

# Alejandra Tavolini - Damien Hirst

About the Study of the Protagonists

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If there is an artist that turned into a paradigmatic character in the contemporary art world, that would be Damien Hirst. During the 90's, he presented the series Natural History, where real dead animals were placed in big crystal containers; animals such as a shark in *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of the Living* (1991), a sheep in *Away from the Flock* (1994), a cow with its calf in *Mother and Child Divided* and a pig in *This little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed at home* (1996).

Back in 2007 and thousands of miles away from England, the Argentine artist Alejandra Tavolini, emulated Hirst's work by recreating Natural History but using puppets instead of dead animals. She reduced the scale almost to its minimum and placed in small crystal urns, also filled with formalin, all types of puppets as vivid reproductions of those cows, pigs, sharks, sheeps used by the British master.

*About the Study of the Protagonists* has an antecedent: the series *Fauna* developed since 2004, where puppets were created based on a conscious investigation of the real animal's anatomy. The artist established different stages to define the entire process: The first stage was focused in the elaboration. The puppets were totally black and the main features were just suggested. The special distribution of the padding, gave the animals a certain look of weakness and lack of vitality. In addition, they were treated with cutting elements, violently slashed and also crashed into the ground while the process of assemblage was taking place. The artist tormented those puppets as the real creatures were tormented by all kind of disgraces in their natural life. In a second stage, another group of puppets suffered new physiognomic changes: their bodies mutated, heads multiplied and extremities were modified as if they were under the effects of "genetic diseases".

*About the Study of the Protagonists* turned puppets into "scientific objects" from the very moment they were immersed into formalin and exposed to the scrupulous sight to judge them. But there isn't just a scientific interest in this investigation; it is also an invitation to meditate about the artist situation in the contemporary world.

Tavolini and Hirst represent both sides of the same coin. Tavolini created the exact same animals Hirst used, but not as fake versions but as examples that highlight the differences between two realities shown not only in the quality of the materials involved, the scales or complexity of the plastic elements used in those pieces. The main contrast lays in the relation between the working conditions and commercial circulation and approach to both works; the eternal conflict of the "first and third world production". Publicity, location, access and reception of art by the public in general, but from the critics and art dealers in particular whose valuation is aesthetical as well as economical, and decisive to turn them, or not, into wonders.

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