

Time Out

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ART

Brought to book



Sarah Kent discusses art and publishing with Damien Hirst.

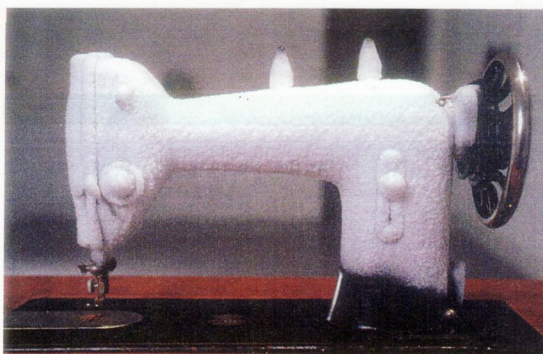
‘I’ve always said I’d like “father” on my gravestone instead of “artist”,’ says Damien Hirst. ‘I’m setting up trust funds and writing my will,’ he adds. Death is on his mind. This doesn’t prevent him operating in the here and now, though. We are in Science, his London office, which has recently moved to a five-storey house in Gower Street. Plans include opening a gallery on the premises or in a rented space to show work from the YBA generation.

Hirst has just bought a huge property in Vauxhall – four buildings with 70-foot-high ceilings, formerly the workshops of scene painter Victor Mara. He borrowed the cash from his New York dealer Larry Gagosian, ironically gazumping him in the process (Gagosian plans to open a larger London gallery). Hirst’s assistants, who currently occupy four London studios, will all move to Vauxhall. They produce the spin

and spot paintings. A painting of 18,000 spots has taken three years to finish. ‘When you have big studios you get bigger art,’ Hirst comments ruefully. One studio specialises in plaster pills; he can’t use the real thing in sculptures because they absorb moisture.

Now that he’s a manager, doesn’t he miss the days when he worked alone in a studio? ‘I don’t have that option any more. I’ve made my bed,’ he replies. ‘You can’t have your cake and eat it – your factory and your easel! You become responsible as an employer. I’ve been an organiser from the beginning with “Frieze” [an exhibition of Goldsmiths graduates that Hirst initiated while a student]. If you love art you want to help people.’

His latest venture is a publishing company, Other Criteria. ‘Jane Simpson: Fresher Art’ (£24.99) is their first artist’s book. I expected them to continue the radical approach initiated by Hirst in ‘97 with his mammoth tome ‘I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, with Everyone, One to



One, Always, Forever, Now’, a gloriously creative collaboration with Booth Clibborn Editions that is more like an original artwork than a traditional book. But, with its mix of photographs and texts by Norman Rosenthal and others, ‘Fresher Art’ is completely conventional. Simpson produces ice sculptures such as ‘Sewing Machine’, its motor replaced by a refrigeration unit that coats the machine with ice, and ‘Balustrade’ – the banister of the Norrtälje Konsthall in Sweden frosted with an icy film. An inveterate collector, Simpson has begun producing rubber and ceramic versions of the kind of jugs, vases, and jars featured by Morandi in his paintings. Coloured grey, cream, blue or buff and clustered on shelves, her beautiful still lifes are like the ghosts of the Italian’s paintings returning to haunt us and demand restitution in to reality.

The signed, limited editions

(£75) are like sculptures, though. Clad in a creepy rubber cover coloured yellow, pink or terracotta, they are accompanied by rubber casts of kitchen utensils – sauce jugs, a gravy boat and a butter dish and knife – that wobble when touched.

‘Jane is a very good artist, but she’s been overlooked,’ says Hirst. ‘Her book was a good one to start with – I knew it would be traditional so we wouldn’t get over our heads with it. You have to pick your designers very carefully, because they have massive egos – we have Jason Beard working in-house – and I have to stay out of it because I get frustrated when people go in opposite directions from me. I’d have bulldozed Jane into my way of thinking.’ The books are designed in collaboration with the artist, so the next publication – with video artist Angus Fairhurst – may take a completely different form.

Kent, Sarah. “Brought to book.” *Time Out: London*. 15-22 January 2003.