The background is an abstract artwork by Tracey Emin. It features a light, off-white or pale pinkish background. Overlaid on this are numerous vertical and diagonal drips of red and white paint. There are also large, dark, textured areas of red and black paint, some resembling splatters or thick brushstrokes. The overall effect is one of raw, expressive emotion, characteristic of Emin's work.

TRACEY EMIN
I LOVED YOU UNTIL
THE MORNING



For more than thirty years, TRACEY EMIN (b. 1963), one of Britain's leading contemporary artists, has made expressive and candid works that explore love, loss, desire, and grief. This is the first museum exhibition in North America dedicated to her work.

Emin came to prominence in the 1990s as a multidisciplinary artist, but she began her artistic journey as a painter. When she was selected to represent Britain at the 2007 Venice Biennale, she decided to make a public return to painting. This exhibition is the first to trace the evolution of her paintings over the subsequent two decades, setting them alongside selected drawings and sculptures.

Unflinchingly honest and with a frankness that can be unsettling, Emin uses the materiality of paint to convey emotional states that veer from the most life-affirming to the most harrowing aspects of being a woman. The multiple emotional registers of her works leave their meanings open-ended: the use of red evokes love, passion, and desire, as well as pain, trauma, and injury. The female figure unites her works across media and decades and becomes a channel for personal experiences that are at once timely and universal.



I said No ca. 2005–15

Acrylic on canvas
Collection of Gianfranco D'Amato

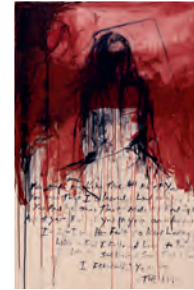
Emin sometimes works on paintings over several years. Here, layers of paint cover earlier compositions, as though repeatedly burying a painful event that has taken years to process. The words *I SAID NO* are almost obscured by white paint, but once seen they blaze through like a headline, conjuring the context of rape. Below the figure are patches of yellow that, upon a closer look, resolve into more words: *LIKE A NIGHT WHEN I WAS SO DRUNK*. Together these brief sentences create a sparse internal dialogue that grasps and turns over a memory, even as it begins to fade.



And It was Love 2023

Acrylic on canvas
Courtesy of the artist

Emin creates emotional intensity through her energetic brush marks and strong use of color, as well as the ambiguity of the scene. Are we witnessing a passionate encounter, a scene of violence, or a medical emergency? A detail at the center of the painting suggests it may be all of these. A circle on the figure's stomach and a line extending from it — easily overlooked amid the drips of paint — come into focus as a stoma connected to a tube and a urostomy bag. These details recast the painting as a self-portrait made after Emin's surgery to treat bladder cancer in 2020.



I Followed you to the end 2024

Acrylic on canvas
Yale Center for British Art
Gift of the George Economou Collection

Writing is a key component of Emin's art, often juxtaposed with images. Here, a spectral female figure emerges from a field of red, edged by black shadows and a circle reminiscent of the blood moon in a total lunar eclipse. Although her face is obscured, she brings an intensity of address, as if casting a spell with the poem written on the lower half of the painting. Using the canvas like a page in a journal, Emin presents an ode to men, love, and loneliness. The invocation of "the end" alludes to Emin's confrontation with her mortality following her cancer diagnosis.



I wanted to be clean 2023

Acrylic on canvas
Collection of Frederic Court

Many of Emin's paintings feature a single, standing female figure, enclosed by the edges of a vertically oriented canvas. Here, a naked figure stands beneath a showerhead, which pours out not water but a red shroud, like a rinse of blood. Rivulets of red and gray mix with the outline of her torso before dissolving her lower body into pure paint — as though the paint itself is part of a purification ritual, an attempt to "be clean."



***Pelvis High* 2007**

Acrylic, oil pastel, and pencil on canvas
Private collection

In 2007, Emin was selected to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale, becoming only the second woman to receive a solo exhibition in the British Pavilion. She resolved to use the occasion to mark her return to painting — the medium with which she began her artistic journey as a student in the late 1980s. *Pelvis High* was one of three large paintings she completed for Venice. It has a subtle and even hesitant quality that is in stark contrast to the bold and direct character of the paintings that she made in subsequent years.



***A rose* 2007**

Acrylic on canvas
Private collection

Before giving this painting its formal title, Emin affectionately called it *Turner Eat Your Heart Out*, fondly addressing the artist J. M. W. Turner (1775–1851). The layers of white impasto on Emin’s canvas harken back to Turner’s famously expressive use of paint to attain dramatic atmospheric effects. Emin created the soft, muted hues of this canvas by using layers of white acrylic to overpaint the earlier, brightly colored compositions underneath. The painting looks almost entirely abstract, but the gray shadow and tangled red lines cohere with unmistakable clarity into a fragment of a woman’s lower body.



***Black Cat* 2008**

Acrylic on canvas
Private collection

This striking self-portrait was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe’s disturbing short story “The Black Cat” (1843), in which the narrator kills his pet. Emin, who frequently refers to her cats in her work, depicts herself wearing a black dress, her face completely obscured. Of this work, Emin has said, “In one way it appears to be a demonic self-portrait, skittish and psychotic, something heavy and malevolent to behold. On the other hand it could come across as being gothic, cartoonish, something from the Hammer House of Horror. Not so unlike Poe himself.”



***Sometimes There is No Reason* 2018**

Acrylic on canvas
Private collection

Emin outlines a female figure with deft, economical brushstrokes. A few lines behind her back delineate pillows, but whether they belong to a bed at home or in a hospital is left to the viewer to imagine. The red puddle of paint between the figure’s legs suggests that this may be a medical crisis. The painting at first appears sparse and minimal, but its pink hues and horizontal drips reveal traces of earlier compositions, covered but not entirely gone. The muted turbulence beneath the surface creates a push and pull with the stillness of the figure painted on top of the layers — perhaps representing deeply felt emotions and inner turmoil following an unknown tragedy.



You kept it coming 2019

Acrylic on canvas
Private collection

A female figure kneels or crawls on a red floor. White paint covers layers of red and blue, indicating that several other compositions are underneath the final image. An ambiguous shape hovers over the woman, echoing her contours. Is it an oppressive weight pushing the woman down, or a protective spirit shielding her from the darkness beyond? As with many of her paintings, Emin allows the viewer to contemplate all of these possibilities.



***I never Asked to Fall in Love —
You made me Feel like This*** 2018

Acrylic on canvas
Private collection

Suspended in a reservoir of red, a female figure seems to drown or bathe in blood. Drips of paint move upward, defying gravity, as though she inhabits an unearthly dimension. A darker shape, reminiscent of a crab with giant pincers, appears threateningly below her torso. The color red seems to stand at once for love and for the pain of love that is lost.

SCULPTURE

SECOND-FLOOR
GALLERIES

Like her paintings, Emin's sculptures spontaneously capture the body in various states of incompleteness. Figures lie prone on the ground, conveying a sense of vulnerability. The bronzes are scaled up from smaller maquettes, made spontaneously in clay, that explore both the physicality and the emotions of the body.

DRAWING

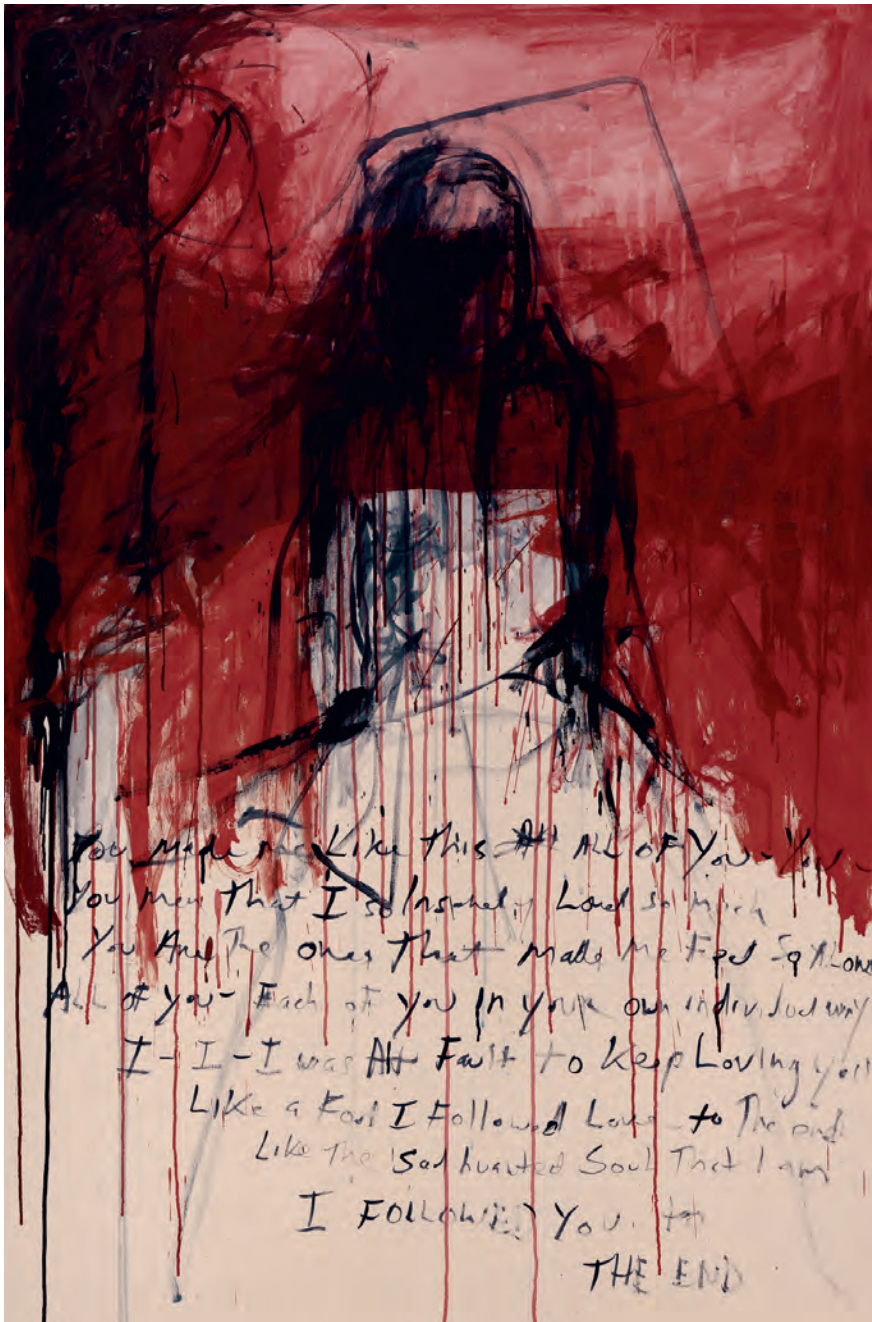
STUDY ROOM

A skilled draftsman, Emin sees drawing as the foundation of art. Using a variety of materials and working at different scales, she makes drawings that range from complex painterly scenes to simple line drawings. She has likened drawing to a stream of consciousness, and often makes dozens of works at great speed and with a lightness of touch that distinguishes them from her paintings.

NEON

ENTRANCE COURT

Writing is an integral part of Emin's work, appearing in her paintings, drawings, prints, and neons. She has been making neons since 1995, translating her distinctive cursive scrawl into attractive colorful signs. Emin's neons amplify the power of language and turn deceptively simple phrases into nuanced and layered sentiments.



You made me like this ~~at~~ All of You - You
You knew that I ~~wasn't~~ had so much
You are the ones that made me feel so alone
All of you - Each of you in your own individual way
I - I - I was At Fault to Keep Loving you
Like a Fool I followed Love to the end
Like the sad hearted Soul that I am
I FOLLOWED YOU TO
THE END

Tracey Emin: I Loved You Until The Morning was curated by Martina Droth, Paul Mellon Director, with Tracey Emin and her creative director, Harry Weller.

Arthur W. Zeckendorf has generously supported the exhibition and accompanying publication.



To learn more about the exhibition

I Followed you to the end, 2024

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