

FAURSCHOU NEW YORK

TRACEY EMIN

EXORCISM OF THE LAST PAINTING I EVER MADE

Faurschou New York

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"I stopped painting when I was pregnant. The smell of the oil paints and the turps made me feel physically sick, and even after my termination, I couldn't paint. It's like I needed to punish myself by stopping the thing I loved doing the most. I hated my body; I was scared of the dark; I was scared of being asleep. I was suffering from guilt and punishing myself, so I threw myself in a box and gave myself three and a half weeks to sort it out. And I did. My only regret about this project was that I didn't carry on painting from that moment. It took me another five years before I started painting again." – Tracey Emin

In 1996, British artist Tracey Emin (b. 1963) locked herself naked in an enclosed room at a gallery in Stockholm for 3 weeks to reconcile her anxieties and guilt around painting, a medium she had abandoned 6 years prior. After a traumatic period in the early 90s with two abortions, Tracey Emin could not physically stand the thought of painting and wanted to face her troubled relationship with the medium. Through fish-eye lenses in the exterior walls of the room, visitors could follow glimpses of Emin's process. This exhibition at Faurschou New York marks the first time that this seminal work of art is exhibited in the United States.

Emin's performance is not merely to be understood as catharsis, a cleansing self-therapy, but as the staging of an artistic exorcism by Emin enacting her own life in front of the viewers. Initially, Emin had intended for the paintings made inside the room to be destroyed in a fire after the performance, but she ultimately decided against it, leaving the space and works as a testimony of the physically and mentally challenging journey she had been through. The entire collection of artworks and objects in the room were preserved as an installation, which are all exhibited here in their original constellation.

The paintings and drawings that Emin created in the process refer to and appropriate works by male artists Egon Schiele, Yves Klein, Edvard Munch, and Pablo Picasso. Historically, women's access to the artist's studio have been as models, not artists. The representation of women has been a male affair, where the female nude stands out as the most distinct example of the objectification of the female body. However, in *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made*, Emin positions herself in the double role as both model and artist, challenging the universal acceptance of women as objects of the male gaze. Further, Emin documented the performance in the photographic series *The Life Model Goes Mad*, in which she takes on the role of the model in her own studio, reclaiming female identity and sexuality.

Emin is known for her autobiographical and confessional works, with themes of femininity, abortion, and the political and stigmatic structures surrounding them. *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made* stands out as a pivotal work and predecessor to a line of works, in which Emin uses her own life, trauma, and emotions as a means of expression, with the most widely recognized piece being *My Bed* (1998). After the exhibition in 1996 in Sweden, Emin once again had to distance herself from painting, but ultimately took it up again. Today, Emin's artistic practice and voice to further the recognition of female artists is as vibrant and poignant as ever.