

## Damian Hirst's Exhibition at Palazzo Grassi in Venice

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The scientists, from Galileo to Newton, interested in arts and history, always have had some collections where there was everything; from the Unicorn's bone to the sphere for premonitions, the potions to feel good to the alchemical texts.

The exhibition of Damian Hirst, which opened Thursday at Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana, is in this framework, in the mass of a thousand things that any intellectual retained, in the times when it was thought that culture was universal, that each of us, individually, could collect all the knowledge the world was offering.

A huge amount, of uneven objects, that have little to do with each other.

Damien Hirst, the father of the young British artist, after years puts himself out there with this giant exhibition completely changing himself and his work. There are no provocations, animals, drugs, colored dots. In this sense, the bet is high, because it takes the scene abandoning what made him famous, refusing to repeat itself, if not for the wealth. It seems that like the Gagosian of 20 years ago, even the good Pinault has provided unlimited funds.

The story is simple: in 2008 it was discovered that the wreck of a ship sank off the east coast of Africa, belonged to Cif Amotan II, a freedman of Antioch who lived between I and II century AD. He freed himself from slavery and gathered an immense fortune among art works, jewelry, antiques, and spoils of war. This treasure was loaded onto his ship to be brought to a temple, but



it never arrived at its destination. Then the recent discovery, the re-emergence of encrusted artifacts from the sea, sometimes very damaged. That this story is a complete fabrication is unimportant. The story holds in the exhibition beyond the inconsistencies.



So triune works: sculptures rebuilt as new, falsely sculptures subjected to spend time on the seabed, video or picture of their recovery. Here, size matters: from tiny gold sculptures to the 18 meters of the giant's height that fills the courtyard of Palazzo Grassi (Demon with Bowl). Also the materials: gold, silver, bronze, black and white granite.

The challenge is to create, provide the public with a story, a fairy tale. Herein will lie the success or failure of this exhibition. Beyond the technical expertise, the cost of production of this enormity similar to a collection, the impression that is created is truly to enter in a strange archaeological museum. And this also serves the ornaments, such as the caskets with the collections of fake rare shells, which are a fall in the tension of the exhibition. They certainly will not be sold at a high price, but they offset, creating the image of the museum. Basically in any discovery there can be the wonderful, but also the tool, the consumer good, the shell.

The materials are conventional ones; the works have an aspect that can be ambiguously connected to experiences already lived. We are surprised for the size of the caskets, in a much elaborated fictional language that makes this surplus of fantastic syncretism, between myth and cartoon, surrealism and jewel, gods and monsters in a credible collection of the wonders of an invented world. So much so that a toy, a robot, put into glass case, all of gold, with its excellent caption, can certainly represent a deity and the incredible abilities in aging of works with rust, sponges, algae and shells, just as fake, which makes it plausible marine finds.

The fairy tales, the stories, at the dawn of humanity was needed to recognize, ritualize and defeat the real and imaginary dangers, to reconnect with nature. Even with the advent of the novel, the narrative has maintained, according W. Benjamin, its function: "on the one hand the meaning of life, the other the moral of the story". Damien offers this in the exhibition, a fairy tale and a game, that ridiscute a large part of contemporary art that instead brings to the concept, to the minimalism of the artistic gesture and of the space that contains it. Here is the provocation of the treasures from the wreck of the unbelievable, the real controversial point and the novelty. Certainly coming out of this experience, the public cannot say, "This I could do it myself." It may pleasure at the Market?

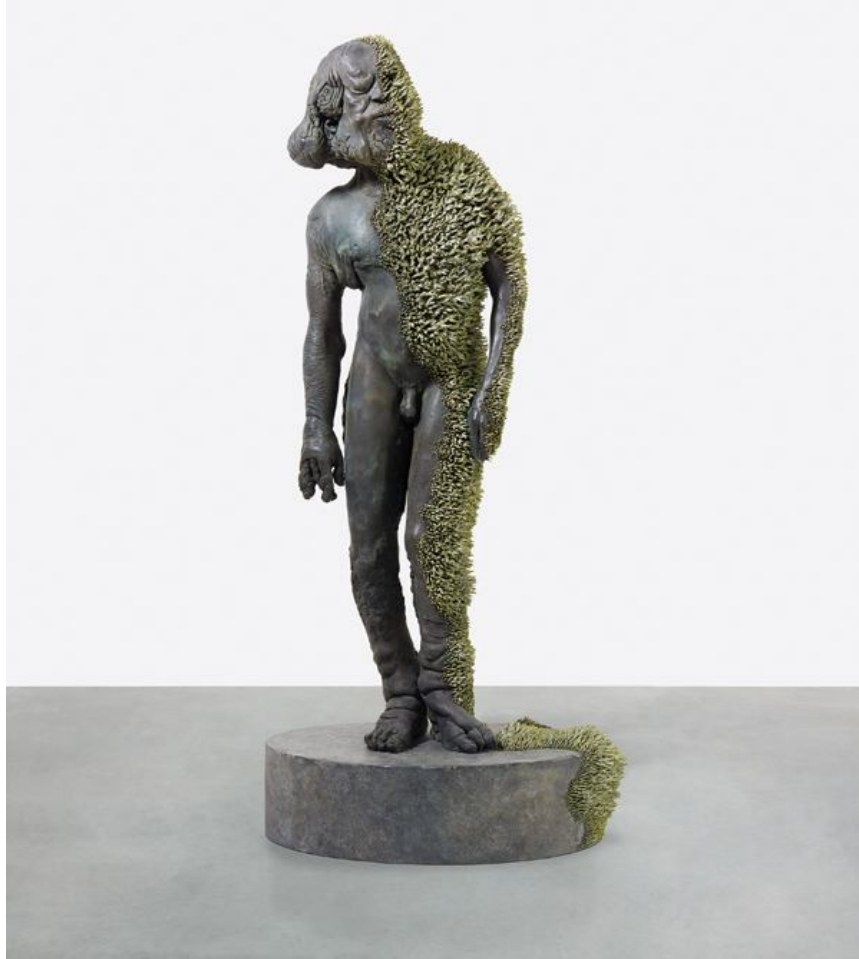












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