

Damien Hirst

Mandalas

20 September – 2 November 2019

White Cube Mason's Yard

White Cube is pleased to present 'Mandalas', an exhibition of new work by Damien Hirst at Mason's Yard. His first major show in London for seven years, it features large-scale works from the recent concentric paintings.

Returning to one of his most well-known motifs – the butterfly – Hirst's new paintings take their inspiration from the mandala: highly patterned religious images that represent the cosmos or universe in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain or Shinto traditions. Predominantly circular, they feature exquisitely colourful butterfly wings placed into intricate concentric patterns on household gloss paint. Complex and restless, their compositions resolve at the centre with a single butterfly, a point of visual and mental focus; a spiritual or energy nexus.

The 'Mandalas' continue themes present in Hirst's earlier 'Kaleidoscope' series (2001 – present), foregrounding both the symbolic power of the butterfly and a sense of spiritual epiphany. Whilst the 'Kaleidoscope' paintings directly connect with Christian iconography – one collection was named after entries in the *Book of Psalms*, and others replicated patterns from cathedral stained glass windows – Hirst's new work draws on specifically Eastern philosophical traditions. Like mandalas themselves, which are used as an aide to meditation, their complex and assertive visual power emerges through the integral relationship of part to whole, where an excess of detail opens up multiple visual connections and paths across kaleidoscopic compositions. In these works, the palette is restrained, often tonal explorations of a single colour, and a textural, painterly surface sits in tension with the strict precision of their overall layout. This is particularly evident in several 'shade' or near-black paintings included in the exhibition, such as the large-scale triptych *The Creator* (2019), installed along the back wall of the lower ground floor gallery, and *Obscuritas* (2019), in which a tapestry of rich, dark tones creates the effect of a receding three-dimensional vortex.

Hirst began working with butterflies as early as 1989 and they have featured consistently in his work since, inciting visceral and emotional responses in the viewer. As Rod Mengham has written in the catalogue to accompany the exhibition: 'Hirst's prolonged exploration of the life cycle of the butterfly, its spectacular visual appeal, the mythological and cultural formations it has inspired, and the variety of forms of response it has provoked in both artists and scientists, is one of the most thoroughgoing and many-sided conceptual projects sustained by any contemporary artist.'

A symbolic vehicle for reflections on beauty, mortality and existence, he has described the butterfly's image as a 'universal trigger'. By using their wings alone, isolated from their whole-bodied reality, Hirst points to an idealised beauty while, at the same time, co-opting their exuberant, natural patterning into ready-made elements within a systematic and methodical abstraction. Like the Victorian lepidopterist displays which originally inspired the butterfly works, the 'Mandalas' rely on a democratic and regularised approach to placement but, in the process, effect a form of rhythmic patterning, a Rorschach-like mirroring that emerges from iconographic organisation.

Associated with the soul in classical culture, the butterfly, while visually seductive, always carries the inference of death. In this way, Hirst's butterfly paintings, like much of his practice, engages with the fundamental concerns and constraints of human existence. 'I've got an obsession with death...' Hirst has said. 'But I think it's like a celebration of life rather than something morbid.'

BIOGRAPHY

Damien Hirst was born in 1965 in Bristol, UK. He lives and works in London and Gloucestershire. Since 1987, over 90 solo Damien Hirst exhibitions have taken place worldwide, and his work has been included in over 300 group shows. In 2012, Tate Modern, London presented a major retrospective survey of Hirst's work in conjunction with the 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Hirst's other solo exhibitions include Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana, Pinault Collection, Venice (2017); Qatar Museums Authority, ALRIWAQ Doha (2013 – 14); Palazzo Vecchio, Florence (2010); Oceanographic Museum, Monaco (2010); Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (2008); Astrup Fearnley Museet für Moderne Kunst, Oslo (2005); and Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples (2004).

His work features in major collections including the British Museum, London; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Washington, DC; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Tate, London; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, CT; The Broad Collection, Los Angeles; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Fondazione Prada, Milan; and Museo Jumex, Mexico City among many others.

White Cube Mason's Yard is open
Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm.
Admission is free.

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