

[ART JOURNAL]



Too much information?

Tracey Emin's retrospective at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art has attracted more than 13,000 visitors in the three weeks since it opened. But it's also drawn scathing reviews from some prominent critics

BY LUCIE GODEAU
AFP, EDINBURGH

The first retrospective of work by Tracey Emin, the enfant terrible artist who has made a career out of intimate personal details including her own unmade bed, has opened to mixed reviews.

As well as *My Bed*, a mess of vodka bottles, cigarette butts and dirty underwear, *Tracey Emin: 20 Years* also features *Conversations With My Mum*, a video of her talking to her mother, and *It's Not the Way I Want to Die*, a model of the roller coaster in her hometown of Margate.

The show, at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, has attracted more than 13,000 visitors in the three weeks since it opened, but many critics have been scathing, accusing her of being unsubtle and self-important.

Most of the works focus on the artist's own life — her teenage years, being raped at the age of 13, relationships and fears about never being a mother — with an unblinking intensity.

"Emin has turned her life into a public spectacle like no other artist before her," wrote Patrick Elliott, the exhibition's curator, in its catalogue.

Born in 1963, Emin is, alongside figures such as



Above: A woman walks past works by artist Tracy Emin titled, from left to right, *Volcano Closed*, *Something I've Always Been Afraid Of* and *Star Trek Voyager*, at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art. The first retrospective of work by Emin, the enfant terrible British artist, opened at the museum last month.

Left: Emin's *When I Think About Sex I Think About Men, Women, Dogs, Lions, Group Sex (and I Love You All)*, on display at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

Damien Hirst, associated with the Young British Artists group that emerged in London in the 1990s.

Her eye-opening works have made her a household name and brought financial success — millionaire advertising guru Charles Saatchi, a major collector of contemporary British art, has repeatedly snapped up her pieces.

Emin has gradually become part of the art establishment — she became a member of the Royal Academy in 2007 and represented Britain at the Venice Biennale last year.

But she still draws stinging reviews from some critics.

"By the end of this show, I felt as if someone had been shouting at me down the phone for a couple of hours — a kind of emotional earache," the *Guardian* newspaper's reviewer wrote.

The *Times* was hardly more flattering — "What distresses me far more than Emin's taste for the obscene ... is her amazing, unshakable faith in her own importance," its reviewer said. Visitors to the Edinburgh show were divided in their reactions, meanwhile.

"Heavy, boring, rubbish" and "personal, thought-provoking, absorbing" were just two of the comments left in a visitors book.

The show runs in Edinburgh until Nov. 9 and travels to the Contemporary Art Center in Malaga, Spain from Nov. 28 to Feb. 22, 2009, and the Art Museum in Bern, Switzerland from March 10, 2009 to June 21, 2009.

Curator hides Stalin mementoes from Russians

The director of the Stalin museum had only one thought when Russian jets started bombing the Georgian city of Gori: preserve the personal effects of the city's most infamous son

BY MARK TREVELYAN
REUTERS, GORI, GEORGIA



When Russian bombs began falling on Gori, Robert Maglakelidze took a desperate decision: he loaded his car with a precious consignment and fled along the dangerous road to Tbilisi.

Stowed inside were the personal effects of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin: his military greatcoat, peaked cap, pen, glasses, silver sword and pipe — in total some 50 unique items.

Maglakelidze, director of the Stalin museum in Gori, says bringing them for safekeeping in the Georgian capital was the only way to ensure their survival.

"I had to take the risk," he said. "Thank God, they didn't bomb the museum, but there was no guarantee. We said 'let's preserve these things for future generations.' These personal things can't be replaced."

Gori, Stalin's birthplace, was first bombed and then occupied by Russian troops in the short war that followed Georgia's ill-fated attempt on Aug. 7 to Aug. 8 to recapture its rebel, pro-Russian province of South Ossetia, just north of the town.

The Russians have left Gori now, but scars from

the fighting remain. At the weekend, workmen were clearing rubble and glass from several large apartment blocks heavily damaged by bombing.

Yet the Stalin museum — an imposing, pale stone building with a colonnade and a tall rectangular tower, crowned with a red and white Georgian flag — escaped virtually unscathed.

"We're clearing up, there is a lot of dirt. There was thick dust, the halls are filthy," said a museum official, Mziya Naorchashvili.

The museum was closed on Saturday, but managers allowed reporters to look inside parts of it.

One window was smashed by the entrance, and three more above the red-carpeted stairs leading to a white marble statue of the dictator, Lenin's successor and Georgia's most notorious son.

Paintings nearby show him in his various roles: the bearded young revolutionary fronting a 1905 workers' demonstration; the pensive leader reading papers by a desk; the dutiful son alongside his mother.

Two marble busts survey a landing with more paintings: an idealized portrait of a boy Stalin sitting outside with friends, and Stalin the party leader greeting Communist officials.

The double doors to the

galleries were sealed. But outside are the tiny brick and wood house in which the young Josif Dzhugashvili was born in 1879, and the green railway carriage — formerly belonging to the Tsar — in which he traveled to the Yalta, Potsdam and Tehran conferences in World War II.

You can even buy a replica Stalin pipe for 12 lari (US\$8.60), a small silver bust for 25 lari, or a bottle of Georgian wine with his portrait on the label for 20 lari.

"Until the collapse of the Soviet Union there were lots of visitors from the whole world, about half a million a year. Today it's 18 to 25,000 a year," said Naorchashvili, whose own home was damaged in the bombing.

After 33 years working there, she said, "the museum is virtually my life."

How does she feel personally towards the man whose shrine she protects, and whom many in the former Soviet Union still admire as a strong national leader and World War II savior?

"I respect him for his intelligence, for his talent ... He was a statesman. He didn't do anything against Georgia."

But she also acknowledges "all these troubles" — a euphemistic reference to Stalin's purges which caused the deaths of millions of people, some after show trials

and many after suffering exile and forced labor in the camps of the Gulag.

For regional governor Lado Vardzelashvili, Stalin's shadow lies over even today's events, shaping the actions of his distant successors in the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev.

"I think what is happening here is part of Stalin's legacy, because Putin and Medvedev think exactly the same way as Stalin," said the young governor, whose office overlooks the central square dominated by a giant statue of the dictator.

During the conflict, he says, he tried to do a deal with a Russian general over the monument.

"I made him an offer: take it with you and never come back." But the proposal was declined.

Director Maglakelidze says the museum aims to reopen on Sept. 8. He will return the precious items now being stored in a Tbilisi museum once parliament has taken a decision to lift the official state of war with Russia.

And he sounds a note of optimism on the museum's future and the prospect of attracting visitors from around the globe again.

"I think there will be big interest, for the sake of the town. The whole world knows about Gori now."



Celebrity Interview

Will

CONTINUED FROM P14

Only the path wasn't that long, he points out, a touch shamefully. And there weren't many rejections, either. He joined the LA comedy troupe the Groundlings in the early 1990s. Within three years he was a regular on the TV show *Saturday Night Live*, where Bill Murray, Eddie Murphy and John Belushi started out. What about working the circuit, I ask, and paying your dues? He laughs. "I got *SNL* with a bit of a guilty conscience. There were people who had been at the Groundlings for six or seven years and became my teachers. For me to then get picked for *SNL* after three years ... I was, like, 'Um, sorry I got this.'" He looks embarrassed. "I felt like a mouse who found this hunk of cheese that nobody else got."

Ferrell describes starting on *SNL* in 1995 as "a very scary dream come true." Adam McKay, who joined the show's writing team in the same year, remembers meeting Ferrell. "The other writers and I thought Will was the straight man. It wasn't until the first read-through that I thought, 'Holy crap, he's amazing.' He could do all these characters, he was a great straight man, and then he proved he could write. The writing staff fell in love with him very early on."

Ferrell contributed scalding impressions of George Bush and Ted Kennedy, and created Gene Frenkle, a fictional member of Blue Oyster Cult, whose inept cowbell playing repeatedly spoils the group's attempts to record (*Don't Fear the Reaper*). The character appeared in only one sketch, but turned out to be Ferrell's most popular creation. "Even now, people present me with cowbells to sign," he says, sounding bewildered.

McKay believes Ferrell's persona dovetailed neatly with the mid-1990s mood of the show. "The cast was this really well-adjusted group of people. It wasn't the crazy, drug-addled *SNL* of the 1970s and 1980s. We had the advantage of seeing what fame had done to those people who had gone before. The new intake was made up of anti-celebrities who reacted against that excess. I think people still respond to that in Will. He knows pompous big shots are ridiculous, and that there's a hard fall waiting for them. He has a pretty healthy outlook on the whole joke of wealth and fame and Hollywood."

While he was still at *SNL*, Ferrell began dallying in movies, including the deservedly disliked *A Night at the Roxbury*, in which he played a dorkish poseur whose delusions of cool are undermined by the fact that — you guessed it — he still lives at home with his parents. His fortunes changed with a part in Ben Stiller's 2001 catwalk comedy *Zoolander*. Ferrell quit *SNL* a year later, and the rest is a tally of box-office figures with zeroes on the end like never-ending smoke rings.

Anchorman, *Talladega Nights* (2006) and *Blades of Glory* (2007) were all hits, and McKay confirms that an *Anchorman* sequel is on the boil. While the Frat Pack has more or less dispersed, Ferrell is tight with the new comedy kings: Judd Apatow, who produced *Step Brothers*, and Seth Rogen, who has a cameo part in the film.

But is there a change in the offing? In 2005, Ferrell took his first straightish part, as a tax inspector who hears a voice narrating his life, in *Stranger Than Fiction*. It was a quirky film that provided him with one of those semi-dramatic roles comics love because it shows off their range. Today, Ferrell is weighing up other "straight" scripts. "I don't have this yearning to be respected or taken seriously. But it does bother me that comedy isn't considered hard to do."

He put his case most eloquently in a song he performed with Jack Black and John C. Reilly at the 2007 Academy awards ceremony. It began with Ferrell reciting: "A comedian at the Oscars/ Is the saddest man of all/ Your movies may make millions/ But your name they'll never call," and ended with him resolving to play "a guy with no arms and legs/ Who teaches gang bangers *Hamlet*." Somewhere in between, he wistfully imagined dining with Jeremy Irons, then threatened to break Ryan Gosling's hips.

As with most comedy, its intent was deadly serious. "I don't think the producers of the show even got what we were doing," he says, despair creeping into his voice. "They were backstage saying, 'Oh, that was lovely. Very funny.' They didn't realize every word was true."