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Damien Hirst's "The Last Supper" Presented at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, August 13 through November 27, 2016



Damien Hirst
Chicken, 1999
screenprint

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Corcoran Collection (Gift of The Heather and Tony Podesta Collection, Washington, DC)

Washington, DC—*The Last Supper* (1990), a series of 13 monumental prints by British artist Damien Hirst, was acquired by the National Gallery of Art from the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 2015. Hirst was among the most prominent of the Young British Artists—or YBAs, as they are known—who revitalized the British art scene in the 1990s. In *The Last Supper*, he wittily explores the role of faith, viewing it in relation to art, medicine, and religion. Never before shown in Washington in its entirety, the visually arresting *Last Supper* series will be installed in the West Building Concourse Gallery from August 13 through November 27, 2016.

Installation Organization and Support

The installation is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Installation Highlights

The 13 prints that make up *The Last Supper* refer to the number gathered at the biblical Last Supper. Hirst raises the question of whether our faith in medicine, with its promise to stave off disease and death, is now comparable to our faith in religion. He conflates minimalist pharmaceutical packaging with the form and style of 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 *Last Supper* prints features a pharmaceutical label that has been altered. The names of medicines have been replaced with those of common British foods ("Ethambutol Hydrochloride" becomes "Steak and Kidney," for example) and the names or logos of the manufacturers have been replaced by those of the artist—Hirst's own brand, so to speak.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 our daily bread.

Damien Hirst

Born in Bristol, England, in 1965, Hirst studied at Goldsmiths College in London. He first came to public attention in 1988 and went on to become one of the most prominent artists of his generation. Pharmaceuticals have played a part in Hirst's art since his early career, beginning in 1988 with his first glass-fronted *Medicine Cabinet*, the shelves of which were lined with packaged drugs, culminating in 1992 with *Pharmacy*, an installation comprising a true-to-life pharmacy, and subsequently with the "Pharmacy Restaurant & Bar," opened in Notting Hill in 1997. Many of his works are widely recognized, from his *Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991), featuring a shark suspended in formaldehyde, to later works such as *For the Love of God* (2007)—an actual human skull studded with real diamonds. Throughout his work, Hirst takes a direct and challenging approach to

ideas about existence, calling into question our awareness and convictions of the boundaries that separate desire and fear, life and death, reason and faith, love and hate. He uses the tools and iconography of science and religion, creating sculptures and paintings whose beauty and intensity offer the viewer insight into art that transcends our familiar understanding of those domains.

Hirst lives and works in Devon and London, United Kingdom. He was included in the 1992 Young British Artists exhibition at Saatchi Gallery, London, and in 1995 he won the Turner Prize. Solo exhibitions of Hirst's work have been held at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples (2004), Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst, Oslo (2005), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (2008), Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague (2009), The Wallace Collection, London (2009–2010), the Oceanographic Museum, Monaco (2010), the Museo di Palazzo Vecchio, Florence (2010), and Tate Modern, London (2012). Damien Hirst's first exhibition with Gagosian Gallery was in 1996.

Curator

The installation is organized by Judith Brodie, curator of modern prints and drawings, National Gallery of Art

Press Contact:

Laurie Tylec, (202) 842-6355 or l-tylec@nga.gov

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Department of Communications
National Gallery of Art
2000B South Club Drive
Landover, MD 20785
phone: (202) 842-6353
e-mail: pressinfo@nga.gov

Anabeth Guthrie
Chief of Communications
(202) 842-6804
a-guthrie@nga.gov

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PRESS CONTACT

Laurie Tylec
(202) 842-6355
l-tylec@nga.gov

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