

# ARTnews

MAY 2012

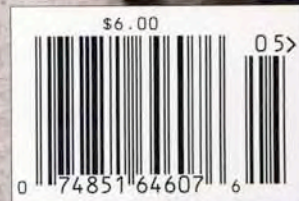
## Naked or Nude

Tango and Passion: Albers's Secret Nudes

**Tracey Emin: 'In a Rodin/Turner Sandwich'**

Pretty Ugly: Cézanne's Bathers

**Senior Moment: Depicting the Aging Body**





**T**RACEY EMIN FINDS HERSELF WITH ODD BED-fellows in an erotic new exhibition at Turner Contemporary, located in her childhood hometown of Margate, on the southeastern coast of England. The show brings together her own nude studies with those of Auguste Rodin and J. M. W. Turner. "It's quite impressive to be in a Rodin/Turner sandwich, and I do have to pinch myself when I think about it," says Emin.

Turner (famous for his tempestuous seascapes), Rodin (the master sculptor), and Emin (creator of in-your-face art that documents her own sex life, traumas, and longings) do not make an

**BY ELIZABETH FULLERTON**

obvious threesome, but they find some common ground in a shared fascination with female sexuality. Called

"She Lay Down Deep Beneath the Sea: Tracey Emin at Turner Contemporary," the exhibition opens on May 26 with around 120 works by Emin and about 20 by Turner and Rodin combined.

The curious confluence of artists came about naturally, as the gallery already had Rodin's *The Kiss* (1901–4) on a year loan from

# 'In a Rodin/Turner Sandwich'

**Tracey Emin** finds common ground with two unlikely predecessors in an erotic exhibition



Auguste Rodin's  
undated drawing *Dans le 7th ciel,*  
*couple de femme nues allongées.*



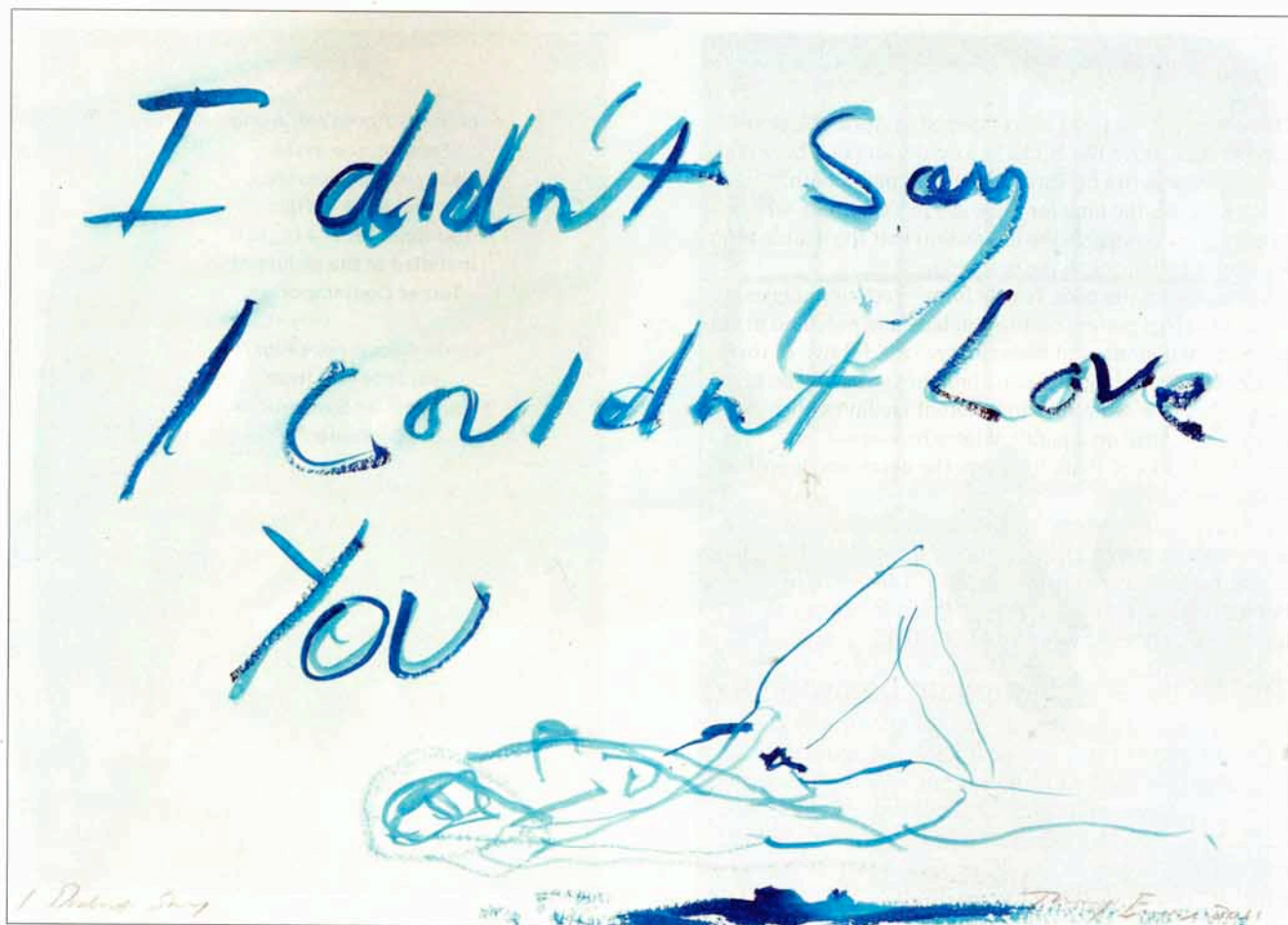
Tracey Emin in the seaside town of  
Margate, England.



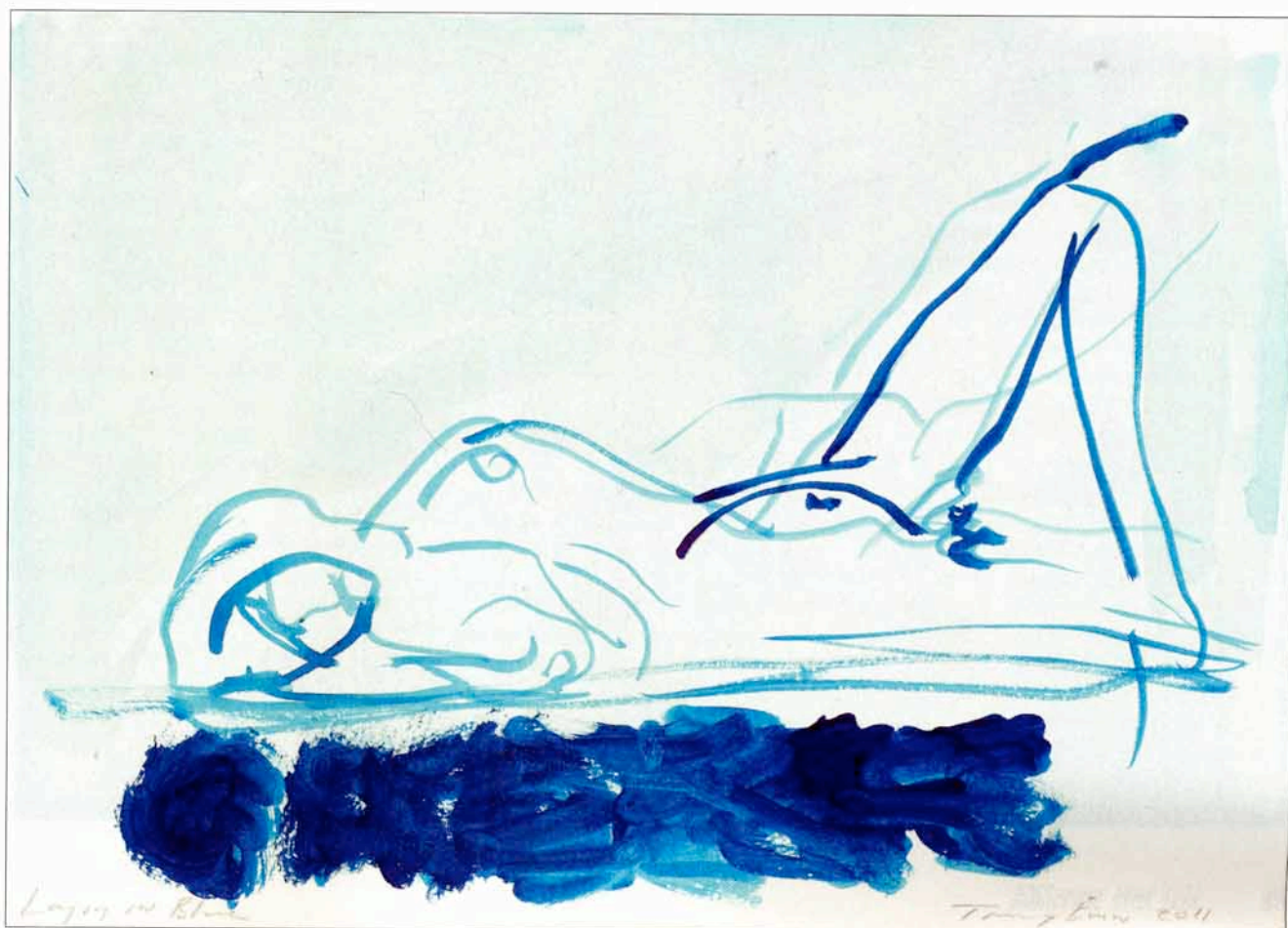
J. M. W. Turner's  
*A Sleeping Woman,*  
after 1830.

the Tate collection and is committed to exhibiting at all times at least one piece by Turner, who was a regular visitor to Margate. "It just felt like it would work to put the three of them together," says Victoria Pomery, director of Turner Contemporary. The David

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ABOVE *I Didn't Say*, 2011, by Emin. BELOW *Laying on Blue*, 2011. The strong blues in her recent work evoke Margate's waters.





Chipperfield-designed gallery opened in April of last year and perches above the North Sea on the site of a boarding house that was run by Turner's lover, Sophia Booth.

*The Kiss* sets the tone for the show in the atrium, whose sweeping windows give the impression that the marble lovers are almost embracing in the surf below.

Variations on the nude female form—reclining suggestively with legs parted, outlined in blue and executed in watercolor, monoprint, and embroidery—will fill two of three rooms devoted solely to Emin. The other room will be given over to her new sculptures in different mediums, including a tangled neon ball on a plinth, a large bronze cat, and mounted blocks of chalk found on the beach and inscribed with lines of text.

A small central gallery will hold nude drawings, sketches, and watercolors by all three artists. Among these is Turner's tender portrait of a woman sleeping—believed to be Booth—naked from the waist up, drawn in pencil and watercolor sometime between 1830 and 1835.

## The show is a triumphant homecoming

for Emin, who was born in London but moved with her family to Margate as a toddler. She left the town a rebellious teenager and returns a full-fledged member of the art establishment, as demonstrated by her appointment last year as professor of drawing at the Royal Academy of Arts in London and the hanging of one of her neon works in the prime minister's residence at Number 10 Downing Street. "I wanted

OPPOSITE Rodin's drawing

*Femme nue assise,  
aux jambes écartées,*  
ca. 1890 (left).

*The Kiss*, 1901–4 (right),  
installed in the atrium of  
Turner Contemporary.

BELOW *Recumbent Figure*,

ca. 1844–45, from  
"The Whalers Sketchbook,"  
by Turner.







to give Margate something new and exciting," she says.

The so-called Young British Artist, now 48, admits she is scared about bringing her new work to the town where she grew up. The site of her first sexual encounters, Margate has inspired much of her raw, confessional art, such as her appliquéd quilt *Mad Tracey from Margate, Everyone's Been There* (1997) and her monoprint *Fucking Down An Ally 16/5/95* (1995). But that blatantly sexual phase is over, Emin says. She now wants to emphasize sensuality, which for her has many layers of meaning. "There is very little in my life which is sexual or erotic," she explains. "It's more to do with memory. I'm more interested in love."

Subliminal references to the once-elegant resort town, whose promenade shops are now largely shuttered, are evident in the preponderance of blue in Emin's new material and in her neon works, which nod to the amusement arcades lining the forlorn seafront.

**For Turner, who attended school** in Margate briefly, it was the yellow sheen of the southern coastal light, and later his romance with Booth, that drew him frequently to the town. The posthumous discovery in 1857–58 of erotic drawings among Turner's bequest so appalled the famously buttoned-up English critic John Ruskin, a fervent admirer of the artist, that he reportedly burned some of the offending works in a bonfire, although the truth of this story remains unconfirmed.

"To find studies of the naked female form was to that generation shocking. They didn't necessarily connect it with

artistic practice," says Ian Warrell, a Turner expert and curator at Tate Britain, home to the world's largest Turner collection. The drawings, which depict studies of genitalia, nude women, and figures engaged in sex, were "just private ramblings" to test ideas, Warrell adds, and were never intended for public view.

The works by Emin and Rodin are more explicit. Rodin's drawings of naked women with their legs splayed or their bodies intertwined focus on female erotic pleasure, although these, too, were made for private consumption. "Rodin's drawings are more observational. . . . They're more fluid than Tracey's, and corporeal. He's a sculptor after all—whereas Tracey's have more psychological and personal intensity," says Catherine Lampert, a Rodin specialist and consulting curator who helped select the Rodin pieces in the show from the Musée Rodin in Paris.

Emin's art is likely to prove a big draw for Turner Contemporary, which, like Spain's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, has put a rundown town on the tourist map. However, anyone expecting to find signature Emin shock tactics—used-tampon installations; embroidered quilts, like *Psycho Slut* (1999), screaming racy slogans; or *I've Got It All* (2000), self-portrait photos that show coins and notes spilling forth from her crotch—will likely be disappointed.

A hint about the artist's preoccupations these days may dwell in the show's name, "She Lay Down Deep Beneath the Sea," which Emin says refers to "the idea of coming to terms with the weight of something that is so much bigger than myself—old age, death. All of these things are ahead of us." ■