

London, November, 2024

Dear Tracey,

I'm walking through your show¹, open to what it wants to touch.

On the way here I got involved in a fight between an Armenian woman and an English man. He was shouting at her. Slag, slag, slag.² I asked him to stop. I'm still shaking. How many more times will we be called that way just for being ourselves? Being yourself and never hiding, that's what I've always admired of you!



The third painting is small, purply red and reddish blue. Like a bruise still fresh, growing in the flesh. Does a wound take longer to heal when it lies beneath the surface? I see two legs but, were it not for a vagina opening up where the two curves meet, I could mistake them for a heart. Actually, the body looks like a pair... sorry, not two people. Like a pear, and an apple, rotting. A *natura morta*. That's what makes your show so powerful... from the death bed, a scream of survival.³ Yours'. Mine. Anyone's. Anywhere. We all fear, grieve, love, cry, laugh, die. Aren't these the experiences that make us human, our universal language? ⁴ Yet 'we' create strict boundaries between me, you, us, them. 'We' build walls and point fingers at other bodies.⁵ Have 'we' become so busy defining who we are that we forgot the importance of this body we live in and, as vulnerable as it may be, how it makes us human?⁶ Bodies in red, bodies in blue, unruly bodies, too. With female attributes mostly.⁷ They hover on canvases in all different sizes and four-cornered shapes. Compositions of chaos. Isn't that what life is... making order out of chaos?

Washes of blood. Two bodies at the center of a bed, spooning. Are they angry, sad, lonely or is their bond a safe haven in a world that is not? Though, what happens outside seeps in. No walls, no clothes, no escape from inside the bed; the intimate space par excellence. For true intimacy you must know how to be vulnerable.⁸ But how does one cozy up to vulnerability if one has never felt safe? I needed to show that woman someone cared, that she is not alone. Privilege comes with responsibilities. A man distracts me loudly explaining the work. I'm sick of being told what to see, to think. I want to have time to tap into what my body knows, to intuit and perceive what a work has to say.⁹ I want to have the right to be wrong. Trusting myself is my biggest achievement so far. Red, blue, white, black. Flesh, feeling, light, dark?



¹ "I followed you to the End" at White Cube Bermondsey, London. (2024)

² Tracey EMIN: *Why I Never Became a Dancer* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhCa_71LWhg> [accessed 16 November 2024].

³ James Tiplady @ This Here for Plinth, 'In the Sickbed', *Plinth*, 2024

<<https://plinth.uk.com/blogs/magazine/tracey-emin-white-cube>> [accessed 16 November 2024].

⁴ Dylan Evans, *Emotion: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, 81, Second edition (Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁵ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity: Creed, Country, Colour, Class, Culture*, Paperback edition published in 2019 (Profile Books, 2019).

⁶ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2006).

⁷ Lauren Elkin, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (Chatto & Windus, 2023).

⁸ Brene Brown, *The Power of Vulnerability* (Sounds True Inc, 2013).

⁹ Siri Hustvedt, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and the Mind*, First Simon&Schuster hardcover edition (Simon & Schuster, 2016).



Silence. There is a target on your stomach. If you're the target who is the shooter? Someone you love, life, God, a man, a woman? Does it even matter? I admire how you're allowing yourself to be seen with all your wounds. Full frontal, not sideways, not facing away on an analyst's couch. No, staring into the eyes of who's willing to look back. Were they a coward? I certainly was. Always wanting to hide and yet so desperately wanting to be seen. I was asking the impossible; for someone else to confront my own shame. Stop singing. A guard calls out a child who, jolly and enthralled, is about to touch you. Isn't that where it all starts... how we learn to suppress our true nature to adhere to societal norms and cultural expectations? Women ¹⁰ and men ¹¹.

I move onto a triptyc; three faces, the first one hardly outlined. I tear up and I know I am not alone. At your Royal Academy show in 2021 one reviewer wept for an hour.¹² Do 'we' need Art because it's a space where we're safe to feel? To be ourselves? To be seen? I do see you/me. Softer this time, pink and pretty, like I never saw myself. And those words I so deeply longed to hear. I want to know what that child feels but it's not mine. I was 23 when I had my abortion. How old were you? I know you know how it feels to both grieve that loss and know that you cannot be a mother ¹³. I once sketched a necklace to hold the fetus I had lost. It's the only thing I did to process what had happened. Then a man stopped me in the street saying that she, who would never be, was always by my side. I was left cracked open in full daylight. It was ten years ago. I would have so many things to teach her now, but would I have had the time to learn? My mother, born three years before you on this very day, taught me early on, how one can get crushed by the weight of one's fragilities. So, I cut off and numbed what was still soft. People, including her, praised me for being strong like a rock. Until I was almost dead. But if I could give life, life was still in me. "I fell in love with you", that's what I chose to do; to slowly fall in love with all the sides of me; from soft and rosy, to hard-edged and blue.



"You hurt me, you hurt me, you hurt me...". Your confessional work may be a product of the West's strong individualist ethos but it's never edited, glamorized, beautified. When did 'we' become more afraid to be ordinary¹⁴ than to be lonely? Sure, it takes courage not to look away; to acknowledge pain, without the need to save.¹⁵ To acknowledge the fear and do it anyways. But, whether for sadness or joy, never justify your tears. That's what I would teach that child. Cry. Dare to care. Vulnerability is scary but you will never feel the joy if you can't feel the pain.¹⁶ Pleasure is your birthright, too. I suddenly notice how many heads have halos... sinning saints. We need to embrace the wholeness of who we are. Who others

¹⁰ Clarissa Pinkola Estes, *Women Who Run With Wolves* (Rider, 2008).

¹¹ Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men*, 25th anniversary edition (Da Capo Press, 2015).

¹² 'Tracey Emin's I Followed You to the End at The White Cube Bermondsey – The Isis' <<https://isismagazine.org.uk/2024/10/tracey-emins-i-followed-you-to-the-end-at-the-white-cube-bermondsey/>> [accessed 7 December 2024].

¹³ Tracey Emin, *Strangeland*, A Sceptre Book, 4 (Sceptre, 2005).

¹⁴ Brown, *The Power of Vulnerability*.

¹⁵ Vanessa Machado de Oliveira, *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism* (North Atlantic Books, 2021).

¹⁶ Brown, *The Power of Vulnerability*.

are.¹⁷ How are we going to birth a different world if we can't face our own ugliness? The beauty of you being so vulnerable is that it allows others to see themselves in you. Humanity seeing itself.¹⁸ Isn't that what rituals were also for? Growth, whether collectively or individually, happens through confrontation, catharsis and connection.¹⁹ That's what you create; a space to be fully human. Together.

Was death so close that everything was intricate and crystal clear?²⁰ A bleeding, broken body in a big and fluffy bed. It's one of the only decorated rooms, lamp and flowers on the wall. At last, a proper home. Death does not know our name only last fears and desires. "I followed you to the end" and yet you are alive. Splashes of colour. Quivering lines, high and low but always forward. Translucent washes. A thinning veil between two worlds, allowing answers to come through. Layers that tolerate depth, unlike De Kooning's impenetrable surface or Auerbach's heavy paint.²¹ Another rebirth. Like when five years after *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made* (1996) you started painting again, or when your mother died and you decided that your hand/brush would only be connected to your heart. Pure emotion.²²



A last work pulls me in; it's different, calm and powerful. It reminds me of a cave painting. Back to the origins. Is the red symbol from the language of our ancient foremothers²³ and the canvas was later flipped on its head, or does it represent the mountain you had to climb to get to the end? The bed and the body are becoming one. That's how close you were to death. Do you agree that our body is sacred... because, even when it fails us, it is what keeps us alive?

Love,

Cosima

¹⁷ Artforum Video, 'DAME TRACEY EMIN ON HER ART AND LIFE', *Artforum*, 2024
<<https://www.artforum.com/video/dame-tracey-emin-on-her-determination-to-live-and-painting-1234721321/>> [accessed 7 November 2024].

¹⁸ Anna Robinson, WhatsApp, "Tracey Eminem" group chat

¹⁹ Byung-Chul Han and Daniel Steuer, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present* (Polity press, 2020).

²⁰ Audre Lorde, *The Cancer Journals*, Penguin Modern Classics, 2020.

²¹ Emin, Dawson, and Higgie, *Tracey Emin Paintings*.

²² Tracey Emin, David Dawson, and Jennifer Higgie, *Tracey Emin Paintings* (Phaidon Press Limited, 2024).

²³ Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization*, 1. paperback ed (Thames & Hudson, 2001).

LIST OF FIGURES

1.



Fuck You

2024

Acrylic on canvas board 24.5 × 32.3 × 3.2 cm |

9 5/8 × 12 11/16 × 1 1/4 in.

ph. COSIMA BUCARELLI

2.



Blood – Blood and More Blood

23 2024

Acrylic on canvas

183.8 × 215.8 × 4.5 cm | 72 3/8 × 84 15/16 × 1 3/4 in.

ph. COSIMA BUCARELLI



Don't ask me to be like you

2024

Acrylic on canvas 183.8 × 121.7 × 4.5 cm | 72 3/8 × 47 15/16 × 1 3/4 in.
ph. COSIMA BUCARELLI



I Fell in Love with you - I Kept Falling in Love With you - This is Me

2024

Acrylic on canvas

Overall: 123.8 × 290.8 × 5.7 cm | 48 3/4 × 114 1/2 × 2 1/4 in.
ph. COSIMA BUCARELLI



5.

I Followed you to the end

2024

Acrylic on canvas

182.2 x 120.1 cm | 71 3/4 x 47 5/16 in.

183.8 x 122 x 4.5 cm | 72 3/8 x 48 1/16 x 1 3/4 in. (framed)

ph. WHITE CUBE



6.

Take me to Heaven

2024

Acrylic on canvas

205.4 x 279.5 cm | 80 7/8 x 110 1/16 in.

207 x 281.1 x 5.7 cm | 81 1/2 x 110 11/16 x 2 1/4 in. (framed)

ph. WHITE CUBE



7.

Time to Go

2024

Acrylic on canvas

207 × 281.1 × 5.7 cm | 81 1/2 × 110 11/16 × 2 1/4 in.

ph. COSIMA BUCARELLI

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity: Creed, Country, Colour, Class, Culture*, Paperback edition published in 2019 (Profile Books, 2019)
- Bly, Robert, *Iron John: A Book about Men*, 25th anniversary edition (Da Capo Press, 2015)
- Brown, Brene, *The Power of Vulnerability* (Sounds True Inc, 2013)
- Butler, Judith, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, 2006)
- Elkin, Lauren, *Art Monsters: Unruly Bodies in Feminist Art* (Chatto & Windus, 2023)
- Emin, Tracey, *Strangeland*, A Sceptre Book, 4 (Sceptre, 2005)
- Emin, Tracey, David Dawson, and Jennifer Higgie, *Tracey Emin Paintings* (Phaidon Press Limited, 2024)
- Evans, Dylan, *Emotion: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, 81, Second edition (Oxford University Press, 2019)
- Gimbutas, Marija, *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization*, 1. paperback ed (Thames & Hudson, 2001)
- Han, Byung-Chul, and Daniel Steuer, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present* (Polity press, 2020)
- Hustvedt, Siri, *A Woman Looking at Men Looking at Women: Essays on Art, Sex, and the Mind*, First Simon&Schuster hardcover edition (Simon & Schuster, 2016)
- Lorde, Audre, *The Cancer Journals*, Penguin Modern Classics, 2020
- Machado de Oliveira, Vanessa, *Hospicing Modernity: Facing Humanity's Wrongs and the Implications for Social Activism* (North Atlantic Books, 2021)
- Pinkola Estes, Clarissa, *Women Who Run With Wolves* (Rider, 2008)
- Plinth, James Tiplady @ This Here for, 'In the Sickbed', *Plinth*, 2024
<<https://plinth.uk.com/blogs/magazine/tracey-emin-white-cube>> [accessed 16 November 2024]
- 'The Wounded Healer – This Jungian Life', 2021
<<https://thisjungianlife.com/episode-176-the-wounded-healer/>> [accessed 7 November 2024]
- Tracey EMIN: Why I Never Became a Dancer*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhCa_71LWhg> [accessed 16 November 2024]
- 'Tracey Emin's I Followed You to the End at The White Cube Bermondsey – The Isis'
<<https://isismagazine.org.uk/2024/10/tracey-emins-i-followed-you-to-the-end-at-the-white-cube-bermondsey/>> [accessed 7 December 2024]
- Video, Artforum, 'DAME TRACEY EMIN ON HER ART AND LIFE', *Artforum*, 2024
<<https://www.artforum.com/video/dame-tracey-emin-on-her-determination-to-live-and-painting-1234721321/>> [accessed 7 November 2024]

AN EPISTOLARY ESSAY ON TRACEY EMIN'S SHOW "I FOLLOWED YOU UNTIL THE END" AT WHITE CUBE BERMONDSEY.