

Enter Symbol: US Quote Charts NewsFind Symbol:

NEWS & COMMENTARY: CULTURE

- ▶ Top Worldwide
- ▶ Regions
- ▶ Markets
- ▶ Economy/Politics
- ▶ Commentary
- ▶ Sports
- ▶ Culture

Culture

▶ E-Mail This Story ▶ Printer-Friendly Format

Damien Hirst Talks About Books, Elephants, Drinking, Dead Pets

RESOURCES:

- Bloomberg TV
- Bloomberg Radio
- Markets

(The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of Bloomberg.)

By Carol Kino

June 24 (Bloomberg) -- Damien Hirst, 40, has annoyed and intrigued the art world ever since his pickled tiger shark appeared at London's Saatchi Gallery in 1992.

Since then, Hirst has stayed in the news along with his media mogul patron. Artifacts from Hirst's London bar, Pharmacy, brought \$20 million at Sotheby's in London last fall. Charles Saatchi sold the shark to the New York collector Steven Cohen for a sum reported to be as much as \$12 million earlier this year.

New ventures for Hirst include a Devon seaside restaurant, the Quay, which opened in June 2004, and book publishing. "From the Cradle to the Grave," a collection of Hirst's drawings, appeared in the U.S. in March and his painting catalog, "The Elusive Truth," is now available through Gagolian. "I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, with Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now," a 1997 pop-up book, will be re-released in September. Books by other artists will follow.

Such is his productivity, he employs assistants in the time-hallowed tradition of Renaissance masters.

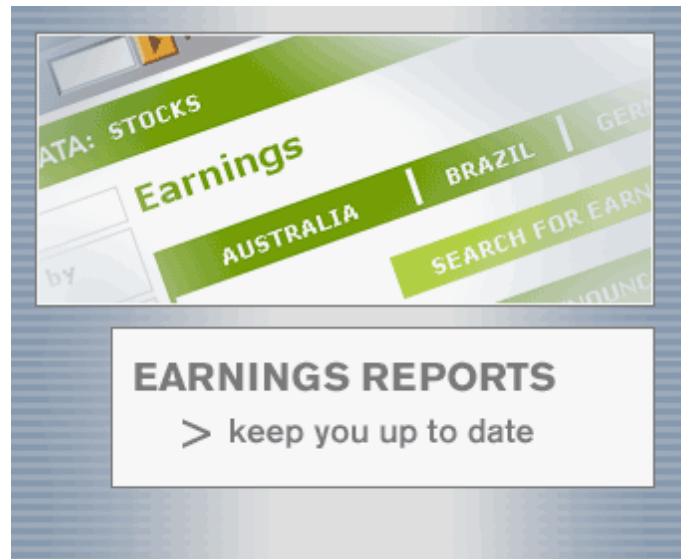
Hirst recently spoke with Bloomberg's Carol Kino by telephone from his home in Devon, where he lives with his longtime partner, Maia Norman, and their two sons. They're expecting a third child in September.

Dead Elephant

Kino: How did your drawing book come about?

Hirst: I've never really thought of the drawings as art -- I've always been into the look of the finished thing. But now that I've got more of a following, friends said I should exhibit them, and I just thought it would be a good idea to make a record.

Drawings are a brilliant way to work out things before you make them. If I was going to put an elephant in formaldehyde, I've got to go and get an elephant, which is a very difficult thing. But if you draw it on a piece of paper, it's like an aid to visualizing. You don't want to end up with a massive expense and a big tank and loads of water and a dead elephant, and find you don't actually like it.



Kino: You've been producing books for a few years through your company Other Criteria, but suddenly your program seems to have ramped up dramatically. Why's that?

Hirst: I've stopped drinking, which gives me a lot more extra time than in the past.

I think books are great. After the exhibition, the book is the only thing to remember it by. It's a very old-fashioned way of communicating.

Helping Hands

Kino: When did you start using assistants to make your work?

Hirst: As soon as I got a little bit of money. I'd have an idea like the spot paintings, which were going to be an endless series. I painted five and it was a big effort. I thought, "I don't want to do this forever," and I had friends who needed money. It put us all on a bit of an equal footing as well, so we could all go to the wine bar instead of the pub.

Art seems to be more popular today; there's this element of being kind of a rock star. Even the prices seem to be a lot higher than they were in the past, so that brings a whole set of fears. You can't really look at the past and say, "How would Picasso have dealt with this?" -- because he didn't really have to.

Kino: What's it like to run a studio?

Hirst: You know what people say, there's no "I" in team. You lose a kind of personal touch, which is maybe why I like Goya and Soutine, because they have that. I sometimes think I should get rid of all this and just paint. But because I've got a responsibility for all the people who work for me, I'd never do that now.

Buying Back Works

Kino: You recently bought back many of your works from Saatchi? Why did he agree to the deal?

Hirst: The only thing I could come up with was that I offered the most money. I had just had a big show in London that sold out, so instead of going out and buying sweets, I just bought it back. It was very strange, because there were two medicine cabinets which I'd sold for 500 pounds each and they came back for 500,000 pounds each, like long-lost children.

Kino: Will you keep some of the work you bought back or are you selling it all?

Hirst: Oh, no, I'm going to keep it all. I'm looking at trust funds. If the kids do OK, maybe I'll give it to some museum. I'm just trying to find a way that I can make sure that my kids are all right. You don't want it to screw them up, do you? You don't want them to sell it all to buy heroin.

Dead or Alive

Kino: Do you live with any of your animals, either living or dead?

Hirst: I've got three ponies, called Amnit, Tiny and Bramble; one dog called Lucy; two other dogs called Moses and Claudine; and my cats, Mole, Ethel and Stanley. And I've got three dead ones in the freezer that need to be buried -- two cats and a rabbit that died in the last six months.

Kino: Why do you keep them in the freezer?

Hirst: Because Maia, my partner, wants a proper funeral, and we haven't got around to it yet.

"From the Cradle to the Grave" (\$330 unsigned, \$560 signed and numbered) and "I Want to Spend the Rest of My Life Everywhere, with Everyone, One to One, Always, Forever, Now" (\$100) are published by Harry N. Abrams Inc. in the U.S. and Booth-Clibborn Editions in the U.K. "The Elusive Truth" (\$250) is available through Gagosian Gallery.

Last Updated: June 24, 2005 00:06 EDT