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Tracey Emin

BY COLIN GLEADELL

EMIN FIRST GAINED NOTORIETY nearly three decades ago as a member of the YBAs (Young British Artists), with deeply personal and confessional works that chronicled her life, thoughts, joys, and sorrows, often obscured by an apparently reckless and hedonistic lifestyle. Over the years, as her steady, prolific output attracted high-profile collectors, prestigious museum and gallery shows, and an international audience, her public image gradually morphed from that of an art world wild child to a pillar of its establishment. This perception was cemented by her election to the Royal Academy in 2007, followed by her appointment there as a professor—one of only two women in the institution's history ever to achieve this distinction. (The other is Fiona Rae.)

Today Emin ranks among the best-known British artists. Her position within the international art market, though, seems less settled. Francis Outred, the Christie's head of postwar and

contemporary art in Europe, concedes that Emin's auction prices do not match her fame: The record for a non-charity sale is £157,250 (\$250,000), achieved at Christie's London in February 2010 for one of her appliqué blankets, *It's the Way We Think*, 2004. Outred describes her market as a peculiarly British phenomenon, with a limited auction market that does not match the extent of public interest. More to the point, he says, "buyers of her best works are committed collectors and do not want to sell," thereby limiting the supply.

Representatives at Emin's primary galleries—White Cube in London and Lehmann Maupin in New York—concur, saying that her more substantial exhibited works all sell, yet few reappear on the secondary market. The galleries placed work from her exhibition at the 2007 Venice Biennale at prices from £12,000 to £350,000 (\$24,000 to \$700,000), including some substantial sculptures. None of the large-scale works

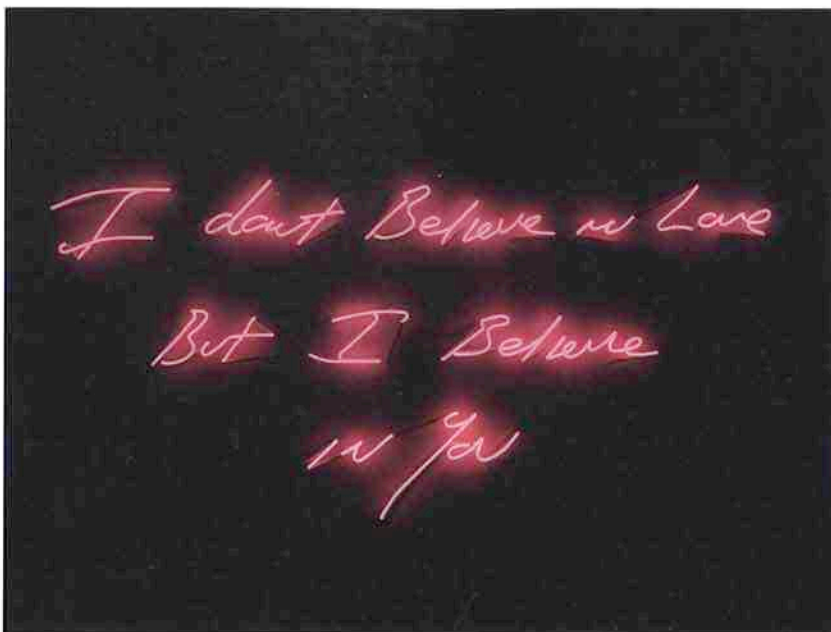
In 1998, Tracey Emin presented *My Bed*, a mattress with soiled sheets on a rug littered with personal objects. She was shortlisted for the Turner prize the following year and Charles Saatchi bought the piece for about \$250,000. Now, experts say, it could fetch more than \$1.5 million.

have reappeared at auction to date.

"Collectors want to keep her sculptures; they don't want to sell," says gallerist David Maupin, who will give over both of his New York gallery spaces to Emin's work in May. "In my view, she is a visual poet, and one of the most important living artists. Although her work sells well, hers is not a speculator's market."

The roster of museum and private collections holding her work is extensive, the private list peppered with celebrities—Orlando Bloom and Kate Moss—and prominent collectors—Anita Zabludowicz, Victor Pinchuk, Kent Logan, the Rubell Family—and notables who straddle both worlds—Elton John, George Michael, and Kenny Goss, who may well possess the greatest number of her works.

According to Daniela Gareh,



Right: *I Don't Believe in Love But I Believe in You*, 2012, an editioned neon sculpture in the artist's own handwriting. Below: *I've Got It All*, 2000, a photograph from an edition of six. One sold at Phillips London for \$51,800 in 2011.



director of sales at White Cube, American collectors were the first to snap up Emin's major works in the early 1990s. But the collector who probably did more than anyone else to put her on the map is Charles Saatchi.

For his legendary "Sensation" exhibition in 1997, he acquired Emin's tent, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995, a small camping shelter embroidered with the names of every-

one she had ever slept with, including her mother at birth. Private dealer Eric Frank originally bought the tent from her for £12,000 (\$19,000) and sold it to Saatchi for £40,000 (\$64,000). Saatchi was rumored to have turned down an offer of £300,000 (\$400,000) before it was destroyed in a catastrophic 2004 Momart storage fire.

Saatchi's other major acquisition was *My Bed*, 1998, which he bought for £150,000 (\$248,000) from Lehmann Maupin's "Every Part of Me's Bleeding," the exhibition that won the artist a nomination for the 1999 Turner Prize. The installation consists of her actual bed—unmade and with soiled sheets—on a dirty rug littered with empty vodka bottles, cigarette butts, condoms, and other detritus. Saatchi still owns the work, and market insiders believe it is so iconic that it would now fetch in excess of \$1.5 million.

Saatchi also paid the top auction price for a group of Emin's paintings when he acquired *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made*, 1996, at Christie's London in February 2001 for £108,250 (\$157,000), outbidding the Tate Gallery and more than doubling a high estimate of £40,000 (\$58,000). The paintings were the product of a performance by Emin in Sweden, during which she sought to overcome anxieties going back to her student days, when she destroyed all her paintings.

Born in 1963 in Croyden, London, Emin was raised in poverty in the seaside town of Margate after her father left her mother. Emin's teenage years saw a catalogue of misfortune, including rape, pregnancies, and abortions, which are all intimately documented in her work. It was halfway through a two-year program at the Royal College of Art in 1989 that she demolished her paintings. Her longtime friend and fellow artist, Sarah Lucas, encouraged Emin to pursue her art through whatever methods inspired or motivated her. The two opened a shop selling art and objects in London in 1993. The same year she was spotted by gallerist Jay Jopling, who gave her a solo show cheekily titled "My Major Retrospective" at his then new White Cube gallery. It consisted mostly of memorabilia and a large embroidered blanket.

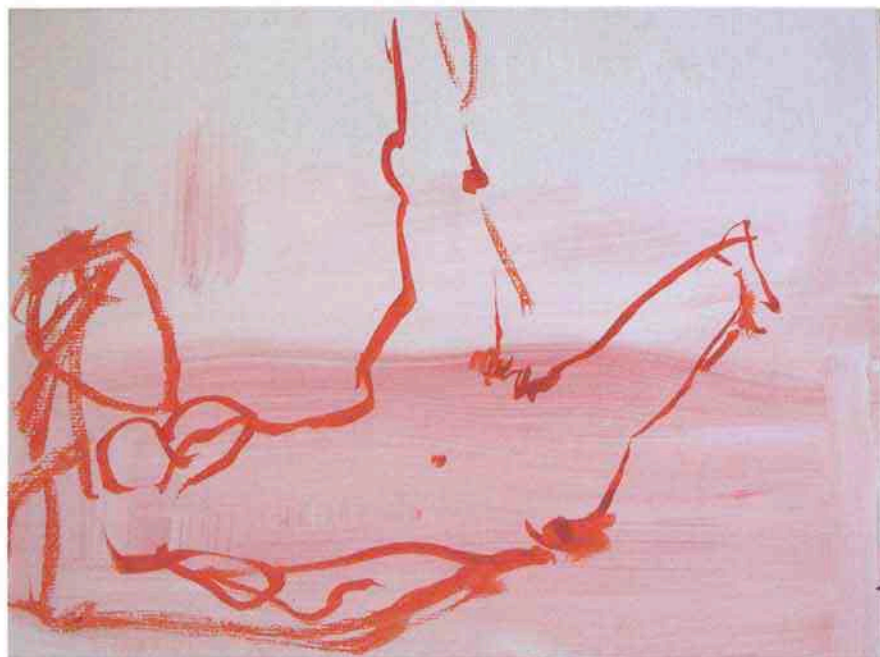
Following the debut at White Cube, which has shown her regularly since, came a breakthrough exhibition at the South London Gallery in 1997, the same year as Saatchi's "Sensation" showcase at the Royal Academy.

In the United States, Emin's first showing was by White Cube at the Gramercy International Art fair (the forerunner of the Armory Show), in 1994. She was included the following year in Richard Flood's "Brilliant!" exhibition of YBAs at the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, and Lehmann Maupin began to represent her in 1997.

Emin's work embraces a wide variety of media—from letters and memorabilia to photographs, drawings (her most prolific format), mono- and editioned prints, gouaches (mostly of her own body), paintings, videos, films, neon sculptures, textiles, and sculptures—with writing and storytelling the common thread.

Such a diverse body of work takes time to study and understand, which accounts in part for Emin's lower prices compared with other notable YBAs, according to Alexander Branczik, senior director of contemporary art at Sotheby's London. He also notes that bidding for her work comes mostly from the U.K. and elsewhere in Europe, and to a lesser extent, the United States. "We haven't had interest from South America or Asia yet, though that may change," he says, since White Cube launched in Hong Kong recently and Lehmann Maupin will open there this spring.

Works on paper, mainly depicting the artist herself, have appeared at auction since 1997 and garnered up to £46,850 (\$75,000), the sale price for the 2011 gouache *Deep Blue III*, at Christie's London this past June. The highest price for a single photograph is £32,450 (\$51,800), paid at



Phillips de Pury & Company in London in February 2011 for *I've Got It All*, 2000, from an edition of six, in which the artist clutches a pile of money to her crotch.

Emin's most commonly auctioned sculptural works are phrases in her own handwriting set in neon, usually issued in editions of three, with two artist's proofs. Her first was *The Tracey Emin Museum*, 1995, which was made to hang outside the self-styled Tracey Emin Museum in Waterloo Road, London, where she traded her own work from 1995 to 1998. The artist still owns this unique work. An early example of her editioned neons is *Kiss Me, Kiss Me, Cover My Body in Love*, 1997; it was shown at White Cube in April 1997, when the edition sold out at £4,750 (\$6,800) each. A piece from this edition later sold at Christie's London in February 2003 for £19,120 (\$31,000). Another early neon, *Be Faithful to Your Dreams*, 1998, went for £43,250 (\$70,000) this past October at Phillips in London.

The record for a neon, and the second highest auction price for the artist, was set at Sotheby's New York during the charity Red Sale in February 2008, when the heart-shaped *I Promise to Love You*, 2007, sold for \$220,000. The top non-charity price for a neon is the £85,250 (\$133,000) achieved at Phillips in February 2010 for another example of *I Promise to Love You*, from the same edition. On the primary market her neon works are currently priced between £55,000 and £100,000 (\$87,000–160,000), according to Gareth.

Currently the most sought-after works, Gareth says, are Emin's appliqué blankets or quilts, especially those that measure more than six feet square, with early examples commanding prices close to (continued on page 88)



From the Files

- **Charles Saatchi** offered Emin 61 million to re-create her hand-embroidered tent, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*, 1995, after it was destroyed in a massive warehouse fire in 2004. The artist turned him down, saying it was simply not possible.
- British Prime Minister **David Cameron** has one of Emin's neon

sculptures, *More Passion*, 2010, hanging at 10 Downing Street. It is on loan from the Government Art Collection.

- During an infamous 1997 television appearance, while a panel of experts attempted to discuss the Turner prize, a visibly intoxicated Emin slurred her words and eventually stormed off the set, announcing that she wanted to "be with her mum."

Above: A private collector acquired *Sex drawing Sydney 2007-1*, 2007, an acrylic on board, at the 2011 Frieze fair in London; such works range from \$40,000 to \$48,000. Left: *It's the Way We Think*, 2004, an appliqué blanket, sold for a record \$250,000 at Christie's London in 2010, to dealer Ivor Braka.