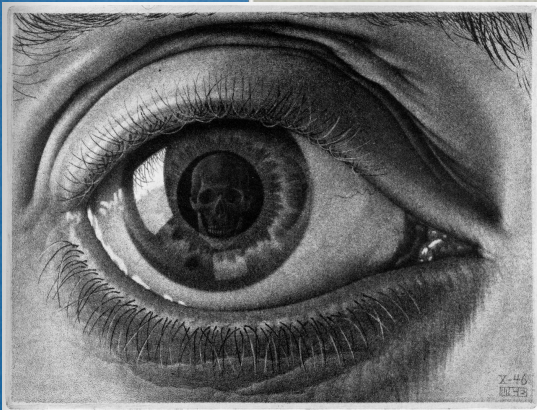


# Comparative Study

MC Esher and Damien Hirst

By: Tabea Kleibs





# Comparative study

“You can try and avoid [death], but it’s such a big thing that you can’t. That’s the frightening thing [...]” – *Damien Hirst (Interview)*

I have decided to explore the idea of death for my comparative study, as death is an omnipresent issue, which influences society today as well as it did 70 years ago. Furthermore, the exploration of death creates an open gate of investigation regarding the cultural contexts, functions and purposes of death in these pieces. This comparative study therefore explores how these three pieces, two by Damien Hirst and one by M.C. Escher, reflect the idea of death, and how they share similarities as well as differences regarding this main theme. Whilst all pieces contain the same concept of death, have a similar color scheme and reveal a similar mood, they vary within the cultural contexts and time periods, which leaves the pieces with different purposes and functions. Whilst the first impression of Escher’s ‘Eye’ demonstrates the idea of having experienced death, Hirst’s ‘For the Love of God’ seems to portray a beautiful and expensive side to death, whilst ‘The Void’ primarily creates the impression of looking at a pharmacy with different drugs/pills. Yet, the first impression doesn’t always have to be the right one, which I will explore in this comparative study.

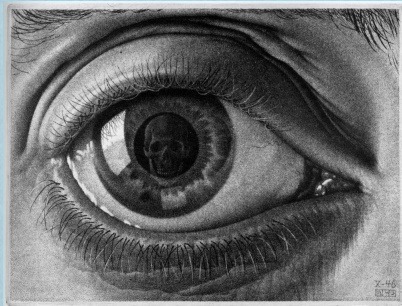
“Eye”

Year: 1946

Size: 31.7 x 31.9 (cm)

Media: Mezzotint and dry point

Source: Human Eye Drawings from the Masters. Digital Image. Craftsy. Craftsy and Sympoz, 17 June 2013. Web. 1 October 2015.



Surrealism (post World War 2)

M.C. Escher  
(Maurits Cornelius Escher)

“For the Love of God”

Year: 2007

Size: 171 x 127 x 190 mm | 6.7 x 5 x 7.5 in

Media: Platinum, diamonds and human teeth

Source: Hirst, Damien. *For The Love of God*. 2007. Damien Hirst. *Damien Hirst*. Web. 1 October 2015.



Contemporary art

Damien Hirst

“The Void”

Year: 2000

Size: 2360 x 4710 x 110 mm | 92.9 x 185.4 x 4.3 in

Media: Glass, stainless steel, steel, aluminium, nickel, bismuth and cast resin, coloured plaster and painted pills with dry transfers.

Source: Hirst, Damien. *The Void*. 2000. Damien Hirst. *Damien Hirst*. Web. 1 October 2015.



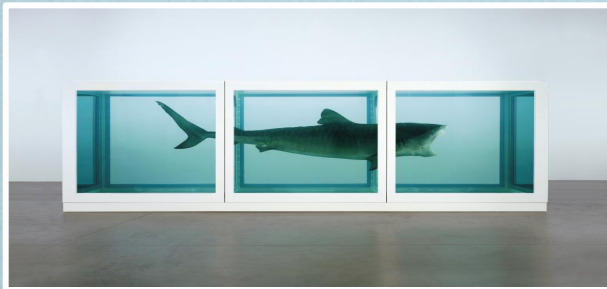


# Introduction to Damien Hirst

Damien Hirst, a “[...] morbid child” always showed interest in “the grisly and gruesome aspect of life” and was “[...] fascinated by the images of disease and injury” – *Damien Hirst Biography*

## Damien Hirst:

- ❖ Hirst's history includes artists, which came from the BA fine art course at Goldsmith.
  - ❖ In the 1980's
- ❖ This included: Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin, Jake, Dinos Chapman and more.
- ❖ Damien Hirst was influenced by the YBA movement:
  - ❖ The use of shocking imagery and openness towards the material and process.
  - ❖ It abolished the traditional separation of media into painting, sculpture, printmaking etc.
- ❖ His religious upbringing contributing to the art work that he later on produced (Biography Editors).
- ❖ From this, Damien Hirst created a “zoo of dead animals” (‘Like People, Like Flies’).
  - ❖ Presented it in the ‘Young British Artists I’ exhibition.



Name: The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living  
Year: 1991  
Media: Glass, painted steel, silicone, monofilament, shark and formaldehyde solution  
Size: 2170 x 5420 x 1800 mm | 85.5 x 213.4 x 70.9 inch  
Source: Hirst, Damien. *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*. 1991. Damien Hirst. *Damien Hirst*. Web. 1 October 2015.

## The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living, 1991

- ❖ Representation of the main theme: death
- ❖ A shock effect is presented: Seeing a shark preserved and out of its natural habitat, as well as the overall image of a shark, with a scale of 2.17 x 5.42 x 1.8 metres, might be frightening enough.
  - ❖ The shark seems to be attacking something, as seen by its open mouth.
  - ❖ There is a significance in the fact, that the shark won't decay or pass away. Yet the shark is dead and has been killed, by an Australian fisherman.
  - ❖ The preservation is a contrast to the theme of death, as the preservation hinders the animal of decaying, therefore it's still present after its death rather than being gone.
- ❖ This was Hirst's first and original idea, from which other extreme ideas developed.

## Sensation exhibition:

- ❖ Brought together by Charles Saatchi
- ❖ First brought together by September – December 1997
- ❖ At the Royal Academy of Art, London
- ❖ Included 42 pieces of other YBA movement candidates including ‘The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living’



# “For the Love of God”

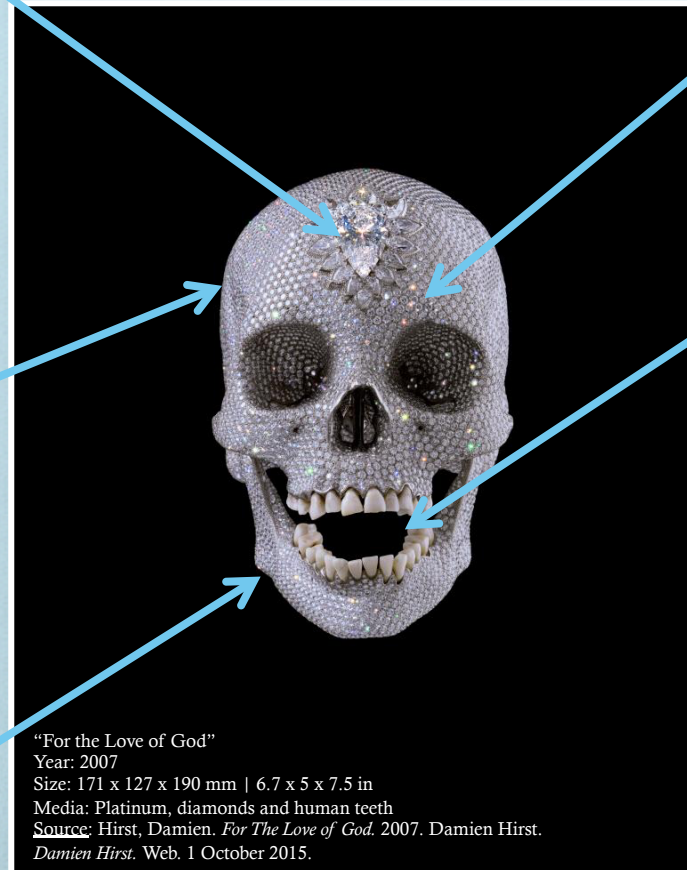
“Death is said to be so negative, it had to be something positive, ridiculous in it’s perfection”  
(Hirst, “For the Love of God”)

- ❖ ‘For the Love of God’ has reference to ‘The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living’
  - ❖ Since it was Hirst’s first extreme idea, from which this one developed

## The use of Media:

- ❖ The diamonds present a permanent state:
  - ❖ Diamonds won’t change over time, paint would.

- ❖ The diamonds come from the Aztec inspiration (see slide 5).
- ❖ Futuristic touch: the skull reminds of sci-fi.
  - ❖ Creating a contrast between death and the bright diamonds
- ❖ Shocking Art detected: use of real teeth
  - extreme idea: YBA
  - ❖ Openness to material
  - ❖ Abolishment of original media idea



- ❖ The skull portrays an association to religion, referring to different cultures and their religions in association with death (slide 5).
  - ❖ This choice of a piece can furthermore come from Hirst’s religious upbringing.
- ❖ Skull not as negative as the overall concept of death portrays it.
  - ❖ It is not dark and dull, but rather bright and shiny
  - ❖ This presents a dichotomy.
- ❖ Big diamond is the focal point, which is set against the black background
  - ❖ This places emphasis on the bright diamonds, which is a contrast of the piece.

- ❖ Chiaroscuro effect: contrast between the shining diamonds and the dark background, places the skull in the center of attraction

## Diamonds:

- ❖ The big diamond seems unique:
  - ❖ Resemblance to the YBA movement, the outstanding diamond is different to the other ones; just like the movement, as it differed from other movements
  - ❖ Diamonds wanting to make death look pretty

“Maximum that can be put against death”

(Hirst, “For the Love of God”)

- ❖ Diamonds acting as a reflection
  - ❖ Reflecting death
  - ❖ Death apposed with negativity, stones are positive and stand for beauty

- ❖ There is a link between the ‘Day of The Dead’ and the skull decoration:

- ❖ Showing the beauty of death.

- ❖ Diamonds are expensive, which could be interpreted, as the death that is cherished due to its value:

- ❖ It immortalizes it.

- ❖ Strong and powerful through platinum use and diamonds

- ❖ Death unavoidable
- ❖ Not able to overcome it
- ❖ The skull is therefore dead but not gone



# Observation and celebration of death in other cultures

## The celebration of the dead:

- ❖ Skulls are an important symbol of death and sacrifice in most cultures, especially in Mexico.
- ❖ The Mexican culture celebrates the arrival of the dead spirits, ancestors, with the use of flowers and decorations.
  - ❖ Especially through the decoration of skull.
- ❖ This culture celebrates the “Day Of The Dead” or “El Día de Los Muertos”.
- ❖ Skeletons and skulls were important symbols of death and sacrifice in the pre-Columbian period.
  - ❖ *Sugar skulls* are candies, made from sugar cane, sold to kids on the festival.
  - ❖ *Clay skulls* also resemble the shape of a skull and are often used for decorative purposes; for example the decoration of the ‘ofrendas’ – the family altars.
- ❖ There is an overall idea of the embellishment of the skull.

## For the Love of God

“[...] with inspiration drawn from Aztec skulls and the Mexican love for decoration and attitude towards death.”  
(Hirst, “For the Love of God”)

## cultures

### The connection to Damien Hirst:

- ❖ Damien Hirst has reflected the idea of the Mexican portrayal of death in his work.
- It “Acts as a reminder that our existence on earth is transient”  
(Hirst, “For the Love of God”)
- ❖ Through his artwork, Damien Hirst is trying to show, that just like the skull, no one's life is permanent. This idea however, is somewhat preserved through the embellishment of the skull.
  - ❖ The decorations on the skull, the diamonds, seem to make death more bearable and even beautiful.
  - ❖ A correlation can therefore be found between the decorations of sugar skulls in Mexico, and the decoration used by Damien Hirst.
    - ❖ Both are used to make death seem less sad and dull, but rather attractive.

Examples of sugar cane skulls used in the Mexican culture

Source: Mexican Sugar Skulls. Digital Image. *Intimate Weddings*. Intimate Weddings, 29 October 2009. Web. 1 October 2015.



### Aztec art:

- ❖ Hirst has furthermore taken inspiration from the Aztec arts.
- ❖ The Mosaic was believed to represent the creator god Tezcatlipoca, also referred to as ‘Smoking mirror’ (“Mosaic Mask of Tezcatlipoca.”)
- ❖ The mask itself is supposed to represent Quetzalcoatl, also referred to as ‘the feathered serpent’ or the rain god Tlaloc (“Aztec Mosaic Masks & Turquoise Double Headed Serpent Mosaic - The British Museum - London.”)
- ❖ The Aztec skull from the British museum is similar to Hirst’s ‘For the Love of God’:
  - ❖ The used mosaic pallets on the Aztec skull are similar to the diamonds used by Damien Hirst.
  - ❖ Just like the mosaic on the Aztec mask, the diamonds on Hirst’s piece are set onto the skull individually.

Source: The British Museum. *The Turquoise Mosaics*. 1400-1521. The British Museum, London. *The British Museum*. Web. 1 October 2015. →



Aztec/Mixtec  
15th-16th century AD From Mexico  
Height: 17.3 cm Width: 16.7 cm



# “The Void”

- ❖ Every pill could mean something different
- ❖ There is an association with death:
  - ❖ Taking the pills could suppress reality, which stands in relation to the void.
  - ❖ The pills might allow to forget death, as they could have medical purposes; thereby death due to a disease can be prevented.
  - ❖ However it could also kill you, if the dose is too high or the pills are abused.
- ❖ Pills could also be the childhood fascination of disease and injury from Hirst.
- ❖ Colour scheme: cold, monochrome
  - ❖ Not pleasant
  - ❖ Hospital like
  - ❖ Confrontation with modern medicine
- ❖ Representation of someone's emptiness.

- ❖ The Pills could be a preservation of death
- ❖ They could furthermore stand for a stage between life and death – the pills can prevent death, as they might help cure a sickness etc. They thereby stand between the death of someone, if they aren't taken, and their life.

- ❖ Pills are reflected within the glass, which could refer to the unlimited amount of drugs present, but the fact that death is still inevitable.
  - ❖ Slight dizziness that is caused by the use of compact rows in relation to the big piece.
- ❖ Pills are separately placed into the shelves on the piece creating variation and individualism amongst them.

❖ ‘The Void’ uses many different pills, which could stand for the removal of emptiness in various ways.

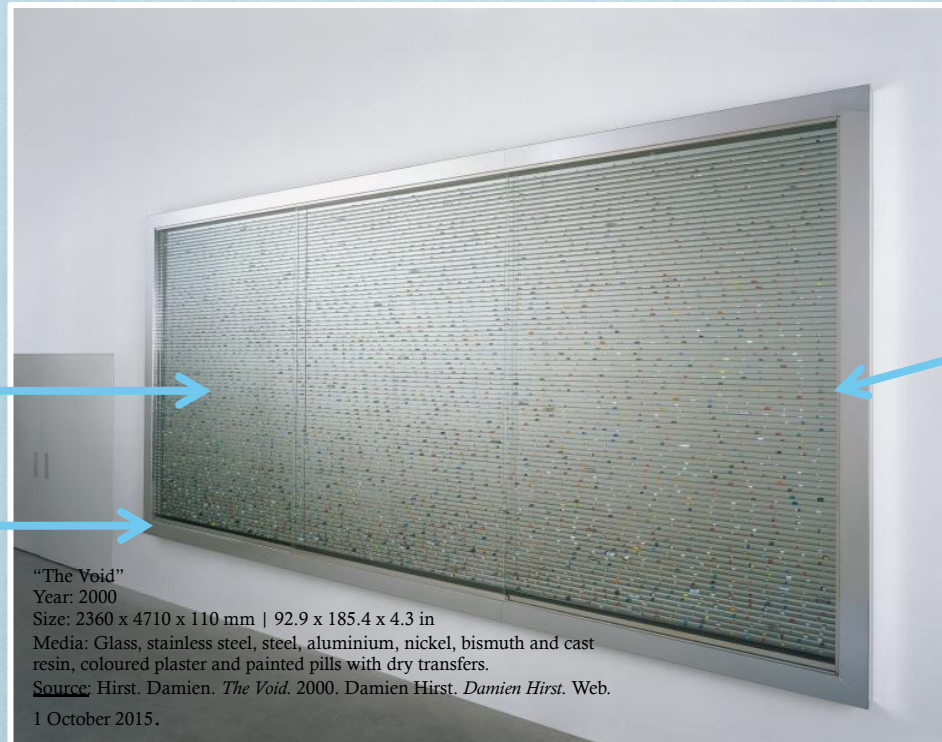


## Pills:

- ❖ Could represent different ways of dying: as every pill could have a different effect.
- ❖ Can however also be seen as help/prevention of death. It can thereby be seen as a type of medication.
- ❖ Lines: “[work] like a grid [...]” Creating a “balance between the lines, the [piece] gets much darker [...] it pulls you in, or the space pulls you in – and keeps you out equally” (Hirst, “Hoyland and Hirst”).

## Material:

- ❖ The material used differs from the usual material someone would have used: ex. acrylics.
- ❖ The different use of media refers back to the YBA movement and their shock tactics.
  - ❖ The media allows an individual interpretation of the piece – own interpretation of what the pills are standing for.



“[...] the aesthetic allure of the pills is rendered useless in the face of their unknown medical purpose” (Hirst, “The Void”).

→ Easy interpretation: we don't know what the pills are for, they are simply used for their looks.



# Beckmann's idea of the Void

## Max Beckmann 1884-1950:

- ❖ Beckmann was a German painter and printmaker.
- ❖ He is known for exploring the human condition in portraits, self portraits and mysterious allegorical paintings (Hess).

## Beckmann's Void :

Beckmann's description of 'The Void'

- ❖ The void is: "The space between the black canvas and the drawing" (Hirst, "Hoyland and Hirst").
  - ❖ Beckmann is hereby referring to his 373 prints, which were all done in black and white.
- ❖ The idea of using only black and white seems to have developed from his war time experience (World War 1)
  - ❖ This approach could be justified by the use of dark, dull and simple colors.
- ❖ The drawn "shapes become beings and seem comprehensible" to Beckmann in the 'great void' (Beckmann)
  - ❖ Beckmann calls the uncertainty of space, the 'space between black canvas and the drawing' God.

## Association to Hirst:

- ❖ Hirst's artwork 'The Void' is in response to Max Beckmann's idea of the void.
- ❖ Hirst described it as "something moving between yourself and Beckman's Void" (Hirst, "Hoyland and Hirst").
- ❖ For Hirst, the black canvas is the Void.
  - ❖ Hirst's work is therefore placed between him and the void – so the black canvas.

The rows of the shelves are presented like grids, that pull the audience into the artwork:

- Into the canvas
- And therefore into the void, meaning closer to god.

Audience having to take a closer look to identify the pills on the shelves, thereby drawing their attention into the piece further.

Hirst's adaption of Beckmann's Void

## Comparing Beckmann's Void to Hirst's:

- ❖ Hirst's piece is primarily made of shelves, which look like grids.
  - ❖ These are meant to draw the audience into the piece: allowing a further and closer look.
  - ❖ This therefore leads to the audience being closer to god, as they are closer to the void, (according to Beckmann's interpretation.
- ❖ A similar approach can be said about the pills, as they draw the audience closer to the piece. They are thereby too, a tool of drawing people into the void and closer to god.
  - ❖ One pill can therefore lead to or represent the direct way towards God/heaven.

One pill might additionally represent the way to God/heaven. The suppression of reality through the use of drugs (medically or for abuse) could set you in trance.



# Function and Purpose – ‘For the Love of God’ & ‘The Void’

## BEAUTY IN DEATH

### For The Love of God:

- ❖ Through the inspiration of the Mexican tradition, Hirst is wanting to portray a different way of seeing death. ‘For The Love of God’ does this through the use of something lasting, that is furthermore of great value and presents a great contrast to the dark cliché of death: diamonds.
- ❖ ‘For The Love of God’ is focusing on the beautiful side of death, rather than portraying it as dull and gruesome. Hirst is thereby wanting to make something less desirable, more enduring and attractive. The Diamonds, which stand for great wealth, therefore add value to the message that is trying to be portrayed: death should be cherished as well as life.
  - ❖ Through the eyes of the audience as well as the curator however, there is still space for own interpretations regarding the use of the diamonds.



“The Void”

Year: 2000

Size: 2360 x 4710 x 110 mm | 92.9 x 185.4 x 4.3 in

Media: Glass, stainless steel, steel, aluminium, nickel, bismuth and cast resin, coloured plaster and painted pills with dry transfers.

Source: Hirst, Damien. *The Void*. 2000. Damien Hirst. *Damien Hirst*. Web. 1 October 2015.



“For the Love of God”

Year: 2007

Size: 171 x 127 x 190 mm | 6.7 x 5 x 7.5 in

Media: Platinum, diamonds and human teeth

Source: Hirst, Damien. *For The Love of God*. 2007.

Damien Hirst. *Damien Hirst*. Web. 1 October 2015.

## WAYS TO DIE OR DELAYING/PREVENTING DEATH

### The Void:

- ❖ Other than ‘For the Love of God’ this piece has a somewhat different purpose, however it can be interpreted in two ways, which can be analyzed by the viewer individually. It could represent a :
  - ❖ Medical use and can therefore be seen as help
  - ❖ Death in a contemporary way – through drug abuse

### Medical help:

- ❖ Through the help of drugs – medicine – that are presented on the shelf, people are able to cure sicknesses, make them better or prevent them for as long as possible.
- ❖ The variety of pills thereby stand for the different medications available

### Drug abuse:

- ❖ It contains a futuristic touch to it, therefore referring to modern death, : presenting the ‘modern way to die’.
  - ❖ Death through drug abuse, which is a modern day 21 Century problem.
  - ❖ The amount of pills thereby referring to the many and different ways of death.



# Comparison – “For the Love of God” and “The Void”

## SIMILARITIES

### CULTURAL CONTEXT:

- ❖ Remains the same for both pieces, since both are linked to the YBA movement in the 1980's. Both pieces stand for the main goal of Damien Hirst's YBA movement: the shock effect through the representation of known media.

### MEDIA:

- ❖ Even though the material may vary, both pieces have an unusual use of this, as the pills are usually a basic commodity, as well as the Diamonds. The skull and teeth isn't a basic commodity, yet, it isn't material every artist would consider.

### FORMAL ELEMENT:

- ❖ Both pieces hold a futuristic/temporary touch, as well as something confusing. In 'The Void' it is presented through the amount of pills in the various rows, as well as the material (the pills) overall, since the use of drugs is a 21 Century issue. 'For The Love of God' represents the futuristic aspect and the confusion through the large amount of shining diamonds.

### FUNCTION AND PURPOSE:

- ❖ This again relates to the shock effect that is in focus of Hirst's art pieces, as well as the free use of known media: 'real life' material and 3-Dimensional objects, such as the pills and the skull.

## DIFFERENCE

### 'The Void'

#### MEDIA

- ❖ Consists of mainly pills, placed on the art piece individually, which are however objects.

#### COMPOSITION

- ❖ The Void doesn't have a focal point: there is no center of attraction, as the piece presents a variety of objects to focus on. This can lie in association to the purpose of the piece, which are the different ways of interpreting it: the medical use or drug abuse.

#### REPRESENTATION OF THE MAIN THEME– DEATH

- ❖ The Void seems to represent contemporary infliction through drug abuse, and how many different deaths there are.

### 'For The Love of God'

#### MEDIA

- ❖ Here there is the use of a real skull in combination with diamonds: there is a greater shock effect through the use of the real skull.

#### COMPOSITION

- ❖ Consists an inconspicuous focal point, which is the big diamond in the middle of the forehead. The focal point in is significant, since it draws the audience's attention to it, and it represents an element which differs from the rest in the piece.

#### REPRESENTATION OF THE MAIN THEME– DEATH

- ❖ For The Love of God wants to symbolise death as a rather beautiful thing, and emphasises it's attention on making it look less morbid.

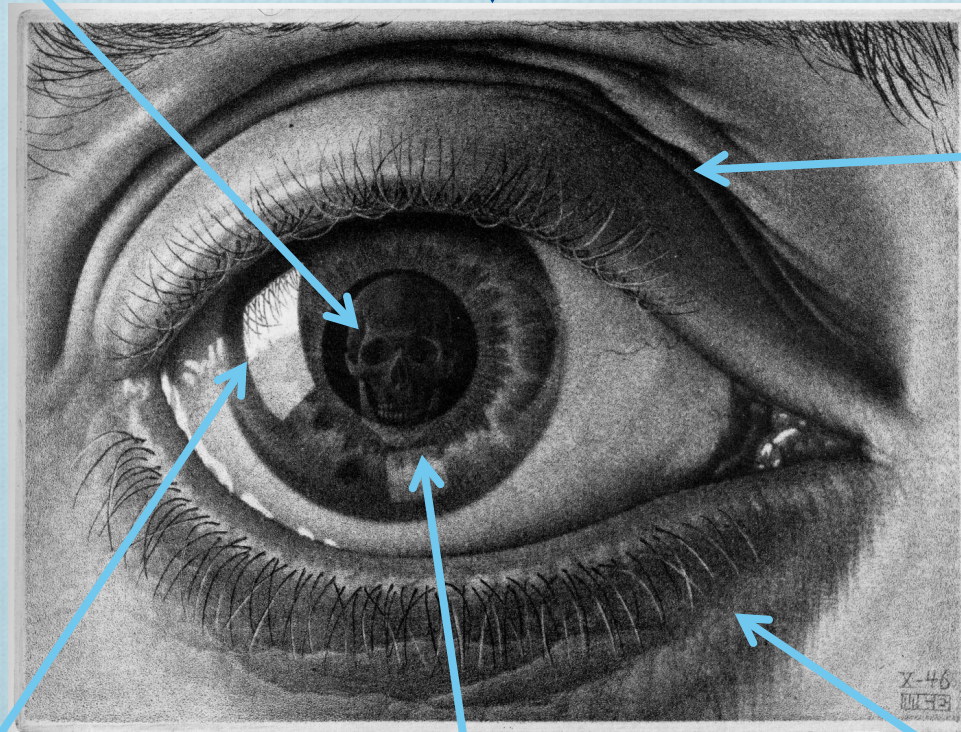


# “Eye” Analysis

Escher is “Teasing us with the one who watches over all of us, the fate of each of us, death” (“M.C. ESCHER”)

“Eye”  
Year: 1946  
Size: 31.7 x 31.9 (cm)  
Media: Mezzotint and dry point  
Source: Human Eye Drawings from the Masters. Digital Image. Craftsy. Craftsy and Sympoz, 17 June 2013. Web. 1 October 2015.

Colour: Dark, gray and monochrome colour reflecting darkness and sorrow of death and destruction. It makes the audience feel the cold atmosphere that must have been around.



❖ Reflection of death in the artist eye through the use of a skull:

- ❖ Focal point of the image
- ❖ Draws people's attention into the focal point—the center of the eye

❖ Death illusion in the eye relating to the post WW2 era

- ❖ Many people literally having to look death in the eye
- ❖ People having to face death

❖ The death represented in the eye could be in association with the death of Escher's teacher (Samuel de Mesquita) who died in WW2.

❖ Reflection of light:

- ❖ Cold touch to the image
- ❖ Light and dark contrast: chiaroscuro
- ❖ Makes the image live → suggesting how real the image is
- ❖ Just like death is real

❖ Iris intensely created → influencing the idea of death

❖ Round eye shape done by a convex shape mirror

- ❖ Draws people into the painting and into the focal point

- ❖ Closes into the vision

❖ Contextual fit: the author lets the audience be reflected in the eye

❖ The skull in the image is thereby representing the audience, just like someone would be reflected back, when looking into the pupil of someone else.

- ❖ Audience = death and skull

❖ Media: The etching is done very fine

❖ Also holds roughness

- ❖ Very cold and harsh strokes

- ❖ Creates a negative atmosphere

❖ Correlation between death and use of material



# The Cultural Context of Escher's "Eye"

## Surrealism:

- ❖ Surrealism was founded in Paris by a small group of writers, 1924 (up until the 1940's)
  - ❖ André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Juan Miró etc.
- ❖ They wanted to channel the unconscious to unlock the power of imagination.
- ❖ Expressing imagination as revealed in dreams:
  - ❖ Perception of reality; to generate a new set of imagery by liberating the creative power of the conscious mind.
  - ❖ This was stated after WW1, when artists wanted people to think further and beyond the war.
- ❖ Post World War 2
- ❖ Most influential avant-garde movement in 20<sup>th</sup> century art

## André Breton:

Defined surrealism as "Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express - verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner - the actual functioning of thought." – artists should seek access to their unconscious mind in order to make art inspired by this realm (The Art Story Contributors).

## Dada movement (1916-24)

- ❖ Was an anti war movement, which started in Zurich
- ❖ Arose after World War 1, and was a reaction to nationalism and rationalism.
- ❖ It was opposed to authoritarianism and an ideological leadership.
- ❖ Dada art wants to "demystify artwork in the populist sense", yet they allow self interpretation (Wolf).
- ❖ It wants to deconstruct daily experience; and show that in rebellious ways.
- ❖ There is a contrast in this art: seemingly silly art style with historical anti-war background and message.

## Nazi persecutions as part of Escher's history

- ❖ Escher was touched in a personal way:
  - ❖ His old teacher Samuel de Mesquita was persecuted in 1944, supposedly by Nazi officials.
- ❖ He had to move from place to place, due to the influence Nazis had around World War two.
- ❖ He then worked in collaboration with artists who opposed the Nazi regime.

## MC Escher – Surrealism, the Dada movement and Nazi Germany:

- ❖ Wasn't part of the surrealist movement
  - ❖ He wasn't associated with André Breton
- ❖ However, he portrays surrealism in his work since he works with perspective and illusion, shown by the reflection of the skull in the pupil.
- ❖ He furthermore portrays the idea of death by the skull itself
- ❖ The Dada movement is portrayed by the own interpretation behind the skull: is it the reflected audience? Is it something the artist sees?

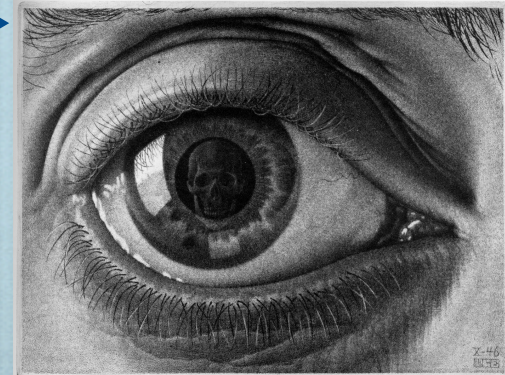
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# Cultural Context and its influence on Escher's Work



Political influence – post World War 1 (as well as later on WW2)

❖ Political influence – Led MC Escher to see what death was like and what consequences it can have on people's lives. Due to the political instability, Escher himself had to experience losses, later on leading him to create one of his most famous art works as it is an indirect representation of the result of WW1 and 2 on the artist, as well as many civilians at that time.

Dada movement (1916-24)

❖ The Dada movement enabled Escher to work with other artists who were opposing war and had faced war issues. The artworks showed people and scenes 'representationally' in order to have the form and movement analyzed. The Dada movement showed Escher, in what ways death can be portrayed. He later implemented this idea in his work, through the reflection of the skull in the pupil, which is open for interpretation as well as directing the audience onto a certain path: the idea of death.

Surrealist Movement 1924

❖ The Surrealist Movement was the first stage to Escher's famous art works. Just like the Dada movement, the surrealist movement contributed to Escher's art work, in the sense of how it is portrayed: using imagination to create the reflection in the eye, as well as understanding it as an imaginary reflection. Together with the Dada movement, it enables the audience an own interpretation, leaving room for imagination, with links however to reality. This can once again be seen through the use of the skull reflected in the pupil: the actual function and purpose of it is open, leaving room for imagination.

World War Two

Art Work 1946

❖ Finally, the movements and the political influence lead Escher to create his own art piece, based on the history of Europe and his personal experience of death and destruction.



# The function and Purpose of Escher's "Eye"

## NO ESCAPE FROM DEATH

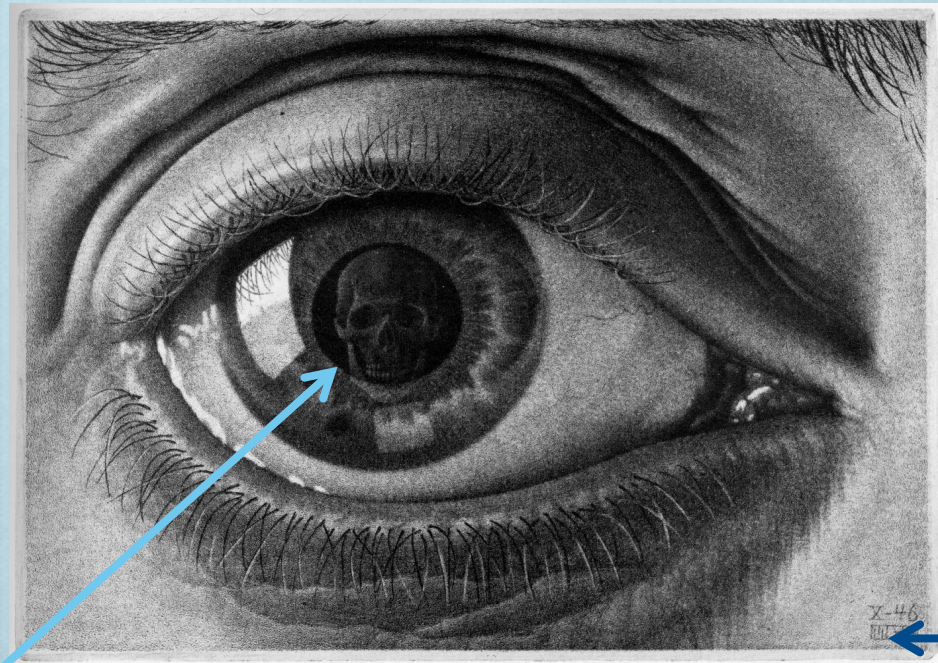
There are two interpretations regarding the purpose of Escher's piece and the skull and symbol of death in the pupil:

### Having to face death:

1. Escher is implying that everyone has to look death in the eye at some point, and that some people might fear death.
  - ❖ Everyone has to face death, as there is no escape from it.
  - ❖ However, some have to face it earlier as others, just like Escher's friend had to.
    - ❖ Some may die due to a sickness, others due to political conflicts (such as wars – Escher's teacher).
2. The skull in the pupil of the viewer (artist) might be the reflection of someone looking at them, perhaps even the audience themselves.
  - ❖ They are therefore the cause of death

### Death reflecting:

- ❖ The reflection in the eye might be the reflection of someone– in Escher's or someone else's – eye.
- ❖ Death can reflect off of individuals:
  - ❖ This can be due to the fact, that some people might be involved in, or the cause of other peoples death, such as the Nazis in World War 2.



The person (skull) that is reflected back from the pupil, might be dying or is already dead.

"Eye" Year: 1946 Size: 31.7 x 31.9 (cm) Media: Mezzotint and dry point  
Source: Human Eye Drawings from the Masters. Digital Image. Craftsy. Craftsy and Sympoz, 17 June 2013. Web. 1 October 2015.



# Comparison between Escher and Hirst

## MC. ESCHER

### Cultural Context

Escher's cultural context is based on surrealism and post WW2, as well as the political influence of the Nazis and their impact (death, war and fear), which was later inspiration for his work. Escher had artistic support and worked together with other artist (Dada movement).

### Function and Purpose

Escher focused on the the destruction caused by World War 1: two interpretations include, opening the eyes of the audience, that death cannot be escaped as well as letting the reflection in the eye of the artist (death) be the reflection of the audience, thereby implying, that the audience is the representation of death. In both ways however, the main theme, death, is portrayed negatively.

### Media:

The media that were used, are mezzotint and etchings with dark colors and textural elements. This was then printed, once the etching was done. The rather old and traditional media furthermore creates a rather dismal and dark mood.

### Formal elements:

Escher used textural differences in his point and included a clear focal point fore the audience to spot: the skull reflected in the eye of the artist. This therefore allows the viewer to assume the context, which is supported by the use of dark colors.

## DAMIEN HIRST

### Cultural Context

Damien Hirst was the founder of the YBA movement (went to art school, where the movement was based on) and was inspired by the shock tactics and different media use throughout his career. Hirst grew up religiously, contributing to his art work and his inspiration of death. He furthermore worked with other members of the YBA movement. Lastly, Hirst's ideas were inspired by pre-existing art pieces, such as the Aztec Mosaic mask and Beckmann's idea of the Void.

### Cultural Context

Both went to art school, worked with other artist, were involved in art movements and are inspired by death. Furthermore, the artist's lives had an impact on the pieces: Escher's war experience and Hirst's religious upbringing both relate back to death.

### Function and Purpose

Both have an obvious confrontation with death and associate death with the living through the objects: pills, skulls and eyes.

### Media:

Both artists used media, that aren't as commonly used: mezzotint and etchings as well as skulls with diamonds and pills on shelves. Also, both colour schemes are dull and the media overall outstanding and 3-Dimensional, once again setting the mood of the pieces towards the audience.

### Formal elements:

Both artists focused on a darker atmosphere and colour scheme, representing death. Escher does this more than Hirst however, since Hirst focuses more on a futuristic touch.

### Function and Purpose

Hirst's work contains the 'shock effect', showing the difference of his art, therefore displaying death in many ways: through preservation (re-using the skull, and as seen through the preserves shark) as well as the direct confrontation with the pills on the shelf (like in a pharmacy thereby implementing the medical use as well as having the abuse of drugs).

### Media:

Shocking media was used: a skull of a dead individual and their teeth as well as pills, which could really be used for anything. Real life material was therefore used.

### Formal elements:

In Hirst's work, the diamonds as well as the many rows of pills in the pharmacy shelves, create confusion and the media use creates a darker atmosphere. One piece also withholds a focal point ('For the Love of God'), which is the big diamond on the forehead of the skull, that is implying a futuristic touch. Also, 'The Void' includes a certain depth through the many rows of pills and creates a cold environment through the colour use, yet, it doesn't include a focal point.



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