles in 1991 seems both sudden and insincere, but can be justified because of the similarity of the spots to pills and medicine packaging. Variations within each painting in this series result from the different sizes and numbers of spots. The colored circles are between «1 1/2 millimeter dots and one painting 7 foot-square» tall, the space between them usually measures one spot diameter.

The number of spots varies as well, from at least half of one spot up to one million spots.489

Figure 34: Hirst Spot Paintings (household paint on canvas), 1992 – 1997. 
Source: © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2012. In: Hirst 1997, p. 245.

The shapes, including triangles, rectangles, and discs, and sizes of the canvases vary from a few centimeters to several meters in size. Occasionally a single color dominates the spots; it is usually impossible to tell whether bright or dark colors predominate; some are kept in shades of gray or in pale colors. Due to the grid-like arrangement and uniform size there is no obvious sequence or hierarchy within the spots. The grids may differ; besides the mostly rectangular grids, which are arranged parallel to the canvas, there are rare others that are reminiscent of mandalas or church windows, or that are arranged diagonally (figure 34).

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»One of a Kind« Work of Art or Mass Production? Hirst and Series

In 2005 the »Physicians' Desk Reference« contained 4,000 titles. Hirst follows the entries of this book (or the 1990 Sigma-Aldrich Catalog of Chemical Compounds) in alphabetical order as far as possible, with the intention of using all of them.490 By 2011 Hirst had created up to 1,500 Spot Paintings.491

Unlike other well known series in art history – such as Monet's »Les Meules« – Hirst did not create a dozen or dozens, but more than a thousand Spot Paintings. The paintings mirror (consumer) society, reflecting the era of mass consumption through the assembly line production of paintings that are each somehow the same and yet different and unique; paintings in which the exact same thing (in this case the spot) can be seen en masse and each is the same (a spot) while each is also different and individual, created by individuals despite the visual negation of this fact.

One can understand this demonstratively exaggerated mass production as satire about art and the art market or the ironic, exaggerated over-fulfillment of the advice that art-market-artists stay with one idea:

»Production […] is controlled – or at least greatly influenced – by private galleries; the type of work, the amount of it, the size of editions and the setting of prices. There is a strong presumption […] that they should continue doing what they have become known for doing. Bank’s cruel headline […] »One Idea, Eight Years’ – only picked upon […] a general tendency in which constancy is a virtue. The idea is that if you keep plug-

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490 There are exceptions to nearly all of the rules concerning the Spot Paintings, in this case there are two pieces of identical size called »Untitled« from 1995. See Hirst 1997, p. 244.
491 See Reyburn 2008. »Someone told me there are 800 spot paintings […] But I’m sure there are more than that." See also Manchester 2009. Thornton 2008 refers to 1,000 »Spot Paintings«. Hirst has talked about ending this series since the mid-nineties and constricted it after 2008, something he also announced publicly in the same year. See e.g. Damien Hirst: No Sense of Absolute Corruption. Exhibition catalogue. Gagosian Gallery, New York 1996, p. 11–13. Hirst himself talked about 6,000 Spot Paintings in 2005. See also Sotheby’s: Damien Hirst. An Interview with Tim Marlow. Online video on Sothebys.com, August 2008. Warhol talked about ending series but never did. See Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 33. In 2012 Hirst showed a lot of his Spot Paintings in all eleven Gagosian Galleries worldwide at the same time, which were estimated to be 1,400 to 1,500. See Hagan 2012.
ging away a single trick for long enough, the buyers […] will get it, and in any case it becomes recognizable and therefore accessible through its very familiarity. By insistent repetition, the artists in effect brand their work.«

With this art market strategy, Spot Paintings become mass consumer-products, bought because they are recognizable from experience and from advertising, regardless of personal affinity for them, »Hirst's [...] Spot Paintings [...] form part of an endless series. As simple as an idea in advertising, they yield impressive and alluring physical objects.«

Hirst emphasizes the painting-aspect through the title of the series, which contains the word »Painting«. Although the title states that this is a painting, something unique that was created by the hand of one (or more) artist(s), in an age of mass production, Hirst produced hundreds of Spot Paintings with the help of his workforce of up to 160 assistants. Thus, the concept of 'unique' artwork is challenged. The frequent criticism of the press, that Hirst created his work (not just the Spot Paintings) mostly »not even himself«, voices the question of who generates art? And thus, what is art? Is art the idea or the execution (only monitored by the artist)? In »Untouched Condition« Gayford stresses that artists like Warhol and Koons, but also Rembrandt and Rodin, like any architect, did not produce many works themselves, but rather monitored the process. Those artists, like Hirst, often only gave the artworks the 'finishing touch'. So they are indeed »unique« artworks, but they look like consumer products.

**ii) Hirst and the Tradition of Painting**

How do the Spot Paintings, ie »paintings«, those old fashioned art objects, fit into »the age of art as a commodity«? They are critical witnesses and helpers of Hirst’s marketing, quintessential for his art.

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494 Stallabrass 2006, p. 166.
495 See Gayford 2006.
496 Sensation. Exhibition catalogue, p. 33.
Since the mid-1990s, he has talked about ending the Spot Paintings, but then he never has.\textsuperscript{498} Maybe he was inspired here by Warhol, who also always wanted to end some of his series.

This behavior neither confirmed nor denied the much vaunted 'death of painting'. Like Hirst, for Koons, painting is \textit{the} artistic medium par excellence: »A photograph for me does not have the same spiritual seduction, it does not have the same essence.«\textsuperscript{499} To the question what made paintings more eternal Koons replied: »For one thing you have the support of the museum. And the framework of painting, and the support of the institution of museums, is in everyone, it's in the subconscious mind.«\textsuperscript{500} In 2010 Hirst answered similarly, when asked if there is an art after the finance crisis: »Painting! If doubt takes the upper hand, people come back to painting. It is the most secure. That is what's familiar.«\textsuperscript{501}

Hirst followed this approach in particular in his photo-realistic series of actual close-ups, or microscopic images of cancer cells, which are based on photos. But like the Spot Paintings, those are photo-realistic hand-made paintings. They act as »fetishes, paintings about fetishes and about painting as fetish and they offend and flatter simultaneously. There is a […] [Spot Painting, n. UB] for every collector's taste if not perhaps pocketbook«.\textsuperscript{502}

The Spot Paintings are about the condition of painting, of the painter per se. Stallabrass called Hirst an »endgame painter« who creates colored objects in a row reminiscent of computer pixels\textsuperscript{503} in an era in which painting was purportedly dead or at least dying. The use of pure geometric primitives – color and form – »myths of originality and authenticity«\textsuperscript{504}, which are so important for the art market, are pseudo-scientifically debunked, »abstraction's mystery« is eliminated.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{498} See ibid, p. 33.
\bibitem{500} Koons ibid, p. 33.
\bibitem{502} Bankowsky in Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 32, 33. This quote about Richard Prince's series Nurse Paintings was transferred to Hirst.
\bibitem{503} Ibid, p. 167.
\bibitem{504} Pop Life. Exhibition catalogue. London 2009, p. 54.
\end{thebibliography}
In contrast to Mikhail Matyushin, Joseph Albers, and Piet Mondrian, Hirst neither actually reflects anything scientific nor develops orders of color and form further, this is just ironically »feinted«. Hirst creates mimicry of painting. Basically, the Spot Paintings are more an artistic concept-satire on paintings and their market than actually paintings, which are (despite or because of that) named or sold as paintings.

For Duchamp all paintings are readymades, as they are made using industrially produced individual colors today. Through his conscious juxtaposition of unmixed colors Hirst transfers this thought experiment into reality. The artistic, individual expressiveness remains in the manufacturing process of the painting, since he chooses the colors »according to his feelings«, but the quality of these emotions is not visible in the finished painting and could just as well be planned by a computer program:

»The first idea was just questioning ... painting. I came from that kind of background of Rothko painting: paint how you feel ... When I got to Goldsmiths I had a real problem with that kind of expressionism. Because I suddenly realized that it wasn’t really working, but I still had the desire. So, I was trying to scientifically reduce that urge into something ... Thinking of a sort of unemotional machine that makes paintings. Trying to place all those expressive decisions made about colour into a grid to create a system where you could just paint how you feel because in the end it is pointless. It doesn’t matter how you feel, they always come out happy ... They just looked brilliant so I just carried on making them.«

Like mass advertising, Hirst’s art should be understandable for all (albeit on different levels). One level is for the (potential) buyers/viewers who see the works in person at the gallery. Those viewers usually have a higher income and sometimes are more informed or better educated about art. The works address them directly and they can appreciate art historical allusions and appreciate the feeling, for instance, of standing opposite real dead animals in formaldehyde. Possibly, these rich collectors might even have a safe behind a

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505 Russian artist Matyushin’s tables and illustrations about the interaction of color, shape, and sound for a German exhibition entitled (in German) »Relativitätstheorie in der Farben/ und Formenlehre. Organische Kunstkultur« (1914-1924) look similar to Hirst’s Spot Paintings.
507 See Hirst 1997, p. 98.
wallpaper-like Spot Painting, like in the artwork (figure 35) by Danish-Norwegian artist duo Elmgreen & Dragset: »The real money behind« (2010). Referring to Hirst’s financial success on the art market, this work revealed what is behind the spots – similar to »Keep It Spotless (Defaced Hirst)«, which is analyzed in the following chapter, namely, the commerce, which is addressed in the title. Expressions like »cash spot« or »spot business« also fit here. Hirst provides allusions for the aforementioned (potential) buyer/viewer who is educated in art history in the Spot Paintings: they recall artworks, for instance by the late Francis Picabia, but especially from the 1960s and 70s by Poul
Gernes or Thomas Downing, John Armleder, François Morellet, Larry Poons, or Gerhard Richter’s color chart paintings (figure 36), in which he used color samples, a tool of industrial painters, to generate paintings »automatically«. First, Richter worked at random, then he used mathematics to determine colors and their arrangement on the canvas:

»Richter produced the first in his series of grid paintings in 1966 in which he replicated, in large scale, industrial colour charts produced by paint manufacturers. As with his photo-paintings, the use of found material as a source removed the subjective compositional preferences of the artist, however, the Colour Chart Paintings took this a step further, eradicating any hierarchy of subject or representational intent, and focusing on colour to create an egalitarian language of art.«

Figure 36: Judge, 1024 colors (paint on canvas), 254 x 478 cm, 1966.


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508 Charles Thompson provides a good overview on various potential forerunner works from recent art history. For the Spots he names Armleder, Downing, and Richter. See Charles Thompson: The Art Damien Hirst Stole. 3am-magazine.com 14 September 2010.


Richter called his Color Chart Paintings generally »1024 Colours« or something similar, Poul Gernes and John Armleder titled theirs »Untitled«, and Thomas Downing »Grid # 8«, all expressing comparable, then-contemporary, ideas of mechanical art democracy – what you see is what you get. Their concept art sought to demystify and democratize art. Ultimately, however, they often created elitist art for a small group of wealthy and well educated collectors. While these artists tried to wipe out individual style and content, these works (as well as Hirst’s outwardly) bear similarities to advertising and graphic design – with the difference being that Hirst’s spots are enriched with additional post-modern ironic ingredients. He denies, however, references to other artists such as Richter: »They have nothing to do with Richter or Koons or Bridget Riley or Albers or even Op. They’re about the urge to the need to be a painter above and beyond the object of painting.« Cooper however, depicts Hirst’s epiphany with his Spot Paintings as follows:

»[C]oming across by chance an image of Gerhard Richter’s 1024 Colours (1973), a geometric colour chart of straight-from the-tin commercial gloss, Hirst conceived a way forward. The picture he had seen was in a book that had recently arrived at the Anthony d’Offay Gallery, where he worked as a picture-mover to earn the money to pay his way through art college. Graham Gussin, a Chelsea art student who also worked part-time at the Dering Street dealers, remembers Hirst staring and staring at the picture in the book, before saying of Richter: ‘What a free man!’«

Hirst painted only the first five Spot Paintings himself, just those five paintings feature barely visible puncture holes in the center of the colored circles that were made by dividers. In the later Spot Paintings made by Hirst’s assistants, all individual production traces were erased. Here a parallel can be seen with the aforementioned design of pills (and their packaging). His helpers worked exactly according to Hirst’s requirements, like machines, without leaving streaks and blotches. According to Hirst the traces of production illustrated the hand-made in the ones he painted himself. In those made by Hirst’s assistants, those traces would interfere with the perfect, but

512 Stallabrass 2006, p. 61.
514 See ibid.
516 See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 119.
517 See ibid, p. 69.
Figure 37: George Zippato, Ron Arnold, Diane Padys, Carol Turturro, print advertisements for Dannon.

sterile impression. His attempt to make the hand of the creator invisible and to create an »unemotional machine to make paintings« is reminiscent of Richter and the Écriture automatique of the surrealists. Dada, believed that the destruction of high art would lead to something better, Hirst, however, does not. Instead, he integrates high art into his art-commerce, in the same way that Hirst also integrates the high art that was once criticized by Dada, which in turn has also become high art, as well as the principle of l’art pour l’art, which believed in the destruction of commercialism for the betterment of art. This becomes evident especially through the visual reference to the color figures adopted by Richter (even if in detail they actually are not such color figures), which provide a promising indicator of an »infinite« variety of consumer products (figure 37). The consumer chooses a color, the consumer artist Hirst always subjectively chooses new color combinations from the same ready-made »color palette«. The spots are reminiscent of this classic painting tool, as well as the circles of color in water color paint boxes. Instead of Hirst’s subjective and individual choice, he could also have used a computer program. The result could hardly be visually distinguished, which is demonstrated by Hirst as well.

### iii) Drugs, Medicine (Cabinets) and Candy

> »We enter the art gallery as though into a pharmacy, looking for remedies nicely packaged for admissible [sic] illnesses.«

George Bataille, 1930

The aspect of mass production and the pseudo-scientific-microscopic is shown in the schematically assigned medical titles that refer to science and

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518 See ibid, p. 119.
519 Ibid, p. 98.
medicine, to which also the »official« name of the Spot Paintings points: Pharmaceutical Paintings.\textsuperscript{523}

Although the Spot Paintings are abstract and relate to abstract painting, they evoke very concrete things from reality, through both title and form. The evenly rounded shapes of the spots are reminiscent of geometric, clear medicine packaging, their design (figure 38), and the legal or illegal drugs they contain, especially pills (figure 41).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{nobivac_lyme.jpg}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{colorful_pills.jpg}
\end{figure}

In fact, these packages contain similarly clear geometric forms and colors (often in combination with clinically pure white coloring) like things that Hirst exhibited in his »Pharmaceutical Cabinets«. For the first time in 1989, he lined up different colored and shaped consumer products in these cabinets, for instance real medical packaging (figure 39) or later (reproductions of) pills, cigarette butts, or diamonds that provide a similar visual impression as the spots – clean and industrially produced. He also had these rows of things painted photo-realistically in oil on canvas (figure 40), like the spots. The grid-like structure of the spots is reminiscent of blister packaging for pills (figure 41) and of the often white shelves in supermarkets or pharmacies. Similarly, the spots recall consumer products lined up in department stores (figure 41), an association which is even clearer in Hirst’s cabinets (figure 39). The untouched quality that invites the viewer to purchase, the clean, the alluring, the \textit{embarras de richesses} and the freedom of choice are reflected in Hirst’s abstract Spot Paintings. The spots are floating; the shelves or grids are invisible, which gives them a magical quality that is

\textsuperscript{523} See Manchester 2009. Because of the fact Hirst himself and most other publications talk and write about Spot Paintings, this publication uses that denomination as well.
evident even in his animals in formaldehyde, or that is represented by the living flies in »A Thousand Years« and in the Butterfly Paintings as well.

In the Spot Paintings, Hirst refers to industrial design and advertising in a positive and ironic way. He overzealously celebrates their clear, simple, positive, colorful packaging design modeled on constructivism and Bauhaus. Even the visual impression of the packaging produces a positive feeling of reliability, security, and trust, which act as intensifiers of consumption for/in the minds of (drug) consumers: »Product packaging is now largely advertising space. It seeks to attract the attention of customers and assists in finding the goods. As a 'silent salesmen' packaging makes self-service possible.«\(^{524}\) In addition to the packaging, the Spot Paintings are about medical drugs. In the correct dosage, pills may promise a cure, but they may have negative side effects and in the wrong dosage they may be dangerous. In English »drugs« can refer to medical ones, but also to mind-expanding and illegal drugs. Hirst’s colorful spots are reminiscent of ecstasy pills or the blaze of

\(^{524}\) König 2008, p. 249.
color that can be activated by taking ecstasy. The geometric equality and regularity with which the spots are distributed over the entire canvas results in a slightly psychedelic effect in larger Spot Paintings (as in paintings of Bridget Riley), because the eye can hardly focus.

Figure 41: Hirst, Thirteen Pills (oil on canvas), 121.9 x 91.4 cm, 2008.

Through the over-fulfilling perfection of representation, the Spot Paintings can be read as a reminder of speciousness. Hirst refers to both legal and illegal synthetic drugs and their design (figure 43) also in a positive way. As the artist admits he consumed both legal and illegal drugs for years\(^525\), a didactic approach here (»Drugs are dangerous«) is too simple because of the ironic contrasting effect. Drugs and drug consumption are also celebrated as beauti-

\(^525\) See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 103-106.
ful, colorful, and joy giving. »The spot paintings are an unfailing formula for brightening up people’s fucking lives.« 526, Hirst said. Here the discrepancy between the titles, recalling prescription (and therefore potentially dangerous) drugs contrast with the seemingly ever-bright and positive colors of the spots, a juxtaposition which also expresses the ambivalence of consumption. With »well-behaved« cynicism Hirst flirts with pseudo-ironic, pubescent pop elements.

As stated earlier, Hirst used a black spot only once in an early painting as black is a dark negative color he tried to avoid for the Spot Paintings. The pharmaceutical industry seems to think the same. Journalist Meike Mai saw one Hirst’s pill cabinets and had the idea to interview a leading pharmacist Siegfried Throm:

»[Mai:] Do black pills exist?

[Throm:] ’Brilliant Black’ as a dye is even allowed. But would you swallow a black pill? Drugs should be pure, you associate that with white.

526 See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 119.
Only because most pills are white?

No, white is also the cheapest.«527

In addition to any kind of drugs, the paintings could potentially also be associated with sweets and their packaging. Hirst compares his spots with Smar-ties528 (dyed hard candy coated chocolate lentils), which are often presented on a white background (figure 43) as well. The book cover of this study shows an homage to a Hirst Spot Painting made from Smarties on a frosted cake for a Smarties PR event for children in London in 2008. As a child, Hirst allegedly had to have his stomach pumped because he mistook colorful medical pills for candy.529 Through the ambiguous appearance of the spots, Hirst blurred the boundaries between healthy consumption and stimulants. He shows their similarity in appearance, their effect on the viewer, as well as their respective bright and dark sides. Consumption of illegal drugs and candy can clearly be categorized as excess consumption. But medical drugs may also belong to essentials if they are used to save lives. Hirst demonstrated in

529 See Hirst/Burn 2001, p. 119.
his Spot Paintings that the borders between essentials and non-essentials are fluid and subjective.

The colors of Smarties and of medical pills do not correspond to their taste or content, »neither the agents nor the fillers [of medical pills], mostly lactose, calcium carbonate or starch from corn, rice or potatoes, do.« In the same way, the different colors of Hirst’s Spots do not indicate any particular meaning.

iv) Reality and Ritual

As he did in many of his series, including those with the dead animals, Hirst tries to bring the sterile and factual as well as reality »into the picture« in his Spot Paintings, to connect art and life ironically – this time through the use of white, pristine canvases (ie pure material) and ordinary household paint, »Another parallel is the play with the domestic, largely highlighted through the use of household paint, which sets up mocking parallel between the paint on the canvas and the paint on the wall on which it will be hung, and a knowing reference to easel painting as decoration. Hirst’s spot paintings are made with ready mixed household paint.«

Hirst used readymade (that is, untampered) household paint reminiscent of commissioned works of facade and sign painters and of paint-boxes. Even mixing colors would contradict the principle of the machine-made, the clinically pure. Hirst says the devaluation of the means – he demonstratively uses no oil paint – that the idea is more important than the »cheap« execution. The Spot Paintings »look« mass produced in quantities but »are not«, thus they are suggestive of being both. Nothing is as it seems and everything is as it seems with Hirst. The pills in his cabinets are not real. The spots are not really produced industrially. Both merely refer to reality, with the difference being that the paintings are full-fledged consumer products like medicines, besides the fact that they both promise various sorts of »healing«.

530 Siegfried Throm interviewed by Meike Mai, SZ Magazin no. 26, 29 June 2012.
531 Stallabrass 2006, p. 164.
532 This is allegedly a problem to do with international customs. See Napoli 2004, p. 41. Elsewhere Hirst claims the real pill would rot after a while. See Hirst 1997. The pills are made e.g. from painted bronze, artificial resin or plaster.
Hirst expressed in his series the Spot Paintings the potentially infinite\textsuperscript{533} (like the plots of daily soaps), which makes the ritual so important for people. What was once the ritual of the Sunday church service, gave way to the consumption of long-running television series, or the collection of series, like the one of butterflies, or paintings. Like the consumption of cigarettes of a particular brand (in Hirst’s works at first always Silk Cut for the reasons mentioned earlier, later only Marlboro Light), the repeated consumption of a drug that is legal or illegal can also be seen as a ‘calming’ ritual, which descended originally from old indigenous American religious rituals.\textsuperscript{534} »Art is like medicine, it can heal. Yet [I have, note: UB] always been amazed at how many people believe in medicine but don’t believe in art, without questioning either.«\textsuperscript{535} The Hirst universe often expresses comparable ideas/concepts/themes in the various product lines of the brand Damien Hirst. The message that Hirst sends with the cigarettes in cabinets also applies to the pill-like spots, both in a way the ultimate ambivalent consumer product: »Cigarettes are such clinical forms. They are like pills. They have purity before you smoke them. They’re expensive, dangerous.«\textsuperscript{536} The infinite, the ritual, which both religion and tobacco promise, can also be found in the production and sale of products of mass consumption\textsuperscript{537}, in the machine-made visual appearance of the Spot Paintings:

»I like the way the [spot] paintings look like they could have been made by a big machine – the machine being the artist of the future. The reason I play snooker or pool is because it enables me to try to behave like a machine. A machine could play snooker flawlessly. People trying to be machines, machines try to be people. Snooker has a similar but three-dimensional feel to the paintings.«\textsuperscript{538} Spot Paintings simultaneously represent the luxurious and the cheap: The chic aesthetic of pool tables and cigarettes, the strikingly simple design and color of billboard ads, the expensive, only affordable for the rich luxury good »Spot Paintings«, but also the cheap use of household paint instead of oil, the mass of paintings that were more produced than painted without

\textsuperscript{533} Cicelyn in Napoli 2004, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{535} Hirst 1997, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{536} Ibid, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{537} Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 93.
\textsuperscript{538} Hirst 1997, p. 246.
many required skills characterize the Spot Paintings and in that way make them synonymous with what is exaggeratedly referred to as »yuppie art« in the present study.

v) Yuppie Art for 'Over the Sofa«? – Spot Paintings in Movies

As in YBA the »y« in yuppie (young urban professional) represents a »young« that is already dated/aged today: the term »yuppie« for young career-conscious city dwellers came to the UK and the U.S. in the 1980s, which is called the yuppie decade, since this time produced many successful business people. Also the computer boom and later the New Economy boom of the 1990s continued this trend. Yuppie life revolved around consumption, the term yuppie is often associated with arrogance, selfishness, and economic ruthlessness. With the latest economic and financial crisis since the fall of 2008 the yuppies might have lost their character as a metropolitan »dominant culture«.

YBAs and yuppies are now in their 50s or older, part of the establishment, and sitting in boardrooms draped with »yuppie art«, like Spot Paintings for instance. The negative interpretation of »yuppie art« described above is succinctly conveyed by the use of Spot Paintings in two feature films in recent years. One appeared in the British superhero comedy »Kick-Ass« in 2010539, where the penthouse headquarters of the villain; the brutal, ruthless drug lord D’Amico; is decorated with several artworks, all of which symbolize violence and/or wealth. Next to »Self« (the blood head of YBA artist Marc Quinn) and pictures of a Warholian pistol and his dollar and pound signs in neon, we find a Spot Painting (figure 44) from Damien Hirst. All works represent the character of the ex-yuppie D’Amico, who uses art without understanding clearly, purely as a way to show off. The art was purchased with impure means such as violence and drugs.

The Spot Paintings also smack of something that is on its way out, much like the hedonistic consumerism of the 1980s and 90s, the paintings have aged with their creator.540 The slightly pejorative, ironic term 'yuppie art' assumed wealth and power, while also suggesting superficiality and lack of taste in art. Yuppie art collectors see art rather as investment and status symbol, than actually as »inspiring« and »good« art. The press often reproaches (subtly) the buyers of Hirst’s art with this suggestion as well. Hirst is well aware of this interpretation of his works and the ones of other former YBAs; he alludes to

that ironically in the previously cited British art market satire »Boogie Woogie« from 2009. He was responsible for providing it with works of art.

In »99 Francs«, a movie satire about consumerism and the wasteful world of advertising of the 1990s, there is a Spot Painting in the office (figure 45) of the greasy, successful, high-flying copywriter and cocaine-addicted yuppie Octave. He is the Damien Hirst of the 1990s: both were acclaimed creative young high-flyers, who loved to consume a lot of cocaine and go all out at excessive parties. The Spot Painting was properly chosen, due to its simplicity and coloration it stands out in the movie like an advertising graphic on a wall.

The fact that the Spot Painting hangs in an advertising agency and that it looks like a color chart – it could be applied art – draws attention to Hirst’s use of the location.

vi) The Handling of a Location – White Cube and Museum

Like any readymade – and the Spot Paintings recall those – Hirst’s art needs the gallery space with which it communicates, otherwise it is not necessarily recognizable as art. As stated in Thümmler, American artists have questioned the white cube since 1970. In contrast, the white cube became widely accepted in the UK at the earliest in 1985.

Hirst’s London gallerist called his gallery »White Cube«. For Hirst, the ‘neutral’ white gallery space is never really neutral, instead he is always aware of the white cube. The first Spot Paintings were still part of the gallery space, with the spots painted directly onto the white wall. The white background mirrors the white cube of a gallery. Hirst’s art represents the ‘hedonistic’ use of paintings; they are made for the commercial sale space »gallery« or the minimalist-oriented penthouse of a rich collector/consumer with high ceilings and plenty of space »over the sofa.« »Art that has to be in a gallery to be art isn’t art.« The anti-YBA artists group, the Stuckists, accuses Damien Hirst and others: »The Stuckist is opposed to the sterility of the white wall

541 See 38th Minute in »99 Francs« (director: Jan Kounen). France 2007. 139 min. It is not obvious if it is a poster or a painting.
gallery system and calls for exhibitions to be held in homes and musty museums, with access to sofas, tables, chairs and cups of tea.«

In fact, Hirst’s Spots reflect the white cube and the 'human' art environment described by the Stuckists, because they are also reminiscent of living room wallpaper or wrapping paper. The prop character or the active participation in an art happening, which is more obvious in the rest of Hirst’s art, is less evident in the Spot Paintings because of their more subtle references to materials and location (or their 'stage' for Hirst’s mise en scene), but due to their initial appearance directly on the white walls of a white cube, this »prop« aspect is also evident. Museum and gallery are two locations for Hirst’s performance of the Spot Paintings.

Hirst seems to view the museum as a temple for things of alleged eternal value that generates pseudo-religious feelings. On the one hand, he rejects it, because it appears obsolete in the postmodern age, however, on the other hand, he seeks the proximity of public institutions and plans to own a museum for his art and his collection. In the Olympic year 2012 Hirst also had his first major retrospective at the Tate Modern. How much he is attracted by traditional art venues and, at the same time, how much he seeks to serve as provocateur by contrasting his works with those venues, was evident when he chose the traditional London Wallace Collection for his Blue Paintings in 2010 or the traditional Amsterdam Rijksmuseum for the 'Diamond Skull' in 2008.

vii) Faith in Medicine and Advertising

»The high Priesthood of secular medicine has replaced the church as the source of salvation.«

Damien Hirst

The white of the Spot Paintings refers not only to the location, but also to the white of the »demi-gods in white« (a German expression for arrogant

544 Ibid.
545 See Thümmel 1997, p. 212.
546 See Farah Nayeri: Hirst to Get First U.K. Retrospective at Tate for Olympic Year. Bloomberg Online, 3rd March 2011.
547 See Hirst interviewed by Liebs 2010.
doctors), to the germ-free and thus healthy and the (would-be?) trustworthy white of many electronic consumer products in kitchens or bathrooms – here advertising strategies, the scientific and the medical of the »Pharmaceutical« paintings echo here: »A copy of the colors in operating rooms give the [electronic, n. UB] device a medical antiseptic atmosphere. The white aura appears as an emanation of its perfect purity.«

With this supposedly sterile, clean, industrial look the artist indicates that even pill boxes advertise the product they contain, especially if they want to seem ostensibly serious, discreet, and trustworthy. Hirst celebrates/comments on faith in medicine and/through advertising. »I started them as an endless series ... a scientific approach to painting in a similar way to the drug companies’ scientific approach to life. Art doesn’t purpose to have all the answers; the drug companies do.«

With the simple and credible appearance of medical drugs Hirst also celebrates/comments on the religious element, which is inherent in science, especially in medicine. Like religion, medicine pretends that, in this case by taking a pill, one (at least for awhile) becomes immortal. »Medical drugs are presented as a life-prolonging, death-neglecting illusory world, [...] medicine strikes as a consumer-friendly, colorful and basically still unreachable and unavailable illusory world [...].«

Science tries to optimize and extend life, going beyond the earthly one. The seemingly exotic names of drugs sound like ritual incantations or prayers in Latin. The development of medical drug names is quite expensive. Thus they provide confidence in a magical, quasi-religious healing, although the consumers (often) do not understand them. Hirst also transfers here a marketing strategy from consumer culture:

»Many advertising slogans in Germany are purposely phrased in English or French, for example, because the companies know not only that the consumer will understand, but also that a slogan in a foreign language

551 See Napoli 2004, p. 162.
552 Wallis in: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 103.
555 See ibid, p. 26.
556 See ibid.
557 Siegfried Throm interviewed by Meike Mai, SZ Magazin no. 26, 29 June 2012.
will be perceived as ambiguous, scintillating, and exotic; existing in a
kind of limbo that opens up a larger associative space. In reference to
Kant it could be said that it is more a matter of conveying a certain sig-
nificance but not a definitive meaning.«

The last sentence of Ullrich’s quote concisely summarizes the principle of in-
fluence and reflection of consumer culture in all of Hirst’s works.

In »Pharmacy« (1992) Hirst faithfully re-created a whole pharmacy: »The
Pharmacy is like a cathedral of our times, where new, redemptive
simulacra, new idols of healing, are celebrated and exhibited.« Often visi-
tors believed they made a wrong turn and entered a real pharmacy instead of
a gallery.

Despite Hirst’s verbal refusal to refer to art history, references to it are
obvious. Maybe these references were mediated by the style of advertising,
which was also influenced by Bauhaus, constructivism, and conceptual art.
The visual appearance and titles advertising medicine packaging and pills
that influenced the Spots are more subtle than other forms of advertising be-
because these products are shrouded in an air of guaranteed seriousness because
they are exclusively available in pharmacies as prescribed by a doctor. This is
comparable the absolution of a priest in a church and with the behavior of
art dealers in a renowned gallery. As evidenced by medical scandals, however,
there is no guarantee that medicine will at the very least do harm, as in the
case of Contergan, and no guarantee that doctors actually always have the
good of the patient in mind or that they do not prescribe medicines based on
factors like packaging, personal interest, or bias when some drugs may have a
cheaper alternative or may be unnecessary. Faith in context with medicine
can be important/promote healing:

»The placebo research shows again and again: Large injections work bet-
ter than small, painful ones, those which leave a bruise are better than a
small prick now and again. Colorful pills work better than colorless. And
all this applies even more if the active agent is nothing more than sugar.

558 Ullrich 2006, p. 43.
559 Ibid, p. 29.
560 See Napoli 2004, p. 29.
561 See Tagespiegel: Grüental zahlte 50 Millionen Euro für Contergan-Opfer.
Tagesspiegel Online 8 May 2008.
The price also has an enormous influence. Expensive pills work better than cheap ones, even if the content is identical.« 562

Hirst transfers this placebo-marketing principle of faith in medicine (packaging) to his art, »seeing is believing«. 563 Spot Paintings in general do not just deal with pharmaceutical advertising, they also contain specific references, for example to the pharmaceutical company Bayer, whose logo is found not only on the back of Spot Paintings as Hirst’s ’company’s stamp’ 564 but also several times on the Sotheby’s exhibition catalogue. 565 The artist replaced the company’s name in its famous logo with his last name, but maintained design and font.

This goes beyond Hirst seeking a specific reference to a pharmaceutical company’s trademark. The logo itself interested him: »Am I a sculptor who wants to be a painter, […] or a cynical artist who thinks painting is now reduced to nothing more than a logo?« 566 He is also aware of the logo-like nature of the Spot Paintings irregardless of medical allusions. Hirst cites the smooth, perfect, high-gloss surface of billboards (Fig 76 and 82), the »graphic punch of billboard imagery« 567, which he sees as the artistic influence of the present, and which he names not only when asked about his inspiration for the Spot Paintings. 568

Hirst created motifs inspired by commercial art that seem to be intended for (T-shirt) design and were later used as such, as in the case of the Spot Paintings or the »Diamond Skull«. Spots appeared in various advertising formats in the past 20 years, for instance in several television commercials for GO!, a now defunct British budget airline, as well as in the logo of the British Council, the billboards of Kids Company, and ads for Hyatt’s hotels:

563 This old proverb goes back to 1609: »Seeing is leeving« in S. Harward MS (Trinity College Cambridge, p. 85.
In Apotryptophanae the spots, fifteen up and fourteen across, scatter the gaze, like the handfuls of pills thrown over Keith Allen in Hirst’s video for «Country House’ (1995) and hit by fellow Goldsmiths graduates, Blur, that was to be an anthem for Britpop. Spots are, of course, a ubiquitous tool in graphic design [...]. Yet, thanks to Hirst, the 1990s contracted a peculiar epidemic of candy-colored measles, from wrapping paper [...] to the exterior of the Tate Boat, designed by Hirst himself. In exploiting the juncture between art and popular visual culture, he succeeded in branding an era.«

As a student Hirst used, as previously mentioned, the Art Directors Annual as an inspiration. Maybe he was familiar with promotional graphics like figure 37, which originates from that annual. Like in the Spot Paintings, differently colored areas are placed on a white background. Hirst, however, does not depict products, but rather reduces this idea to innuendos and creates a product (design) himself. Hirst retroactively influenced advertising. He would not only threaten advertising companies and other creative people who allegedly stole his ideas, with a lawsuit, he was also sued himself, because he adapted the ideas of others. This becomes apparent in the Spot Paintings. Hirst considered suing GO! Airlines because in an advertising campaign around the turn of the millennium they used spots, which appeared to be similar to his. Conversely, for instance, the American Thomas Downing or the Dane Poul Gernes created, as mentioned, series of paintings in the late 1960s that are visually and conceptually hardly different from Hirst’s Spot Paintings.

Another level of meaning (in addition to the one for the (potential) buyer/viewer) addresses the general public, the absent-minded observer, who, in contrast to Benjamin’s concentrated observer, views Hirst’s works – in fact more like advertisements – solely via the media; photo, film, print, or television.

Like a good logo or advertisement, his art also works in today’s consumer society: in glossy catalogues, on billboards, but also in black and white, small and grainy, or on a phone’s camera, the Spot Paintings are always easily

570 See Stallabrass 2006, p. 278.
571 See Tom Sutcliffe: What the ornament business owes to Hirst. The Independent Online, 26 October 2010.
572 See Stallabrass 2006, p. 133.
recognizable, as are the formaldehyde works: »The reproduced work of art will, to ever increasing degree, become a reproduction of a work of art that was designed for reproducibility.«

The downside of easy reproducibility and recognition is evident in the fact that the Spots recall, like many of Hirst’s early works from his student days, wallpaper or fabric design. Therefore they have been accused of arbitrariness and commercial art and are hence often perceived as being open to attack and unreliable. Hirst in turn meets these criticisms by glamorizing or ironically over-fulfilling them and actually providing a variety of products with Spots in his shop; beer bottles, shoes, and watches are all available. The Spots act like an artist’s signature. Like a trademark logo, all this is also associated with an increase in prices.

Here, too, Hirst blurs the boundaries between art, applied art, and design. The familiarity of glossy pictures and their promise of salvation is celebrated while at the same time using conflicting titles to create a feeling of unease.

### viii) Over-Identification with the Viewer

The principle of the potential over-identification (the term was coined by the Slovenian theorist Žižek) with supposed wishes of buyers, kitsch elements, or high-gloss finish is reminiscent of the music band/artist group Laibach, which at the time of communism in Slovenia in the 1980s, through their over-identification with totalitarianism, exposed according to Žižek »the obscene superego of the system«: »Laibach’s method is extremely simple, effective and horribly open to misinterpretation. First of all, they absorb the...

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575 A branded product is more expensive than a no-name, generic product, just as a signed work of art costs more than an unsigned work. See e.g. Stallabrass 2006, p. 278.
mannerisms of the enemy, adopting all the seductive trappings and symbols of state power, and then they exaggerate everything to the edge of parody.\footnote{Richard Wolfson: Warriors of weirdness. Daily Telegraph Online. 4 September 2003.}

The same can be said about Hirst and his handling of consumption. In contrast to Laibach, who had to defend themselves repeatedly against allegations of fascism, Hirst’s real attitude toward consumption is not entirely clear. However, his text »Why cunts sell shit to fools«\footnote{See Damien Hirst: Why cunts sell shit to fools. In: Muir/Wallis 2004, p. 82-85.}\footnote{Interview with Damien Hirst. Exhibition catalogue. »Young British Artists«. Saatchi Gallery. London 1992, p. 20-21.}\footnote{Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 218.}\footnote{Stallabrass 2006, p. 4.}\footnote{Ibid, p. 46.}\footnote{Ibid, p. 70.} heavy-handedly suggests that his exaggerated over-fulfillment of consumer desires is a part of his art. Nevertheless, he feels good in the role of the »cunt«, who sold »shit« to »fools«. As early as 1992, Hirst stated that only the exaggerated makes sense: »Usually things only make sense, what they are exaggerated.«\footnote{Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 218.} He said this in connection with the Spot Paintings, which at that time only numbered 64.

As a true child of his time, Hirst reacts by creating the severely oversimplified Spots, stressing alterations in viewer behavior. The art viewer used to look often, long, and precisely at a few pictures in the museum (and in life). The modern viewers are so familiar with the flood of images on television and the internet; they consume a large number of images in a short amount of time: »The public is extremely visually educated because of the complexity of advertising in the last 30 years. […] People are incredibly visually educated through being sold things.«\footnote{Hirst in Napoli 2004, p. 218.}

Much of the current flood of images is of commercial nature; Hirst and other YBAs use »material from mass media a lot of people cannot help but know about«\footnote{Stallabrass 2006, p. 4.}\footnote{Ibid, p. 46.}\footnote{Ibid, p. 70.}, according to Stallabrass. Benjamin distinguishes between a critical and appreciative viewer. People can either become accustomed to art; everyone is a casual expert in photography, film, and television\footnote{Ibid, p. 46.}\footnote{Ibid, p. 70.}; or people can actively and consciously experience art. The masses seek distraction, – they want to consume – art demands viewer’s concentration\footnote{Ibid, p. 46.}\footnote{Ibid, p. 70.}, Benjamin wrote. The aforementioned Stuckists however, tout the following: »The surroundings in which art is experienced (rather than viewed) should not be artificial and vac-
For them, the less conscious, more appreciatively-consumerist art experience is tied to the place of the museum, or its mise en scène (or staging) as a home and integral part of life, as opposed to purely intellectual, conscious, active but »quixotic« experience of art in the white cube. This attitude is contrary to the common perception of the museum as a place that is removed from life, where art is kept »germ-free« without the original context of, for instance, a church. This contradiction can possibly be resolved, as the British Stuckists might still think of the densely draped old museums in London equipped with colorful curtains. But other critics have more so spaces in mind that are reminiscent of the white cube.

This modified »point of view« goes hand in hand with the conception of »celebrity«: self-promotion, style, and image became more important in shaping identity. The more images (and for instance actors) are viewed reproduced on photos and film, the more important the cult of celebrity becomes, preserving the original aura of art. This applies not only for the artist and each individual but also for museums and galleries, which are now managed like corporations. According to Stallabrass advertising becomes like art and vice versa, for which the Spot Paintings are the best example. Glossy magazines are designed artistically. Their photographers, for instance Helmut Newton, are classified as artists. Conversely, the viewing of contemporary art and culture today has become an activity that is inextricably linked to buying, like mass media and advertising: Hardly a museum lacks a shop, a fact emphasized for instance by Banksy in his film »Exit Through The Gift Shop«.

In 2005 this probably prompted Hirst to set up the company Other Criteria, which is like Keith Haring’s Pop Shop in the 1980s, to sell Hirst art and merchandise (such as those of other artists) in three shops in London and New York. There he sells art prints, posters, prints of Spot Paintings, postcards for a British pound, exhibition catalogues, »Diamond Skull« T-shirts, et cetera. Hirst is an artist-entrepreneur who himself ensures the sale of his art, often thwarting his galleries and auctioning his works directly at

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587 See p. 88.
588 With Hirst’s then finance manager Frank Dumphy and his old school friend and longtime assistant Hugh Allan. See https://www.othercriteria.com/info/about/ (Retrieved: 20 May 2010).
Sotheby's – one of its branches in London, located directly next to Sotheby's. In his art Hirst reflects the principle of »brands not products«, which, as mentioned, is practiced by large corporations such as Nike or Coca-Cola. Hirst's artist brand, staged in a kind of over-all-performance, includes the Spot Paintings as kind of franchised goods »produced« by assistants.