

NEWS

work of art. His was not a protest, but itself a "conceptual addition." He added mysteriously: "The idea of mortality is the inspiration to act" — a phrase surely destined to make a good Godalming folk splutter into their sherries.

A disappointment, then: What it really needs now is for Timothy Clifford to persuade his very good friend John Paul Getty II to buy the sheep for the nation and for Brian Sewell to attack it with a gallon of creosote. That really might rival *Whistler v Ruskin*.

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THE ATTACKER: Mark Bridger believed he was "continuing the artistic process"



Ink attack artist escapes with stain on his character

The case of the dead sheep exhibit raised questions of the public's response to art, says Jacqui Thornton



THE ARTIST: Damien Hirst wanted gallery visitors to "think about mortality"

AN ARTIST who poured black ink into Damien Hirst's exhibit of a dead sheep pickled in formaldehyde has been found guilty of criminal damage but will not have to pay compensation.

Mark Bridger, who said that he was seized by inspiration, was conditionally discharged for two years at Bow Street Magistrates' Court yesterday.

After a case dominated by questions of public response to unconventional art, stipendiary magistrate Mr Jeremy Cunnor told Bridger: "In more than two and a half centuries Bow Street has had countless 'less than usual' cases and this may be num-

bered among them in due time. I have to say I am entirely satisfied that this case has been proven. He made no order for compensation or costs.

After the hearing, Bridger, 33, from Shotover Hill, Oxford, who now teaches English to foreign students, said: "I wouldn't do it again but I don't regret it."

He had admitted opening the lid of the tank containing the sheep at the Serpentine Gallery and pouring in the ink before placing a label Mark Bridger, *Black Sheep*, May 9 1994 over the original title.

He claimed he was not damaging the piece, later sold for

£25,000, but was contributing to it by "continuing the artistic process" and, therefore, denied the charge of criminal damage.

Mr Chuck Nduko-Ere, prosecuting, said the exhibit — entitled *Away From The Flock* — cost £1,000 to restore to its original state. It is now in Helsinki.

Mr Hirst, a Berlin-based artist who has achieved popular recognition and aroused conflicting passions with his exhibits of a dead shark and a rotting cow's head, told the court yesterday that he wanted a "mental response" from the public but did not want anyone to interfere physically with it. "I wanted

them to think about themselves, about life... I wanted people to think about their own mortality." He said that comments in a magazine interview that he might have left the exhibit as it was after the incident if it were up to him were "light-hearted".

He said he would not have been surprised if some people reacted with horror but said if someone had asked to change it, his response would have been: "Mind your own business."

Mr Hirst, who described himself as a "conventional" artist, said that the exhibit had to be covered after the incident.

"I was worried that the damage

could have been more lasting. I didn't want to take the sculpture out of the exhibition. People worked late into the night so it was ready in the morning.

"It was an interference, but I wanted to get on top of it by concealing it. It was not quite the original work but I was happy with it. It is very, very almost imperceptibly darker."

"I think it is common knowledge that when you go to an art gallery you don't touch things."

Bridger told the court that he was overwhelmed by a feeling of *carpe diem* when he saw the sculpture on a day trip to London.

He said: "I saw the exhibit and

had the idea of changing it and calling it *Black Sheep*. I found the idea inspiring so I went off to Notting Hill to buy some materials and some ink."

"I did understand that the sculpture was intended to focus on mortality and was in a *carpe diem* frame of mind so, having had the inspiration, I was of the bold intention to act accordingly."

"I felt that was the appropriate way to act when inspired by the idea of mortality. To me *carpe diem* means tomorrow might not be available."

"I felt that whatever the consequences of the act I would not damage anybody or anything. It

was a positive idea." He added that he thought his action would "endorse" Mr Hirst's work and denied that he was attention seeking.

"If he was not pleased then I thought he would say 'this is life and death and, well, that's life'."

"I believe I would have had the artist's consent to do this. That was my innermost belief. It was a little optimistic."

After the hearing, Mr Hirst said he did not condone what Bridger had done, but was happy with the outcome of the case. He said: "It could have been a lot worse. Somebody could have decided to come in with a hammer."