

A Free Course on the History of Western Art

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60-05 THE YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

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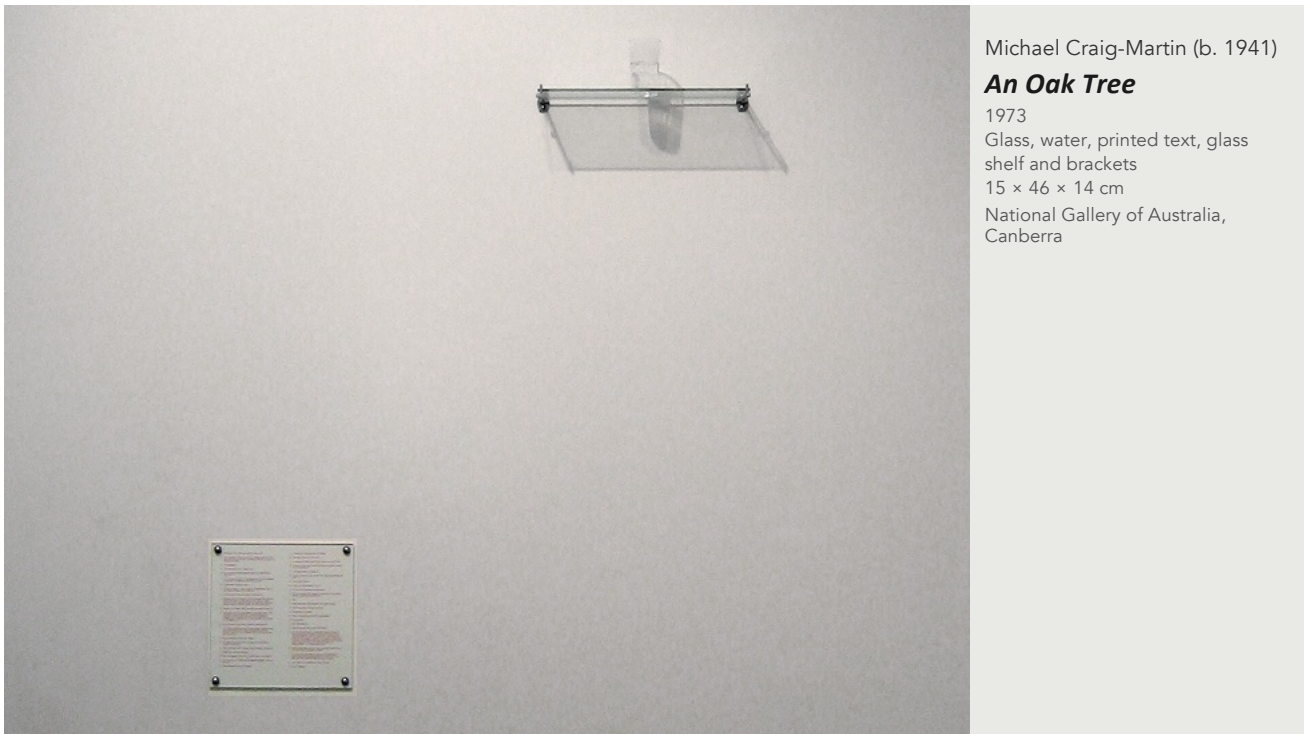
Damien Hirst
For the Love of
God
2007

- This is Section 60 on recent art movements. and this talk is about the iYoung British Artists or YBA. They emerged in the late 1980s as one of the most **provocative forces** in contemporary art. Coalescing around the **1988 Freeze exhibition** — organised by **Damien Hirst** while still a Goldsmiths student — they embraced **shock, irony, and unconventional materials** with gleeful irreverence. Sensation, celebrity, and the art market became as much their medium as canvas or bronze. Figures such as **Hirst, Tracey Emin, and Sarah Lucas** redrew the boundaries of what art could be.

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Michael Craig-Martin (b. 1941)

An Oak Tree

1973

Glass, water, printed text, glass shelf and brackets

15 × 46 × 14 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Michael Craig-Martin (b. 1941), *An Oak Tree*, 1973, Glass, water, printed text, glass shelf and brackets, 15 × 46 × 14 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

- This is the work that started it all – not literally, but spiritually. **Michael Craig-Martin**, born in Dublin and raised in Washington D.C., became the single most influential teacher behind the Young British Artists. As a tutor at **Goldsmiths College of Art** from 1974 to 1988, he dismantled the rigid boundaries between painting, sculpture and printmaking, insisting his students think conceptually rather than technically. **An Oak Tree** is a glass of water on a shelf, accompanied by a text in which Craig-Martin argues, with deadpan logic, that it is in fact an oak tree. The work draws directly on **Marcel Duchamp's** readymades and on Catholic transubstantiation.
- When first exhibited at the Rowan Gallery in London, it baffled critics. One review in **Studio International** called it “a maddening exercise in semantic gamesmanship.” The Tate critic **Andrew Wilson** later described Craig-Martin as “the godfather of the YBAs.” His teaching method – rigorous one-to-one tutorials where students had to defend every creative decision – produced a generation of artists who were articulate, ambitious and unafraid of provocation.
- The **YBAs – Young British Artists** – emerged from Goldsmiths in the late 1980s. The core group included **Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Gary Hume, Mat Collishaw, Angus Fairhurst, Michael Landy, Fiona Rae, Ian Davenport** and **Anya Gallaccio**, with a second wave bringing in **Tracey Emin, Chris Ofili, the Chapman Brothers, Rachel Whiteread** and **Gillian Wearing**. Backed by the advertising mogul and collector **Charles Saatchi**,

they dominated British art throughout the 1990s with shock tactics, tabloid notoriety and genuine formal innovation. They made contemporary art front-page news for the first time in living memory.

Pronunciation Guide

Craig-Martin: KRAYG MAR-tin

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Mat Collishaw (b. 1966)

Bullet Hole

1988

Fifteen Cibachrome
transparency panels on fifteen
light boxes

229 × 305 cm (overall)

Private collection

Mat Collishaw (b. 1966), *Bullet Hole*, 1988, Fifteen Cibachrome transparency panels on fifteen light boxes, 229 × 305 cm (overall), Private collection

- In the summer of 1988, a group of second-year Goldsmiths students led by **Damien Hirst** occupied a disused London Port Authority building in Surrey Docks and staged **Freeze**, the exhibition that launched a movement. The most arresting work was **Bullet Hole** by **Mat Collishaw**. Fifteen backlit transparency panels, arranged in a grid, showed a massively enlarged forensic photograph of a gunshot wound to the head, appropriated from a pathology textbook. The image was at once seductive and repulsive – the wound’s pink folds resembled a flower. It reportedly gave the show its name: a frozen moment of impact.
- The only contemporary review came from **Sacha Craddock** in **The Guardian**, who noted the show’s “**professional sheen**” and surprising ambition for a student exhibition. **Michael Craig-Martin** later recalled: “**It was a combination of youthful bravado, innocence, fortunate timing, good luck, and, of course, good work.**” **Charles Saatchi** attended *Freeze* and bought a Collishaw piece – the first YBA work to enter his vast collection.
- Hirst had gained sponsorship from the **London Docklands Development Corporation** and **Olympia & York**. He personally drove the Royal Academy’s **Norman Rosenthal** to the show by taxi, and ensured that Tate director **Nicholas Serota** also attended. Thatcher’s Docklands – ground zero for free enterprise – was the perfect backdrop. The sixteen exhibiting artists included **Sarah Lucas, Angus Fairhurst, Gary Hume, Anya**

Gallaccio, Ian Davenport, Fiona Rae and Abigail Lane. Most of the work was abstract and surprisingly conservative, but Hirst's entrepreneurial chutzpah changed everything.

Pronunciation Guide

Collishaw: KOL-ih-shaw

Cibachrome: SIB-ah-krome

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Damien Hirst (b. 1965)

The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living

1991

Tiger shark, glass, steel, 5% formaldehyde solution

213 × 518 × 213 cm

Private collection (Steven A. Cohen)

Damien Hirst (b. 1965), *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, 1991, Tiger shark, glass, steel, 5% formaldehyde solution, 213 × 518 × 213 cm, Private collection (Steven A. Cohen)

- In 1991 **Charles Saatchi** offered to fund whatever artwork **Damien Hirst** wanted to make. The result was a fourteen-foot tiger shark suspended in formaldehyde inside a steel-and-glass vitrine. The shark, caught off Hervey Bay in Queensland, cost **£6,000**; the total cost was **£50,000**. Hirst wanted something “**big enough to eat you.**” First shown at the **Saatchi Gallery** in 1992 as part of the inaugural **Young British Artists** exhibition, it became the defining artwork of 1990s Britain and the global symbol of Britart.
- **The Sun** ran the headline “**£50,000 for fish without chips.**” Critic **Robert Hughes** called it a “**cultural obscenity.**” But the **New York Times’s Roberta Smith** wrote that the shark “**gives the innately demonic urge to live a demonic, deathlike form.**” Its title – characteristically long and philosophical – asks whether the living can truly comprehend their own mortality. The shark is simultaneously life and death, predator and specimen.
- Born in Bristol and raised in Leeds, Hirst grew up obsessed with death. He was arrested twice as a teenager for shoplifting. At sixteen he sketched beside cadavers at **Leeds Medical School**. By his mid-twenties he was the most famous artist in Britain. The original shark began to decompose – Saatchi had added bleach to the fluid – and was replaced with a new specimen in 2006 when collector **Steven A. Cohen** acquired the work for a reported **eight to twelve million dollars**. Hirst once wryly stated: “**I just**

fucking hate death.”

Pronunciation Guide

Hirst: HURST

formaldehyde: for-MAL-deh-hyde

vitrine: vi-TREEN

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Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963)

House

1993

Concrete, wood and steel
Approx. 900 × 600 × 400
cm (three storeys)

Destroyed 11 January
1994 (formerly 193 Grove
Road, London E3)

Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963), House, 1993, Concrete, wood and steel, Approx. 900 × 600 × 400 cm, Destroyed 11 January 1994 (formerly 193 Grove Road, London E3)

- In October 1993, **Rachel Whiteread** completed **House**, a full-scale concrete cast of the interior of a condemned Victorian terraced house at 193 Grove Road, Bethnal Green. Commissioned by **Artangel** and sponsored by Beck's, the work transformed absence into presence. Doors, windows, fireplaces and stairs were rendered as ghostly protrusions in grey concrete. The surrounding houses had been demolished; House stood alone like a Brutalist monument to lost domesticity.
- **Andrew Graham-Dixon** of **The Independent** called it “one of the most extraordinary and imaginative public sculptures created by an English artist this century.” Thousands visited daily. Graffiti appeared reading “**Wot for?**” with the reply “**Why not!**” On 23 November 1993, Whiteread became the first woman to win the **Turner Prize**. On the same day, Tower Hamlets Council voted to demolish the sculpture. She also won the **K Foundation art award** for the worst British artist, worth £40,000 – double the Turner. She donated half to **Shelter**.
- Born in Ilford, Essex, Whiteread studied painting at Brighton Polytechnic and sculpture at the **Slade** under **Phyllida Barlow**. She once worked in Highgate Cemetery repairing coffin lids. Her earlier work **Ghost**, a plaster cast of a Victorian parlour, had been bought by Saatchi in 1990. House was demolished on 11 January 1994 in under two hours. The earthmover operator told reporters: “**It's not art, it's a lump of concrete.**” Whiteread, who was present, said she would cry, but on her own.

Pronunciation Guide

Whiteread: WHY-tred

Artangel: ART-ain-jel

Phyllida Barlow: FIL-id-ah BAR-loh

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Sarah Lucas (b. 1962)

***Two Fried Eggs
and a Kebab***

1992

Table, two fried eggs,
kebab, photograph

89 × 152 × 87 cm

Saatchi Gallery, London

Sarah Lucas (b. 1962), *Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab*, 1992, Table, two fried eggs, kebab, photograph, 89 × 152 × 87 cm, Saatchi Gallery, London

- Take a worn wooden table. Place two freshly fried eggs side by side at one end. At the other, put a pitta bread stuffed with shredded kebab meat. Hang a photograph of the same arrangement above it. The result is unmistakable: a reclining female nude reduced to breasts and genitalia using the crudest slang of the British greasy spoon. **Sarah Lucas** turned lad culture back on itself. The eggs had to be re-fried daily, meaning the work was always fresh and always perishable – just like the objectified body it depicted.
- Art historian **Anne M. Wagner** wrote that Lucas's main task was **“the mining of the semantic possibilities of everyday things.”** Author **Michelle Robecchi** praised its **“simplicity and formal directness, combined with a subtly perverse humour.”** Journalist **Lynn Barber** noted Lucas's early work seemed **“fuelled by anger; anger against pornography and men's casual denigration of women,”** though Lucas herself preferred the word “annoyed.”
- Born in Holloway, north London, and raised on a council estate in Islington, Lucas was the tough one among the YBAs – Doc Martens, lank hair, pints and roll-ups. She graduated from Goldsmiths in 1987 and showed in **Freeze** the following year. In 1993, she and **Tracey Emin** opened **The Shop** in an empty premises in Bethnal Green, selling cheap art multiples and handmade objects. Lucas was a regular at the **Colony Room** and the **Groucho Club**, and confessed to being **“an aggressive drunk.”** Her work reads

as both a feminist critique and a working-class two fingers to the art establishment.

Pronunciation Guide

Lucas: LOO-kuss

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Marc Quinn (b. 1964)

Self

1991

Blood (artist's), stainless steel,
Perspex and refrigeration
equipment

208 × 63 × 63 cm
National Portrait Gallery,
London (2006 version)

Marc Quinn (b. 1964), *Self*, 1991, Blood (artist's), stainless steel, Perspex and refrigeration equipment, 208 × 63 × 63 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London (2006 version)

- **Marc Quinn** made a cast of his own head and filled it with ten pints of his frozen blood – the total volume in a human body. The dark crimson sculpture sits inside a Perspex case filled with frozen silicone oil, maintained at minus eighteen degrees Celsius by a refrigeration unit. If the power fails, the head melts. An urban myth holds that the original 1991 version did exactly that during renovations to **Charles Saatchi's** kitchen. Quinn has never confirmed it, but clearly enjoys the story.
- **Will Self** described the work as following a **“Eucharistic formula: bread equals body; alcohol equals blood.”** The **National Portrait Gallery** called it **“unconventional, innovative, and challenging.”** Quinn, who graduated from Robinson College, Cambridge, with a degree in History and History of Art in 1986, had no formal art training. He learned bronze casting as an assistant to the sculptor **Barry Flanagan** in 1983. He was the first artist represented by the dealer **Jay Jopling**, who would go on to found **White Cube** gallery.
- **Self** was created during a period when Quinn was a severe alcoholic. The theme of dependency – the sculpture needs electricity to survive, just as Quinn needed drink – is central. He has made a new version every five years, documenting his ageing face. A doctor extracted the blood over approximately twelve months. The pin-prick holes from the needles are visible on the frozen surface. Quinn has instructed that after his death, a final **Self** be cast using his remaining blood and a death mask of his face.

Pronunciation Guide

Quinn: KWIN

Perspex: PER-speks

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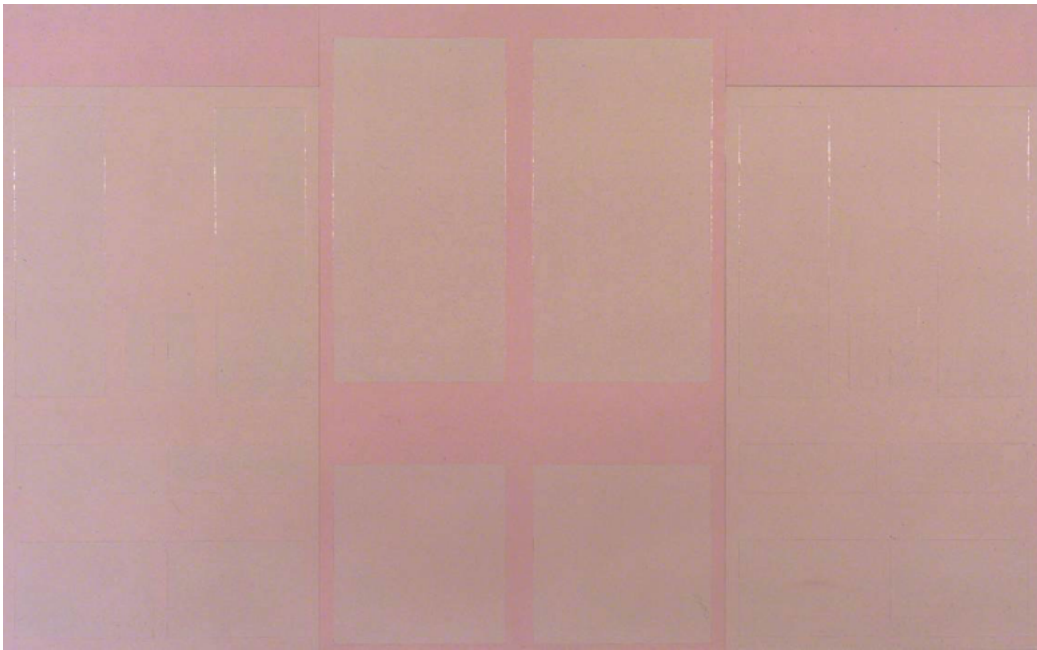
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Gary Hume (b. 1962)

Incubus

1991

Gloss paint on panel

218 × 145 cm

Tate, London

Gary Hume (b. 1962), *Incubus*, 1991, Gloss paint on panel, 218 × 145 cm, Tate, London

- **Gary Hume** was the quiet painter among the YBAs. While his colleagues pickled sharks and exhibited unmade beds, Hume painted hospital doors. His early **Door paintings**, begun at Goldsmiths and exhibited in Freeze, reproduced the swing doors of **St Bartholomew's Hospital** in household gloss paint on large aluminium panels. ***Incubus*** is typical: flat, hard-edged, monochrome panels that read as both abstract painting and institutional architecture. The high-gloss surface reflects the viewer, implicating them in the work.
- Critic **Adrian Searle** wrote that the Door paintings “**occupy a strange territory between Minimalism and Pop.**” **Matthew Collings** described Hume as “**the thinking person's YBA.**” By the mid-1990s, Hume shifted to figurative subjects – flowers, faces, birds – still rendered in glossy household paint that pooled and dripped on aluminium sheets. The combination of graphic simplicity and luscious surface became his signature.
- Born in Bexleyheath, Kent, Hume was among the sixteen artists in Freeze. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he remained committed to painting throughout the conceptualism of the decade. He was nominated for the **Turner Prize** in 1996 and elected a **Royal Academician** in 2001 – one of several YBAs who joined the very institution they once sought to provoke. His work ***Vicious***, exhibited in ***Sensation***, later sold at Christie's for significant sums. Hume proved that painting could hold its own in an era of installations, taxidermy and confessional art.

Pronunciation Guide

Hume: HYOOM

Incubus: IN-kyoo-bus

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Jake Chapman (b. 1966) and Dinos Chapman (b. 1962)

Great Deeds Against the Dead

1994

Fibreglass, resin, paint, mixed media

277 × 244 × 152 cm

Saatchi Gallery, London



1994, Fibreglass, resin, paint, mixed media, 277 × 244 × 152 cm, Saatchi Gallery, London

- The **Chapman Brothers** took **Francisco de Goya's** 1810 etching **Grande hazaña! Con muertos!** from his **Disasters of War** series and rendered it as a life-size three-dimensional tableau. Three mutilated mannequins hang from a dead tree, their limbs severed and rearranged. The bodies are cast in fibreglass with forensic detail – exposed muscle, bone and viscera painted with nauseating realism. It is Goya's print made flesh, a confrontation between old-master horror and contemporary spectacle.
- Critic **Sarah Kent** wrote that the Chapmans' work "**forces us to confront images we would rather forget.**" Art historian **Hal Foster** described their practice as "**trauma culture made visible.**" The piece was included in **Sensation** at the Royal Academy in 1997, where it stood alongside their even more notorious **Zygotic Acceleration, Biogenetic De-Sublimated Libidinal Model** – child mannequins with genitalia for noses and mouths. The tabloids had a field day.
- **Jake** and **Dinos Chapman** both studied at the **Royal College of Art** and worked as assistants to **Gilbert & George** before establishing their partnership. Their collaborative practice – rare in the YBA generation – produced some of the movement's most extreme and technically accomplished works. **Hell**, a vast nine-part vitrine tableau showing thousands of tiny Nazi figures committing atrocities, took two years to make. It was destroyed in the 2004 **Momart warehouse fire**, along with works by other YBAs. The Chapmans remade it as **Fucking Hell**. They once described their aesthetic as the art

of “unredeemed pessimism.”

Pronunciation Guide

Goya: GOY-ah

Grande hazaña: GRAHN-day ah-THAN-yah

Zygotic: zy-GOT-ik

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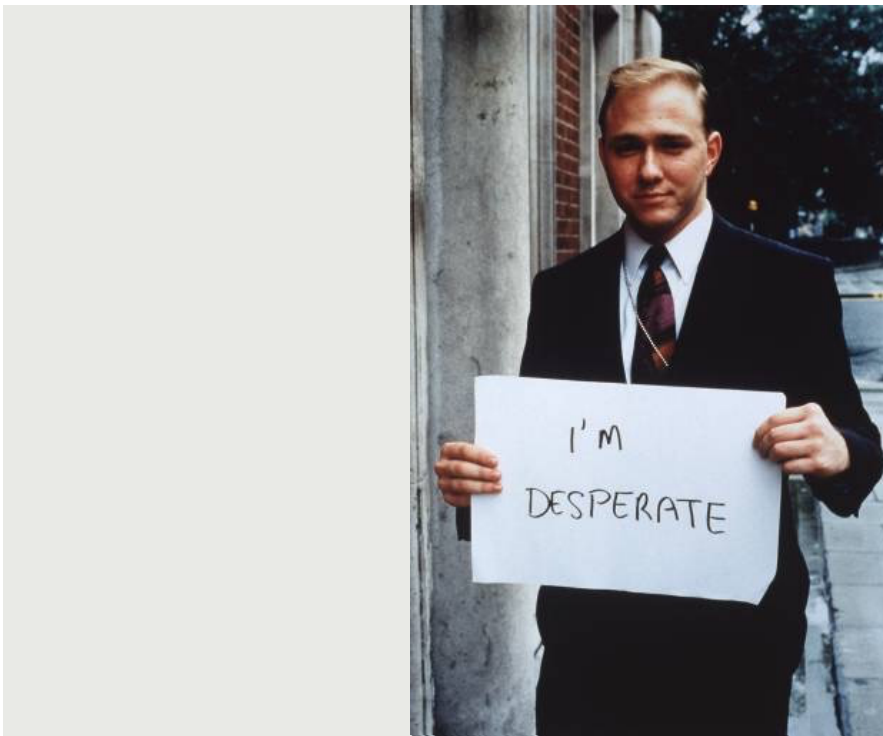
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Gillian Wearing (b. 1963)
Signs that Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs that Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say
1992–1993
Chromogenic colour prints
122 × 92 cm each
Tate, London / Maureen Paley
Gallery, London

Gillian Wearing (b. 1963), *Signs that Say What You Want Them to Say and Not Signs that Say What Someone Else Wants You to Say*, 1992–1993, Chromogenic colour prints, 122 × 92 cm each, Tate, London

- **Gillian Wearing** stopped strangers on the streets of south London and asked them to write down what they were thinking on a blank piece of paper, then photographed them holding their signs. The results were devastating in their simplicity. A suited City businessman holds a sign reading **“I’m desperate.”** A young police officer writes **“Help.”** An elderly woman declares **“I really love Reggae music.”** The gap between appearance and inner life is the point. This is portrait photography as emotional ambush.
- The series won Wearing the **Turner Prize** in 1997. The jury praised her **“exceptional ability to reveal the gap between the public and private self.”** Critic **Michael Bracewell** described the work as **“an extraordinary act of social portraiture, both tender and unsettling.”** One of the images was later used in a **Volkswagen** advertising campaign without Wearing’s permission, leading to a legal dispute.
- Born in Birmingham, Wearing studied at **Chelsea College of Art** and then Goldsmiths, graduating in 1990. She belonged to the second wave of YBAs who emerged in 1992–1993. Her subsequent work continued to explore the tension between public facades and private selves, through documentary-style video, masks and performance. Her bronze statue of the suffragist **Millicent Fawcett** now stands in **Parliament Square** – the first statue of a woman in that location. From street photography to national

monuments: a remarkable arc for a Goldsmiths graduate.

Pronunciation Guide

Wearing: WARE-ing

Fawcett: FAW-sit

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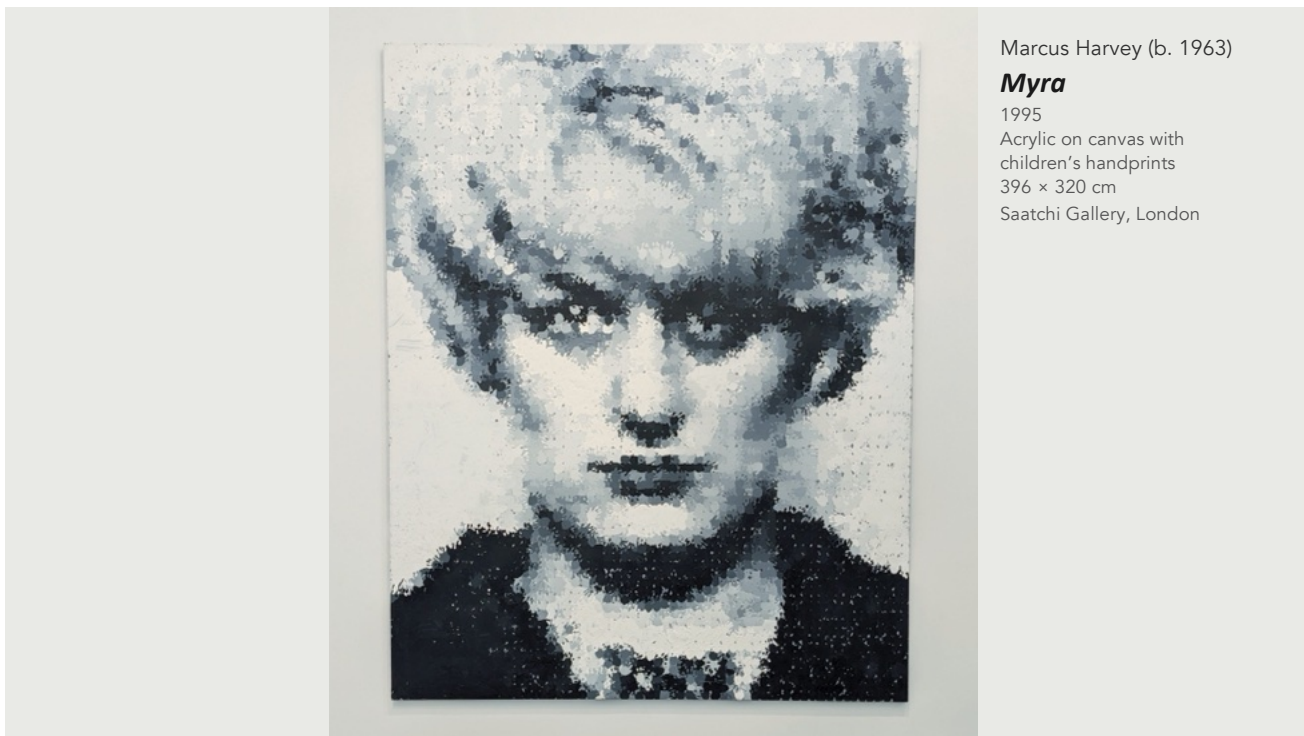
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Marcus Harvey (b. 1963), *Myra*, 1995, Acrylic on canvas with children's handprints, 396 × 320 cm, Saatchi Gallery, London

- When **Sensation** opened at the **Royal Academy** on 18 September 1997, it was this painting that caused a national firestorm. **Marcus Harvey** had reproduced the infamous police mugshot of the child murderer **Myra Hindley** on a monumental scale, using a template of children's handprints to build the image. From a distance, the portrait is recognisable; close up, the viewer sees only tiny palms and fingers. The effect is profoundly disturbing – the hands of innocents constructing the face of their destroyer.
- **Mothers Against Murder and Aggression** picketed Burlington House. The painting was attacked twice, once with ink and once with eggs, and had to be cleaned and rehung behind a Perspex shield. Royal Academicians resigned in protest. **David Gordon**, the RA Secretary, defended the decision, arguing that Hindley's image was "**in the public domain; part of our consciousness.**" The show attracted over **300,000** visitors. It was, wrote critic **Richard Dorment**, "**the most talked-about exhibition in living memory.**"
- Harvey had studied at Goldsmiths from 1982 to 1986, slightly before the core YBA cohort, and was already an accomplished painter. The Sensation exhibition, funded by **Saatchi**, included **110 works** by **42 artists** and cemented the YBAs as a cultural phenomenon. It opened in the same year as **Tony Blair's** landslide election and **Princess Diana's** death – a volatile moment of national self-examination. When Sensation toured to the **Brooklyn Museum** in 1999, Mayor **Rudy Giuliani** attempted to revoke the museum's funding over **Chris Ofili's The Holy Virgin Mary**, which incorporated elephant

dung. Australia refused the exhibition outright.

Pronunciation Guide

Myra: MY-rah

Hindley: HIND-lee

Giuliani: joo-lee-AH-nee

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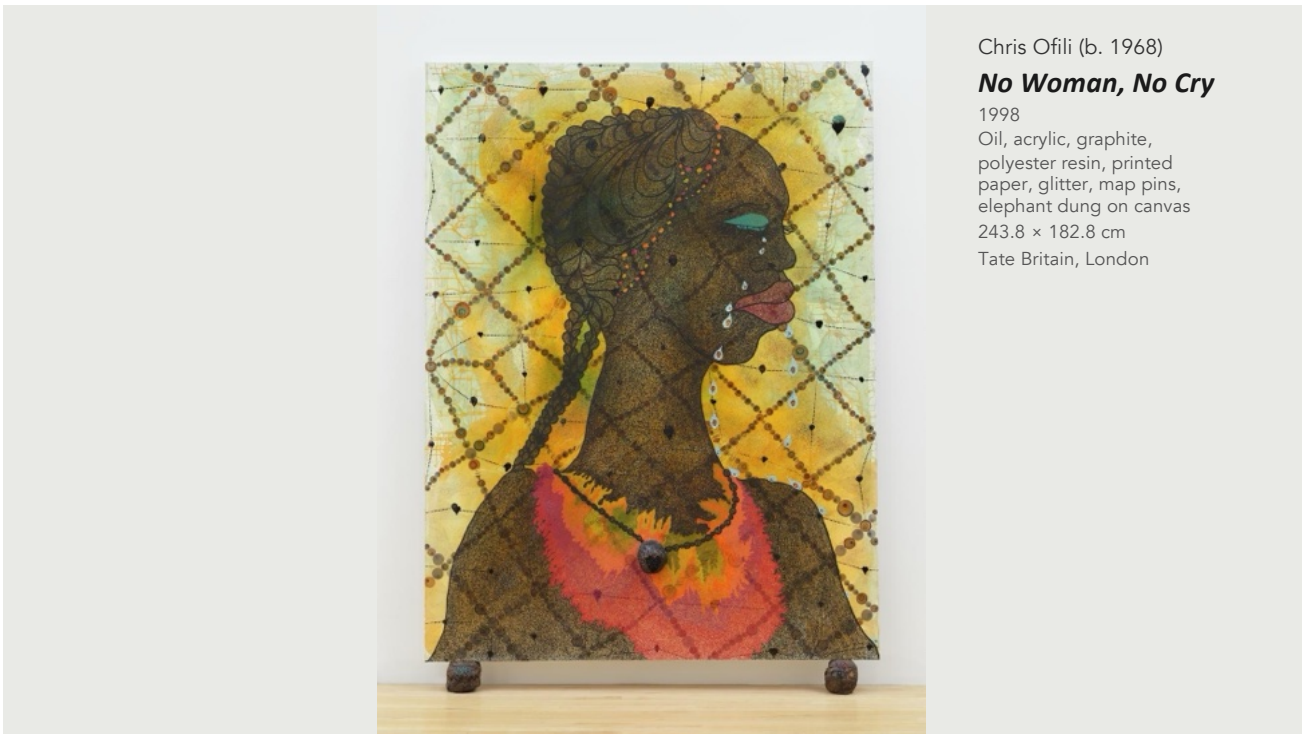
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Chris Ofili (b. 1968)

No Woman, No Cry

1998

Oil, acrylic, graphite,
polyester resin, printed
paper, glitter, map pins,
elephant dung on canvas
243.8 × 182.8 cm

Tate Britain, London

Chris Ofili (b. 1968), *No Woman, No Cry*, 1998, Oil, acrylic, graphite, polyester resin, printed paper, glitter, map pins, elephant dung on canvas, 243.8 × 182.8 cm, Tate Britain, London

- **Chris Ofili** painted a weeping Black woman in profile against a shimmering golden background. Each tear contains a tiny collaged photograph of **Stephen Lawrence**, the eighteen-year-old murdered in a racist attack in Eltham, south-east London, in 1993. In phosphorescent paint, barely visible in normal light, Ofili inscribed the words **“R.I.P. Stephen Lawrence 1974–1993.”** The painting is propped against the gallery wall on two balls of dried elephant dung; a third forms the pendant of the woman’s necklace. Ofili has left instructions that if the dung ever deteriorates, Tate should contact London Zoo.
- **The Financial Times** called *No Woman, No Cry* Ofili’s **“masterpiece”** and **“a modern Pietà.”** Tate curator **Judith Nesbitt** wrote that Ofili **“was deeply moved by the way in which Doreen Lawrence’s overwhelming silent grief had been transformed as she became even stronger in spirit.”** The work helped Ofili win the **1998 Turner Prize**, making him the first Black artist and the first painter since **Howard Hodgkin** in 1985 to receive the award. **The Times** headline read: **“Great works of art or just a pile of dung?”**
- Born in Manchester to Nigerian parents, Ofili studied at **Chelsea School of Art** and the **Royal College of Art**. A British Council travel scholarship took him to Zimbabwe in 1992, where he began collecting elephant dung – the material that became his signature and his controversy. Named after the **Bob Marley** song, **No Woman, No Cry** transcends the

YBA appetite for shock. It is a painting of genuine emotional depth that confronts institutional racism and celebrates Black maternal resilience.

Pronunciation Guide

Ofili: oh-FEE-lee

Pietà: pee-eh-TAH

Doreen: dor-EEN

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Tracey Emin (b. 1963), *My Bed*, 1998, Mattress, linens, pillows, rope and various memorabilia, 79 × 211 × 234 cm, Tate Britain, London (on long-term loan from the Duerckheim Collection)

- In 1998, **Tracey Emin** spent four days in bed during a suicidal depressive episode, drinking only vodka. When she finally got up and saw the wreckage – stained sheets, empty bottles, cigarette packets, soiled underwear, a pregnancy test, used condoms, crumpled tissues – she had a revelation. **“I saw the bed out of that context and I saw it in a big, white space,”** she later recalled. She transported everything to a gallery. It was, she said, **“a damsel in distress.”**
- Shortlisted for the **Turner Prize** in 1999, *My Bed* attracted ferocious criticism. **Craig Brown** wrote a satirical piece for **Private Eye** titled **My Turd**. But art critic **Matthew Collings** praised its **“punkish quality”** and **“unique genius.”** Two performance artists, **Yuan Cai** and **Jian Jun Xi**, jumped onto the bed with bare torsos in a fifteen-minute pillow fight they called **Two Naked Men Jump into Tracey’s Bed**. The Turner Prize show attracted **140,000 visitors**, averaging 2,000 per day.
- Born in Croydon and raised in Margate, Emin endured sexual abuse as a teenager and an abortion that haunted her subsequent art. She studied at the **Royal College of Art** and became associated with the YBAs in the early 1990s, opening **The Shop** with **Sarah Lucas** in 1993. Her tent **Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995**, shown in *Sensation*, listed every person she had shared a bed with – including her twin brother and childhood friends. *My Bed* sold at Christie’s in 2014 for **£2.5 million** to German

collector **Count Christian Duerckheim**, who loaned it to Tate Britain.

Pronunciation Guide

Emin: EM-in

Duerckheim: DOORK-hyme

Yuan Cai: yoo-AHN TSYE

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Gavin Turk (b. 1967)

Pop

1993

Waxwork in glass case, fibreglass,
brass, clothing

279 × 115 × 115 cm

Charles Saatchi Collection / Various
private collections

Gavin Turk (b. 1967), *Pop*, 1993, Waxwork in glass case, fibreglass, brass, clothing, 279 × 115 × 115 cm, Private collection

- **Gavin Turk** cast himself in wax as **Sid Vicious** posing as **Elvis Presley** holding a gun, then sealed the figure inside a glass vitrine like a museum display of a historical relic. It is a Russian doll of celebrity: a young British artist impersonating a dead punk impersonating a dead rock-and-roller. The waxwork is meticulously crafted by **Madame Tussauds'** technicians – Turk's face, Vicious's sneer, Presley's stance. The gun references **Andy Warhol's** Elvis silkscreens. Everyone in the chain died too young or too famous.
- Critic **Matthew Collings** called *Pop* “a witty meditation on what it means to be an artist in the age of celebrity.” Turk's degree show at the **Royal College of Art** in 1991 had consisted of a single **English Heritage** blue plaque reading “**Gavin Turk, Sculptor, worked here, 1989–1991**” – and the RCA famously refused to award him his degree. The rejection made him famous overnight. He described it as “**the best thing that ever happened to me.**”
- Born in Guildford, Turk openly acknowledged that **Charles Saatchi's** patronage was essential to the YBAs' success. Both Presley and Vicious came to untimely, drug-related ends, and *Pop* is partly a warning about the destructive machinery of fame – prescient for a generation of artists who became tabloid celebrities. Turk pioneered the use of waxwork as a fine-art medium, prefiguring later interest in hyper-realistic figurative sculpture. His work constantly interrogates authorship, originality and the

commodification of the artist.

Pronunciation Guide

Turk: TURK

Sid Vicious: SID VISH-us

vitrine: vi-TREEN

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Michael Landy (b. 1963)

Break Down

2001

Performance / installation
(industrial conveyor belt,
destruction of 7,227 personal
possessions)

Site-specific, C&A store, 499
Oxford Street, London

No longer extant (Artangel
commission)

Michael Landy (b. 1963), *Break Down*, 2001, Performance / installation, Site-specific, C&A store, 499 Oxford Street, London, No longer extant (Artangel commission)

- On 10 February 2001, **Michael Landy** began systematically destroying everything he owned. Over two weeks in the former **C&A** department store on Oxford Street, a team of twelve operatives in blue boiler suits dismantled, shredded and granulated **7,227** of Landy's possessions on an industrial conveyor belt. Every object was logged: his car, his clothes, his passport, his father's sheepskin coat, love letters, artworks given to him by fellow YBAs including **Hirst**, **Emin** and **Hume**. The residual waste weighed **5.75 tonnes**.
- Critic **Adrian Searle** called *Break Down* "**one of the most extreme and logical artworks of the decade.**" Writer **Julian Stallabrass** described it as "**a devastating critique of consumer culture that is also an act of self-annihilation.**" Commissioned by **Artangel**, the piece attracted **45,000 visitors**. Landy was left with literally nothing – no passport, no driving licence, no bank card. It took him months to reconstruct his bureaucratic identity.
- Born in London, the son of a disabled former tunnel miner, Landy graduated from Goldsmiths in 1988 and exhibited in *Freeze*. His earlier work **Scrapheap Services** had explored the disposability of people in post-industrial Britain. *Break Down* was the logical extreme. It was also a rebuke to the art market that had made the YBAs rich. By destroying art that colleagues had given him – including a Hirst painting and an Emin print – he was biting the hand that fed the movement. In 2008, Landy was elected a **Royal Academician**. He was appointed to oversee the RA's permanent collection, a

delicious irony for a man who once destroyed everything he had.

Pronunciation Guide

Landy: LAN-dee

Artangel: ART-ain-jel

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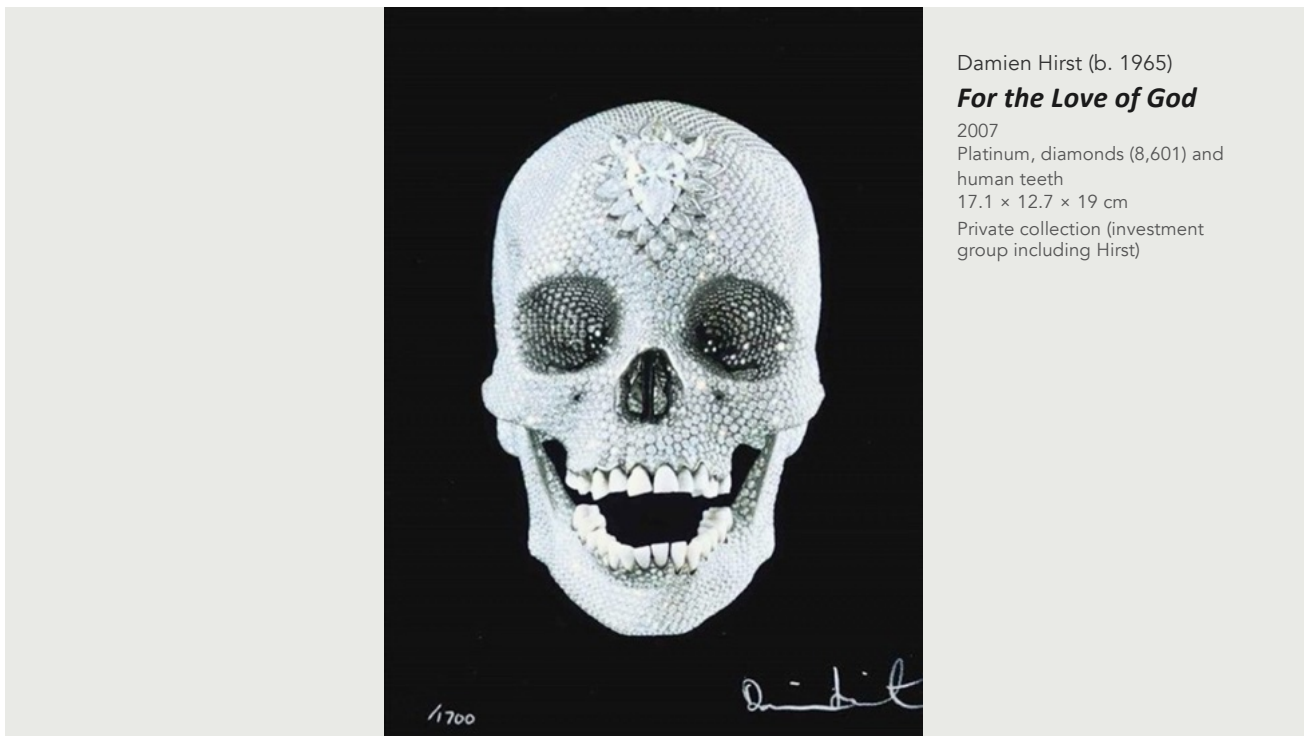
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Damien Hirst (b. 1965)
For the Love of God
 2007
 Platinum, diamonds (8,601) and
 human teeth
 17.1 × 12.7 × 19 cm
 Private collection (investment
 group including Hirst)

Damien Hirst (b. 1965), *For the Love of God*, 2007, Platinum, diamonds (8,601) and human teeth, 17.1 × 12.7 × 19 cm, Private collection

- A platinum cast of a human skull encrusted with **8,601 flawless diamonds**, including a pear-shaped pink diamond on the forehead. The teeth are real, taken from an eighteenth-century skull bought at a taxidermy shop in Islington. Production cost: **£14 million**. Asking price: **£50 million**, reportedly achieved through a sale to an investment consortium that included Hirst himself. **For the Love of God** is the ultimate YBA object: death as bling, memento mori as luxury brand. The title came from Hirst's mother, who asked **"For the love of God, what are you going to do next?"**
- **Rudi Fuchs**, former director of the **Stedelijk Museum**, called it **"the most remarkable work of the new century."** Art critic **Robert Hughes** was less kind, dismissing it as **"supreme vulgarity."** But the work crystallises the YBA legacy: art as spectacle, art as commodity, art as front-page news. By 2007, the movement's enfants terribles had become the British art establishment. **Emin** was made a Royal Academician and later a Dame. **Whiteread** received a CBE and a DBE. Hirst opened his own **Newport Street Gallery** in 2015.
- The YBAs' true legacy is structural. They proved that contemporary art could attract mass audiences, paving the way for **Tate Modern's** opening in 2000. They spawned a gallery ecosystem – **White Cube**, **Sadie Coles HQ**, **Victoria Miro**, **Maureen Paley** – that made London a global art capital. They put the Turner Prize on primetime television. Not all survived: **Angus Fairhurst**, one of the original Freeze artists and Hirst's closest

friend, took his own life in 2008. But from a warehouse in Docklands, this generation redrew the map of what art could be, who could make it, and who would pay for it.

Pronunciation Guide

memento mori: meh-MEN-toh MOR-ee

Fuchs: FOOKS

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60-05 THE YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

DR. LAURENCE SHAFE

WWW.SHAFE.UK



Damien Hirst
**For the Love of
God**
2007

- So what happened to the YBA. It was a late, brilliant flourishing of postmodern art, now superseded by more sincere, globally diverse, and digitally inflected practices.
- This happened for a few reasons:
 - **The Irony Trap:** Living in a state of constant irony became tiring. People began to crave "New Sincerity"—art that actually meant what it said.
 - **The Digital Revolution:** The internet changed how we consume images. Postmodernism's "shock" at appropriation felt quaint when everyone was already making memes and remixes.
 - **Globalism:** Postmodernism was very Western-centric. The shift toward a global art market (featuring voices from Africa, Asia, and South America) moved the conversation beyond 20th-century European philosophy.
- Many scholars now use the term **Metamodernism** to describe our current era—work that oscillates between modernist earnestness and Postmodern scepticism and irony
- The YBA model now looks parochial and dated but will be remembered for its irony, appropriation, the way it collapsed high and low culture, its questioning of authorship and authenticity, its use of shock as a critical strategy, and the way it made the art market a subject in itself.

- That brings me to the end of this talk. Thank you for your time and I hope to be seeing you again soon.



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