

GAGOSIAN



DAMIEN HIRST

Relics and Fly Paintings

Open from June 5, 2021

6–24 Britannia Street, London

Damien Hirst, *Destruction*, 2008, flies and resin on canvas, 84 × 84 inches (213.4 × 213.4 cm) © Damien Hirst and Science Ltd. All rights reserved, DACS 2021

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I always say [my work is] about life, but I don't know, I suppose it does dwell on the dark side.

—Damien Hirst

Gagosian is pleased to present *Relics and Fly Paintings* by Damien Hirst, the second phase of the artist's yearlong takeover of the Britannia Street gallery, following the inaugural exhibition of *Fact Paintings and Fact Sculptures*.

For this new iteration, the artist has clad the interior of the gallery in black butterfly-patterned wallpaper that reproduces the kaleidoscopic surface of his painting *Valley of Death* (2010). With its uniquely immersive atmosphere, the exhibition brings together a number of Hirst's bodies of work, prompting reflections on themes of darkness and death, the past and the future.

Hirst's *Relics* are memento mori: cast in bronze, they depict corpses, skeletons, and mummies in meticulous detail. Juxtaposing morbid realism with fantastical sources of inspiration, these bodies frozen in time emphasize the artist's deft combinations of art, science, history, and religion. A suite

of metallic *Meteorites* of various sizes continues Hirst's engagement with the concept of the simulacrum and plays into the long-standing human fascination with outer space. The monumental sculpture *The Martyr – Saint Bartholomew* (2019) follows the historical tradition of depicting its subject flayed alive as an écorché figure study, balancing biblical devotion with a similar reverence for the human body. While Hirst's sculpture is a nod to this centuries-old artistic practice, the holy man's solid stance and gleaming figure are also reminiscent of a robot or a modern anatomical model.

Hirst incorporated real insects into his *Fly Paintings*, mining their myriad symbolic associations with cycles of life and the fear of death. Like much of his oeuvre, these paintings revel in startling dichotomies while harking back to various formal precedents; subjecting organic matter to the strictures of geometry, they evoke Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* (1915) and Richard Serra's black paintstick drawings, among many other references. The *Fly Paintings* offer a hauntingly detached perspective on human existence that is at once microscopic and macrocosmic in its purview.

Damien Hirst was born in 1965 in Bristol, England, and lives and works in London and Devon, England. Collections include the Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples, Italy; Museum Brandhorst, Munich; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid; Tate, London; Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow, Scotland; National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Moscow; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Art Institute of Chicago; The Broad, Los Angeles; Museo Jumex, Mexico City; and 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan. Exhibitions include *Cornucopia*, Oceanographic Museum of Monaco (2010); Tate Modern, London (2012); *Relics*, Qatar Museums Authority, Al Riwaq (2013); *Signification (Hope, Immortality and Death in Paris, Now and Then)*, Deyrolle, Paris (2014); Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo (2015); *The Last Supper*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (2016); *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*, Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana, Venice (2017); *Damien Hirst at Houghton Hall: Colour Space Paintings and Outdoor Sculptures*, Houghton Hall, Norfolk, England (2019); and *Mental Escapology*, St. Moritz, Switzerland (2021). Hirst received the Turner Prize in 1995.

#HirstTakeover

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