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Tracey Emin at Lehmann Maupin
By Alfred MacAdam

Lehmann Maupin inaugurated its new Chelsea space with a dazzling multimedia show by Tracey Emin. Using film (a sleeping woman), embroidery (on torn hotel sheets), neon (an obscene invitation), and sculpture (an ephemeral pair of sandals, painted and made eternal), Emin transformed autobiography into art. That is, the objects she deployed in this space Rem Koolhaas so brilliantly reconfigured do and do not constitute her life story. Even as she presents herself, Emin effaces her self, constructing metaphors with a life of their own that connects them to an artistic tradition, one that includes the reworked expressionism of Martin Kippenberger.

The centerpiece of this superb show was *To Meet My Past* (2002), a metal four-poster bed decorously turned down and covered with feminine floral quilts. This is Emin's primal scene, the locus of desire, fear, memory, regret, revenge, and loneliness. It is a female body, and we must look at it first from the foot and then from both sides. Above the headboard are the words "Weird Sex," with a sketch of a woman sitting on a tombstone in a graveyard. This sex is not weird because it is unconventional; it is simply a reminder that sex recalled is a necrophilic act of mourning, a celebration of something dead that was once pleasure or pain but is now only an absence, a memory. On the left side of the bed, Emin embroidered "I Can Not Believe I Was Afraid of Ghosts. Tracey Emin 1969—1974." Her signature misspelling marks a rift in this bold statement: she wants to believe the past is gone, includes a pair of dates in obituary style, but leaves us doubting her confident veracity. Embroidered on the right side: "I'm going to get you and when I do the whole fucking worlds going to know, that you destroyed my childhood." Another bold declaration, belied by the bed's emptiness, by the fact that memories do not die. Emin's characteristic smash-mouth obscenity is attenuated here, replaced by wistfulness and forthright social criticism.

In a rear gallery, there were four witty abstract paintings by Casey Cook, whose visual experiments with perspective and trompe l'oeil constituted an esthetic rejoinder to Emin's passion play.