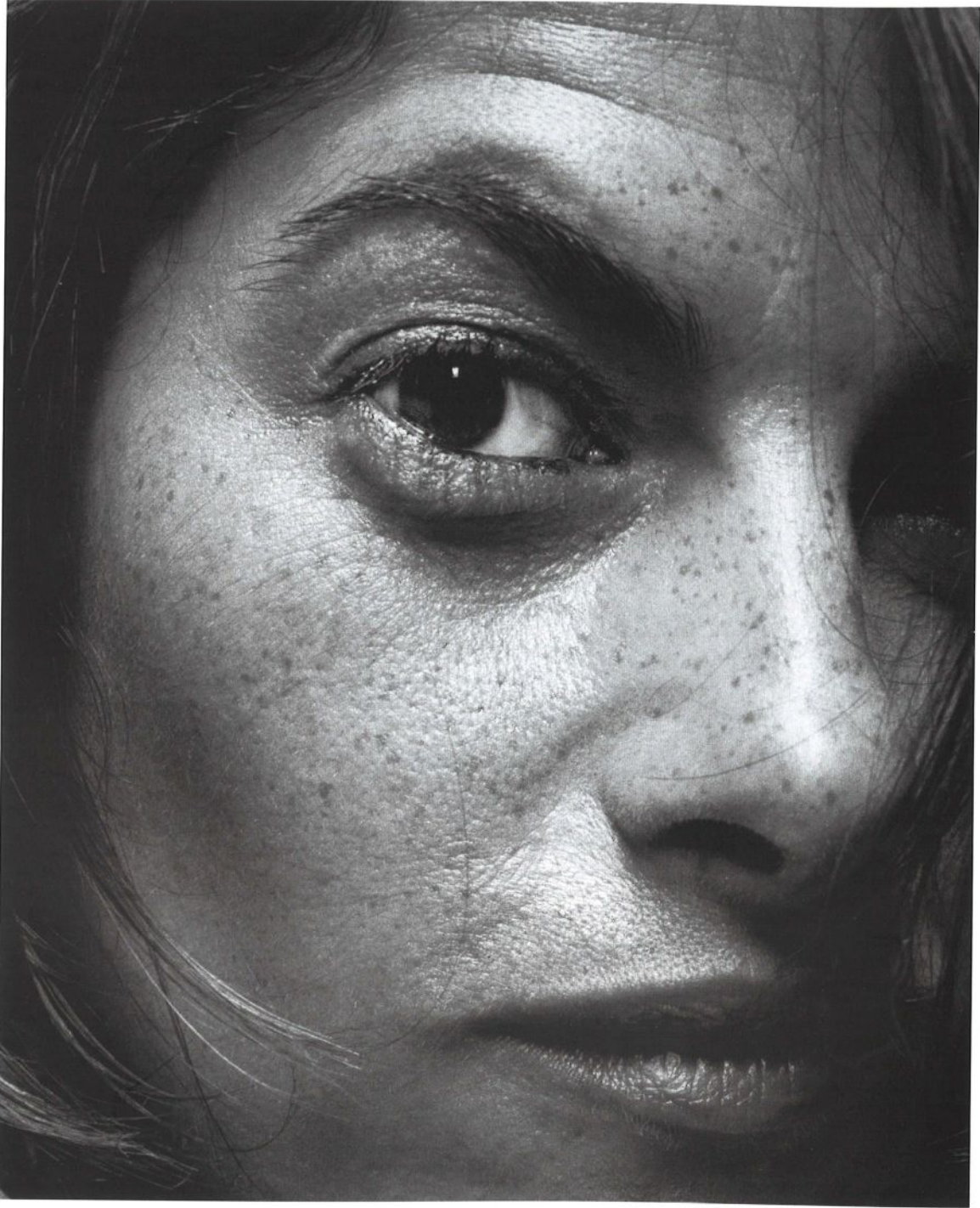


LEHMANN MAUPIN



FLATT

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Made in America

Photograph: Nadav Kander

TRACEY EMIN

Labor of Love

interview

JOHN NEWSOM

John Newsom speaks with Tracey Emin about her absolute ascension and uncompromising, triumphant love of life and art on the planet at half-a-century.

JOHN NEWSOM: You and I had originally met at your first show at Lehmann Maupin when the gallery was located back on Greene Street.

TRACEY EMIN: I loved that space. It was so warm and the show just worked so well. I miss it. Before the gallery moved to Chelsea, I had a dream that they had moved to Chelsea. And this is really before Chelsea had become "Chelsea", and in my dream the gallery was really big with low ceilings and everyone thought it was really cool, but I hated it. It was this other part of New York and I really didn't like it. Isn't that weird? But funny enough, now I really like the Chelsea space. I was their inaugural show when they opened there, and I thought it was going to have 18-foot high ceilings, and it did in some places, but not the main gallery, so I couldn't double hang, which I had planned to do. To me, the show was a disaster because I really didn't get to do what I wanted to do, and I really resented the space and the walls, but now after having done several shows there I really love the space. I love the floors, I love the corridor space, and I know now how I can break the space up and what I can do with it. I like it now, and I like it so much more compared to many of the spaces in Chelsea, it works so much better than a lot of spaces.

JOHN NEWSOM: And did you have a similar dream regarding Lehmann Maupin's Chrystie Street space as well?

TRACEY EMIN: Rachel and David said that they did the Chrystie Street space with me in mind because they knew I needed a

really warm space to respond to, and I did immediately. What's weird about both shows that I've done on Chrystie Street is they have been really austere and really dark, which is interesting because the space isn't. So I like the benefits of Chrystie Street for that reason.

JOHN NEWSOM: So tell me about the current show in Miami, *Angel Without You*.

TRACEY EMIN: Miami is a retrospective neon show of 19 years of making neons. There are 67 neons in Miami MOCA till March 9th. So basically you've got most all of these neons in one space.

JOHN NEWSOM: How did you feel the reception to the work was?

TRACEY EMIN: Triumphant. It wasn't good, it was triumphant. It's such an ambitious show. My largest show being the one which was held at The Hayward Gallery, the whole of The Hayward Gallery. But the most ambitious show I've done has been the neon show. If you have, take for instance a Bruce Nauman show with neon, you expect the crackle and the noise and the flickering and everything. With my neons there is no noise, there is no crackle, and there is no flicker. It's not part of the work. To install 67 neons without a technical hitch is really like a military procedure.

JOHN NEWSOM: How long did it take to install?

TRACEY EMIN: The planning took two years. The installation took eight weeks.

JOHN NEWSOM: And did you oversee the entire curation?

TRACEY EMIN: Yes, absolutely all of it.

JOHN NEWSOM: Were the neons brought in from various locations?

TRACEY EMIN: No, all of the neons are exhibition copies that were made for the show. None of them were on loan from anyone because it's so complicated. Every single neon that's made is different. So if I am to take that neon from your wall, and if it were to break, you would never get that neon back again. So I don't want to risk all of that. And also, if I take someone else's neon I'd have to do the insurance and the value of their neon, as opposed to the insurance and value of the replacement neon.

JOHN NEWSOM: Is the show traveling?

TRACEY EMIN: No [laughs], of course not. A lot of people are getting to see it now because a lot of people travel there, especially this time of year.

JOHN NEWSOM: So what are you currently working on?

TRACEY EMIN: I'm working on bronzes.

JOHN NEWSOM: And with the bronzes, are there certain types of narrative elements?

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah, I'm working on a show that's called, *The Last Great Adventure Is You*, and it's about the ascension of love and going to a point where you can go no



TRACEY EMIN, *I Think it's in My Head*, 2002. Appliqué blanket, 96.46 x 89.37 inches, 245 x 227 cm.
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further...and in terms of actually having unrequited love being the highest love of all because you can never attain it... you can never reach that peak. It's like when you climb a mountain: you can climb to the top and climb back down, but it's like you never get to the top, you just keep climbing. So that's what it's about.

JOHN NEWSOM: Like a constant or absolute ascension.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah.

JOHN NEWSOM: And this exhibition will be held in...

TRACEY EMIN: In White Cube Bermondsey, London. And Bermondsey's 50,000 square feet.

JOHN NEWSOM: When is the exhibition scheduled for?

TRACEY EMIN: During FRIEZE in October.

JOHN NEWSOM: So you've been busy.

TRACEY EMIN: I'm busy all the time. I've done eight shows in the last two-and-a-half years.

JOHN NEWSOM: One of the things that I've noticed about your work is that it seems to have this intense strength and intense vulnerability going on simultaneously, kind of running concurrent to each other.

TRACEY EMIN: Well... it's like me.

JOHN NEWSOM: Yes. Like when I was on my way to meet you today, I thought to myself, "I have to bring her roses, give her a hug, I'm so glad she's on the planet, etc."

TRACEY EMIN: And I said you can keep the roses!

JOHN NEWSOM: Exactly! [both laugh]

TRACEY EMIN: Actually, I'm flying back to London in an hour and I hate to see things go to waste. The tulips upstairs... look at these roses here... I hate leaving flowers.

JOHN NEWSOM: Do you ever take any time off or are you constantly going?

TRACEY EMIN: I went to Capri for a little holiday for ten days in September with my friend, but we spent a lot of time looking at grottos and thinking about work that I'm going to do. So I have time off, I have a holiday, but I never stop thinking about the work, and usually I always take my watercolors with me and I'm always drawing, always thinking, always writing.

JOHN NEWSOM: Had there been a survey exhibition in addition to The Hayward show that's focused on the drawings? I know it's an integral part of your work.

TRACEY EMIN: No, I've never had a drawing show and I'd like to, I'd really really like to. Mind you at Chrystie Street

it was all ink drawings, but it's a funny thing because people don't value drawing anymore. I was professor of drawing at The Royal Academy, and people just don't value what drawing means and that it has to do with the coordination between the eye and the heart and the hand. And if you're an artist you're supposed to, you should, work with emotional content or that there should be some there. It should be this somewhat profound notion or else it isn't art. So by drawing you learn how to pull all of these things together and how to make it work. A lot of people just don't value that anymore and they certainly don't value it commercially or financially at all. It's like... you can still buy Picasso drawings.

JOHN NEWSOM: It's a bit ironic don't you think, because it's such a root in the work.

TRACEY EMIN: Well, it's the essence isn't it? It's the beginning. Then you have these really successful artists who make a working drawing after they've made the work. Which you can see it, you can see it. You've got these really successful artists who can't really draw at all, and just do it as a kind of like, you know...

JOHN NEWSOM: When you were young and just beginning to look at drawing and work, who were you looking at?

TRACEY EMIN: Oh well, when I was young, really young, 15 or 17 years old, 20 years old... Egon Schiele, Edvard Munch, Kathie Kollwitz, you know German Expressionism really, and that's still what I look at.

JOHN NEWSOM: Have you been up to The Neue Galerie since you've been here last?

TRACEY EMIN: No, and I usually always make it a point to go, but I just moved into this apartment, literally just moved in. I just only picked the keys up nine days ago and have been too busy really, going to the foundry during the day and shopping and organizing furniture during the night. I'm going to be doing a show in Vienna with Egon Schiele at The Leopold Museum, just me and Egon Schiele.

JOHN NEWSOM: When will this show be held and what work of yours will it focus on...drawings?

TRACEY EMIN: 2015 or 2016, soon. I can't quite remember. It will have all kinds of things. But going back to what we were talking about with the drawings. I would absolutely love to do a really big show of just drawings.

JOHN NEWSOM: There's a definite perforative aspect to some of your work, particularly in the earlier things... and in thinking about Munch and the angle of expressionism... what came to mind were the Vienna Actionists. Do they interest you? The 'action' of it?

TRACEY EMIN: People like Otto Muehl and those things quite repulse me on a certain level.

JOHN NEWSOM: But the cathartic quality, that's what I'm getting at here. I love your description and the iconography of the ascension.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah, but it also kind of works on a conceptual point of view as well. I'm not just like vomiting up all over the place and sticking it up on the wall and calling it art. You know there's a system of thought that goes through it. And people go, "Oh, it's so open" and everything... and it's absolutely not, you know. It's really edited and controlled, because otherwise I would be a disaster — wouldn't I? — in some type of mental institution for a start. So I control what I want people to see and how I want them to perceive it. That's why it's art, and that's why it isn't some kind sort of outsider thought or cathartic release. I know, I went to art school for seven years or whatever.

JOHN NEWSOM: And you were at Goldsmiths?

TRACEY EMIN: No, I was at Royal College of Art and I left my M.A. in 1989. Most of my contemporaries didn't leave their degrees until 1992.

JOHN NEWSOM: When was your next integration with an academic setting?

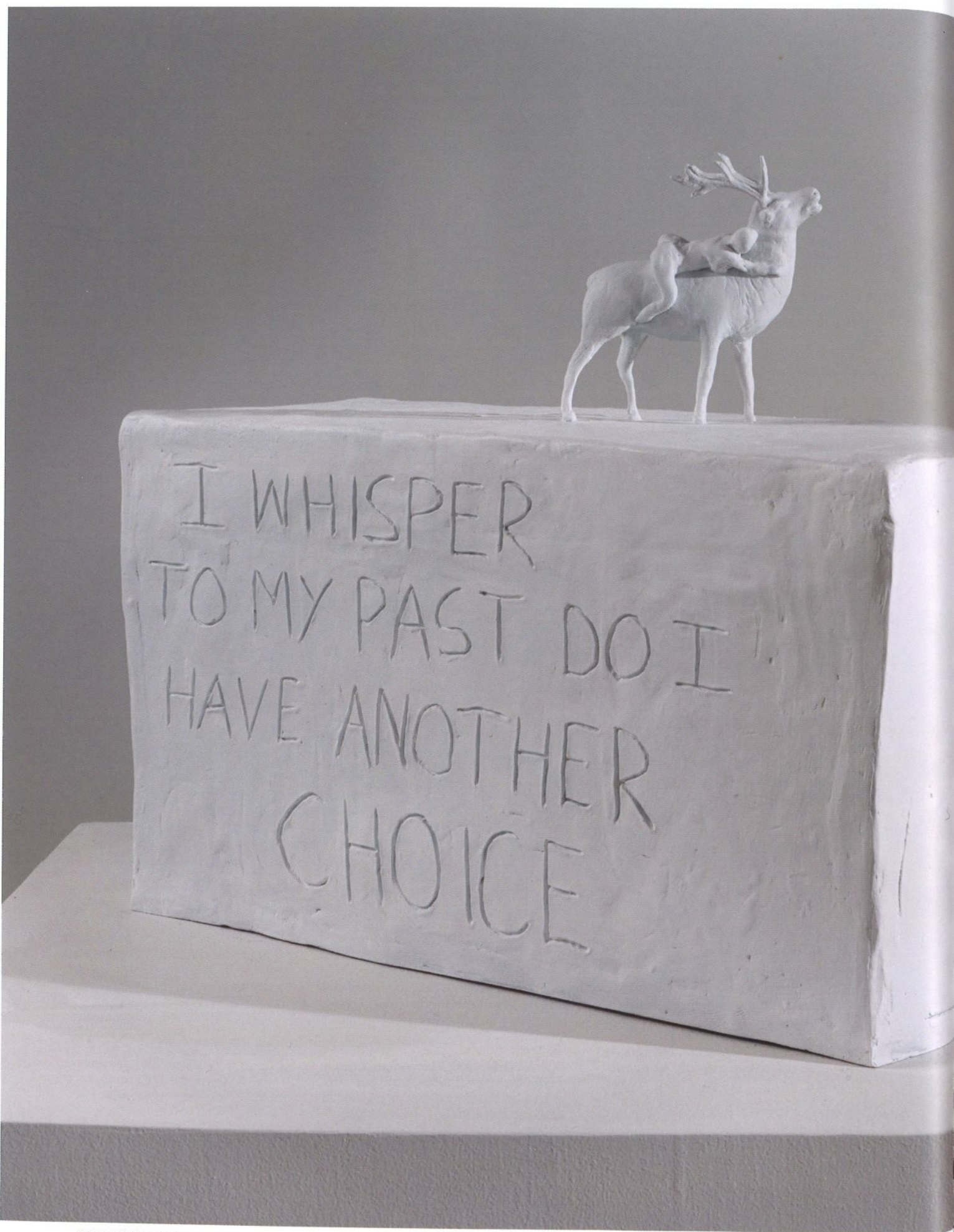
TRACEY EMIN: I was made a Royal Academician at The Royal Academy in 2007. It's a nice thing, kind of like an accolade. And then I was made professor of drawing a few years ago.

JOHN NEWSOM: So now you're in New York.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah, I'm really excited about having a place in New York. I'm 50. I'm walking down the road and I think, "Why am I staying in a hotel? I don't have to, I don't have to do this." You know? I've got a place in Miami, I've got a boat in the South of France, and my apartment in Miami costs less than my boat in the South of France. And I use my boat only about six times a year and it dawned on me... having an apartment in Miami could be a really good idea because it's just such a great place. It's America, it's exciting: the architecture, the people... and I like being on my own. I ride about on my bike, I don't know anyone, it's just great. And I was in Miami and going back to New York, and I was staying in a hotel here and I had to be at the foundry. I had to be at the foundry at 7 o'clock in the morning.

JOHN NEWSOM: Where is the foundry?

TRACEY EMIN: In Astoria, and I had to leave at 7 o'clock. So I got up at 6 o'clock, was on the phone with room service and said, "I want scrambled eggs." No wait, I said, "I want two boiled eggs, some toast on the side, some butter on the side, some tea with extra hot water and some grapefruit juice." And I said it had to come at 6:30am, and they said okay, yep 6:30am in a half-hour. I get in the shower, wash my hair, get out, 6:30am and no breakfast, no breakfast, no breakfast...



TRACEY EMIN, *I Whisper To My Past Do I Have Another Choice*, 2013. Bronze, 10.98 x 18.5 x 7.52 inches, 27.9 x 47 x 19.1 cm., Edition of 5.
©Tracey Emin. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND LEHMANN MAUPIN, NEW YORK AND HONG KONG. Photo: Elisabeth Bernstein.

JOHN NEWSOM: Uh oh.

TRACEY EMIN: I call down, I say, "I'm waiting for my breakfast." And they're like, "Oh we're sorry, we'll be with you in 15 minutes" or something. "No it can't be, because I need to leave in 15 minutes." I'm like, "I need it now." She says, "Oh they should be knocking on your door any minute." No breakfast, no breakfast... Then she asked, "When did you put your order in for?" "6am this morning." And she said to me, "Oh that was really early." And that's it ... I just lost it. "Yeah that's why it's called room service because the restaurant isn't open, that's why it's early." Then she said, "It's coming now, it's coming now." The breakfast comes and there are two cold hard boiled eggs with potatoes. I then had to leave at 7 o'clock and with no breakfast or anything. So we stop and I get a cream cheese bagel or whatever. I'm like allergic to cream and milk but I'm like fuck it. Then I end up being really violently sick, and I'm supposed to be working and it's 7 o'clock and I just say, "I can't keep doing this. I can't do this anymore. What price am I paying against my own comfort and my own well-being?" So that's what made me go out and buy an apartment. That, that breakfast! That one bad breakfast room service experience made me think I can't do this anymore. But, this building is an old maternity hospital and the original lobby was really beautiful but they've done some terrible remodeling to the lobby, and it used to have the original old furniture with photos of the history of the hospital and within twenty-four hours of feeling really, really proud about the lobby, I feel shamed of the lobby, so now I'm lobbying the lobby to get it back to its original status, like style and majesty. It was really majestic before, so anyway, but I'm really happy with the apartment. I love it!

JOHN NEWSOM: Are you planning on spending more time in New York now?

TRACEY EMIN: Last year I spent about four months in America. And last year I spent about six weeks in England. But I'm not living here. I'm just staying here with more comfort, which is good. And also, being an artist, I think London is fantastic, it's a metropolis. I love it, it's my city. I really love it, but New York really is the epicenter for art whether you like it or not. London has the food, it's probably the best in the world. It's incredible what's happened there in the last 20 or 30 years for food and restaurants, it's amazing. But art...? It's a second. New York is definitely where it's at.

JOHN NEWSOM: Yes, London is your city, and New York is it's own animal. Is there a difference for you when you go out, is it pretty obvious and does it affect your comfort zone?

TRACEY EMIN: In London I get stopped for my autograph all the time. I'm a superstar in London, and here, I'm not. Here I'd be recognized if I walked into a trendy design shop, or a niche thing like the art galleries or that, but not out in the real world.

JOHN NEWSOM: Which gives you the freedom to do your own thing.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah, I'm not on my guard at all.

JOHN NEWSOM: You seem like you're in a really good place. You're emitting good vibes.

TRACEY EMIN: I am, yeah. I'm happy. You know it's this thing I was saying about being 50. When I bought this apartment here in New York, I called my Mom up and said, "Mom, I'm 50 and I'm living like a teenager." [laughs] Because really women at 50 start thinking of grandchildren and I said I've just reversed everything.

JOHN NEWSOM: You're young and vivacious, so happy for you.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah. I feel now in my life like I have a lot to look forward to. I just wrote an article for a newspaper about being 50, and they just didn't understand it. They just wanted to print pictures of me when I was younger and I said, "No. I'm looking forward." A few months ago I was in LA, in H&M, funny enough — something I don't do in London is go to H&M [laughs] — and I was there like buying six v-neck t-shirts for work or for whatever. And so I was going up the escalator in H&M and there was some music playing. I wish I could remember what it was... it was like a very upbeat, Motown, very generic kind of upbeat happy song that really pulled me in. I suddenly had this epiphany that my heart wasn't broken... and for the last 10 years I've walked around thinking my heart was broken, 12 or 13 years or something.

And I've not blamed anybody, but I've accepted the status quo that I have a broken heart and I suffer from it and this is difficult, and I'll probably never get it mended and that's what it is. But as I got to the top of the escalator I realized, "How could anyone ever break my heart when they really didn't love me enough?" It's impossible. Only someone who really, really, really loves you can break your heart. It has to be equal, it has to be mutual. If you break your own heart over loss or abandonment, then you can mend your own heart because you were the one who decided it was broken.

JOHN NEWSOM: Yes, that is very true.

TRACEY EMIN: No one broke my heart. So once I worked that out, I suddenly realized that I didn't have a broken heart.

JOHN NEWSOM: It's interesting that you were ascending on an escalator, having this new exhibition coming up and all.

TRACEY EMIN: And as I was turning around ... I like mice and cute things ... and as I was turning around there were these slippers. Really funny because I hadn't taken any slippers with me, and there were these wooly knitted slippers like mice and I said "Yes." I thought, "Yes." I reached out to just pick them up and went to pay for them, I thought everything had fallen into place.



JOHN NEWSOM: Fantastic. I have a feeling you're coming up on a really strong period.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah. And realizing I didn't have a broken heart I immediately felt better, and I suddenly thought, "Wow, there is hope. There IS hope out there." A hope which I had never had before. I've been on my own for five years or whatever, and I suddenly realized there was no reason to feel I'm alone. I've got fantastic friends, I feel warm, I feel good. If I was with someone I wouldn't be buying this apartment in New York here. This apartment isn't for two people, it's for one person. This is me. I'm making plans for my future which means I'm not alone. It's a brilliant feeling.

JOHN NEWSOM: And all very natural it sounds like, nothing forced.

TRACEY EMIN: And with the broken heart thing, it's also the same with the art. I realize I've got 30 years ahead of me, of making art, and my art has never been broken, or I've never felt it was. It's always been this successful flow and I suddenly realized like, I know what I'm doing.

JOHN NEWSOM: It feels like New York is good for you.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah, and I absolutely love my gallery here. What I do with Rachel and David, it's not like we do shows... each show I do with them enhances my life. I've always felt that they have extended their hands to me.

JOHN NEWSOM: How did that dialogue begin? Because you've been with them a long time, no?

TRACEY EMIN: Yes. I've been at Lehmann Maupin for 18 years. I've been with Jay Jopling for 21 years, a long time. And I'm a very loyal person. And the good thing for me is that with both galleries, they've grown and I've grown. And both galleries are very very different. Jay works sort of, like a giant military operation, where Rachel and David are much more like family oriented and very warm, working one to one. So it's a very different way of working with the different galleries. But with Rachel and David... Rachel came to my show at South London Gallery in 1997 and they invited me over to take a look at the space, and the condition was they pay my flight and my hotel. But, if I didn't like the gallery or I didn't feel good I would pay my flight and my hotel and I'd let them know.

JOHN NEWSOM: And then you arrived...

TRACEY EMIN: And then I arrived and the first person I met was David. He's so funny [laughs]. We were just dancing and dancing and dancing, and back in those days we both chain smoked, and we really, really, really had a good time. And then Rachel came back and I showed Rachel all these clothes I'd bought and I was like a size 0, mind you we were young and of course I loved the gallery... the Rem Koolhaas architecture, it was really warm, and nice, and so that's how it all started. Right from the beginning I started working with them. I did a performance in the gallery, they would invite me over for things, and it was good and Rachel and David are my friends.

JOHN NEWSOM: Terrific, what a story.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah, it's warm. It's odd because of course, there's commerce involved. It's business, it's a gallery, but it doesn't feel like that. It feels more like that they facilitate my creativity.

JOHN NEWSOM: I'm curious to ask you how the studio developed into what it is today?



TRACEY EMIN: Well the studio is pretty phenomenal. It happened pretty organically. I was working and I had an assistant, then the assistant left and I had a girl doing my sewing and it turned out that she was hyper brainy and super smart, and she'd just been sitting around sewing the whole time. And she actually got her Mom in, and she and her Mom did all my filings for me. And then she said, "I will help you for six months sorting everything out, and after that I'm leaving." She stayed six years. Meanwhile, in that six years we get a bookkeeper, and now the bookkeeper 'Natasha' runs all the home operations and she's actually my P.A. secretary, She runs all the properties, all the personal side and she has her own personal assistant to help with that. And Eimean runs the studio and all the shipping, registration, installation, working with museums, whatever... collectors. And then we have Emin International which is our online company, where we sell a lot of nice things... prints, cups, all sorts of really nice things, Google it.

JOHN NEWSOM: When did you start Emin International?

TRACEY EMIN: We began Emin International in 2008 I think. And it's my

studio's company so everybody benefits from it, everyone. Really, because there were all these people selling my stuff on eBay and a lot of forgeries and all kinds of weird stuff, so I just thought I wanted a way in which people could deal directly with the studio. You can buy something for like 5 pounds, 10 pounds, 100 pounds, and we do amazing business. We had a shop, but we decided to close the shop because online is so fantastic.

JOHN NEWSOM: Your galleries must be thrilled to have you and to see how you've grown and witnessed your development. Again, you seem to have created a space with these certain perimeters and you're able to just excel in those spaces.

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah. I think it's because I'm making my own space and it's not being made for me.

JOHN NEWSOM: Do you collect yourself?

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah, yeah I do, but really weird art, it sounds eclectic. I bought a Picasso sculpture a couple of years ago.

JOHN NEWSOM: What type of Picasso sculpture?

TRACEY EMIN: It's a little tiny rock with a head on it.

JOHN NEWSOM: Okay...

TRACEY EMIN: A must have that everyone, you know... Why buy a house when you can buy that? No, but, you know I just put it in my pocket, 'cause not everybody can't put a Picasso in their pocket.

JOHN NEWSOM: That's great.

TRACEY EMIN: And I did all of these pieces on Marie Therese, and they're so beautiful, and I thought this is just my way of thanking Picasso. You know... he gave to me. And that piece came from the family foundation, so it's a really good provenance and everyone loves it.

JOHN NEWSOM: As I sit here listening, it occurred to me that you must be one of the most eligible women in New York?

TRACEY EMIN: Yeah, yeah I am. I was in the South of France and someone said to me, "You must be the most eligible woman in Europe?" And I said, "Just Europe?" [laughs]

JOHN NEWSOM: Oh absolutely.

Never Again!