

Damien Hirst

Cherry Blossoms

The Foundation Cartier pour l'art contemporain

261, boulevard Raspail 75014 Paris

6 July 2021 – 2 January 2022

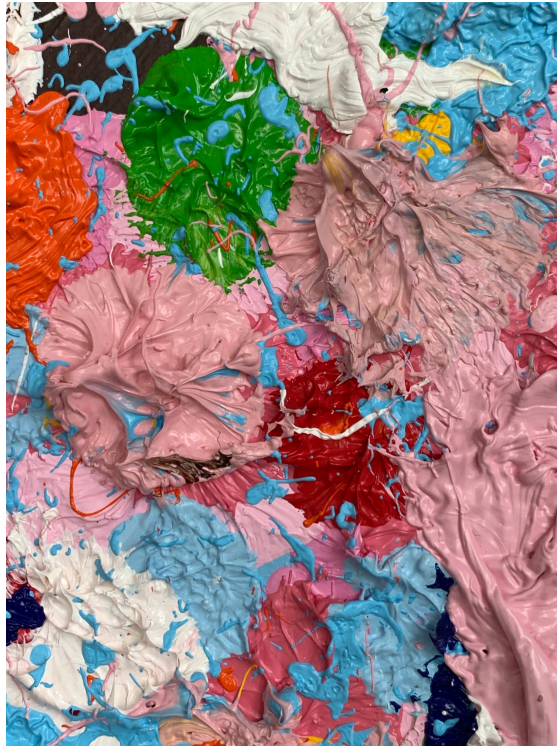
Published at *Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art*

<https://whitehotmagazine.com/articles/cartier-pour-l-art-contemporain/5095>



Renewal Blossom (2018) Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates.

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*Cherry Blossom (detail) (2019) Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates.
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View of the exhibition Damien Hirst Cherry Blossoms photo by Thibaut Voisin

“I wanted to distance myself from the physical aspect of painting . . . to adopt an intellectual stance with respect to every artist’s servitude to manual craft.” —Marcel Duchamp

Cravenly conceptually vapid, eye-candy schmaltzy and sadly cynically Populist—Damien Hirst’s doleful, trite, and tacky exhibition of thirty *Cherry Blossoms* paintings is the response to a 2019 invitation by Hervé Chandès, General Director of the Fondation Cartier. High examples of zombie representational kitsch may be the right way of describing these thirty puffy

exercises in the repetitive dab. Regret would be the reasonable response.

Clunky and exceedingly crude—all painted in a similar poppycock palette—*Cherry Blossoms* wants to (and claims to) absorb the spectator into the pretty paintings. But if you know and love good immersive art and/or good painting, they do quite the opposite. Seeing this minor show—striving so hard to make you happy—even if only for under five minutes, as I did, can leave you feeling bilious—like you ate an entire bag of Gummy Bears. It is an endless spread of bright colored dabs—and not enough of anything else. Pass the hot pink Pepto-Bismol please.

As paintings they are ham-fisted, conceptually pointless, brash in scale only, obstreperous, high-delusional bombast that lack invention, intelligence, and sensitivity. They make the case for those that say (wrongly) that painting is as dead as a door nail.

Certainly this turgid display does nothing to change my critical evaluation of Hirst as just another epitome of excess. Indeed, this exorbitant lowering of the mannerist bar had me pitying him. Hirst must be a glutton for dream castigation scenes.

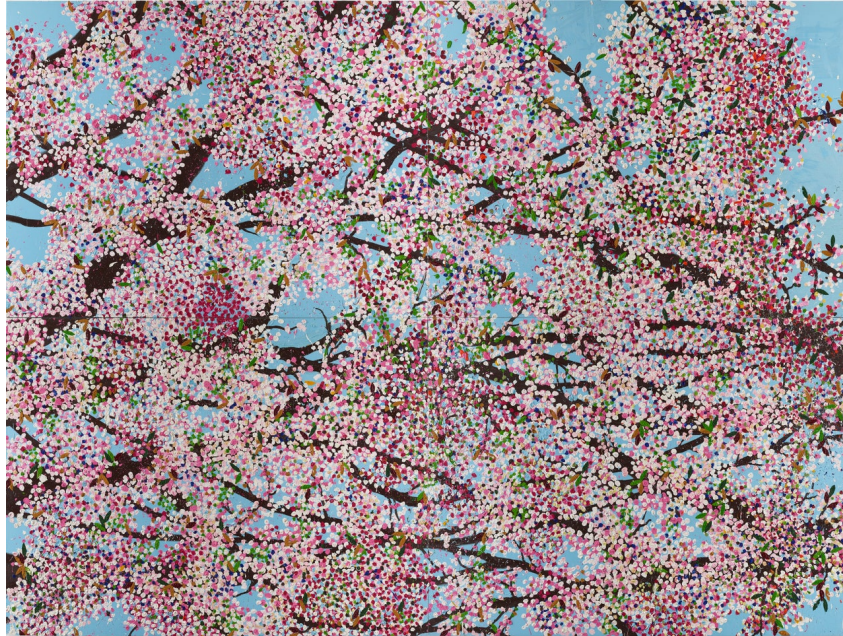
May I moan again here about Marcia Tucker for launching her “Bad” Painting movement? I may.

Bombastic hype is expected by this media superstar. Good work, is, alas, apparently out of the question. The paintings are intolerably pedantic. There is something corny, boring, and dull about *Cherry Blossoms*, because the paintings are too self-involved to even play the coy (and tired) game of fake-crushing the “high art/popular culture” divide. The work is simply low art by those standards. (I have an anathema for that postmodern Pabulum, anyway.)

The work’s screaming pink color display does not create an estrangement—or distancing effect—that might draw the mind into an attitude of appreciation. There is no color defamiliarization going on here that might offer other critical judgments besides regarding these pointless Pointillist paintings as a form of anti-intellectualism. Worse, the gross gargantuan scale of these abysmal canvases performs an ill proportioned psychic dominance over the viewer. We are expected to be impressed. But as I navigated the immense galleries containing these immense—ludicrous—indulgent paintings, the same disappointment, typical of our era of

depressed expectations, occurs: I am expected to not see these cliché fake gestures as only empty grandeur. Yet I do.

Joseph Nechvatal



*The Triumph of Death Blossom (2019) Photographed by Prudence Cuming Associates.
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