

## Artist Resources – Damien Hirst (British, b. 1965)



Hirst, 1988  
Photograph: Margaret Mellis, Getty

[Hirst's website – biography, press, writing, interviews, artwork](#)

Hirst forged his way into the art market while still a student in 1988 with the exhibition *Freeze*, which he organized at the London Docklands. Twenty years later, *The Guardian* profiled the participating artist's and reflected on the impact of the exhibition.

In 2008, Hirst bypassed the gallery system and became the first artist to [personally auction off his own work](#), selling two years of output at [Sotheby's](#) for record prices. The venture secured Hirst's [reputation](#) as a rebel and an art market capitalist, while marking a turn in his creative practice.

"I think I've always been afraid of painting, really. Right from the beginning," Hirst told [Interview Magazine](#) in a 2008 discussion about the art market, fame, and a return to painting. "Paintings that continue emotions but aren't emotional....But it does awaken something, it works in some way. But they are denying something; they are all denying something. And in the end I've just gotten to the point where I can't deny it anymore."

Richard Prince [interviewed Hirst](#) in 2009 about creative drive on the occasion of Hirst's largest exhibition to date, *Requiem*, at the [Pinchuk Art Centre](#).

In 2012, the [Tate Modern](#) hosted the first British survey of Hirst's career, tracing his first twenty years of iconic sculptures, installations, and paintings. [Watch Hirst and curator Ann Gallagher walk through the 11 rooms of the exhibition.](#)

[The Guardian](#) also spoke with Hirst at his studios in London on the occasion of the Tate's retrospective. "I always wanted to be bigger, but not biggest," Hirst explained. "It can't be about being the best...but what you do with [the art]. Being best is a false goal, you have to measure success on your own terms."

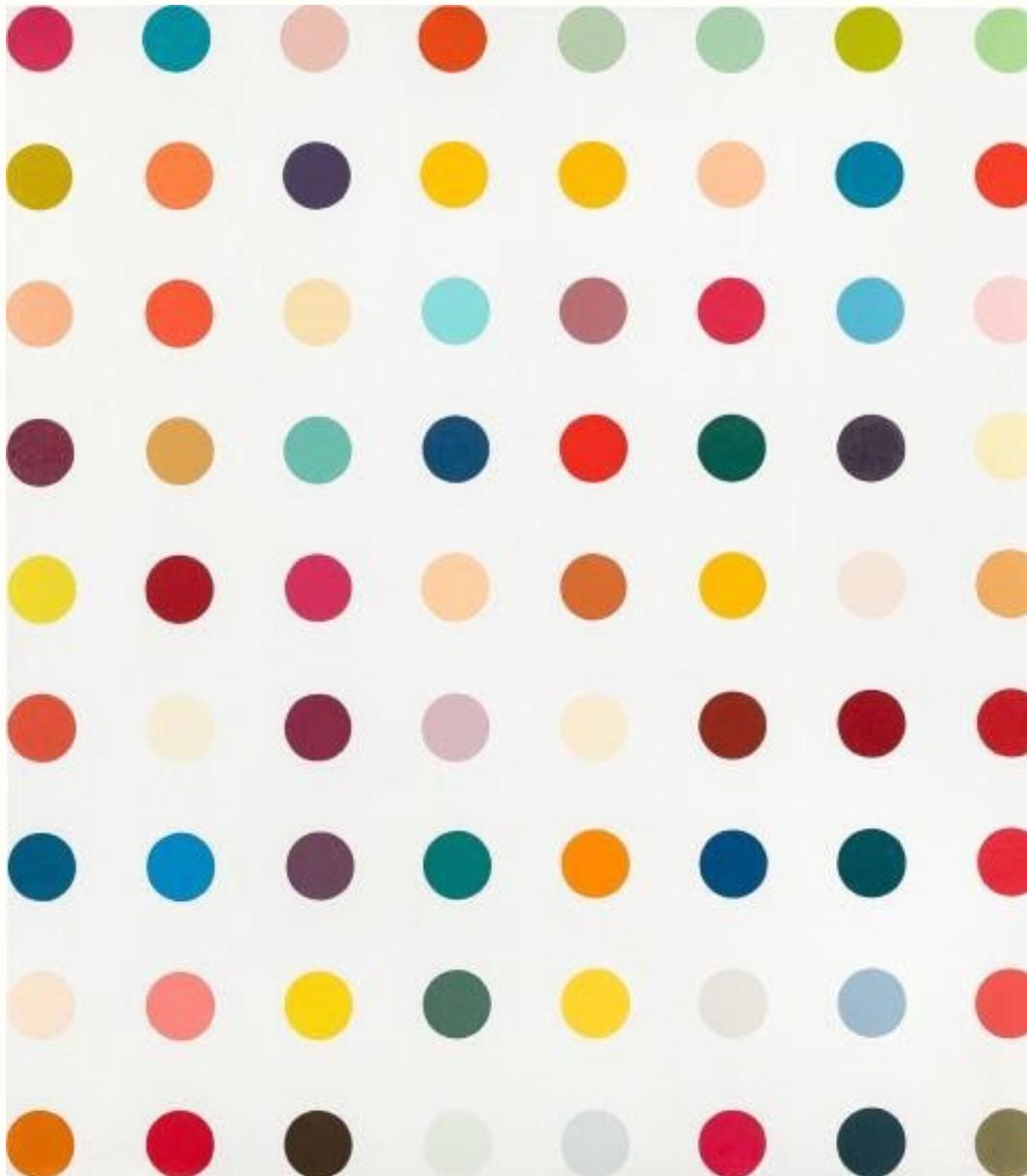
Venice hosted Hirst's [second major exhibition in Italy](#) in 2017, sparking a tumult of [criticism](#) and [praise](#) that has marked the artist throughout his career.

"You always want to create things that when you look at them you can't escape from them, so that you trap the eye and you trap the imagination," Hirst reflected in a [discussion with a curator](#) from the Yorkshire Sculpture Park about his motivation for seven provocative sculptures featured in the 2019 [Yorkshire Sculpture International](#).

Hirst's most recent work was [inspired by frontline workers](#) during the COVID-19 pandemic and [goes to support](#) NHS Charities. While in quarantine, he [took to Instagram](#) to answer questions directly from his followers.



Hirst at work in his London studio, 2017



Damien Hirst (British, b. 1965)

**N-(9-Aridinyl) Maleimide**, 1992

Household gloss on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:152.1

Rising to fame alongside the Young British Artists in the late 1980s and 1990s, Damien Hirst is known for his controversial and poignant works that explore intersections of art, life, and death. The artist's "spot paintings" (1986-2011), which feature uniform, hand-painted, colorful circles, are one of his most recognizable series. In the early 1990s, Hirst created a sub-series of "pharmaceutical paintings," where the grid-like spots on white backgrounds are titled with drug names taken from the chemical company Sigma-Aldrich's catalogue *Biochemicals for Research and Diagnostic Reagents*. **N-(90Acridinyl) Maleimide** references a chemical used to measure sulfate molecules in wine. According to the artist, the pharmaceutical spot paintings are "a scientific approach to painting in a similar way to the drug companies' scientific approach to life. Art doesn't purport to have all the answers; the drug companies do."

*On view June 22 – September 25, 2022*

Damien Hirst (British, b. 1965)

**Dominion**, 2019

Butterflies and household gloss on canvas

Private Collection; L2019:152.1

Damien Hirst first catapulted to fame while a student at Goldsmiths College in London, recognized for his work as an artist and curator of the 1988 *Freeze* exhibition at the Surrey Docks, which also launched the careers of fellow students and contemporaries. Known for his entrepreneurial instincts and knack for self-promotion, Hirst has since amassed a lucrative following for his fearless exploration of complex themes of death, science, beauty, and religion. **Dominion**, a recent addition to his *Kaleidoscope* paintings (begun in 2001), features butterfly wings arranged in concentric circles and held together with richly colored gloss paint. The composition recalls Hirst's *Mandalas* series, which takes inspiration from the eponymous symbolic Hindu and Buddhist representations of the universe. Hirst started working with butterflies 1991. For him, their short life span and the common practice of pinning dead butterflies for preservation makes them ideal for probing the fragility and vulnerability of life, and the cyclical nature of death and resurrection. On their repeated appearance in his work, Hirst explains: "You have to find universal triggers: everyone's frightened of glass, everyone's frightened of sharks, everyone loves butterflies."

On view May 13 – August 16, 2020

#### Extra Resources

[Hirst's Butterfly Color Paintings](#)

[Kaleidoscope Paintings Series](#)

