

The thirteen prints that make up the *Last Supper* series refer to the number gathered at the biblical Last Supper. Damien Hirst, among the most prominent of the Young British Artists (or YBAs, as they are known), provokes us to consider whether faith in medicine, with its promise to stave off disease and death, is now comparable to faith in religion. And he notes the similarity between the abstract, geometric style of pharmaceutical packaging and the abstract, geometric style of certain contemporary art, wondering “why some people believe completely in medicine and not in art, without questioning either.” Hirst recalls watching his mother fill a prescription at a pharmacy, taking note of how at ease she was with the visual motifs used to market drugs. “My mum was looking at the same kind of stuff in the chemist’s and believing in it completely. And then, when looking at it in an art gallery, completely not believing in it.”

Each of the prints in the series features a pharmaceutical label that has been altered: the names of medicines are replaced with those of common British foods (“Ethambutol Hydrochloride” becomes “Steak and Kidney,” for example) and the names or logos of the manufacturers are replaced by those of the artist—Hirst’s own brand, so to speak. Enlarged to a heroic scale, the prints pose the question of whether pharmaceuticals—a staple of many contemporary diets—may have become not only the salvation in which we put our faith, but also our daily bread.

DAMIEN HIRST

British, born 1965

The Last Supper

1999

series of thirteen screenprints

Corcoran Collection,

Gift of Anthony T. Podesta, Washington, DC (prints 1–5),

Gift of The Heather and Tony Podesta Collection,

Washington, DC (prints 6–13)

