

'Spot' On

Don't try to connect Damien Hirst's dots—the joy is in their inscrutable detachment

By Cynthia Behr Warso

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Damien Hirst. Every mention of the blockbuster British artist is preceded or followed by a reference to his level of artistic merit (or lack of), his personal ethics (or lack of), his wealth (no lack of), notoriety (no lack of) and the art market conditions of the last several decades that drove fine art prices sky high (of which he was a major beneficiary). Love him or hate him, Hirst is one of the world's most famous living artists.

Michele Quinn of MCQ Fine Art Advisory is bringing his art Downtown with *40 Spot Woodcuts* from his 2011-2012 series. You shouldn't miss it.

The exhibition is modest compared to Hirst's infamous \$12 million shark preserved in a vitrine ("The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living," 1991), or his sculpture of a human skull bedazzled with more than 8,500 diamonds ("For the Love of God," 2007). The *Spots* are circles of color: isolated, contained, coolly abstract and minimalist. As opposed to Hirst's more outrageous pieces, this is the kind of art that can trigger a complete emotional disconnect. Amplifying the effect, Hirst's elegant prints betray no trace of the artist's hand, which isn't surprising considering his oeuvre and his penchant for outsourcing to assistants.

These woodcuts leave no room for commentary of the usual sort—for the kinds of feelings they evoke in the viewer or any other experiential bonbon. The briefest description should suffice: Hirst's colorful *Spots* appear solo or in symmetrical arrays. Don't go looking to find yourself.

In art, human beings like a face. We long to see ourselves reflected back, and we want to lock eyes—even if only with the orbital sockets of a skull or the opaque peepers of a dead shark. Now we thrill to the stalking behavior of ravenous international art buyers. If it isn't personal, visceral or vicious, we feel no passion for it at all. Which brings us back to those indefatigable, inhuman *Spots*.

The titles are perhaps the most immediately relatable thing about the pieces in this show. Who hasn't popped a pill out of a sanitary foil pack? Help yourself to a bright orange "Mepartricin" (12 by 12 inches), or fill a placebo prescription for some multicolored "Isovanillin" (19.5 by 25 inches).

These *Spot* prints are also reminiscent of candy dots stuck on paper strips.

It's possible to imagine Hirst's entire body of work reduced and encapsulated in the *Spot* series: organic matter compounded into some kind of shaman's medicine bundle based on an inexplicable binary code, and made solely to be consumed. Sickness, side effect or cure depend entirely on one's point of view.

40 Spot Woodcuts by Damien Hirst at MCQ Fine Art, 620 S. Seventh St., noon-5 p.m. Mon-Fri through April 26, opening party 5-7 p.m. Jan. 31, 366-9339, MCQFineArt.com