



Left:
Damien Hirst
Nothing Is a Problem for Me
 1992
 Glass, painted MDF, Ramin, steel,
 aluminum, and pharmaceutical packaging
 72 x 108 x 12 inches
 Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates
 © Damien Hirst. All rights reserved, DACS 2010

Below:
Damien Hirst
No Feelings
 1989
 Glass, faced particleboard, Ramin, plastic,
 aluminum, and
 pharmaceutical packaging
 54 x 40 x 9 inches
 Photographed by Joanna Fernandes
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“MEDICINE CABINETS”

BY MOLLY GOTTSCHALK

Dinner party guests are consistently and unavoidably drawn toward their hosts’ medicine cabinets, driven by curiosity about what is hiding behind the mirrored doors. Somehow this undeniably taboo faux pas has become so generally accepted that any clever host will make a clean sweep of his or her prescription stock somewhere between tidying house and answering the doorbell.

These vessels whisper the secrets of a society that holds drugs on a pedestal, not unlike the way they are depicted in Damien Hirst’s exhibition “Medicine Cabinets” at L&M Arts, New York, this fall. Carefully placed and methodically curated, each bottle is as significant as its contents are sterile, its position as intentional as it is precise.

Ultimately, a peep into Hirst’s cabinets will reveal clues to his depiction of humankind. According to the artist, these works are “catacombs of lost dreams,” which he expects to “act as catalysts in a chain reaction between the viewer and the object.” Within this experience, he intends to portray the cabinets as “conceptual icons, images of pain, mortality, joy, hope and fear, and despair,” and a confidence of “hope in the face of hopelessness.”

On view through December 11, the exhibition is appropriate and timely, given that we have strayed further and further from sobriety. Pharmacies have become sanctuaries, dispensing tonics and pills intended to preserve, enhance, or soften the reality of daily life. In his work, Hirst effectively romanticizes this modern obsession, and confides: “It is of great interest to me the way drugs affect our perceptions and emotions, the way they control and order as well as how they

can create chaos and misery.” He believes that “drugs punctuate the whole of our lives, young and old.”

These works are in keeping with Hirst’s recurring exploration of mortality. Although each perfectly packaged bottle of pills may claim to be death’s antithesis, clearly no drug has yet to outsmart nature, and this exhibition serves as a gentle reminder of our inevitable destiny. When asked why he feels such confidence is bestowed upon these temporary pharmaceutical remedies, Hirst replies that “our confidence is sometimes well founded when cures are created for illness and disease, but with all the hope and expectation of the human race eventually we concede to our own mortality and die.” He draws the bottom line with the statement “No one gets out of here alive,” and admits, “but we can’t help wanting to live forever.”

This exhibition transforms two entire floors of the gallery into a pseudo-pharmacy

comprising 18 medicine cabinets as well as a selection of Hirst’s Sex Pistols memorabilia, all spanning an extended period of time. Despite subtle changes among the chronology, those who dare meddle in his cabinets arrive at the same

conclusion, which he says is “always the same and as strong as it always was.” His ultimate message, that there’s no cheating death, is shockingly unwavering even in the company of cabinets, filled to the brim, that wholeheartedly beg to disagree.

