paintings he made before travelling to London in 1760; here the influence of contemporary French art, in particular the work of François Boucher, is palpable. This painting, a still life of the same year (no.6), and a painting entitled *Time clipping the wings of Love* (dated 1761 (no.9), that is, after his arrival in London, form a visual bridge to the next sections on Zoffany and the London stage and his association with the Academy. Indeed, the curators organised the gallery hang so that visitors could view these earlier paintings in conjunction with examples of his theatrical compositions in the next gallery, allowing the contrasting style and subject of works such as *David Garrick and Mrs Cibber as Jaffier and Belvidera in 'Venice Preserv'd'* (1762; no.19) to be seen and understood. Zoffany was primarily a portrait painter and most of the exhibition was given over to his conversation pieces and full-length society portraits. The translation of Zoffany’s style, from small to large format, brings into sharp focus his continental training and artistic development in Rome. Indeed, the tautness of these compositions with blocks of bold, contrasting colours, brings him closer to the grand-tour portraits of Pompeo Batoni than to the freer handling and subtle tones of, for example, Thomas Gainsborough. However, Zoffany’s maturity and range were underlined by the works from his stay in India, from the austere Mordaunt’s cockfight (no.86) to his *Nagaphon Ghat, Upper India* (no.95), where the artist reimagines the Mughal landscape through the work of Joseph Wright of Derby and others.

The curators conceived telling juxtapositions and signposts within and between galleries, but the transition between the Indian section and the last, entitled ‘Revolution, Reaction and Retirement’, was somewhat abrupt, as if the curators literally ran out of space. The Sacker Galleries can hardly be described as generous for the staging of an exhibition of this scale and complexity, although the close nature of the hang, along with the dark wall colours and dramatic spot lighting, added to the intensity of the visitor’s experience. But the lack of space dedicated to the final section may explain why *The death of Captain Cook* (c.1794; no.107) was not shown in London, which was a pity because Zoffany was Joseph Banks’s original choice as artist to accompany Cook’s second voyage to the South Seas (in the event, Zoffany’s friend William Hodges made the voyage) and because the painting’s grouping with two equally macabre revolutionary subjects, *Plundering the king’s cellar at Paris* (exh. RA1794; no.104) and *A scene in the Champ de Mars, celebrating over the bodies of the Swiss soldiers* (c.1794; no.106), was, to my mind, the unexpected coup de théâtre of the display at New Haven. Such practicalities often influence exhibitions as they adapt to different venues, however, and should in no sense overshadow the undoubted achievement of the curators in realising such a thoughtful and thought-provoking exhibition.


**Damien Hirst**

London

by LYNNE COOKE

SPANNING SOME TWENTY-FIVE years, the mid-career survey of Damien Hirst’s work at Tate Modern, London (to 9th September), offers the first opportunity in Britain to gauge the significance of its most celebrated contemporary artist. What is at stake is not, however, just the work that is on view. Hirst’s practice encompasses more than a plethora of diverse artefacts. From his debut in 1988 he has been involved in the staging of exhibitions, the creation of an artistic brand and the fabrication of a public persona.

Hirst curated his first show in 1988, while still an undergraduate at Goldsmiths College of Art in London. His conviction that the art world as it then existed could not accommodate his generation led to the conclusion that he and his colleagues would have to reinvent it, tailoring it to their own ends. Inspired by the recently opened semi-private Saatchi Gallery in north London, where monumental works by Minimalist artists such as Donald Judd and Richard Serra were presented in a renovated industrial space, Hirst masterminded *Freeze*. The three-part group show, comprising mostly the work of his fellow students, proved pivotal in that it both launched his generation to critical acclaim, and identified Hirst as the most precocious and ambitious among his peers. Although it was located in a semi-derelict warehouse in the then far from chic south London, he ensured that leading figures from the art world would attend by dint of a sophisticated press campaign and the provision of a fleet of taxis to expedite their travel from central London. Seeing Serra’s work at Saatchi’s Boundary Road gallery had been formative for Hirst on several levels. ‘It was one of those big moments in my life, when the power of art really hits home’, he recently added, in a telling aside: ‘The work goes from something conceptual to something in the real world, like a life threatening object, in the blink of an eye’.

Key among subsequent chapters in the narrative of Hirst’s preoccupation with presentation and marketing was *Pharmacy*, a bar and restaurant he launched (with three partners) in the later 1990s. Located in Notting Hill Gate, it served *inter alia* as a high-visibility watering hole for friends and associates. Several years later, capitalising on the direct access that auction houses purportedly offer to buyers who are intimidated or otherwise wary of the gallery system, Hirst bypassed his dealers and sold an extensive body of new work direct from the studio. A two-part auction at Sotheby’s, London, on 15th and 16th September 2008, this high-profile event garnered the artist an astonishing £111 million in sales revenue. Fortuitously, it took place on the same day that Lehmann Brothers, the stalwart of the American financial system, collapsed,
bankrupt. As the financial crisis spread globally, a small sector of the contemporary art world continued to prove itself largely immune: certain kinds of art seem able to triumph over life’s devastating forces. Hirst’s savvy staging of this unprecedented sale coupled with its serendipitous timing demonstrates his keen grasp of the infrastructure and mechanisms of the art world, and his almost uncanny skill in shaping it to his own ends.

Tellingly, when planning this retrospective at Tate Modern, Hirst handed over curatorial control in large part to Ann Gallagher, Head of Collections (British Art) at Tate, thereby ensuring that all the appurtenances of a high-ly professional presentation would be clearly in place. Gallagher’s checklist of some seventy works judiciously winnows the selection to omit many less successful recent works, such as an extensive series of paintings from c.2006-08 that bear the heavy imprint of Francis Bacon. She focuses instead on certain thematic and formal continuities, bodies of work that begin early in Hirst’s career: medicine cabinets; animals in formaldehyde (two schools of fish, a white lamb, a shark, and a cow and calf – the notoriously ‘divided’ mother and child) and installation works in which the life cycles of insects (flies and butterflies) are resumed. Examples from the series of medicine cabinets that comprised Hirst’s memorable degree show at Goldsmiths in 1989 are presented here together with his mod-ernity series (Fig.36), this has proved a productive strategy. The cabinets, their shelves brimming with pharmacological offerings, deftly marry Conceptual and Minimalist methodologies, a thematics grounded in pathology and healing, and a metaphysics probing immortality.

These impressive early works provide a high benchmark against which the more recent production must be judged. By the later 1990s Hirst, who had joined the Gagosian Gallery in 1996, had considerable resources at his behest. Whereas, formerly, securing of the necessary funds for his more ambitious projects like the shark in The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living (1991; Fig.35) had taken him years, now he could materialise his most immediate thoughts. That the benefits of affluence may be double-edged is suggested by recent sculptures, comprised of thousands of meticulously hand-painted pills or carefully crafted diamonds, shown sometimes in gold-plated, sometimes in stainless steel vitrines, wreathed in a patina of Gucci and Swarovski. According to Hirst, having money ensures ‘greater control’ – presumably over both the production and dissemination of his work. Where artists in previous decades sought to control the distribution and reception of their works in order to extricate themselves as far as possible from what they perceived as problematic aspects of the commercial, mainstream art world, Hirst, by contrast, has employed those mechanisms to embed himself more securely at its centre.

Since the later 1990s Hirst’s audience has ballooned to include a coterie of mega-rich collectors that now stretches across a North American/Western European axis to include the Middle East, former Soviet states, and beyond. Its global reach operates at yet other levels, with equal efficacy, courtesy of the extensive range of artefacts, including T-shirts, coffee mugs, posters and editioned prints, available to online shoppers on Hirst’s website. Presumably, it is his effective mining of both ends of that financial spectrum that has made Hirst the highest grossing artist since Picasso. One of the last galleries in the exhibition, the room which – chronologically and conceptually – should have been devoted to the diamond skull, For the love of God (2007; Fig.37), which cost some £14 million to fabricate, has been transformed into a store to merchandise these wares. Although the...
E X H I B I T I O N S

compositions that resemble stained-glass windows, resplendent bodies have been arranged into formaldehyde. Taken together with the adjacent glass and kitchen sinks, these works give weight to Hirst's role for a leading artist today, but Hirst puts a further spin on it, glossing it with a peculiarly British interpretation: an evangelical spirit whose function has long been to present such work will be able to negotiate between the genuinely popular and the populist, with its false claims to broad social relevance. The act of Hirst's development follows an unbroken trajectory from the most rigorous conceptual art, imbued during his years as a student at Goldsmiths in the mid-1980s, to immersion in idioms ubiquitous on today's high street, commonplace religious symbolism alongside horror-movie kitsch. What is significant is that this evolution has not undermined his occupancy of the inner sanctum that is home to the most esteemed of post–War artists, among whom are his mentors, Bacon and Serra. To take Hirst whole — that is, to engage with the full extent of his practice — is to become aware how uncomfortably fraught are the professional roles that we, his insider audience, are required to perform in what is becoming an increasingly toxic climate prioritising 'entertainment'. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the foremost British artists of Hirst's generation — Tacita Dean, Douglas Gordon and Steve McQueen — all live and work abroad.

Photography in London

London

IN MAY THE Photographers’ Gallery reopened to the public after a major renovation and extension of its new home on Ramillies Street. Continuing its long tradition of showing both established and emerging photographers, the new exhibition spaces were inaugurated by shows devoted to the Raqs Media Collective, based in New Delhi, and works by the Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky (both to 1st July). The two new works by the Raqs Media Collective — a video and a sculpture installation respectively — both push the boundaries of the conventional definition of photography as a medium. The most prominent piece, An afternoon unregistered on the Richter scale (2011; Fig. 40), is a silent, looped video projection in which a single archival image is manipulated through several almost imperceptible alterations — clothes change colour, a hand twitches and a fan starts to move before the image finally fades away. The original photograph in the video was taken by the British photographer James Waterhouse and depicts the interior of a surveyor’s office in Calcutta in which several men sit diligently at work, hunched over their desks. In many ways it is a fitting first choice for the Photographers’ Gallery at their new venue as it both engages directly with the history of the medium and continues the championing of experiment.

In contrast to the Raqs Media Collective display, the larger exhibition Burtynsky: Oil is devoted to a selection of works by a single established artist. While the thirty works on display are from a larger documentary series way, and to the degree, that contemporary art, the mass media and popular culture have become fused in public consciousness. Among the implications of this sea-change is an urgent question which Hirst’s show highlights: how can contemporary art be at once popular and hold the high ground? By extension, it also questions how institutions whose function has long been to present such work will be able to negotiate between the genuinely popular and the populist, with its false claims to broad social relevance. The act of Hirst’s development follows an unbroken trajectory from the most rigorous conceptual art, imbued during his years as a student at Goldsmiths in the mid-1980s, to immersion in idioms ubiquitous on today’s high street, commonplace religious symbolism alongside horror-movie kitsch. What is significant is that this evolution has not undermined his occupancy of the inner sanctum that is home to the most esteemed of post–War artists, among whom are his mentors, Bacon and Serra. To take Hirst whole — that is, to engage with the full extent of his practice — is to become aware how uncomfortably fraught are the professional roles that we, his insider audience, are required to perform in what is becoming an increasingly toxic climate prioritising ‘entertainment’. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the foremost British artists of Hirst’s generation — Tacita Dean, Douglas Gordon and Steve McQueen — all live and work abroad.

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