

A Postfeminist's Entanglement with The Feminist Cause — Tracey Emin

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Abstract—The role assigned to women in history has long been controversial, and the controversy remains to this day. Feminist artists have accompanied several waves of feminism and have been fighting for more equal rights in art for feminist art. Although after several waves of feminism, the status of female artists in the art world has increased significantly. However, there are some female artists who divide themselves from feminist art. Such behavior has brought discontent to many feminist strugglers. Tracey Emin, one of the most controversial artists in British contemporary art, has not escaped the attention of feminist critics. In this study, feminist art historical theories are used to analyze the reasons for Tracey Emin's controversy. This study also looks at Emin's history with feminism, as well as her individualist, populist, and conservative tendencies, which are the key reasons for feminist critics' critique. This way of exploration is intended to better help people to view the artist's artwork rationally and from a different perspective, rather than to deepen prejudices against the artist.

Index Terms—Feminist art, tracey emin, postfeminist art, feminism artwork.

I. INTRODUCTION

We live in a world of gender inequality, which can manifest itself in many different forms. Feminism seeks to explain the relationship between women and power, and how these inequalities are embedded in knowledge and practice. From the 1960s and 1970s to the present day, feminism has made great achievements in both theory and practice. Feminists have moved from an initial focus on the underlying factors of female oppression, such as whether women's oppression is in the workplace or at home, in the productive or reproductive sphere, in sexual or maternal duties. etc., to an alternative emphasis on social and environmental factors, exploring social gender differences, etc. The feminist wave has dramatically changed the lives that women expect and the way men treat women [1]. At the same time, Feminist critique has suffused the thinking of many disciplines, from anthropology and postcolonialism, to literary studies and indigenous history, and of course art history and art practice.

Feminism is one of the oldest movements in global history. First-wave feminism was a period of feminist activism and thinking in the Western world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was largely concerned with legal problems, particularly the ability of women to vote. The 1960s until the late 1980s are widely considered the Second Wave of feminism. It was a reaction to women returning to their traditional roles as housewives and mothers after WWII.

Men who had been forced to leave the workforce to join the military had returned, and women were sacked and replaced by men. This movement was initially concentrated in the United States of America and then spread to other Western countries. This movement was triggered by the publishing of Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, a renowned feminist text credited for daring to break social conventions regarding the portrayal of women. Friedan was inspired by Simone de Beauvoir's book, *The Second Sex*, first published in Paris in 1949 [2]. The First Wave was primarily concerned with the suffragette struggle for the right to vote, whereas the Second Wave was more concerned with both public and private injustices.

The 1980s' definition of feminism's third wave, with an emphasis on difference and pluralistic development, was very polarizing. These new consumer representations of women, such as Madonna in the United States and the Spice Girls in the United Kingdom, are marketed as postfeminists by the media and popular culture. These actress images are seen as outspoken and competitive yet accused of being narcissistic and sexy bad girls. Such a situation is not only seen in the acting world, but also in the art world. Tracey Emin, born in 1963, is known as a bad girl figure in the UK. Emin grew up in the context of the Third Wave, and her relationship to the feminist cause is largely of a similarly ambiguous nature. There is a contradiction between the way Emin has publicly disassociated herself from feminism and her representation of it in her artwork. For example, Emin's use of needlework in her work is rooted in feminist welfare. In Dovey Jon's *Freakshow: First person media and factual television*, it is argued that the second wave of needlework was seen as a creative medium that could distinguish women from traditional male art and practice, and that needlework was almost always associated with women and female artistic creativity [3], not only is there a connection to the feminist artistic explorations made by previous feminist artists. Yet, on the other hand, her work has often been subject to critical bias in the past. Further complicating the situation, Emin denies that her work is inherently feminist and refuses to engage with feminist causes. Despite this, her work continues to have a huge impact on the British art scene.

This study looks at the often complicated and ambiguous relationship between Emin and the feminist movement. It will examine on the one hand, the range of connections that Emin has with the feminist art movement, such as her sharing creative media and the confessional strategy with certain feminist artists. On the other hand, criticism of her has ranged widely, covering topics such as her embrace of individualism,

her exploitation of populist sentiments, or her indifference to the feminist cause as a collective social movement.

II. INDEBTED TO THE FEMINIST TRADITION

In an episode of the 2015 *The Great British Bake Off*, one of the female contestants decided to take a risk and present to the judges of the show a work based on one of Tracey Emin's most well-known installations. As shown in Fig. 1. The motivation behind the contestant's deciding to base her work on Emin's work remains elusive: it might be her gesture of paying tribute to an artwork by an eminent contemporary female artist whom she revered, or she may have only intended her work to be a symbolic sneer at the artist's controversial installation and was thus simply trying to comment on the work's shocking level of deskilling. In either case, the contestant's attempt was met with bitter defeat: not only was the work deemed a result of the lack of skill and motivation on the part of the contestant, but one of the show's female judges, Mary Berry, claimed that the work suffered a lack of 'tidiness' that allegedly was supposed to be a crucial element in reaping favorable first impression [4]. The fact that the 'untidiness' of the work was singled out to be the most problematic with the contestant's work betrays a deeply gendered view on the kind of proper social role the female gender should be striving to take on: namely, being orderly and tidy and respectable with what they do in life [5].



Fig. 1. Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998, London, Charles Saatchi.

Upon a closer look at the episode, Emin's original installation begins to assume a crucial role in the whole event. The female judge's dismissing the re-creation as untidy in effect represents a typical strand of public perception regarding the deskilling of Emin's work [5]: that is, they should not deserve the status of artworks due to their zero incorporation of 'relevant' artistic skills. However, perhaps the most ambiguous dimension with Emin's work lies in its highly ambiguous feminist message: it could be hard to establish whether *My Bed* was trying to demonstrate that women have every right to be untidy and messy with their lives, or whether it was simply intended to portray only the emotional breakdown following a bad breakup of a very specific individual. For the failed contestant, it could have been the former, but for the female judge, whatever vague or potential feminist message that may or may not have been contained in Emin's installation was non-existent.

Emin's relationship with the feminist cause has been largely characterized by similar ambiguity. There is ample evidence that points to her connection with feminist artistic explorations made by feminist artists preceding her. On the other hand, however, her work has always been the target of much feminist criticism or negligence in the past. Further complicating the situation has been Emin's denial of describing her work as feminist in nature and refusal to be affiliated with the feminist cause overall. Despite all this, her work has continued to generate massive impact within the British art world. This chapter deals with roughly the following two areas to survey Emin's complicated relationship with the feminist artistic tradition as well as the feminist cause in general. The first part of the discussion will be devoted to investigating how Emin's work has been greatly influenced by the feminist artistic tradition, thus establishing the foundation on which to argue that an adequate analysis of Emin's work can never circumvent the feminist framework. The second part discusses the rationale and justification that have served to underlie the variety of feminist criticism that have always been directed at Emin's work.

A. *Shared Creative Media and the Common Enemy of Patriarchy*

One of the inescapable connections Emin has always had with the feminist movement is reflected by the similarity between her selection of creative medium and that of her feminist predecessors. This similarity between them functions to cement her connection with the feminist movement.

One of the central issues that feminist artists before Emin had to tackle was to establish an alternative art history that would do justice to the legitimate role of women artists in art history, thus challenging the established male-dominated art history. To do this, many of them have actively sought to identify elements of women's creative projects that could distinguish them from those made by the male artists [6]. Over time, the needlework was singled out as a key symbol for women's marginalization in art history and for women's oppression in society in general. The reason for this was given by Rozsika Parker, in *The Subversive Stitch* (1984), which points out that in the 19th century competence with needlework was generally deemed a hallmark trait of virtuous middle and upper-class femininity [7]. This notion of needlework as symbol for women's oppression was later subverted by Second Wave feminist artists, who saw it as a creative medium that could set women artists apart from the male art traditions and practice, since it, unlike painting and sculpture, had always been almost exclusively associated with women and women's artistic creativity [8]. This search for alternative creative media and practice went on to include a whole range of other media, such as performance art, video, embroidery, patchwork, appliqué, autobiography, and so forth, all for the sake of finding a uniquely female voice and style upon which the previously male-dominated art history could be shattered and rewritten, and the future course of art history could sufficiently represent the contributions of female artists and artistic practices.

Regardless of Emin's reluctance to be officially associated with the feminist movement [9], it will be difficult to fail to

notice the impact that the above feminist efforts to rewrite and retell art history have produced on Emin's work. Like her predecessors, Emin incorporates and has always relied upon creative media that stemmed from those efforts. She has always worked comfortably with fabric, which she tends to collect from her life. Many of her works feature the technique of embroidery, such as *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995), which lists all the people whom she had shared her bed with from 1963 to 1995. Fig. 2 shows words and images were embroidered onto pillows and other objects to portray the fear and sexual abuse suffered by a young woman, and in *Sometimes I Feel So Fucking Lost* (2005) appliqués were made on hotel linens [10]. Works as such, traditionally deemed as handicrafts instead of artworks, have long been able to take on the status of being artistic techniques that reflect a unique female and feminist perspective because of feminist artists and their efforts in the past, and Emin has been arguably one of the most direct and prominent beneficiaries of this art historical development.



Fig. 2. Tracey Emin, *To Meet My Past*, 2002, London, The Saatchi Gallery.

Despite the verdict of Emin's confessional work being exhibitionist and thus being fundamentally different from the kind of confessional work done by her feminist art predecessors, it has nonetheless been rather faithful to the autobiographical strategy that had been adopted by many feminist artists before her [11]. It might indeed be argued that Emin's confessional art differs at its core from that of feminist artists before her because hers is rooted in a self-serving interest to promote herself and her market value, while that of the latter was aimed at safeguarding the interests of female artists in art history. However, the fact remains that Emin's confessional art is a likely product of the autobiographical tradition pioneered by feminist artists before she began her artistic practice. In other words, without the past efforts that had largely served to make more visible the practice of confession within the feminist art canon, there might be the possibility that Emin may never have been able to successfully place confession at the center of her artistic practice.

A significant part of Emin's work used to be dismissed as lacking artistic skills and creative rigor, not only by male critics but also by female ones. Similar criticism used to be

directed at Judy Chicago when her *The Dinner Party* (Fig. 3). It was ridiculed as 'kitsch' by a male critic [12]. In this respect, Emin and Judy Chicago face a common enemy: the toxic male-dominated art historical order that would always hold the male creativity to be a biological and historical fact while dismissing the female creativity as only myth [13]. No matter how reluctant both female artists may allow themselves to be associated with each other, both have been beneficiaries of previous feminist artistic struggles, indebted to a wide range of feminist artistic techniques and traditions initiated by their feminist predecessors.

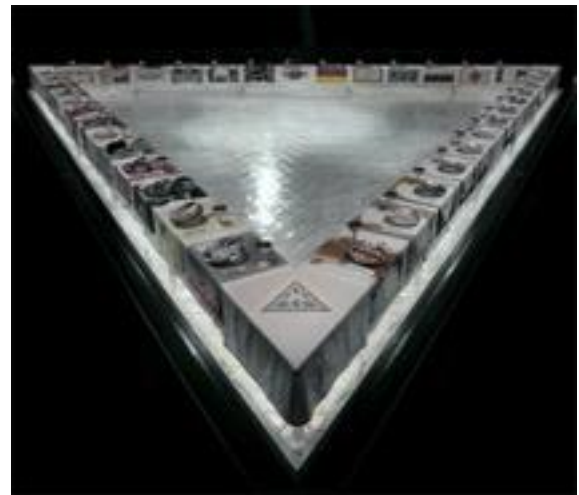


Fig. 3. Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1979, New York, Brooklyn Museum.

B. Subject Matters Matter: Abortion and Female Sexuality

Another way Emin's work is connected to the feminist art movement overall lies in the fact that many of Emin's work tends to treat the same kinds of subject matters that were previously dealt with by feminist artists before her, including sexual abuse, abortion, maternity, rape, personal trauma, and so forth. Such a focus on issues that have been distinctly feminist should deserve, as argued by *Betterton* (2002), to be treated seriously by scholars if a feminist analysis of Emin's work is to be carried out [14].

In traditional patriarchal society, the most central role assigned to women has been that of bearing children and subsequently rearing them; women were treated nothing more than a tool with which the bloodline of a clan or a community could be continued [15]. With the rise of Second Wave feminism, however, the negative physical and mental implications of pregnancy and childbirth have been exposed to the patriarchal perspective [16]. Women were increasingly given the option of abortion if they wish to prevent such implications from damaging their health. Despite never-ending opposition from religious and other conservative forces in society, branding abortion as cold-blooded murdering of lives, the fact remains that the society overall has become more tolerant towards the act of abortion [17]. Emin's treatment of abortion operates largely within such a social context. A range of her work has been devoted to dealing with the issue: *Poor Love* (1999), *From the Week of Hell '94*, (1995), *Super 8 film*, *Homage to Edvard Munch and all My Dead Children* (1998), etc. With the last one, Emin has been praised by Baillie to have successfully and

powerfully fused ‘melancholy and maternity’ in a work that was intended to pay tribute to Emin’s most revered artistic idol and inspiration [18].

Similar previous struggles carried out by Emin’s feminist predecessors have also engendered a more tolerant environment that allows Emin to deal with matters of female sexuality in a more open and direct manner without the kind of social and ideological restrictions that feminist artists before her typically had to face. In the most patriarchal of societies, female sexuality used to be conceived primarily as an inconvenience, an abnormality, something aberrant and toxic that ought to be contained and weeded out, if the goal here is to maintain a social order that is capable of functioning properly and appropriately [19]. After the development of Second Wave Feminism, however, female sexuality has become arguably much less susceptible to the patriarchal stigmatization, and thus has been able to enter public discourse and space with much greater frequency and tolerance than before. The primary way in which Emin’s artistic portrayal and representation of female sexuality is indebted to the feminist movement has been that it has been operating within this social backdrop that was made more tolerant of and acceptable towards female sexuality as something natural instead of monstrous or detrimental.

It is certainly true that arguments could be made that Emin’s representation of female sexuality and abortion is much more predicated on her personal life experience and may well have been motivated more by personal concerns and not by the larger collective feminist social movement. Nonetheless, the argument here is not that whether Emin’s treatment is feminist than that of her feminist predecessors, or even whether it is feminist in nature, but that there is little room for doubt that her artistic practice has been greatly facilitated by previous feminist efforts that have worked to render more visible and more acceptable issues like abortion and female sexuality.

C. Frida Kahlo, Louise Bourgeois, Yayoi Kusama, and Tracey Emin

There exist many similarities between the artistic practices between those of Emin and those of Frida Kahlo. Emin has been unwilling to acknowledge having been influenced by the latter, attributing the perceived similarities between them largely to coincidences and the fact that they are both women [20]. Despite this, one of the biggest overlaps between their works and practices has been that both tend to place a rather central role on the confessional mode, insistently portraying life events in their respective personal pasts. The bulk of Kahlo’s life was spent on sickbed, which constitutes the primary traumatic condition of her life realities, just like past trauma such as rape and sexual abuse have constituted the bulk of Emin’s past life experiences.

In Emin’s *Terribly Wrong* (1997) (Fig. 4). For instance, the subject matter was inspired by a hellish experience of abortion in 1994[21]. By comparison, Kahlo’s *My Birth* (1932). Fig.5 shows *Frida Kahlo's 1932 artwork My Birth*, which is in a private collection. It was similarly inspired by her experience of miscarriage. Not only were the sources of the subject matters quite similar, both works have even quite similar compositional structures. Emin’s monoprint features a woman’s body in an arched position, with a pile of

unidentified substance formed between the legs of the naked body. Despite the difficulty to identify clearly what the substance is, the overall composition is highly suggestive of a woman in labor or the bloodiness of an abortion. With Kahlo’s *My Birth*, the female figure featured in it is also manipulated into a position that reminds the audience of the image of a woman trying to give birth.



Fig. 4. Tracey Emin, *Terribly Wrong*, 1997, London, Tate.



Fig. 5. Frida Kahlo, *My Birth*, 1932, Private Collection.

When explored further, the fundamental reasons behind both artists’ adopting the confessional mode might be boiled down to their respective need to hold onto the mode as a tool to better come to terms with the emotional or psychological damages suffered by them and resulting from past traumas. Although Emin’s work concerns more with sexual oppression [22], which is quite different from Kahlo, it is driven fundamentally by a shared desire to treat wounds inflicted by past traumas.

Emin’s work also resonates with that of Frida Kahlo in that they have both challenged the male gaze that holds strong sway over the representation of the female experience. Specifically, Kahlo’s work managed to do this though her depiction of females as strong and even occasionally masculine, which is frequently in opposition to the way women are typically portrayed from the male perspective, which tends to treat the female image as weakly feminine, sexually desirable, and in need of male protection. With

Emin's work, a somewhat different approach is employed to achieve a similar purpose. In the previously mentioned monoprint, *Terribly Wrong* (1997), the unidentified substance that appears between the spread legs of the female body has been described by Jennifer Doyle as potentially "blood, shit or semen", and she went on to argue that Emin adopts a "bad-sex aesthetic" in her artistic projects. As pointed out by Doyle, such an esthetic choice has been instrumental in Emin's exploration of life experiences that could be "exhilarating, pleasurable, or abject"[23]. Therefore, this strategy of Emin's differs radically from the male gaze, or the male willful fantasy of what the female experience and image should be like or made up of, because such a strategy abandons the male imposition and confronts head-on the true female reality that she experiences: bloodily abject, twisted, characterized by both physical struggles and emotional vulnerability, or in other words, nothing to do with the rosy romanticism with which the male gender chooses to indulge in its fantasy of "the ideal woman".

There are also similarities between Emin's work and those of other typical feminist artists too. Louise Bourgeois, for instance, has been famous for her exploration of her childhood traumas in her work, a typical example of this being her *Autobiographical Series* in 1994[21]. Likewise, Yayoi Kusama's art has also been closely associated with her personal history of suffering from a medical condition called neurologic audiovisual impairment, which has been a key driver for her hallmark use of polka dot patterns in many of her work. For both, art is built upon personal experience, and personal traumas, and for both, art is a tool for somehow healing themselves. Past traumatic experiences, the use of the confessional strategy as a healing mechanism, are some of the key connections linking Emin to the feminist artistic practice and artists; together with the similarities in their choices of creative media, and of subject matters such as abortion and female sexuality, as well as their challenge to the male dominated artistic order overall, it becomes clear that Emin's work and artistic practice have always been closely connected to the tradition and practice of the feminist art movement.

III. TRACEY EMIN: OUTSIDER OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

Even though there are many connections between Emin's work and those of her feminist predecessors before her, many critics have cast serious doubt as to whether she should be treated as a feminist artist proper. Indeed, as argued by Julian Stallabrass, not only have many been reluctant to treat her as a feminist artist, they have also been inclined to deem her as an amateur or simply a charlatan [24]. Such questioning attitudes have apparently not escaped the attention of Emin, and she has been reported to distance herself repeatedly and emphatically from the feminist cause overall. During one public interview, Emin was asked about what she thought of the feminist movement, and she flatly replied: "I don't [25]." A range of causes could be behind both the critics' dismissing and exclusive attitudes towards Emin's work being considered potentially feminist. The following section offers a brief survey of some of these causes.

A. *Worship of Individualism*

One of the major problems that feminist artists and critics

have with Emin has been her embracing individualism throughout the bulk of her career. As professed in her own words in 2015, "I look at myself, and I paint myself, but they're portraits of my mind, of my deepest thoughts [26]." Her work and artistic practice have only one aim to achieve, and that is self-expression and the representation and exploration of her individual life events. Ultimately, she treats her work as a tool to achieve the integration between her personal life and art, with no concerns whatsoever for other ideological or political frameworks at the social movement level [27]. Not only has such an individualistic rhetoric been able to take hold and garner acceptance among certain critics, such as when Alastair Sooke suggests that 'Emin' is 'her most successful work of art' [28], it has also inspired considerable debates around it. On the one hand, this individualistic attitude has apparently appealed to many young people in the UK and elsewhere to the point where she has attained the status of a social and artistic icon [29]. On the other, however, has been unceasing feminist criticism directed at it.

Many female artists have, for instance, placed a central position on female sexuality in their art. However, Emin's dealing with the female sexuality differs fundamentally from that of feminist artists like Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, whose works of art help to shape an image of female sexuality that positively contributes to the collective feminist cause. Emin's work on female sexuality is associated with a desire for commercial exposure, a desire to shock and sensationalize, and is more of a business strategy for commercial advancement than any desire to advance the feminist cause. By contrast, feminist artistic efforts in portraying female sexuality have always been rooted in a more consciously mobilized and organized movement to advance women's welfare in general, anchored in the larger feminist social initiative to promote female welfare in a whole host of female experiences: abortion rights, sexuality, domestic violence, systematic discrimination against women, marital rape, and so forth. Emin's treatment on female sexuality has none of such roots, and frequently borders on an obsessive exhibitionist desire to expose her sexual and bodily secrets.

Emin's ambition for personal commercial advancement and her exhibitionist desire to disclose her personal secrets permeate much of her work. The dominance of commercial and market sensationalism and psychological exhibitionism in those works stems from her fundamental worship of individualism and an utter disregard for the feminist cause. Her confessional strategy is also fundamentally in service of such individualism. As pointed out by Rosemary Betterton, one of the aims of true feminist artists like Marry Kelly in their autobiographical work is to encourage the audience to escape from the autographical elements so as to focus on the wider social and political messages that the work tries to convey, while at the center of Emin's strategy is to encourage idolization of, obsession with and mindless consumption of, her highly personalized and individualized confession and exhibition [30]. Comparing such highly individualized goals with those of the Guerrilla Girls, who have argued that the objective of their work is to concentrate public attention on the many unresolved feminist issues, rather than their individual personalities, it becomes even clearer why Emin's

individualism has been described by Katy Deep as “libertarian individualism, rather than a liberationist politics”, and has been typically treated as contributing nothing to the feminist cause and politics[31].

B. Patriarchy Attacks: She's the Reason Why Feminism is a Joke

Not only have Emin's obsession with her personal past and her highly personalized portrayal of her own sexuality been considered as indifferently and irresponsibly individualistic and selfish in nature, having no concern whatsoever for the feminist cause, they have also been made easy targets of contempt and ridicule from opponents of the feminist cause. A key reason for such patriarchal attack has been her obsession with female sex. As has been

repeatedly shown earlier in the discussion, a huge proportion of Emin's art pertains to the theme of sexuality: *Sex in the bathroom* (from Family Suite), 1994, Materials: Monoprin, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* (1995); *When I Think About Sex, Automatic Orgasm (Come Unto Me)*, 2001, 2005. Lithograph printed in colors on wove, *Sex Sydney*, 2011 Etching, *In The Dead Dark Of Night I Wanted You*, 2018. There are also many others that may not be overtly sex-related, but have been manipulated to be highly suggestive of sex nonetheless. Fairly or not, this has not escaped the patriarchal censorship that is always on the lookout for aspects of the feminist movement that might serve to justify its suspicion of and hatred against the feminist movement as a legitimate and respectable social movement capable of bringing about positive social changes.

Some have pointed out Emin's lifestyle as a somewhat unhinged sex maniac to be a symbol of what has gotten all wrong with the feminist movement, diligently and painstakingly trying to associate Emin's personal lifestyle choices with a social cause as varied in its composition and multidimensional in its efforts as the feminist movement. John Walker has claimed that Emin's art has been characterized as nothing but ‘angry vagina’, ‘victim art’ and ‘misery art’ [32], at the center of which lies only the artist's narcissism and self-pity spun out of control. Walker has also been quite firm on his position that Emin's appeal stems largely from her “sexually alluring body” which he has likened to those of erotic models [33]. Antifeminist patriarchal criticism has also been directed at Emin's proactively embracing the marketing and business side of her overall practice, such as her collaboration with Sarah Lucas in creating *The Shop* and the opening of her online international store later, claiming that such eagerness in appealing to commercial and consumerist interests in the art world would only lead to compromises in the quality of her artistic projects. This angle of criticism is certainly not limited to such promotional and business practices, since we can almost count on the male perspective to always link it back to the sex-motivated point of view, such as when one of Emin's installations, *Exorcism of the last painting I ever made* (1996) (Fig. 6). It was described as appealing to voyeuristic interests among the audience, and “was not that different from sex industry peep shows” [34].

C. Criticism from Within: She's Not One of Us

Apart from the attack from the patriarchal order, there has also been considerable criticism springing from feminist

critics and other feminist artists too. Overall, such criticism has been concentrated on the following several areas: Emin's appealing to populist sentiments, her working-class origin and subsequent reliance on commercializing her work, her anti- intellectual stance, her embracing the conservative politics, in addition to her obsession with individualism. One of the key subject matters of Emin's art has always been Margate, the little seaside town where a significant part her life's trauma took place. She came from a working-class origin, and many of her life's concerns had to do with keeping ends meet, especially after her father left her mother and her during her childhood [35]. This first-hand experience with poverty and financial insecurity from early stages of life may be behind her proactively chasing commercial success when she later started her career as an artist. A disagreeing attitude has been expressed by certain feminist critics towards her striving, often in ways that these critics tend to find fault with, for commercial success at all costs, and the reasons for this have been chiefly that such a zest for money may well translate into a ready willingness on the part of the artist to compromise the quality of her work for commercial gains. This willingness to compromise for business' sake has been linked to be behind her choosing “a particular pathologized representation of working-class femininity and sexuality, the figure of the “slag.” [36].



Fig. 6. Tracey Emin, *Exorcism of the last painting I ever made*, 1996, London.

Indeed, such eagerness to achieve financial independence and subsequent readiness to trade the quality of her work for this independence may also have been why there has been a general tendency to treat her work as appealing too much to the popular taste, or in other words, why it has been regarded by feminist critics as too populist in nature [37]. For those feminist artists whose aim is to establish the feminist art movement as a respectable and independent social and artistic cause that could garner as much support as possible within a male-dominated artistic order, there can be little room for such money-driven compromises and subsequently for such overly commercially motivated female artists like Emin.

The same need to maintain the artistic integrity and the general respectability of the feminist movement also can help

to explain why Emin's self-positioning as an anti-intellectual has been subject to much feminist criticism during her career. Emin's self-identification as a Bohemian artist who has no interest in adhering to the standard or established ways of engaging in feminist art serves to render her art only the "surface gestures of previous (feminist) work without transforming them." [38] Similarly, J. Roberts points out that some of Emin's sexualized work has been nothing but a 'proletarian-philistine reflex against 'feminist propriety about the body'[39]. Others have linked the characteristic tendency to deskilling in many Emin's work to her anti-intellectual and anti-establishment attitudes too, arguing that such attitudes should not be treated as aimed at breaking away from the male artistic establishment and thus clearing way for alternative female artistic conventions and establishment to emerge, but rather, they are simply out of an artistic laziness and impatience to any established rules of artistic practices that are rooted in an sweepingly anti-intellectual indifference to the feminist movement.

Entering the more mature years of her career, Emin's practice was increasingly characterized by an inclination towards conservative politics. With growing recognition from the established artistic institutions, comes her growing popularity among conservatives. At one point, she was involved in portraying some of the royal family events in her drawings, and this was considered a decisive moment that points to her embracing the conservative politics [40]. Since the feminist movement aims at challenging the existing status quo both in the artistic landscape and in many other areas that have been male-dominated, Emin's affiliation with conservative politics and establishments has naturally been a target of feminist criticism, condemned as not only unhelpful for the feminist struggle, but also even potentially erosive for the cause collectively.

IV. CONCLUSION

Then there is Emin's entanglement with the feminist art tradition. There is no doubt as to the massive creative debts she owes to feminist art efforts before her, in terms of her sharing with feminist artists proper the feminist creative media, feminist subject matters such as abortion and female sexuality, the feminist autobiographical or confessional strategy, and the common enemy of patriarchy. In fact, there can be no doubt also that without the feminist efforts preceding her, most of the things that have led to her success would have been unimaginable. She would have had much greater trouble portraying female sexuality and abortions in her work, she would have been much less intuitive in choosing creative media like embroidery and patchwork, instead of painting, drawing, or sculpture, to be her primary media, and she would have even never thought of taking advantage of the confessional mode in the first place.

On the other hand, there has never been short of criticism targeting her and her work. Her adherence to and even worship of extreme individualism portrays her as indifferent to the feminist art movement, thus posing essentially no threat to the existing male-dominated artistic canon. She has been chosen by haters of feminism to justify their hatred against the feminist cause. This, coupled with her conservatism in politics, her obsession with commercial success, and her anti-

intellectual and anti-establishment attitudes, explains why she has been consistently excluded from the ranks of the most revered feminist artists in the west.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

There is only one author for this work. The author had approved the final version.

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