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Recurring Dream

By Linda Yablonsky

FOR HER OPENING last Thursday at Lehmann Maupin's Chrystie Street branch, Tracey Emin wore a tiny gold key on a chain around the plunging neckline of her silvery Vivienne Westwood frock. "It's the key to my sense of humor," Emin said, with a twist of a smile. We were standing in what David Maupin whispered was "the speakeasy," aka the gallery's basement, where champagne was flowing along with much bubbly talk. Upstairs in the main space, the title of Emin's fourth solo turn in New York ("Only God Knows I'm Good") glowed brilliant white in a neon sign hung near the thirty-foot ceiling, in that omniscient position reserved for benevolent gazes and lofty thoughts.

Below, it was friends-and-family night, as it is for most artists' openings, but this is auction season in New York and the crowd of admirers had a more international cast than usual, accented by Italian, Russian, French, Polish, and Shafrazi. Emin's crew from London included Tim Noble and Sue Webster, in town to install five of their works in the town house that architect David Adjaye has designed for collector Adam Lindemann, who was not present. Front and center, however, was the woman whom dealer Lorcan O'Neill called "our landlady," Katy Esquilant, daughter of the proprietor of the Golden Heart, the Shoreditch pub that is a second home to artists in Emin's East End 'hood. Some people never travel without their hairdressers. The English, of course, just bring their own fun.

But it was the Emin touch that carried the show with that sense of humor, taunting and tender at once. Like much of her work, the show plumbs the heights and depths of sex, love, and its absence in many drawings, both inked and sewn, and in a new backroom video animated from drawings of a woman masturbating that is, like much of the rest, about intense isolation and desperate longing. I spotted menswear designer Thom Browne going in as film producer Richard Brown was coming out. Parisian nightlife wunderkind André Saraiva was on the balcony, while on the floor Mera Rubell made a beeline for Piotr Uklanski, whose art she is hanging in Miami. "What's this?" asked another a perplexed guest, eyeing two hat-tree-like poles facing off in the center of the gallery, one with a kind of skeletal lampshade on top. "It's the subconscious," Maupin shot back.

"What's so brilliant about tonight is my show," Emin said to loud cheers, during a short speech at the dinner at Wallse that followed the opening. There over a hundred sophisticates were compelled to stand throughout the evening, balancing small plates of scrumptious morsels in one hand, forks and drinks in the other. "Finger food!" Emin shouted. "What the fuck is that!" Actually, everyone knew, and took that as a cue to get down to serious partying (i.e., laughing and drinking) that included some discussion about Emin's eminently spread-legged show.

Serious people say that art is not supposed to be this much fun, though most art worth looking at, including that made for the church, is really all about adoration and

yearning. In fact, it seemed only fitting that a temple to hard-core Minimalism like the Dia Art Foundation chose the Church of the Intercession (across from Dia's Hispanic Society outpost in Harlem) for its benefit gala on Friday. The event, which took place on the day of the foundation's announcement that it would return to Chelsea after a five-year absence, was especially starry-eyed, though that may have been partly because actor James Franco was the benefit's cochair (with San Francisco collector Frances Bowes, who was in animated conversation with Tate director Nicholas Serota, seated to her left).

Franco's date was his grandmother from Cleveland, Mitzi Verne, who has been dealing in Japanese art for the past fifty-five years and claims to be the person who introduced textile designer Serizawa Keisuke (subject of the Japan Society's current show) to the West. "James got his interest in art from me," she said, beaming at her grandson, who was seated beside Art Production Fund's Yvonne Force and otherwise accosted by photographers, reporters, and well-wishers requesting pictures, interviews, and personal attention.

Another James—Rosenquist—was at the next table, with Robert Longo, Ingrid Sischy, and Antony, the cherub-faced singer who had just returned from a year on the road and seemed very happy to relax out of the spotlight. Musician Arto Lindsay, appearing suddenly on a balcony high above the floor, started the proceedings with a virtuoso guitar performance that suggested cathedral-like spaces are really the most elevating venues for music, even the thrashing, dissonant kind.

"More artists should be on the boards of art institutions," Dia curator Yasmin Raymond was telling Glenn Ligon, who had commented on the recent addition of Robert Ryman to Dia's. Artists Matthew Barney, Zoe Leonard, Kalup Linzy, Tony Feher, and Paul McCarthy were liberally sprinkled among the 340 art personages, who also included Studio Museum chief Thelma Golden, White Columns's Matthew Higgs, Sotheby's Lisa Dennison, MoMA's Kathy Halbreich, collectors [George Aul](#) and Beth Swofford, Art Basel's Marc Spiegel, and PaceWildenstein's Marc Glimcher, whose Twenty-second Street space, leased from Dia, will be razed to make room for a new building that Dia director Philippe Vergne promised would "disappear" behind future exhibitions and, with apologies to La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, would be "a dream house for artists."

"Dia belongs in Chelsea," board chair Nathalie de Gunzburg told the crowd, which erupted in applause. "Nathalie helps me get through the day without putting my mouth in my foot," Vergne quipped. After noting that it had taken his organization five years to land across the street from its previous address, Vergne went on to say that Dia had also acquired three thousand acres of New Mexico desert to protect Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* from any future development that might threaten its serenity.

Money seems to have returned to an art world that is behaving like a spurned lover who is only too happy to renegotiate the relationship on any terms. Yet all anyone in Chelsea talked about at the opening of Mike Kelley's new show at Gagosian on Saturday night was the art on the walls. Yes, on the walls. "Masterful" was the prevailing judgment. Kelley made the paintings on his own, much like McCarthy did for his show of Snow White (or "White Snow") drawings on view uptown at Hauser

& Wirth. "After all these years of fabrication and working with others, it's great to be alone in the studio again," McCarthy said. Clearly an idea whose time has come.