

**The word ‘emin’ means ‘to be sure’ in Turkish, and Tracey (who is half Turkish-Cypriot) lives up to this name with her confident eccentricity. Meanwhile the confessional aspects of her work have resonated with women in particular. But for me her art is almost like a call to her writing, where she reveals her true self.**

HUSSEIN CHALAYAN, artist and fashion designer

In the voice-over narration that opens his 1971 film *About Me: A Musical*, Robert Frank says, “Fuck the music. I’m going to make this film about me”, speaking of the film’s origin in a grant from the American Film Institute to make a documentary about American musicians. In the early 1980s Tracey Emin went out with punk musician/writer/artist Billy Childish; although she sometimes joined in with his poetry performance group the Medway Poets, she was never in a band. But I still like to think that at some point she said to herself, “Fuck the music, I’m going to make art about me.”

And why not? Why write, sing, perform, then record, then perform again, over and over, a song about an ex-lover when you could fill a tent with all their names written down, and put it in a gallery where everyone could see it? For that matter, why make a painting that expresses a suicidal period when you could just import your bedroom, intact with the scars and debris accumulated during that time, into an art space? What could be more direct? That’s more punk than Green Day, and Darby Crash might still be alive if he’d thought of it. It would be easy to say that Emin is the artworld’s Courtney Love, but all that Courtney Love’s career has proved is that a woman can live up to the Keith Richards/Ozzy Osbourne wasted-rock-star-train-wreck stereotype too. Why slog through reading Courtney Love’s diary (or one of her records) when you could look at a Tracey Emin piece instead? I can’t imagine.

ALAN LICHT, musician, artist and writer

Contemporary art has enjoyed a renaissance in Britain over the past 20 years, with ever-broadening audiences engaging and connecting with the work of the extraordinary artists who have emerged in this time. Tracey Emin has been pivotal in her ability to combine traditions in art history with a contemporary sensibility, and her place in broader contemporary culture is a testament to this. A long-standing resident of East London, she is a familiar and welcome figure at galleries and studios in this energetic cultural quarter. What perhaps fewer people appreciate is that, behind the scenes, Emin is also a tireless supporter of the arts. To give one small example: she has not only created and donated works in support of the Whitechapel, but enthusiastically taken on the roles of auctioneer, expert salesperson and rabble-rouser, all in aid of the Whitechapel’s exhibitions and forthcoming expansion.

ANDREA TARSIA, Head of Exhibitions and Projects, Whitechapel Gallery

When I was in graduate school I vaguely remember some rumblings through the library stacks about an artist whose Turner Prize nomination had come from exhibiting her bed, replete with rumpled sheets, used condoms and bloodstains. This made sense, given that only such gratuitous displays could cut through the great wall of theory that academia had built for itself. I’m sure Emin’s name was tossed around, but it did not stick with me. Any aestheticised bed at that point belonged to Rauschenberg, and any philosophy of the boudoir was Sade’s alone, though Slavoj Žižek was doing a good job of updating it.

After that, to be quite honest, Emin’s name and art became rather invisible to me, which is curious, because her notoriety grew in the intervening years (apparently with no little help from certain drink-fuelled antics, and Jay Jopling); and invisibility would seem to be the single condition against which Emin pitched her aesthetic sensibility: here was an artist that demanded she be *seen*, and not just as an artist but as a whipping post at the intersection of public attention and personal femininity.

Nevertheless, I cannot but feel like I have failed Emin in some way, because she, as an artist, does not mean much to me at all (though she has written in one of her neon works that people like me need to fuck people like her, but that seems rather indiscreet). And I take this as a failure of mine because obviously Emin means quite a lot to quite a number of people, at least as much as a dead homosexual conceptual artist apparently means to the US (need I point out the irony here?). So as Venice advances, I will try to sit up and take note. Won’t that mean something?

JONATHAN T.D. NEIL, art critic



Tracey Emin, *Top Spot*, 2004. Courtesy of Tartan Films