

Day 9 - Charles Saunders

The factory style of artists like [Damian Hirst](#) represent a colossal break from traditional approaches to art production and consumption. The combination of brand management and a market-oriented focus effectively replaces inherent subjective value of art, its appreciation and aesthetic quality as a driver of value, and even the artistic ability and skill required in its production with a focus on brand, manipulation of buyer's preferences and demand, and influencing the art market itself through commercial ability. Hirst could be considered one of the most market-savvy artists of all time, as there is arguable little correlation with the quality of his work and the astronomical prices he regularly commands. In fact, often Hirst has little, if any, involvement in the actual production of his art. He employs an army of "assistants" who utilize Hirst's easily replicated framework to create many iterations of established models of art, which then command exorbitantly high prices in market and auction settings. He acknowledges his own poor skill as a painter, stating that the buyer "would receive an inferior painting if actually done by him," and claims that the best spot paintings done through him are by one of his assistants, Rachel. In other words, this unacknowledged assistant creates works of real value, with profits completely captured by Hirst through the inclusion of his signature on the final product. A case can be made that Hirst is stealing the labor and quality of his assistants, and profiting unjustly. On the other hand, his artistic frameworks are simplistic and easily replicated, requiring little actual ability by either him or his assistants. Instead, much of the "value" is justified by glorifying the "ideas" behind his pieces; Hirst himself justifies the factory model by claiming that factories produce ideas, but don't create the ideas themselves--these come from Hirst. However, much of these ideas seem to be attributed to the artworks after the fact; his practice of injecting deceased sharks with formaldehyde would admittedly raise low prices at auction if they were simply titled "shark;" it is the inclusion of a much more suggestive title such as [Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living](#) that produces any discussion whatsoever. The titles add value to otherwise benign works of simplistic art, and forces viewers to attribute a much more extensive meaning than would otherwise be possible.

Hirst generally produces six distinct categories of art. His tank pieces, labeled the [Natural History Series](#), encompass a variety of dead animals preserved in much the same manner as the shark mentioned above, and consistently command high auction prices through the forced perception that they highlight the disparity between life and death, despite the fact that many replicas are produced and generally drivers of value like uniqueness are destroyed. His other categories produce much the same effect. The cabinet series encompass a collection of surgical tools or pill bottles in pharmacy medicine cabinets, as exemplified by [Blood of Christ](#) or [Lullaby Spring](#). His spot paintings have garnered a considerable amount of recognition, and consist of fifty or more multicolored circles on a white background--another supposed illusion to drugs, and easily mass produced by his army of assistants. His spin paintings involve Hirst spilling paint onto a revolving pottery wheel, and are so easily produced that Hirst has himself claimed that it is "[impossible to make a bad one](#)." Finally, Hirst's butterfly paintings are simply collages made of thousands of dismembered butterfly wings, again describing themes of life and death, and again easily produced in Hirst's factory setting.

Hirst's main dealer [White Cube](#) has sold over four hundred spin and butterfly paintings and over six hundred spot paintings, and it is no surprise that Hirst is regularly shown in the [Gagosian Gallery](#), another marketing genius concerned more with status, brand, and manipulation of buyer's test than actual inherent artistic value. Hirst's marketing prowess has begun to transcend the art world, as he has ventured into a recent clothing line, and opened a short-lived club in New York City. A telling anecdote involves a noted auction house rejected a piece involving Stalin, stating that they never deal in connotations of Stalin or Hitler, but when asked if there would be any interest in a piece of Stalin branded by Hirst, the auction house replied that they would then have to purchase the piece, due to the ensured value that the brand commands. All in all, the factory setting fully commercializes the art market, providing mass-produced artistic pieces carrying forced and arbitrary meaning into a gullible public consumer base easily swayed by marketing ability and the common "herd mentality." The combination of these factors threatens to replace true artistic value with mass consumer-manipulation and the destruction of traditional aesthetic qualities of art. http://whitecube.com/artists/damien_hirst/