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VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Damien Hirst
[Duration 2:06]

Patrick Elliott, Chief Curator, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh:

Damien Hirst is dealing with, always with life and death. And it comes in a way out of Francis Bacon and Andy Warhol, those are his two big heroes. Bacon is dealing with man as meat and Warhol is dealing with his very sort of logo-like, sharp, punchy images. And Damien Hirst has managed to combine the two together in these works, which also deal with life and death. Sometimes literally. The works in the exhibition include butterflies pasted sort of on to huge oil paintings. There's the sheep in formaldehyde. It looks like it's alive, it's sort of skipping along, but in fact of course it's dead. There are all these pharmaceutical packages which are for the living to fend off death. And another thing that he's deeply interested in is religion, which isn't so often mentioned I think when Damien Hirst's work is discussed. He grew up in a strict sort of Catholic household as well, he had a Catholic upbringing, so this feeds into his work very strongly. For example the sheep that's in formaldehyde is in fact a lamb, and so that's obviously got strong Christian connotations. But also the way he uses pharmaceutical products as barriers towards death. I think in the past where we might have gone along to a priest for a consultation if we were worried about death or something, now you go along to a doctor. So he's very, very cleverly mixed these ideas of life, death, religion, drugs, Francis Bacon, Warhol, and he's sort of holding all these ideas up in the air in this amazingly punchy way. But I also think they've got great length to them, I think they're very interesting ideas, which aren't just sort of glamorous cheap tricks. I think they're very complicated serious issues that he's dealing with. I don't think he's given quite enough credit for the seriousness of his art. Or in fact for the humour of his art, and it's supposed to be funny.