



Tracey Emin

The job of the artist is to actually make time stand still.

Tracey Emin is in her London studio. She says: "I bought this building in 2010. I live two minutes from here in a really old house that was built in 1729. This once used to be an artists' area, now it is more shops and fashion. It was pretty derelict for a long time. I bought the small house next door and I will knock it down and David Chipperfield will help me build a new house which will join onto the studio. When I am old, even if I can't walk I still want to be able to work. With a house with a lift I can live next door to the studio and my studio staff can look after me. You have to think about this stuff now – later I will be too old. It is my way of ensuring that I can carry on working."

So, is it London forever?

No.

No?

I spend my time in New York, the South of France, Miami. Yes, it is my base, because I am British, and because it's home.

But David Hockney went to California and he is British too?

Yes, he went, came back and went there again. He went when he was young and also because he is gay and it was a political thing, not just artistic. In those

days it was much better for him to be in California.

So you will stay here?

I am not here all the time. Last year I was only here for four months of the year. I have a house in France 35 minutes' drive west of St. Tropez, in the Var. It's a nature reserve, very quiet, and I spend a lot of time there. And in New York I have an apartment.

Where do you feel more creative?

On the aeroplane. My creativity is more to do with an emotional resource and it has more to do with what I am, not where I am.



Tracey Emin, *You Saved Me*, 2014,
Bronze, 31.5 x 51 x 34 cm Image: ©
Tracey Emin courtesy White Cube

So why do you move about so much?

One reason is because I can. I enjoy the spirit of it. I never ever get bored, so it's not because of boredom. I like different seasons, different weather. Each place has such a different character and feeling. It can spark something off in me.

What about the market?

My galleries take care of that, I don't. That's what galleries are for. The art world in New York is very different to the art world here, another league. Modernism was created in New York and you can feel that excitement still. I have a gallery in New York that I love working with.

Since 1995 when you first exhibited your famous work "Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995", have many things changed in your life?

Yes, unbelievably.

And also in you?

They have. I would never make that work now. It was 21 years ago that I made it and a lot *should* change in 21 years to a person, internally and externally.

You have said that for instance you are not interested in sex anymore, but in love. What does it mean?

When I was younger I was confused, I divided them too much and because of that I would confuse sex for love, which was wrong.



Tracey Emin, Just us, The Last Great Adventure Is You, White Cube
Bermondsey London 8 October – 16 November 2014 Courtesy White Cube

What is sex, if not love?

It should be a combination of things.

So you didn't give up sex?

I did. I can have actually a relationship with someone without sex because I really love them and that love can override all the animal qualities.

Like you have with your brother?

No, I don't mean a platonic relationship. The easiest way to explain things is that I would rather be alone than feel unloved. I like my solitude. If I keep on moving it is because moving means essentially I am alone. I don't move with my family. I think to be an artist you need solitude.

Why?

Because you need some purity of thought, some clarity. I protect that within myself and within my work. Now that I am getting older it matters a lot to protect it within myself.

What are you protecting yourself from?

From losing my creativity, losing my love of art, losing my spirituality, losing all the things you have to nurture as you deal with more and more of the outside world.

Success is an enemy?

Success is fantastic. My most successful thing that I have done is to keep working. I know a lot of artists that still work, but they are jaded or they are cynical and they don't have the same kind of belief that they did when they were younger.

But since "My Bed" have you changed a lot?

Yes, my life has really changed a lot, internally it's like a reflection there. Art and life are like a mirror.



Tracey Emin with "My Bed" at Christie's ©
Tracey Emin, photo courtesy Edward Hopley

But you are still obsessed by you?

Yes, *(she laughs)*, I still use me, I still work with me!

Why so much? Why not portraits of your friends?

Because I don't know enough of me.

You think others care?

I care, and others care about the emotional resonance in my work. My last exhibition that took place at White Cube this Autumn was titled "The Last Great Adventure Is You". Nearly all of the work was about loss. Loss of heart, loss of

life, of youth, of being beautiful. Being 52, not 25. Other people identified with this and art should not be difficult, art should give you something, there should be a dialogue. 45,000 people went to see my exhibition in 5 weeks in a commercial gallery. The majority of them were people between the age of 15 and 20.

Are you a legend?

A little one. Because I am known, people recognise me on the street.

How come you are so well known?

Some artists are, like Hockney, Picasso, Andy Warhol. They are all men! So to be recognised as a woman – also I have an unusual face – as a female artist is a good thing, a rare thing.

You have said several times, and in particular about a very famous artist like Louise Bourgeois, that women artists are not as appreciated as men. Is that true?

It is changing and it is purely history and time that dictate this. In a hundred years' time everything could be completely different.

Were there fewer women artists in the past?

Yes, now there are many more women artists and so with time we'll see.

Once men artists, from Tiziano to Picasso, from Courbet to Matisse, were obsessed by naked women. You are doing that with yourself?

Yes. I am my own model. When you look at Picasso I am sure he used his own body as a model, all the women are square like he was. But then my favourite artists are Edvard Munch and Egon Schiele and they used themselves constantly in their work. So did Rembrandt and van Gogh.



Tracey Emin, Good Red Love, The Last Great Adventure Is You White Cube
Bermondsey London 8 October – 16 November 2014 Courtesy White Cube

There is a show of Egon Schiele erotic drawings at the Courtauld, do you feel close to him?

Yes, since I was 15 I liked his work and in April in Vienna at the Leopold Museum I will show my work along with Egon Schiele's work. It will be a visual dialogue between him and me. It is an ambition I have now, to show with artists who I really admire, to put my work into context where I feel it should be.

In the case of Schiele, is it a bit of the non-sexual love you were talking about?

No. He is dead. But I did write a thing recently about being able to continue love even when someone dies. You can love the dead.

This happened to you?

No, but I think there is such a thing as the living dead, that when someone goes somewhere else you can continue to love without having the love returned and that feels like death.

Unreturned love and aging seem to be your fears?

I am not scared of dying funnily enough. I never thought I was going to live for a long time when I was young, but now I have changed my mind. Which means I am much happier than I was. I see a future...

What kind of a future do you see?

A good future. Working, painting, making sculpture, gardening. I used to grow every vegetable on the roof of my old studio and I loved it. Now I want to do it again, here and in France as well.

For you it's all linked to work? You have no children, no husbands?

I have a cat.



Tracey Emin, The Legs, The Last Great Adventure Is You
White Cube Bermondsey
London 8 October – 16
November 2014 Courtesy
White Cube

Maybe you will fall in love tonight?

I'm not saying it's impossible. For the last five years I have been on my own. In the last twenty years I have spent more time on my own than I have done in relationships, and also I don't have children.

You seem tranquil, but maybe this is only an appearance?

Maybe. Maybe inside I am fizzy and shaking and about to explode. But if I do I am on my own when it happens. I am not making anyone else responsible. I know a lot of people that are with other people and they are really not happy at all but they stay because they are too scared. But the thing that I find complicated is that I am either surrounded by people or else I am alone, there is never a compromise, really ever. It's these kind of issues I deal with in my work.

You like money, sports cars, nice houses and you vote Conservative. Why?

I voted Conservative because it appeared at the time they were going to take care of the arts and I like David Cameron the Prime Minister as well because I think he is kind. They didn't make all the big cuts which they could have. They tried to keep as much as possible the same, not to make things worse. Even if there's no money, I said please don't cut money for the arts, because the arts are really important.

Is England a good country for artists?

In Holland artists were given money every month by the government and at the end of the year they had to give back a painting and the government had more bad art than they knew what to do with. The scheme did not work to produce good art. In Britain if you are a good artist it means you are good.

You seem to be much less extreme now than you were?

It depends what we are talking about. I don't want to appear as materialistic and

shallow when all I have done all my life is to work really hard at my art, that's all I have done. Everything I have and I do is towards my art. When I die my properties will be sold and will pay my death duties and finance my foundation.

What has changed in your art?

I have gone back to my beginning. Everything I do is with my hands.



Tracey Emin, You Saved Me, 2014,
Bronze, 31.5 x 51 x 34 cm Image ©
Tracey Emin courtesy White Cube

Do you try many different media?

I always worked in different media, always. Bronze is new. I have only been working in bronze for three years and learning how to do it.

Is it exciting to find something new?

Yes, really exciting.

But do you also teach?

No, I was Professor of Drawing at the Royal Academy but it was just a tenureship for two years. The students didn't want to do drawing. Young people don't want to draw.

Why?

I think they want short cuts to things.

Can one be an artist without drawing?

Yes, but if you can draw it is a really good tool to have if you want to be an artist.

What kind of artist is this? Even Mondrian could draw! But you draw and paint?

And I draw in ink as well. I have never not drawn, I have been drawing all my life. Now predominantly I exhibit drawn works, paintings and sculptures.



Tracey Emin, Foreground
Sphinx, Background
Devoured by you, The Last
Great Adventure Is You White

Cube Bermondsey London 8
October – 16 November 2014
Courtesy White Cube

What do you think of the art market?

I think the secondary market controls the art market, not the primary market. That is sad. It should be the other way round. Prices can be manipulated. It is commerce, trade, it's not new. Some people trade art, some people believe in art.

Do you think this excessive money has a bad influence on the artists' work?

No, not all artists. I think some artists can transcend that.

If this drawing was worth £1 then and £1,000 now, doesn't it change your way of drawing?

No, the money changes peoples' perception of the drawing, of what they are looking at. So, I made a blanket in 1996 and it sold for £3,500 pounds in 1997. Recently it sold for £720,000 pounds at Christie's. There is nothing in the world that can give you a return like that. It is insane. It is out of my control. The secondary market is its own machine, like an animal. The primary market is the artists' market.

It has to do with fashion?

No, I am not that kind of artist. By now I should be really unfashionable. Younger generation people should not relate to my work, but they do.

So this is a great achievement for you?

Yes, it's brilliant, really good.

What are your ambitions?

To keep working and to find a way for my work to be protected, so it has some kind of legacy. That's it.

Do you think we are living in an interesting period for art?

Yes, on many different levels.



Image: Courtesy Harry Weller

Why?

I think for one thing we are living in a time of fear. There's also this feeling that time is moving so fast, really fast. The job of the artist is to actually make time stand still, to give a moment so the viewer can reflect internally and visually externally and have a response. Art is like a wall. You stop and it talks to you. Art is not competing with technology, machinery, spaceships. Art is something else. Art comes from another place. So it's a really interesting time for the artist at the moment, a very difficult time. I am talking about the Artist in the biggest sense that it could be.

Do you feel different from when you started?

When I started I was innocent.

Have you lost your innocence?

There is a little bit of innocence left, a tiny bit.

And it is this innocence that is left which keeps you an artist?

Art was like my lover, even when I tried to run away or get away from it art always came back to me and saved me. Art never left me. It is a bit like faith, or some people say god or faith or something, this entity of art never abandons me, it looks after me financially as well as spiritually, socially, but most important I have to remain morally secure.

London, December 11 2014.