

**Transcription of Interviews:
Damien Hirst 360 Private View**

Section 1. Damien Hirst and Curator Ann Gallagher

Ann: So, the first part of *Freeze* had the boxes?

Damien: Yeah, there were three parts to *Freeze*. In the first part, I put the boxes piece, and then afterwards, put the *Spot* paintings painted on the wall.

Ann: That was in the third part?

Damien: In the third part, yeah. When I did the *Spot* Show with Gagosian, I didn't actually realise how there'd be so much change in the *Spot* paintings. Seeing the early ones is, like, crazy, really; I mean, I thought they were perfect when I first painted them, but obviously they weren't. Yeah, these are really wonky to me; do they look wonky to you?

Ann: No.

Damien: They kind of do; don't you think it sagged in the middle? I mean they're handmade; It's really important that they're handmade, but I always wondered if it looked like they're machine made, in a way. So, it's like a person trying to be a machine. You know, that's what I like about minimalism, but then, I was always stuck with the decision of how manmade do you want to make them to look. You know, I just imagine cutting every one out of a huge grid, and getting further away from it and closer up. I mean, I started with one inch, two inch, three inch and four inch spots, although I found a few five inch as well, which I've got no idea when I made them.

Section 2. Damien Hirst

I mean it's a kind of weird piece because it was made when I was a student, when I was a second year student at Goldsmiths, I think. Like, I borrowed the money to make it, off of two friends, Angus Fairhurst and Dominic Dennis, other artists I was hanging out with at the time. It was quite a lot of money, and so I went into debt to make it, and it was, like... you know, I remember getting a truck and coming back with all the metal panels in the back of a truck and I put them all on their side, and the truck went round the corner and the



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wheels came out and we hired the van, and I was, like, "Damn". I had to stack them like that, after that. But, you know, it was just a desire to make art that was more real, and about something important. I kept thinking... I love minimal art, but I kept thinking, it's not about anything, and it's sort of, you know, it kept frustrating me. I'd seen a Kounellis work, Jannis Kounellis, where he used a live parrot, and I'd heard about that piece he did with live horses, and a live rabbit, I think, Richard Serra had done, so there was a sort of history of it, and I was kind of into it, you know, and influenced by a lot of that. But, you know, it's weird because when you make a painting, you can sort of sit back from it and look at it on the wall, and you can work out whether it's any good, and you're still the artist, whereas with this, I was just immediately the viewer, which was a really strange experience. I was just, like, what's going to happen rather than, you know, it had a life of its own.

Section 2. Art Critic, Louisa Buck

The first work of Damien's that I really took onboard, and it stopped me in my tracks, was *A Thousand Years*; it was just an amazing spectacle. He is the master of spectacle. He makes such great images, and you did immediately hit the memento mori idea because it was a sort of life cycle contained within this kind of clear glass box. It says many things at the same time, in an amazingly arresting, immediately accessible image. You've got the life cycle of the flies, they hatch, they buzz around, they feed on the cow's head, and they get zapped by the insect-o-cutor. So, you get this kind of nasty brutish and short lifecycle reducing human existence down to its various component parts, but you've got this pristine vitrine; you've got this pristine container, and this is a key part of what Damien Hirst does is produce images of our kind of messy, disgusting, abject, physical reality, but within a very pristine geometric container. So, you've got this play immediately between distancing and geometric sort of abstraction. It was shocking; it was thought provoking; it was just an amazing, amazing artwork, which I still would hold up as one of the great, great artworks, really of all time.

Section 2. Damien Hirst and Curator Ann Gallagher

Ann: So, this is your *Polka Homage*

Damien: 'Da-da!' Yeah, I mean, I think I always went backwards and forwards so, like, whenever I made something nasty, I tried to make something nice, and whenever I made something dark, I tried to make something light. I was always doing those backwards and forwards and through that, so I think I just started thinking that the formaldehyde pieces were getting a bit serious, and then I saw that polka painting where he does the sausage eater or something. It was just a painting, and I thought I could do that with sausages and formaldehyde.

Ann: So, that real thing, again, for you, it had to be real.

Damien: Yeah, but sausages are stupid, aren't they? I remember thinking about Punch and Judy and just thinking when he's hitting them with the sausages or the dog steals the sausages in cartoons and all that sort of stuff.

Ann: And funny, humour?

Damien: Yeah, and it's meat, as well. So, it's just such a crazy thing to do with meat. This has been in my studio ever since then, really, it's just moved studios with

me, and it leaked, and it's got gaffer tape on it. Amazing that they keep that pink colour though, isn't it, after all those years?

Ann: Isn't it? Absolutely amazing.

Damien: What's it doing to our bodies? 'Sausages'.

Section 3. Damien Hirst

I mean, I've always looked to have, you know, to sort of have a thing that describes a feeling in some way, and I think, you know, the fear of these sharks is an unreasonable fear, but it's a good way to kind of tap into that fear of death, which is probably a reasonable fear. I've always avoided using, you know, the things too directly. I mean, the sharks can't possibly eat you, but I think, you know, the combination of it being in the tank, and the tank having reflections, so when you walk round it kind of jumps, and it does scare you, but it's, like...it leaves you thinking you don't know what you're scared of. It makes you uncomfortable, which I think in an art gallery is enough, you know, if you scare people, they probably won't come into the art gallery. It definitely ticked all the boxes for me when I made it. And the size of it was the main thing. You know, I remember at one point when I said I want to get a shark big enough to eat you, and it's, like, how do you get it here? And then somebody said to me, "Oh, you know, don't they ship prawns in trucks?" And you go, "Oh my God, yeah". It's just a freezer truck, and they're shipping prawns in boxes all over the world, you know, which is big enough to fit a shark in it. So, the idea was crazy, but the actual logistics of it are quite straightforward.

Section 3. Art Critic, Sarah Kent

The Medicine Cabinets are all structured, a bit like your bathroom cabinet. You've got, you know, a cabinet with shelves and things on it, but they're also structured like the human body. So, the medicines for your head are at the top, and for your middle, in the middle, and for your feet, at the bottom. So, they're like an anatomy lesson. They say something about the way that the health service treats the human body. We don't regard it as this healthy organism that we want to keep healthy; they regard it as this pathological organism that we have to feed drugs to. They only deal with something that's gone wrong, whereas Damien thinks of his art as a celebration of life. This portrait of life is like a pathological portrait of life. I find the *Medicine Cabinets* quite funny, but you know, in a dark kind of way because here are all these medicines that are supposed to prolong life and keep us healthy, but, of course, Damien very often uses medicines that are out of date, and they'd become poisonous. This relates back, interestingly, to an incident in his childhood. He swallowed some medicines as a kid because he thought they were sweets, and had to be rushed to hospital to have his stomach pumped out, otherwise he would have died.

Section 3. Art Critic, Lynn Barber

The *Shark* was 1991, wasn't it? I think I saw it at Boundary Road at Saatchi's Gallery when it was first shown there, and the sun had this sort of furious diatribe fish without chips for somebody who pays £50,000, you know, and it sort of started, the whole furore about young British art, which I thought was wonderful, you know, because art had been really fusty in the '80s. And although some artists, you know, don't like publicity and they're a bit sniffy about it, I think the truth is, you know, it woke up the public, it made them see that

there was something important going on, and I do think the *Shark* is a really wonderful art work, I mean, it's unforgettable, it's haunting.

Section 5. Art Critic, Sarah Kent

In and Out of Love also uses insects, but it uses beautiful enormous Malaysian butterflies, and when it was originally presented in a shop in Woodstock Street just off Oxford Street, you went into it; so, it surrounded you; so, you had these exquisite symbols of immortality, because they have this kind of symbolic reference to rebirth. Then you went downstairs, and the butterflies, downstairs, instead of flying around, were embedded in paint. They were dead; they had become art; they were on canvas, literally, as well as metaphorically. So, as well as being a life cycle, and death, living death, they also, to me, represented two ways of thinking about art. You could have art as process, a life cycle, something that is like performance art, as we've come to think of it, and you have art as an object, which is static; it's reached its end point; it doesn't alter.

Section 5. Butterfly Expert, Luke Brown

My name's Luke Brown, and I've worked with butterflies for nearly 30 years. We're in a room full of butterflies from all over the world for this piece of art by Damien Hirst. As well as it, obviously, being a piece of art, there are certain things that have to be put in to make it work. These are humidifiers, so they produce all the humidity necessary. The heaters are all run on fan heaters. The plants are specifically selected. There's different butterflies that we've got in here. The table in the middle is used for our food bowls, which are going to attract, again, only some species of butterflies. The owl butterflies, the big owl butterflies and the Morphos, the Blue Morphos, again tend to favour these. Everything's provided in here for them; as far as the heat, the light, humidity, it's perfect, and although it's not a traditional butterfly house that many people may have seen before, food is aplenty, and everything has been provided, but in a slightly different way, possibly.

Section 6. Damien Hirst

Yeah, so I remember... I love the idea of context, and also how you make people look at things, of, you know, things that they take for granted. And I remember, when I was a kid, there was a tree on the street that had blown down; it was, like, enormous. I remember being shocked by its size except when it was upright. Every day you walk past it, you never even see it. You know, with the *Pharmacy* installation, I wanted to get a pharmacy and put it into an art gallery, but one where you actually think you are in a...you know, in a pharmacy. Then, you know, just to... not even confuse you, but it just makes you question everything, but, also at that time, I was thinking about the...I wanted, like, you to believe in art. I wanted, you know, quite desperately for people to believe in art in a way that I believed in it, and I remember being aware that they totally believed in pharmacies, but, you know, walked into art galleries, and went, you know, "All that kind of modern art is rubbish." I remember thinking that, you know, an art gallery and a pharmacy, you know, there's no difference, really. It's just a white room, and you know, they just function differently. One of them is trying to sell you art, the other one is trying to sell you drugs.

Section 7. Damien Hirst and Curator Ann Gallagher

Damien: These paintings, they reflect the colour as well. They're like 20 years.

Ann: Yeah, that was more recent, but that's the first one.

Damien: Yeah, it's amazing because they're paints, they're household paints, but they've... I think they look really good now.

Ann: They look really fresh. The ones that are rotating, did they come first, or did you first make them.

Damien: No, I started making spin paintings, then, I remember I was... I remember thinking I used to be depressed when they stopped because they're great making them, great fun making them, and then when it stops then great, and then you kind of love it for a few weeks, and then you sort of know it, and it's, like, you just want to make another one.

Ann: So, if you've got the motion into it?

Damien: Yeah, but I remember thinking about that motion as well, and thinking it's the motion of the planet; it's the motion of the atoms in our bodies; it's that circular motion's everything. Yeah, but it was a kind of a fairground doing it. Plus, again, it's art, you know, moving art. It's hard to hit a moving target, isn't it?

Section 8. Art Critic, Sarah Kent

Mother and Child Divided is a really grizzly idea. It was made for the Venice Biennale and, of course, in Venice, there are a lot of religious paintings. There's Madonna and Child. So he's taken this idea, but instead of using people, he's used animals. That's already rather shocking that you could use a cow in place of the Madonna, and then he sliced them in half. But, actually, ironically, this work isn't violent at all. It's incredibly quiet and meditative because you walk between the two halves of the two animals, and what you see is the internal landscape of their bodies. They're in formaldehyde. They're all bleached out, so there's no gore. There's no evidence of violence. It's not about butchery at all, it's about the beauty of the inside of the body, and so you're looking at this wonderful internal landscape of the body and, of course, you are thinking "What would I look like sawn in half, am I as beautiful as that?"

Section 8. Curator, Ann Gallagher

For Damien Hirst, the motif of the cigarette is very important, and he's used it throughout; but the epitome of that is *Crematorium*, which gathers together the contents of hundreds of ashtrays. He is talking about human life, and death is part of life, and these very innocuous geometric shaped objects play a big part in death in our society. What you love, and what you hate, what's good for you, what's not good for you, they're all those dichotomies.

Section 8. Damien Hirst

The *Spots*, I mean, I always thought paintings have got to look great. When I first did the first *Spot* paintings, I did it as an endless series. I'd gone from the *Medicine Cabinets* where you make 12 because of all the titles and never mind the bollocks, and then I just thought, how many of these should I make? Then I thought I should name them after drugs, and I got a book of drugs. The book was every drug you could buy from an American company called Sigma. I thought I'd need every drug under the sun, every drug known to man for every painting. So, it became this endless infinite series, and I loved that

idea conceptually. I was imagining that the painting where the insects landed in his painting *In and out of love*; I was just imagining this is another imaginary painter who just endlessly paints paintings. So, it was all these sort of different artists, really, in my head, that were all conceptual artists, and all kind of did these crazy things that in the end looked good in group shows. I actually thought I would start an endless series, but I'll stop somewhere, and, you know... but then I just keep coming up with other ideas where, like, you know, this is a huge one, and it looks...you know, it's totally different to one with four spots. So, actually, the difference in the paintings were so great that I just kept making them, and then coming out with another idea of making another.

Section 9. Art Critic, Louisa Buck

I think Damien's relationship with the market is quite an extraordinary and unique one. Most artists have to be endorsed quite regularly within the kind of establishment to get their market value up, whereas with Damien, he's gone straight to the market. His auction, big sale in 2008 was like a sort of strange Hirst retrospective going on. "You want bling, you want high price art works. I'll give it to you." I mean, I think...let's not forget that he turned the whole gallery relationship on its head by getting an agent in, to cut a deal with Damien's dealers saying, "Excuse me, what's all this 50 percent of the art dealer, you know, our prices go into telephone numbers. We're going to take a different cut, and you can take it or leave it." And, of course, you know, they had no option but to take it. So, he's had this very interesting relationship with the market, and one that I think only he could probably have selling work direct to auction from the studio. That's really unusual. One forgets just how exceptional the way he operates is, in terms of market and market value.

Section 9. Damien Hirst and Curator Ann Gallagher

Ann: You created this wallpaper specifically for this room, but it's based on the catalogue of the Sotheby's Sale?

Damien: Yeah, in the catalogue for the Sotheby's. But this room is really...I just...we thought we'd have to do an auction room, didn't we? So, we've done a whole room, really, devoted to the auction, and, yeah, I made this wallpaper from the inside of the catalogue.

Ann: *The Kingdom* was one of the key pieces from the sale, and it's another shark, something that you made very early on, and then in 2008, you returned to it, and everything in the sale, in a way, has kind of returned to something that you've done before.

Damien: Yeah, well I made everything in, like...yeah, I wanted everything in the sale to be 2008 and just have, like, this big huge...you know, it's kind of like an event, really, wasn't it?

Ann: The way you put the whole thing together is actually more like a major exhibition, and a major two-day event.

Damien: I've always got a kick out of people saying, "You can't do that", and I've always wanted to do that. I don't know why, you know. People have said to me in the beginning, "You can't be an artist and a curator", and I remember, I've always asked the question, "Why?" You know, there were people who bought from that sale have never bought a contemporary art before.

Ann: Yeah, a different audience.

Damien: They never buy through the galleries, you know, they still come to the studio and buy things.