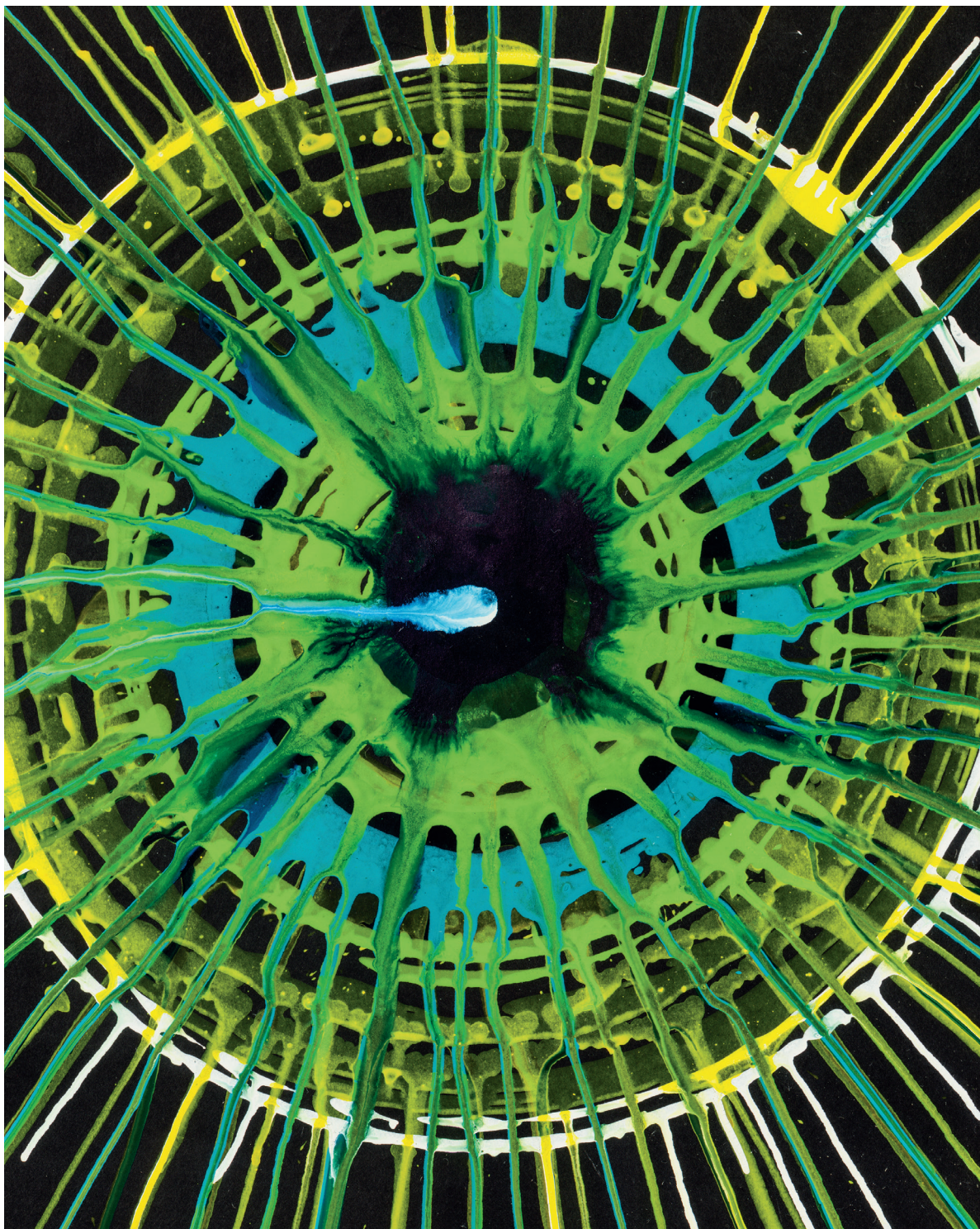


DAMIEN HIRST

DRAWINGS

7.5.2025 TO 12.10.2025



Damien Hirst, *Beautiful That's No Immaculate Conception Drawing (Detail)*, 2008, Science, Stroud, UK © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd.
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ALBERTINA modern

Exhibition Facts

Duration	7 May – 12 October 2025
Venue	ALBERTINA MODERN (Basement Floor)
Curator	Elsy Lahner
Assistant Curator	Lorenz Ecker
Works	138
Catalogue	Catalogue Available in the ALBERTINA Shop and at https://shop.albertina.at/ (German English; EUR 34,90)
Contact	Albertinaplatz 1 1010 Vienna T +43 (0)1 534 83 0 presse@albertina.at www.albertina.at
Öffnungszeiten	ALBERTINA MODERN Karlsplatz 5, 1010 Vienna Daily from 10.00 - 18.00 hrs
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ALBERTINA MODERN: World's first museum exhibition of Damien Hirst's drawings

Drawing machine offers visitors a creative experience

Damien Hirst is world-renowned—less well known are his drawings, which are celebrating their world premiere in this exhibition and can be seen in a museum show for the first time. From May 7 to October 12, 2025, the ALBERTINA is presenting *Damien Hirst - Drawings*, showcasing Hirst's broad range of drawings, from early sketches to conceptual designs.

“All children draw and paint but for various reasons most of them stop and become bank managers or policemen or whatever. I've always drawn for as long as I can remember. I've seen drawing as the beginning of creativity. It's raw, it's personal, it's where ideas can first take shape. Showing these works now feels like revealing the chaotic inner workings of my mind. And inviting people to make their own drawings using the spin machine that I created means they're not just observing the art – they are doing more than that: they are getting involved, and they get to feel like an artist again, and experience the creative process with all its raw, healing energy and power”, says Damien Hirst.

“Damien Hirst is one of the most important artists of our time. His paintings, sculptures, and installations have gained international recognition; his drawings, however, are still relatively unknown. The ALBERTINA MODERN is now opening up new perspectives on Hirst's oeuvre and offering fascinating insights into his creative processes. In keeping with the motto 'Rediscover the ALBERTINA', we are not only showing a completely unknown work by one of the world's most famous artists. The public will also be actively involved in the exhibition and can get creative themselves with a drawing machine specially made by the artist. Together, we want to experience art in a new way! A special focus is placed on Hirst's conceptual approach to the medium of drawing: drawings serve not only as preliminary studies, but are often independent artistic works in their own right or document the considerations underlying the realization of his most important series”, says Ralph Gleis, Director General of the ALBERTINA.

“The exhibition shows early drawings from the 1980s that were created in the context of groundbreaking projects. On display are sketches, preparatory drafts, autonomous drawings, and works that retrospectively reflect ideas that have shaped Hirst's iconic artworks,” says curator Elsy Lahner.

Highlights of the exhibition

With the Spin Drawings created using his drawing machine, Hirst reflects on the interplay of control and chance. The interactive installation featuring Hirst's drawing machine, developed in 1994, is undoubtedly a special highlight: visitors to the ALBERTINA MODERN have the unique opportunity to create their own works of art and experience the artistic process firsthand. The artwork they create can, of course, be taken home with them.

In addition to the drawings, the exhibition will show selected sculptural works that impressively document Hirst's transmedia oeuvre.

An illustrated exhibition catalogue will accompany the exhibition, offering in-depth insights into Damien Hirst's drawings.

The public will have the opportunity to operate the drawing machine at the following times:

May – August, Mondays from 4 to 6 p.m.

September – mid-October, Tuesdays from 4 to 6 p.m.

Participants (adults and school classes) can also create their own artwork on the machine as part of booked guided tours.

The exhibition will open on May 6 2025 at 3:30 p.m. with a children's preview.

Damien Hirst

Drawings

7 May until 12 October 2025

The first-ever museum exhibition of internationally acclaimed artist Damien Hirst's drawings will be presented at Albertina Modern from 7 May until 12 October 2025.

Damien Hirst is one of the most important artists working today, having achieved international recognition for his paintings, sculptures, and installations. However, the British artist's drawings are less well known, which the Albertina Modern will now present for the first time in a museum setting.

This exhibition offers a fascinating insight into Hirst's creative processes, starting with drawings and sketches produced from the 1980s onward. These images, many of which were produced in preparation for his pioneering works, will be shown together with a selection of related sculptures and paintings.

A key focus of the exhibition is Hirst's conceptual approach to drawing which is used in different ways—sometimes as an initial study for a larger piece, sometimes as an autonomous work that stands on its own, and at times as a retrospective exploration of ideas after an artwork's completion. For many of his most iconic series, he used drawings to articulate ideas he considers as significant as the final artworks themselves.

A major highlight of the exhibition is Hirst's ambitious project *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*, which blurs the line between reality and fiction while questioning the credibility of art and historical narratives. The exhibition includes a collection of drawings from this project, which adopt the visual language of classical studies and archaeological documentation.

Additionally, the exhibition will feature Hirst's *Making Beautiful Drawings* installation, originally developed in 1994. This unique work employs a custom-built drawing machine that creates artworks using a spinning disc onto which colours are applied. Visitors to Albertina Modern will have the opportunity to interact with this machine, mirroring the spirit of its original presentation and engaging directly with Hirst's exploration of chance and process in art. The exhibition will feature various Spin Drawings, some of which were composed using this drawing machine, exploring Hirst's fascination with repetition, pattern, and the interplay between control and chance.

Alongside drawings, the exhibition will also display a selection of sculptural works from Hirst's most renowned series including *Natural History* and *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*, further contextualising his practice across different media.

This landmark exhibition at Albertina Modern offers a fresh perspective on Hirst's artistic vision, shedding new light on the fundamental role of drawing in his work. A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition.

Exhibition texts

Introduction

Damien Hirst is one of the most important artists of our age. With his iconic works – such as the Medicine Cabinets, Spot Paintings, formaldehyde preserved animals, and diamond-encrusted skulls – he has made a lasting impact on the art world. What is less known is that many of his works are based on preliminary sketches on paper. Some of his most famous works first took shape as drawings before being realised as paintings, sculptures, and installations.

The Albertina is the first museum to devote an entire exhibition to this very specific aspect of his work. The show offers fascinating insights into Hirst's working methods as it elucidates the role of drawing within the artistic process. Drawings and sketches that have been made in preparation for his groundbreaking works since the 1980s are juxtaposed with the corresponding objects and paintings.

Hirst's conceptual approach to drawing is outstanding. It serves him as a sketch of thought at the beginning of a work process; it may result in an autonomous work of art; or it is made in retrospect to highlight the idea behind a work, which matters to the artist as much as its physical realisation. The spectrum ranges from studies made by Hirst himself to automated drawings influenced by chance, to works on paper produced by his studio.

Damien Hirst was born in Bristol in 1965 and studied at Goldsmiths College in London. In 1988 he organised and participated in the exhibition *Freeze*, widely considered to have been the birth of the Young British Artists (YBA movement). He gained international recognition in the early 1990s as a central figure of this new generation of British artists. In 1995 he was awarded the prestigious Turner Prize. He has since realised numerous large-scale projects, including the monumental show *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* (2017) in Venice.

Ideas on Paper

While some of Hirst's studies are spontaneous and quick – often accompanied by hastily scribbled notes, lists of possible materials, or calculations – other drawings are much more detailed and give a more finished appearance. Hirst mostly creates the latter on larger sheets of drawing paper, often after the realisation of his respective sculptures.

Hirst sees drawing as a central part of his artistic practice. It allows him to capture and remember ideas, and develop concepts. He also makes use of drawing to test spatial dimensions and proportions on paper before a work is realised. Drawing also serves as a means to create visualisations for his team so that they can translate his ideas more easily, or to document details or modifications during the fabrication process.

He describes how drawing allows him to express feelings and convey his view of the world. He sees it as an ongoing development that started in his childhood, when his mother gave him pencils and paper to keep him occupied. She would add new sheets to his drawings so that they would get bigger and bigger – and so he ended up thinking beyond the limits of the paper.

Drawn to Order

In 1988, Damien Hirst first exhibited works that would later become known as one of his signature styles under the name of *Spot Paintings*. Two of those early paintings, *Edge* and *Row*, were executed directly on an interior wall as part of the groundbreaking exhibition *Freeze*, which he organised in London's Docklands. A drawing from the year 1987 shows Hirst's early preoccupation with the systematic arrangement of the spots in these paintings: on a small sheet of paper, he sketched *Edge* and *Row* by creating two grids of 10 × 15 hand-drawn circles. Later drawings document the further planning and conceptual development of the *Spot Paintings* and their sub-group, the *Pharmaceutical Paintings*. On these, the artist notes dimensions and instructions, defines different shapes and sizes of the canvases to be used, or tests compositions on graph paper.

Drawing as a Tool

In some cases Hirst's drawings are produced by his studio assistants, for the purpose of documentation: 'These works are kind of more photographic. But a record of a finished sculpture is very different to a sketch of an initial idea that then becomes a sculpture.' For the artist, drawing is thus a practical means to an end. What remains crucial is that the result lives up to his expectations. The meticulous drawings in crayon, coloured pencil, or pencil not only give him a new perspective on

his work, but also serve as essential intermediate steps in the creation of works based on existing paintings or objects.

For the series *Art & Artists*, hyper-realistic drawings of toys were annotated with directions for large-scale sculptural versions. The drawings serve as a starting point for the sculptures – enlarged adaptations of the original figures. With the Pipe Cleaner Animals, the process was different: Hirst invited children and their parents to his studio to make animals out of pipe cleaners. He then selected his favourites and realised them on a much larger scale before producing drawings of these sculptures.

Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable

What if a spectacular art treasure were recovered from the depths of the sea? *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* tells the story of the legendary ship Apistos (ancient Greek for ‘unbelievable’ or ‘unbelieving’), which sank around 2000 years ago with a collection of priceless works of art on board. Its owner, Cif Amotan II, is said to have gathered his riches on the ship – an extraordinary mixture of mythological figures, depictions of gods, and cultural artefacts. It was only in recent times that these treasures were discovered and recovered in diving expeditions financed by Damien Hirst himself.

But nothing is as it seems. Hirst creates a world that is as fascinating as it is deceptive, in which archaeological sensation, a museum’s mise-en-scène, and artistic fiction have become indistinguishable. The boundaries between truth and fiction become blurred as details emerge that raise doubts. Is this really an ancient sculpture or a popcultural allusion? Is the story real or an artfully constructed illusion?

With this monumental project, on which Hirst and his team worked for around ten years and which is introduced here, the artist plays with ideas of authenticity, historical truth, and what we wish to believe.

Sketchy Truth

The drawings for *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* are part of Hirst’s entire mise-en-scène. The artist emphasises that he does not see them as rescued works of art from the epoch of Cif Amotan II: ‘Obviously the drawings couldn’t have been on the ship as they would have perished in the sea after all those years. So, I imagined a collection of drawings created over time from eyewitness accounts and memories of people who had heard the story, and that the existence of these drawings

first captured the imagination of the treasure hunters and made the discovery of the shipwreck a reality.'

The drawings are not sketches or drafts in the classic sense. Rather, they are part of an artistic narrative that harks back to a certain aestheticism. To feign a sense of historical authenticity, Hirst used goatskin parchment and artificially aged paper, experimented with ancient drawing techniques, and had inks specially made for the project. He consulted conservators to give the impression that the sheets of paper were several centuries old through yellowing, stains, and traces of rubbing.

But here, too, Hirst breaks with illusion. Because they are made from photographs of the sculptures, the drawings take on a modern look – influenced through the camera angle and perspective. Hirst has also included subtle clues that the drawings must date from our age by inserting car brand logos. Such deliberate ruptures point to the central question of the whole project: How is history constructed and how easily are we led by narratives?

Making Beautiful Drawings

In the early 1990s, Hirst began experimenting with mechanised drawing and painting techniques. It was during this period that he created the first *Spin Paintings*, for which he and fellow artist Angus Fairhurst used a modified car mechanism to rotate the canvases. From this first playful – and somewhat dangerous – attempt, Hirst developed further devices.

In 1994, while in Berlin on a fellowship, he presented a drawing machine to the public for the first time under the title *Making Beautiful Drawings*. Hirst describes it as quite simple: 'It was a hand drill underneath with a piece of wood that you just pressed on, and it made the drill spin. We burned out the motor a few times in the show and had to replace the drill. It was very handmade. It was a good one.'

With *Making Beautiful Drawings*, Hirst shifts the focus to the process of drawing itself. He outsources drawing – which is generally considered the most personal and individual form of artistic expression as it reveals the direct and immediate connection between head and hand – to a machine. At the same time, the artist allows us as his audience to operate this machine, thereby creating our own spin drawings. In this way, Hirst opens up a participatory approach while he simultaneously questions traditional notions of unique artistic style and authenticity.

Drawing the Impossible

The shark holds a special place among Hirst's animal motifs. His drawings provide an insight into the development of his iconic shark installations and show how differently he uses the motif of the predatory fish. As early as 1989, Hirst sketched his first ideas for *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) – the work that would lead to his breakthrough – on whatever paper he had to hand: a torn-out book page or a used envelope. In his own words, he wanted 'a shark that's big enough to eat you, and in a large enough amount of liquid so that you could imagine you were in there with it'. The fish floating in formaldehyde confronts us with our own mortality, while at the same time emphasising the preposterousness of actually understanding one's own death.

The drawings show how Hirst looks into different conceptual dimensions of the shark motif. Various studies illustrate his idea of sharks in separate tanks circling one another on a metal frame, such as in *Two Similar Swimming Forms in Infinite Flight* (1993), whilst other drawings explore the possibility of dissecting sharks and exposing their anatomy – a concept that was later implemented in *Death Explained* (2007). Preparatory drawings also exist for *Fear of Flying* (2008–2009), an installation featuring a floating hammerhead shark.

The sketches documenting projects that were never realised are particularly revealing. They show the entire spectrum of Hirst's exploration of the motif and illustrate how he plays through various possibilities in the medium of drawing – from monumental single figures to complex ensembles involving several animals.

The shark studies exemplify how Hirst works in the tradition of classical sculptor's drawings: he uses them as a conceptual tool, as documentation of a thought process, and as a means of exploring the existential questions that pervade his entire oeuvre.

Drawing into the Future

By using his drawings to reflect upon the past and the present while simultaneously thinking them into the future – whether as a design for a later work or as part of a manipulated story – Hirst underlines the understanding of his art as a dynamic, ongoing play with possibilities and illusions. Drawings do not function as rigid preliminary stages, but as open movements of thought: they explore concepts, make doubts visible, and anticipate future transformations. Particularly in works like *A Thousand Years* (1990), *A Hundred Years* (1990) or *Love's Paradox* (2007), Hirst's existential queries are revealed with drastic clarity – as are his drawn explorations of them. Not only do the relevant studies anticipate structure and composition, but they also put symbolic contrasts to the

test: the relationship between life and death, destruction and beauty, closeness and distance. Here, drawing becomes a medium of thinking in extremes.

Hirst's preoccupation with cycles and repetition is evident in many of these drawings – as he questions what remains when everything is fading. Drawing here functions as a means to create a possibility, to envision a future work – to store a thought that may only take shape years later.

Drawing becomes the vehicle with which Hirst can reach into the future. It is precisely this temporal flexibility that gives the drawings a special position in Hirst's oeuvre. Unlike his other works – whether preserved in formaldehyde or precisely arranged in cabinets or on canvases – the drawings retain an openness and incompleteness. They exist in a permanent state of becoming and thus connect the past of his ideas with possible future manifestations.

Context texts

Hirst's *Spot Paintings* consist of coloured dots of identical size arranged in a rigid grid format. In most cases, the rule applies that no colour must be repeated within a picture. The works range from small- to large-size paintings and feature tiny one-millimetre to enormous two-metre spots. Additionally, there are related series of drawings and prints featuring the spot motif. The clear and systematic order of the spots is reminiscent of scientific illustrations such as colour charts, test patterns, or chemical sample grids. Indeed, Hirst plays with the aesthetics of laboratories, classification systems, and medical testing – themes he has been preoccupied with since the outset of his career.

The *Medicine Cabinets* is a series of works in which pharmaceutical packaging is systematically arranged on pharmacy shelves. The clear, organised structure and reduced representation give these works an almost minimalist appearance. The sterile presentation makes them look like relics of modern medicine. They allude to the human quest for control over life and death and our trust in pharmaceutical solutions.

Hirst's *Vitrines* are large glass tanks in which he arranges life-sized scenes focusing on isolation, control, and existential emptiness. Such works as *The Acquired Inability to Escape* (1991) or *Figures in a Landscape* (1998) show everyday or clinical settings that appear both banal and disturbing. The clear, almost scientific arrangement creates a distance that turns us into silent observers of existential conditions. The works frequently deal with confinement – physical, psychological, or social – and with human beings as subjects in a supervised environment.

At the centre of *Mental Escapology* there lies a physical phenomenon: a ball that is kept in suspension by a stream of air. The title of the series, based on the art of escapology, plays not only with the idea of mental liberation – i.e., mental escapology – but also with the fragility of this illusion of weightlessness and control. The balance is always precarious. A mechanical failure or an unexpected gust of air will suffice to cause the system to collapse. In Hirst's well-known installation *Loving in a World of Desire* (1996), a coloured beach ball levitates above a square platform, evoking associations with Minimal Art – an allegory for the quest for love, belonging, or the unattainable. *What Goes Up Must Come Down* (1994), on the other hand, is reminiscent of a physical experiment and points to the inevitability of gravity or the attempt of fighting against what cannot be warded off.

For the Love of God (2007) and *For Heaven's Sake* (2008) are visually stunning confrontations with death. *For the Love of God* comprises a platinum cast of an adult human skull that is completely encrusted with diamonds. *For Heaven's Sake*, on the other hand, is based on the cast of an infant's skull – delicate, vulnerable, and profoundly touching. Both works hark back to the tradition of the vanitas motif: they confront us with the inevitability of death, but in a way that appears almost triumphant due to their splendour and sublimation. They move between religious symbolism and secular mise-en-scène – as reflections upon life, death, remembrance, and the human need to leave a lasting mark. At the same time, they seem like quiet reflections on faith, redemption, and the longing for a victory over transience.

Under the title *Natural History*, Hirst subsumes a series of works in which animals – as solitary specimens or in groups – are preserved in glass tanks filled with formaldehyde. The series explores such fundamental themes as life, death, isolation, and the human desire for deeper meaning. By removing the animals from their natural context and transferring them to a sterile, museum-like environment, Hirst stages these works with an aesthetic reminiscent of nineteenth century natural history collections. In this tension between objectivity and emotionality, the animals appear as objects of research and, at the same time, as silent reminders of the transience of life and our own fragility.

Hirst's *Spin Paintings* are multi-coloured, abstract paintings that are created by applying paint to a rotating canvas. The centrifugal force causes the colour to spread in circular patterns, which lends the paintings an explosive and spontaneous effect. The *Spin Drawings* work on the same principle, but are created by applying various media to rotating paper. Both groups of works combine playful creativity with an experimental mechanical process. They give a lively, colourful, and chaotic impression – and question the relationship between chance and control in art.

The installations *A Thousand Years* and *A Hundred Years* (both 1990) consist of large cubic vitrines in which a closed life cycle takes place: flies hatch from eggs, feed on sugar water, and lay eggs again, while some of them are killed by an electric insect trap. This hermetic system vividly depicts the cycle of birth, reproduction, and death, thus reflecting Hirst's central theme of transience.

Podcast

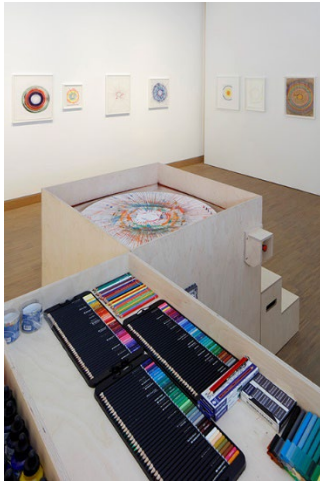
Damien Hirst – Podcast

A podcast for children and adults by and with Matthäus Bär



Press images

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Damien Hirst
Making Beautiful Drawings, 1994
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Installation view Albertina Modern, 2025
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Bildrecht, Vienna 2025, Photo: The ALBERTINA
Museum, Vienna / Rainer Iglar



Damien Hirst
Beautiful Temporarily Lost At Sea Drawing, 2008
Pastel and ink on paper
47 × 42 cm
Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd
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Damien Hirst
Beautiful That's No Immaculate Conception Drawing, 2008
Ink on paper
31 × 21 cm
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Damien Hirst
For Heaven's Sake Drawing I, 2008
Pencil on paper
76 × 56 cm
Photographed by Stephen White
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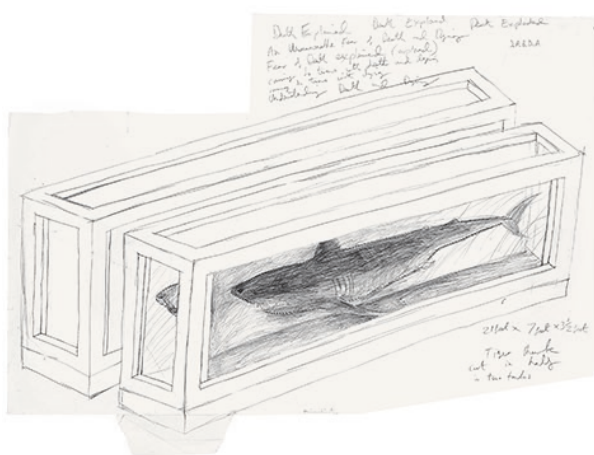
Damien Hirst
 Away from the Flock, 1994
 Glass, painted steel, silicone, acrylic, plastic cable ties,
 lamb, and formaldehyde solution
 96 × 149 × 51 cm
 Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd
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Damien Hirst
 Away from the Flock, 1994
 Pencil on paper
 50 × 73 cm
 Photographed by Stephen White
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Damien Hirst
 Kali Confronts Hydra, 2015
 Pencil, ink and silver leaf on vellum
 59 × 72 cm
 Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd
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Damien Hirst
 Untitled (Tiger Shark in Tank), 2003
 Pencil on paper
 83 × 110 cm
 Photographed by Stephen White
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Damien Hirst

Cat, 2018

Steel, aluminium, polypropylene, acrylic adhesive, epoxy resin, nylon, PETG, acrylic and copper wire

77 × 62 × 56 cm

Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

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