

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Le Figaro

Damien Hirst

By Valérie Duponchelle



The English star invades all 11 Gagosian Galleries and prepares a retrospective at the Tate Modern. Meet this king of communication.

LE FIGARO: You are going to show your Spot Paintings simultaneously at all 11 Gagosian Galleries, from Hong Kong to Paris. Whose idea was that?

Damien Hirst: I always wanted to do an exhibition with only my Spot Paintings. I was tempted to do it twice in the past. Once with Nick Serota at the Tate Modern. We had to cancel it because Charles Saatchi was doing an exhibition at the same time with my shark. Another time, at Hayward Gallery, but that project fell through when the director changed. I was in New York for my exhibition "End of an Era" at Gagosian Gallery when I noticed that each of the nine Gagosian Galleries that existed then was showing different artists. I said to myself: My God! If I put my name everywhere, I could finally do my Spot Paintings exhibition!" It's a double-edged sword: in the beginning, these colored circles feel joyous, simple, seductive. Then, one can no longer focus on them. A dizziness sets in, an unexpected discomfort, a mix of positive and negative feelings.

How many are there in total?

In the catalogue raisonné that we are in the process of making, there are around 1500. This represents 25 years of painting and around 60 Spot Paintings per year. At the time of my auction in 2008 at Sotheby's, I thought about stopping the series. And then I had the idea to make them with tiny circles. I had started before with very big circles, like those shown at the Musée océanographique in Monaco last year. At Gagosian Gallery on Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, I will put the historic works. That will go well with its atmosphere of old masters.

How many of them have you painted yourself? How do you distinguish between the old ones and the new ones?

I've probably painted five of them. I buy the first ones I made back when they come up at auction because I kept so few of them. They were rather unorganized. From afar I wanted them to look like they were done by a machine and that, from close up, they looked more human. I made them with a compass, left a hole in the middle so that the paint would creep in little by little. Over the years, you can see with the naked eye that they have become more and more perfect. I sign them on the back with the year and that's it. In some cases the first few Spot Paintings aren't signed. So sometimes a collector from New York calls me and I'm in New York, so I sign it. I can't mix them up: there were never two that were exactly the same thanks to the unpredictable game of a 1000 color combinations. After, I made the combinations out of 10,000 color options! I see this series of 1500 paintings as one work. My favorite is 10 by 11 Spots because 110 circles form a sort of funny weirdly-shaped square. Man is prone to thinking scientifically like a machine—impeccable, ordered, smooth—while in fact there is only chaos, organic disorder. The Spot Paintings are in the middle.

Some of them are grey. Do they refer to something in the history of art? An entrance to melancholy?

It was the time of catalogues that cost less, with certain photos in color and others in black and white. I saw my Spot Paintings in monochrome and I found them to be great. I made a miniseries of twenty. I experiment a lot with ideas like that. I get very excited and then I let go of it. Maybe I will make others if they are in demand.

The Young British Artists are no longer young. Is it ancient history?

I never liked that term. I don't regret that time period—rather violent, crazy and chaotic, even if we were all friends and all different. I feel better today, more sensible, more calm. Bizarre! At the time, I believed that everything would stay the same and then we found ourselves propelled into another time period. Now

it's time for new artists to stand up and say to their predecessors, "All this, it's shit!" If I was a art student today, I imagine that I would see Damien Hirst at Gagosian Gallery or at the Tate and I would say, "Fuck this!"

What do you think of Saatchi's article lambasting "art bling-bling"?

He can no longer be the king today, so he is putting to death the system that he previously cherished. It's an old reflex, don't you think?

Are you a "royal watcher"?

No, what an idea! I recorded the royal wedding on TV, but I haven't watched it since. That said, it wasn't worth it. You could see it anywhere—you couldn't escape it.