

DAMIEN HIRST'S LOST WEEKEND

Damien Hirst's formaldehyde-pickled cows and sharks made him a magnet for the kind of controversy that surrounded last year's Saatchi-funded "Sensation" show in Brooklyn and also made him the best known of the

Y.B.A.'s (Young British Artists). Today he may just be the most famous artist in the world. His return to New York this fall, for his first major solo exhibition in five years, was a whirl of acclaim and notoriety, from the celebrity-mobbed opening to police descending on his SoHo Grand suite. Joining Hirst's jumbled entourage of family, chums, and one beleaguered publicist, NANCY JO SALES discovered unexpected sensibilities behind the extreme iconoclasm

They'd been standing in the rain for over an hour when things started to get ugly. A bottleneck was forming up at a pair of frosted-glass doors at the end of West 24th Street, the new Gagosian Gallery. Somebody's MoMA umbrella poked somebody else—"Ow! Would you watch that?" And other people were starting to insist, "I was invited here personally by Damien—"

"Do you want to leave? Let's go," a woman said flatly to her boyfriend.

"Yeah, O.K.," said the boyfriend. But they stayed put.

It was September 23, the night of the first major solo exhibi-

tion by Damien Hirst in nearly five years—he was advertising it as his first ever "without formaldehyde"—and it was the opening night of the much-anticipated gallery, which had been rushed to completion just for him. The buzz was that there was a 20-foot man in there.

"These doors are going to fly off!" warned a security guard named Jesse Rogerson, outstretching his arms as if to stop the crowd.

"Is the artist coming?" someone asked. "Is Damien here?"

Inside, the 20-foot man, called *Hymn*, was staring goggle-

eyed across the floor. He was seven tons of painted bronze—a pop colossus modeled after a popular children’s toy—exposing the blood and guts underneath flesh and bone.

Charles Saatchi, the advertising mogul, had just purchased *Hymn* for \$1.5 million.

Once, when asked to declare an “artist’s statement,” Hirst repeated the title of a favorite piece by Bruce Nauman: *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*.

But it wasn’t only *Hymn* that was causing the hush among the thousand people drifting around inside. It was the sheer scope of the show—five bright, cavernous rooms filled with 19 large sculptures, 12 paintings. There was the feeling that something was happening here—that this was one of those nights in New York that would be remembered, like the night of a blackout.

People blinked.

Images of death, the precariousness of life, were everywhere. African river fish darted up and down a shadowy vitrine holding a submerged gynecological chair. A gleaming metal case showed rows of delicate animal skeletons—cats, monkeys, a parrot still looking cocky in his demise. A patient lay on a table surrounded by rough instruments, face covered with a sheet, body oozing fluids.

“*Fabulous*,” whispered Martha Stewart.

It was odd to see celebrities here, a place where the magical thing happening seemed to have nothing to do with fame, but simply with thought, ideas. They’d come out for Hirst, a huge star in England—the so-called bad boy of the British art world, friend of Bowie, favorite of the London tabloids.

In the U.S., he was known as that man who stuck animals in tanks of formaldehyde (a sheep, a shark, a sliced-up cow’s head), got into trouble with the animal-rights activists, and seemed just a little bit repulsive (the piece with the colostomy bags)—maybe all just for the sake of becoming famous.

“He said he wanted to do something that wasn’t like any of his old stuff,” said Larry Gagosian, his American dealer, looking pleased. Next to him stood Jay Jopling, Hirst’s British dealer. They were talking and laughing like team owners who had just won the Super Bowl.

In one of the rooms, a human skeleton lay prone, impaled on a glass cross, with Ping-Pong-ball eyes jumping from its sockets.

“Are you going to the after-party?” people started to ask.

Steve Martin ducked around, trailed by his date, publicist Desiree Gruber. “We’re not together,” she explained. “I’m engaged to be engaged to Kyle Maclachlan.”

Damian Loeb, the preternaturally adolescent-looking painter—also known for his relationship with *Vogue* fashion writer Plum Sykes and his appearances on “Page Six,” the American *Damian*—was standing next to *Hymn*, looking somewhat like a dwarf.

Loeb tried to smile, but he looked a little scared.

“Where’s Damien?” someone asked.

It was 8:30, the opening was technically over—though people were continuing to stream in—and Hirst still hadn’t shown. Maybe he was “pulling a Madonna,” people were saying, or maybe he was afraid of how his work would be received.

And then, suddenly, like a magic trick (he’s fond of magic), there he was—he’d come in the back way—a stubby man, 35, with silver glasses, whose hair had gone gray.

His son Connor, five, was riding on his shoulders, wearing a pair of wraparound shades. His entourage from England was following behind him like a soccer gang. He’d flown over about 50 people—family, bar buddies, friends Joe Strummer, founding

member of the Clash, and Alex James, bass guitarist from Blur. Keith Allen, the burly actor (*Shallow Grave*) and regular at the Groucho Club, London’s art-world watering hole, was waltzing alongside him like a bodyguard in a flashy red getup.

Hirst blinked.

This was the artist’s big moment, but as he entered the opening that will make him, quite possibly, the most famous artist in the world, his face froze in a tense, public smile, uncharacteristic of him. He handed off Connor to Keith Allen and—also uncharacteristically—seemed not to know what to do.

Whatever he was thinking, Martha Stewart approached him in the middle of it all, extending congratulations and asking if she could introduce him to a friend.

“That man fucked my wife!” Hirst snapped.

Taken aback, Stewart stammered that he must be mistaken—the man was gay.

“So’s my wife!” Hirst said, raising his eyebrows, and he darted away.

Hirst is not married.

Then he rushed out the door as quick as he’d come, having paid his respects to “Larry” and “Jay” and a couple of other men in suits. People grabbed at his sleeves. “Hi, hi,” he muttered, “yeah, thanks.”

“Damien, Damien, sign my jacket!” a man out on the sidewalk insisted.

Hirst wrote ALIEN ON CRACK across the man’s back with a proffered Magic Marker.

Hirst looked manic now, almost crazy.

DAVID HOCKNEY, he scrawled on another man’s jacket.

The crowd laughed.

A little girl presented the back of her T-shirt.

YOU ARE GORGEOUS, he wrote.

“Her mother’s going to sell that on eBay tonight for \$10,000,” someone sighed.

Hirst was already in a cab.

Three days later, the promise of Hirst’s opening was being borne out in the art world at large. People who had been there were telling one another, “It’s like a museum show”—a phrase which would be echoed in the review by *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith, who, feeling unusually kind, called it “an extravaganza.”

Larry Gagosian had sold almost every piece in the show, and had someone start counting how many people were coming to see it. Three thousand would come the Saturday after the opening, which Gagosian called a record.

Meanwhile, it had somehow stayed out of the press that the antics of Hirst and his companions were causing no small amount of worry to his publicists, not to mention the SoHo Grand hotel. The police had been called to Hirst’s rooms, and guards had been posted intermittently out in the hall—to shield the other guests from the rowdy crew, apparently, and make sure nothing got broken.

On a Tuesday morning at the gallery, a beleaguered publicist

BEYOND THE COW HEAD

Hirst made his name in 1990 with *A Thousand Years*, a vitrine containing a rotting cow’s head and maggots. Shown at right is part of his new *Trinity—Pharmacology, Physiology, Pathology*, photographed on September 26, 2000.

from Nadine Johnson's office, Sam Ong, was trying to roust Hirst out of bed via cell phone. A slight, elegant young man in a blue bandanna and what appeared to be frosted lipstick, Ong was calling Hirst "Dames."

"Dames," he said, "you have back-to-back interviews today—"

In the foyer, under the watch of *Hymn*, a gaggle of journalists and photographers and a documentary crew from Britain's Channel 4 were yawning, asking one another for smokes. Some were flipping through the show's catalogue—a curious document featuring an essay by a George Poste, a former executive at SmithKline Beecham; it was a pharmaceutical interpretation of Hirst's work: "When a viewed image floods our brain, a formidable cascade of information transfer, processing and storage occurs . . ."

"What time is it?" someone mumbled. "Ah, I just woke up."

It was Hirst. It was now one o'clock, and he was standing against the tall, bright gallery doors looking like a homeless man who'd wandered in to escape the rain. He had on an N.Y.P.D. baseball cap—"Uh, I got it on Canal Street"—and a scuffed-up blue trench coat that was too small for him; his brown shoes were dirty, with a tiny splash of green paint on one toe.

"Dames, do you need water, coffee?" Ong asked.

"Coffee," Hirst managed to say. He didn't seem to like being taken care of.

The journalists and photographers and TV crew regarded him almost guiltily; he appeared to be in some pain.

"This is the photographer from *The Scotsman*—she'll be taking your picture now." Ong ushered him around like a stage manager.

"Damien, you have to sign posters later," Lisa Kim, the gallery manager, reminded him.

"Cof-fee—" Hirst lurched forward like a zombie, adding, "Speed—dope—"

He was born in Bristol, England, to a single mother, Mary Brennan, who on his birth certificate listed her occupation as "shorthand typist." He took the last name of his stepfather, a car salesman. Growing up in Leeds, he got in trouble with the police here and there, nothing serious; he played guitar in a punk band. Famously, he got an E in art.

After his time in secondary school, he was rejected by two professional art schools (Cardiff College in Wales and St. Martin's in London), so he studied on his own, sketching corpses in a morgue. He has said he "can't draw or paint."

The photographer from *The Scotsman* was now posing him in front of one of his signature "dot" paintings; he removed his hat. His hair was thinning and in need of a wash.

"Do I have hat head?" he asked, smoothing his hair.

At 18 he moved to London and supported himself by doing construction. He started making his first work, as his mother described it, "sticking rubbish on boards." In 1985 the trash, or "skip," collages got him accepted to Goldsmiths' College, an art school fashionable for encouraging experimental thinking (and credited with spawning the explosion of British art in the last decade).

The *Scotsman* photographer, a young woman in jeans, was kneeling, snapping his photo; there was the awkward silence that goes along with such moments.

Suddenly, Hirst pitched forward into her lens, with a demonic grin.

She crawled back along the floor, laughing.

In 1988, his second year at Goldsmiths', he demonstrated a talent for showmanship by putting together a now legendary exhibition of fellow students' work—"Freeze"—at an abandoned London warehouse. It was wild, uneven, but through Hirst's efforts highly publicized, and is now generally regarded as the beginning of the reign of the so-called Y.B.A.'s, or Young British Artists—Sarah Lucas, Marc Quinn, and Tracy Emin, among others.

Of all the work in the show, Hirst's was considered the weakest. Everyone assumed he would become a dealer.

"Do you mind if I just walk around a bit?" he asked me.

He wanted first to take a moment to look at his show—which, incidentally, is titled "Theories, Models, Methods, Approaches, Assumptions, Results and Findings." "It's from a book about acid," he said.

He'd arrived in New York two weeks before and had been overseeing the installation—a mammoth task including getting *Hymn* over from England on a huge freight liner and inside the gallery doors on forklifts—but he hadn't been able to view the show in its entirety yet.

It seemed a private moment, and I asked if he wanted me to step away. "No, no!" he said, seeming concerned that wanting to see his own work was somehow egotistical, or pretentious.

He started to look.

As if something was bothering him, he went over to the piece called *Death Is Irrelevant*—the human skeleton with the Ping-Pong-ball eyes bouncing—and snapped the head back together firmly. It had been jiggling.

"That'll teach you," he told the skeleton.

"Damien, what happened to the cows?" asked Jesse Rogerson, the guard, who was on duty again.

"Ah, I outgrew all that stuff," said Hirst.

"Why don't you cut up a human body next?" Rogerson suggested amiably.

"Sounds good to me," Hirst said.

In 1990 he broke through with a piece called *A Thousand Years*—it was a vitrine with a rotting cow's head, a throng of live maggots, and a bug zapper called an Insect-O-Cuter. "It's the only thing I ever did that freaked me out," Hirst said, "because it's out of my hands."

The piece was greeted with a deluge of press, but people questioned his talent, and his motives: IS HE A CON ARTIST? asked the *Daily Mail*, which also liked to report on his London pub-crawling; "a taxidermist emulating a pop star," the *London Times* called him. But now he was making money. "The only interesting people," he said, "are the people who say, 'Fuck off.'"

Charles Saatchi, a fan and de facto benefactor, bought Hirst's shark-in-a-tank—his *Moby Dick*—entitled *The Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* for a reputed £50,000 in 1992.

In 1995, Hirst won the Turner Prize. He was made. And following that he largely disappeared. He had a baby, and then another (Cassius, six months old). His piece in last year's "Sensation" show at the Brooklyn Museum—that same shark-in-a-tank—was made eight years before, and was overshadowed by

THE MAGNUM OPUS

Hirst with his 20-foot, seven-ton *Hymn*. The press was not kind to him early on—IS HE A CON ARTIST? asked a *Daily Mail* headline—but now everyone from Martha Stewart to *The New York Times* sings his praises.

the controversy concerning Chris Ofili's portrait of the Madonna (decorated with elephant dung).

"This Giuliani guy's a bit weird, don't you think?" Hirst said.

We were now in the room with his dead patient on a table.

He stared at it a moment.

"Bbbrrrrhhh!" He shuddered.

A few minutes later, he was sitting back in a drafty room in the gallery drinking his coffee. He was sniffing. He seemed to be developing a cold. He said he'd been to Lot 61, the nightclub, the night before with a bunch of friends and his longtime girlfriend, Maia Norman, a jewelry designer originally from California. He related that when she had their baby, Cassius, by cesarean, he "looked."

"Dames, 10 minutes," clucked Sam Ong, who was sitting nearby poring over his Palm Vx, which was encased in Louis Vuitton.

Hirst grimaced; his hands were shaking a little, pouring milk into his coffee; he spilled it, which seemed to depress him momentarily.

A napkin was quickly found.

On each side of him were paintings depicting his joyous lightness—a round blast of butterflies and his "spin art" (also taken from a children's toy); one, from 1996, is titled *Beautiful, kiss my fucking ass painting*.

He said he was tired.

He said the show had grown out of a desire to make art that would "make people feel like children again."

"A lot of people say my work's about death, but I think it's about life. I think you have to face death to understand it more," he said.

"My son came up to me recently and said, 'Yeah, but, Dad, you're not going to die, are you?,' and I kind of had to think of an answer, and I said, 'Well, that's up to you.' I said, 'I'll always be alive inside you.' And it just came off the cuff, but I think it's a pretty good answer."

He drew on a cigarette.

"I need some lunch," he moaned.

"We are going to lunch, but it has to be quick," Ong said peremptorily, snapping up a large plastic Louis Vuitton tote bag. "There are still several people waiting."

Hirst always seems to be bringing people along with him (*I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, with Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now* was the name of his first book), and maybe he was getting sick of the handlers and journalists and wanted some familiar company. Suddenly, Frank Dunphy, his business manager, and Dunphy's wife, Lorna, were coming along with us to lunch at Bottino, an Italian bistro and Chelsea art-world hangout, just down the street.

Dunphy was a white-haired Irishman with a florid face and sharp, heavy-lidded eyes, and Lorna a bespectacled version of Helen Mirren. They were like a couple on one of those British sitcoms on PBS, very deadpan and dubious about the world. They are among Hirst's best friends. As soon as they appeared, he brightened.

"Can I have a drink? I'll have a Ricard, a *Ree-card*," he told the waiter when we sat down in the restaurant. Diners whispered to one another of his arrival. He pretended not to notice. He left on his N.Y.P.D. baseball cap and trench coat.

"Oh, and a tall glass and two thimbles and a bicycle pump?" he called after the waiter. "Hoo wee," he said.

"This one's a rascal, is it, Damien?" Dunphy asked, referring to Hirst's hangover.

"Yeah, this one's a rascal and a half!" said Hirst. "I might need another drink after this. I got into bed, and all of sudden Maia feels this hairy arm next to her, and she says, 'What the fuck was that?,' and we said, 'Oh thank god, it's Keith!'"—Keith Allen.

Dunphy and Lorna laughed. The escapades of Hirst and his entourage were apparently a source of continuing amusement.

"Yes, I thought I heard the tom-toms beating from one end of Manhattan to the other," Lorna said dryly. "Does Keith still have his red suit on?"

"Has he been touring the city in that red suit?" Ong sniffed.

Hirst said, "Ah, New York is great."

"We were lying in this nightclub with Jay's personal assistant and"—Hirst named another woman—"with her legs up in the air and Jay looking over, going, 'Oh my god, we should write a book about the trip!'"

"It's all going to be documented now," Ong said, giving me a look.

"Larry"—Gagosian—"was saying that you're all insane—insane!" said Dunphy.

"There were 50-something people every time I got back to my hotel room," said Hirst. "There was like 30 people on my balcony last night."

"Damien, you should have stayed with us," said Lorna.

"I wouldn't have had a good time," Hirst said.

They laughed.

"The bank can't keep up with hoisting the limits on the credit cards," Dunphy warned gently.

"Let's change banks," Hirst said. "And the SoHo Grand—goddamn ridiculous! I ordered a bottle of Absolut vodka from room service, plain bottle—\$220."

"Oh, that's crazy," Lorna said.

Hirst shrugged. "We started going to the deli after that. Oh, I've had a fucking great time here. You should have seen"—another friend—"walking around on ecstasy!"

"Where's Maia?" asked Dunphy.

Hirst said, "Smoking crack. No, I don't know. They're just waking up—we've all been splitting up and getting back together. One night I woke up on the floor in a bar with my brother, uncomfortable. It felt like London. I got no idea which bar it was—all I know, it was really seedy and low-life. On Waverly, where's that? . . . The Village then.

"Last night I had a pull of a joint," Hirst said. "And then, pop! Fell asleep." He smiled.

"I had a tumbler of scotch," Dunphy said.

"I haven't seen Cassius in three days!" Hirst complained.

"The airfare"—for all his friends—"came to about £20,000," Dunphy said, low. ("I take care of Damien and his money," he told me.)

Hirst is known for being generous, putting together shows for struggling artists.

He asked the waiter, "Can I have another drink?"

He ordered lunch—the tuna tartare, a shrimp salad—and asked for a piece of lime for his drink. "Right away, sir," said the waiter.

Hirst called after him, "And a ball of string—and some scissors?"

"I do love waiters in New York," he said, laughing. "They don't get fazed, do they, no matter what you ask for. 'You got any glue? You got a needle and thread and some glue, and a razor? And a little bowl of soapy water?' 'Uh, I'll just check, sir.' In England, I went into a pub and said, 'Got any cold beers?,' and the man says, 'Sure.' And I said, 'This beer's warm!' And he said, 'Well, I just got it out of the fridge,' and I said, 'Well, when'd you put it in there?'"

Lorna and Dunphy were laughing.

Hirst exhaled deeply. "I had two coffees, and it didn't wake me up, but this is really waking me up." He drank his drink.

"So, Sam, what should we not discuss?"

"Everything you've been talking about," Ong said flatly.

"What about the police thing—should we talk about that?"

Dunphy said, "I was watching to see if you made it on the news."

Hirst scoffed. "The cops caved in to the fucking hotel—the hotel was fucking dodging it. They said"—polite, whiny voice—"If you can just tidy up the room a bit, you guys.' But they were really like, 'Get the fuck out! We are never, ever being invited back there.'" He laughed.

"God that felt better after that drink!" he said. "And this is supposed to be a glass of wine? You think they've got any more?"

The waiter was asked to bring another bottle.

I got up to go to the ladies' room.

I asked him to say revealing things into my tape recorder while I was gone.

"O.K.," he said. And then he proceeded to say this:

"She's a lovely woman, but I thought she'd never leave! . . .

"So what's Larry up to, exactly?" Hirst asked Dunphy.

Dunphy paused. "A lot of art—and a deal," he said.

"Well, if you can't work with Jay, then you can't work with him," said Hirst. "What's wrong with them?!"

Dunphy seemed to be trying to change the subject: "Well, uh, the paintings were fantastic—"

Hirst sputtered, "I can't believe it—however much you give them they always want more!"

"Eh," Dunphy said, "what did you think of the gallery? I thought it was fabulous. Crowd was incredible, 400 people standing in the pouring rain—"

"I think that cost Larry about \$400,000—the crowd, I mean," Hirst said.

Dunphy and Lorna laughed.

"He had a big long pocket and he didn't stint on it," Dunphy reminded him.

"Yeah," snarled Hirst, "but don't forget, Frank, we've got deep pockets—and long memories." (He'd been quoted that week in an article in *New York* magazine complaining about the way auction houses jacked up the price of artists' work after it had sold in galleries, increases of which the artists never saw a cent. Money was clearly on his mind.)

"Eh," Dunphy said, casting around for a new topic, "what did Jay say—did he like the show?"

"I did a great thing," Hirst said. "I gave Emin"—a fellow artist friend—"a painting."

Dunphy sighed. "What, for the dinner?" he asked.

"No, no," Hirst said, sounding annoyed, "for loads and loads of dinners, and I said, 'You can't sell it without me O.K.-ing it.' I get sick of Larry coming up to me and saying, 'Let's sell it, let's sell it.' I like her—she's good."

There was another pause. Hirst clucked his tongue. "Frank, it only cost me about \$150 to make."

"I just re-insured it," said Dunphy.

Hirst said, "What do you mean?"

"For half a million."

"Oh."

I came back to the table.

"You know how I met this man?" Hirst asked me, putting his arm lightly around Dunphy. "We met in a bar. There was this guy playing snooker going"—he made a drunk face, drunk voice—"hakafakafah."

They laughed.

"And then I got in trouble with a very bad accountant. I had these guys coming into the gallery demanding, I don't know,

"And then he tidied up all my accounts and taught me not to do underhanded deals, 'cause you go to prison, and these guys are maniacs, and if you have money, pay your taxes, and then he called me up one day and he said, 'So, are you ready to talk about cutting down these dealers' percentages?' And I said . . . Yeah!"

"And that's how we met and that's how we keep going," Dunphy said with affection.

"And also he said, 'You have to marry Maia for tax reasons,'" said Hirst. "And I said, 'I'll get married when I meet the right woman!'"

He and Maia Norman have been together for 11 years. (She was formerly the girlfriend of Jay Jopling. "There was some crossover, but he didn't want to lose either one of us," Hirst said.) They live with their two sons and his mother in a 300-year-old farmhouse on the northern Devon coast; they also have a houseboat in London.

"I got three dogs, two ponies, six cats, and two sons," Hirst told me, sounding like a little kid.

"Hey," he said suddenly. "You know who I met here who's absolutely fantastic? David Blaine! He completely blew my mind! We're talking about doing something together."

I asked him if he knew that a lot of people thought Blaine, the magician, was "actually magic."

"Of course he's magic!" said Hirst.

He smiled at me and said, "Look . . ."

He was doing a magic trick with his hotel-room card keys from the SoHo Grand, weaving back and forth, moving his eyebrows up and down, lips pursed in an "Oh" of mock amazement.

Ong looked at his watch again. "Damien," he said, "it's 2:30, and then you have a one-hour shoot, which I'll cut down to a half hour, and then—"

"Come on, Sam," said Hirst, "that's why you're so stressed! If you'd just get drunk and burgle your way through, then when they call you up and say, 'Hey, you gotta get Damien out of bed,' you'd just say"—



OPENING NIGHT

Clockwise from top left: Damien Hirst, with his five-year-old son Connor on his shoulders, next to gallery owner Larry Gagosian, at the party for the new exhibition; collector-actor-writer Steve Martin; magician David Blaine and actress Gina Gershon; sculptor Richard Serra, curators Carmen Giménez and Warren Niesluchowski, and artist Jeff Koons; Hirst, writing on a young fan's shirt; Salman Rushdie with girlfriend Padma Lakshmi; and Martha Stewart, who pronounced Hirst's work "fabulous."

a lot of money in tax. I couldn't work it out! And so I said to these friends, 'I need a good accountant,' and they said, 'How about our Frank from the Groucho Club?' And I went"—looking shocked—"the one that goes 'hafakafahafakak' at the bar and falls asleep like this?" He let his head slip down his hand.

They laughed.

drunk voice—“Fuck off! Arackemsackem—”
Ong pursed his lips. “Damien, come on.”
Hirst ordered another drink.

Back at the gallery, stripped down to his black T-shirt and jeans, and rejuvenated by alcohol and general high spirits, Hirst put on a show for another photographer, shoving cigarettes up his nose, into his ears; he spit.

“Is that funny?” Two ladies from uptown were delighted at having come to see the show and stumbled upon the artist himself. “Is he a riot?” one said.

“Damien, you have to sign these posters . . .” Hirst was taken to an office by the gallery manager, Lisa Kim, to sign a thick stack of posters of one of his dot paintings. He seemed concerned that everyone who’d helped him with the show would receive them, as well as various dealers and collectors. “Calling cards,” he said.

He’s been criticized for his strong sense of the commercial, which has somehow brought suspicion on his artistic integrity. He is part-owner of the London restaurant Pharmacy, which also shows his work. He has directed a music video (Blur’s “In the Country”) and is part of Fat Les, the “conceptual pop group” starring Keith Allen and Alex James, whose grating, punk-influenced anthems (“Vindaloo” and “Jerusalem”) are well known to British soccer fans.

Hirst shrugged. “It’s all art to me,” he said. “I’ve been with the man for 11 months,” said Roger Pomphrey, the director of the documentary about Hirst commissioned by Britain’s Channel 4. (It will air in December.) “And I must tell you—the man’s soul! It’s a *very* intimate portrait. It’s going to show a side of him you’ve never seen!”

Hirst came weaving out of the gallery’s office, appeared to be crashing again. “I’m so tired!” he yelled, as if in physical pain.

The photographer was ready to shoot him again in front of *Hymn*.

Hirst took off his shoes and lay down at the base of the sculpture, closing his eyes, letting his hand drop; he looked as if he were dead.

“Of course, that’s part of the performance,” said another visitor to the gallery, an old man carrying an NPR backpack.

But by the time he was being interviewed again, this time by a reporter from *Egg: The Arts Show*, a public-television program, Hirst looked less like an actor than someone in need of medical care. His shoes were back on, but he was mumbling, shuffling.

“This is *Hymn*—” He couldn’t seem to think of anything to say about it.

The interview was over and now it was Pomphrey’s turn.

“We want to get your thoughts, your feel-

ings, at this very momentous time,” said Pomphrey, escorting Hirst into the room where his camera crew had set up for still another interview. “We want your intimate feelings at this moment—O.K.? Action!”

“Um . . .” Hirst drifted off.

His face in the video monitor looked utterly wiped out, smoke from his cigarette curling around it.

“How do you feel?” Pomphrey prodded.

“ . . . ”

“What do you feel?” Pomphrey urged.

Hirst finally said, “Relief.”

There was a long, vacant pause. Pomphrey shifted in his chair. “And what else?” he asked.

“That’s it,” said Hirst. “I don’t know, you know—it’s hard to say in front of this camera.”

“But you’re in front of me,” Pomphrey said.

Hirst sighed. “Mostly it’s been a flood of bars. I’m tired,” he said. “I’m going to Mexico tomorrow . . .”

He stopped talking, and Pomphrey said, “Right. Well. That’s it, then.” He looked around at his crew. “That was great, wasn’t it? I think we got what we wanted!”

Pomphrey got up from his chair and went over to Hirst, embracing him. “I fuckin’ love you, man!” He kissed him.

Hirst looked like a little boy having to deal with the grown-ups, trying not to screw up his face.

It was five o’clock. Hirst burst out of the gallery onto the sidewalk, exclaiming, “You call that a gallery? What a dump!”

“I need beer, cigarettes, women, baseball bats!” he shouted.

He did a little dance.

He’d been liberated from the handlers, the journalists—all except me—and the plan was for him to take a bunch of friends and family on a two-hour boat trip around Manhattan.

“I want to do it for me mum,” he said. We were walking toward the Chelsea Piers, across the West Side Highway; several companions were already tagging along behind him. “Two weeks in New York and all we’ve done is drag her around to bars! And the kids will love it. Hey, is that Cresser there?”

A skinny, rough-looking man with a shaved head was waving to Hirst from across the highway. “I’m tryin’ to find Keith!” he yelled.

Cresser loped through traffic toward Hirst. “I found a D.J.—he’s got two boxes of records, but we’ve got no turntables—”

“I’ve brought along a journalist,” Hirst warned him, “so don’t watch what you say.”

Cresser told me, “Damien’s with me—he’s the B-list.” He smiled. “We had babies at the same time.”

“And with the same woman!” Hirst said. They laughed.

On the dock, around 20 people had already gathered and were waiting for him—an eclectic bunch, from a pretty girl with rings in her eyebrows to a white-haired woman who looked a tad like Margaret Thatcher, from Cresser’s five-month-old baby, Milo, watching wide-eyed from a stroller, to a rather distinguished British writer named Gordon Burn, who has written extensively about Hirst.

“He’s hung like a donkey, but keep it quiet—that’s his wife!” Hirst said.

“Thanks a lot,” Burn’s wife said.

A ship let out a bellowing *ah-oooo-gah!*

Hirst touched his belly. “Oh, pardon me,” he said.

“Where are my babies?” he asked, looking around. “Where’s me mum? Where’s Maia?”

Burn’s wife told him, “They’re at the hotel, convalescing.” Their plane was the next morning at eight, and, she explained, Maia had felt she needed the rest.

“Oh, right.”

Hirst looked a bit crestfallen.

It seemed as if all he wanted then was to go home himself, back to his family. It was really for them he’d put together this excursion. But everyone was here, happy and excited as always to be with him, so he’d have to go through with it.

“All right, then,” he said gamely, “what do we take, the cabin cruiser or the Screamer? Let’s do both!”

Suddenly, there was someone grabbing me from behind, hugging my belly, which had just produced a nine-pound baby, and squeezing my ample behind. “You are *gorgeous*,” he said. It was Keith Allen, smiling his toothy pirate smile. No longer in his red suit, he was wearing a T-shirt and jeans. He still looked like a fellow who could “handle things for you.”

“How big was the baby, then? Were you torn? Are you ready for a shag?” he asked immediately. “Me mum, she had a time with me—10 pounds I was. They didn’t have a thing then called an ep-ee-dural.”

“So,” he pressed on, “are you with the dad?”

I removed his hands and told him I thought I was too fat to “shag” anyone anytime soon, thanks.

“Cellulite?” he cried. “*Bah*—I’ve shagged bags and bags of it!”

And off we went.

They’d opted for the cabin cruiser due to the presence of a baby and people without jackets. A misty rain had started up again, and it was gray and cold. The boat had a sitting room that looked like an English drawing room, a party deck, and several bedrooms down below.

On deck, Hirst’s friends—the Korean-American artist Michael Joo, Werner Toeb-

ben, who owns the restaurant Maxwell's in Berlin, and others—partook of the well-stocked bar, and were in a convivial mood. Hirst stood alone with a beer.

Allen pulled me onto the couch in the drawing room.

"I met Damien at Groucho's in London," he told me. "He had heard of me, obviously—I was one of his heroes," he said.

There was a pause. Then everyone in the room, including Allen, started laughing hysterically.

"What happened is he came up to me, and he said, 'You're one of my heroes, you are.' And I said, 'Who the fuck are you?' 'Cause I get that all the time, you see. And he said, 'I'm Damien Hirst,' and I said, 'You're the kid who just did the fuckin' shark, am I right?' And he said, 'Yeah, I am.' And I said, 'Come here'—I've got this habit, see, of always taking people away to a corner—and I said, 'Listen to me: anybody can have an idea, and it can be, Yeah, I'm gonna put a fuckin' shark in a tank of formaldehyde—but the difficult thing is fuckin' doing it! And you did it, son.'

"And I said, 'That's the art of it, by the way.' Which I really believe it is. And he just looked at me like this"—Allen grinned craftily. "And then we went out that night with Maia, his lady, and some friends, and I took 'em to a motherfuckin' shit-hole drinking dive. And from then on, we just went fuckin' mad, forever."

He grinned.

Then he turned over his arm and showed me a strange, round wound that looked fresh.

"Now," he said, "you go ask Damien to show you his left arm and you'll find he has one just like this. It's a burn from a barbecue charcoal—we did it on Saturday, lunchtime."

"Why?" I asked.

He looked at me as if the answer were obvious.

"It was an expression of friendship. Blood

brothers? We already done that—this was just to reaffirm it, see. You had to do it yourself, put it on your own arm. It was hilarious, people scrapping around for the coldest piece of coal.

"We got a gang," he whispered in my ear, "called the Embers." He carried out the sibilance on the last s. "Shhhhhh! It's a secret society, I'm fuckin' telling you. There's only four members: me, Alex James, Damien, and Charles Fontaine, the restaurateur—a Frenchman.

"Take me back with you tonight and I'll tell you about our initiation rites."

I went out on the deck to find Hirst.

"Fuck, it's cold out here," he said.

"I'm supposed to look at your arm," I told him. "Oh my God."

His burn looked even worse than Allen's; it seemed semi-infected.

He looked at it. "Now, *that's* drunk," he said.

The D.J. had put on the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street*, and Keith Richards was singing "Happy." Hirst's assistant, a tall, beautiful girl named George, dressed in black, started dancing, drink in hand, and everyone followed.

The cables of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge glittered behind them like a string of emeralds.

"Damien and his generation of artists," said Gordon Burn, the bald-headed writer. "They've really carved out an area of British life—it frightened the Establishment, which is run by these Oxbridge-educated kind of people, because it was an underclass culture, and the very druggiest part of it. They could see it was worth retrieving and celebrating. That's what's really good about them—I've gotten really invigorated by it."

He watched George dance.

"Have you got any Pepto-Bismol?" Hirst came up and asked him.

"Oh, no," said Burn sympathetically. "Just push on through it."

"Yeah," said Hirst. "I'll be O.K."

Yeah, went off to the side of the boat, which was churning through the water, just coming up on the Statue of Liberty. "She's a bit hefty, isn't she?" one of his friends said.

"The John Lennon shot! The John Lennon shot!" It was Roger Pomphrey and his crew begging Damien for a referential moment of footage against the backdrop.

He complied, looking as if he was trying not to hurl.

"I'm exhausted," he told me. "Look, I've got to go out to dinner with Larry after this, and, no, you can't come. And then tomorrow morning I'm going to Mexico. I've got to get away. I've got to relax."

I asked whether he thought the scale of everything in his life had changed, and from now on, it was always going to be this way.

He thought a moment, then we were talking about his piece in the show, the skeleton—*Death Is Irrelevant*. "You know where I got that? From *Star Trek*, of all things."

"Old, or *Next Generation*?"

"*Next Generation*," he said. "It's an episode about an enemy called the Borg. The Borg are this life force; they go around the universe—they're like a hive, a collective. They don't exist as individuals. They assimilate other life-forms; it's like if you shot 'em with a gun another one would appear. They understand your technology and adapt to it and assimilate you—and they get ahold of Captain Picard.

"We are the Borg," they tell him. "You will be assimilated!" Hirst repeated the line in a computer voice. "And Captain Picard says, 'No! We are humans, we believe in freedom and truth!' And the Borg says, 'Freedom and truth are irrelevant! We are the Borg! Prepare to be assimilated!' And Captain Picard says, 'We would rather die than be assimilated!'"

When the boat docked, Hirst was gone before anybody could say good-bye to him, disappearing into the night. □

Jude Law

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 344 enthusiasm and intelligence, but he deflects the conversation from himself, making it hard to get a fix on him. "Isn't that the idea?" he says, smiling. "I also think, Surely the idea of being an actor is keeping a certain amount back so that people believe you, and they're willing to go on a bit of a journey when you play a character. Now, that's not to say that you turn psychotic or, you know, you start sleeping with men, or you crawl around the place in a wheelchair. But you have to go there, as physically or mentally close to that as possi-

ble. But that's all part of learning and working out who I am, too, for me."

Says Po-Chi Leong, who directed him in *The Wisdom of Crocodiles*, "The best actors always keep a certain amount of mystery or aura around them. The boring actors are the ones that give 100 percent. There's nothing left to give to the audience. He keeps himself to himself. One will never get to know the real Jude Law."

Law was born in 1972 in southeast London, a working-class area, to Peter and Maggie Law, both schoolteachers. He was named for both Jude Fawley, the eponymous hero of Thomas Hardy's novel *Jude*

the Obscure, and the Beatles song "Hey Jude." Until the age of 14 he went to a state school, where he was often picked on, called a "poof." When he transferred to Alleyn's, a private school in Dulwich, he was slagged for being working-class. "I couldn't win," he once told an interviewer. At least there was a symbolic virtue to the move: the new school was named after Edward Alleyn, the great Elizabethan actor who was the first Faustus. From an early age Law had wanted to act, and his parents frequently took him to the theater. At 13 he had joined the National Youth Music Theatre. During a weekend audition he was put in the girls' dormitory, where he