

CHRISTIE'S

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TRACEY EMIN'S *MY BED* ON THE MARKET FOR THE FIRST TIME YBA ICON SOLD TO BENEFIT THE SAATCHI GALLERY'S FOUNDATION



My Bed

*Mattress, linens, pillows and objects
31 x 83 x 92½in. (79 x 211 x 234cm.)*

Executed in 1998

Estimate: £800,000 -1,200,000

London – On 1 July, Christie's will offer one of the most iconic works from the YBA movement, Tracey Emin's *My Bed*, 1998, in the Post-War & Contemporary Art Evening Auction, London. Building on Christie's recent success with *Sensation* generation artists, including record prices for works by Jenny Saville and Gary Hume in the February 2014 Evening Auction, and for a more recent work by Tracey Emin (*To Meet My Past*, 2002) in Christie's October 2013 *Thinking Big* auction of sculpture from the Saatchi Gallery Collection, we anticipate a strong degree of interest in this work.

A major piece that encapsulates Emin's deeply personal work exploring the relationship between her life and her art, *My Bed* caused a furore when it was shortlisted for the Tate's Turner Prize in 1999, prompting widespread public debate about the nature of contemporary art. As **Francis Outred, Christie's Head of Post-War & Contemporary Art, Europe**, says: '*In My Bed (1998) Tracey Emin shares with us her most personal space, revealing a dark moment from her life story with startling honesty and raw emotion. Her ability to integrate her work and personal life to a point where they become indistinguishable creates an intimacy with*

her viewers and asks us to witness her cathartic practice as a means of her survival. My Bed (1998) transformed the way the general public engage with contemporary art, and because of this, is one of the most important British works of art of the 20th century.'

*My Bed (1998) is Emin's first readymade artwork that displayed all the forensic marks and detritus of a debauched period in her life. Engaging the viewer with a snapshot of her life brought about by a bout of suicidal depression after a traumatic relationship break-up, My Bed (1998) is made up of her own wooden double-bed with its rumpled sheets, pillows and twisted blankets left in disarray, surrounded by personal effects including empty vodka bottles, cigarette packets, stained sheets, discarded condoms and soiled underwear. As Emin described it in an interview with fellow artist Julian Schnabel: 'I had a kind of mini nervous breakdown in my very small flat and didn't get out of bed for four days. And when I did finally get out of bed, I was so thirsty I made my way to the kitchen crawling along the floor. My flat was in a real mess - everything everywhere, dirty washing, filthy cabinets, the bathroom really dirty, everything in a really bad state. I crawled across the floor, pulled myself up on the sink to get some water, and made my way back to my bedroom, and as I did I looked at my bedroom and thought, "Oh, my God. What if I'd died and they found me here?" And then I thought, "What if here wasn't here? What if I took out this bed-with all its detritus, with all the bottles, the shitty sheets, the vomit stains, the used condoms, the dirty underwear, the old newspapers- what if I took all of that out of this bedroom and placed it into a white space? How would it look then?" And at that moment I saw it, and it looked fucking brilliant. And I thought, this wouldn't be the worst place for me to die; this is a beautiful place that's kept me alive. And then I took everything out of my bedroom and made it into an installation. And when I put it into the white space, for some people it became quite shocking. But I just thought it looked like a damsel in distress, like a woman fainting or something, needing to be helped.'*¹

Looking back on this scene, Emin felt shocked yet absorbed by what it had become. As she says, '*From one second looking horrible it suddenly transformed itself into something removed from me, and something beautiful. I suddenly imagined it out of that context, frozen, outside of my head, in another place.*'² She shipped the bed in its entirety to Japan for an exhibition, installing it next to a pair of chained-up suitcases and a hangman's noose which served to emphasise the painful isolation and entrapment she felt during that whole episode.

Shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1999, Emin exhibited this work at the Tate Gallery, causing polarised reactions among viewers. As she says, '*It's a self-portrait, but not one that people would like to see.*'³ The object of considerable critical attention and strong viewpoints, the work became the centre of an overnight debate about the meaning of 'art', asking audiences to challenge their preconceived way of how they see, experience and understand it. As the novelist Jeanette Winterson has written, '*Emin [...] is interested in doing things differently – so different that they force a revision, another way of looking.*'⁴

Following its exhibition in Japan and her solo show at Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York in 1999, *My Bed* (1998) was exhibited at the Tate Gallery, and was subsequently included in Emin's retrospective, *Tracey Emin: 20 Years, 2008 - 2009*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, which travelled to CAC Málaga and Kunstmuseum Bern, and her 2011 Hayward Gallery exhibition, *Tracey Emin, Love is What You Want*.

A consummate storyteller, Emin engages the viewer in her candid portrayal of the most intimate aspects of

¹ Tracey Emin, quoted by Julian Schanbel in conversation with Tracey Emin *Interview*, 1 June 2006.

² Tracey Emin in conversation with Carl Freedman in Luard and Miles (eds). p. 51-2.

³ Tracey Emin, quoted in S. Kent, 'Bleeding Art', *Time Out*, 8-15 October 1999, p. 24.

⁴ J. Winterson, in Tracey Emin, Carl Freedman, Rudolf Herman Fuchs, Jeanette Winterson, *Tracey Emin Works 1963-2006*, Ann Arbor 2009, p. 6.

her private life with all its indiscretions, insecurities and imperfections. Using her own experience – and frequently her own body – as source material for the work, Emin explores ideas of self-portraiture and narrative disclosure, both intimately bound up with her own biography. Emin grew up in the seaside resort of Margate and her work often refers to traumatic episodes from her childhood as well as to her chaotic teenage years, which resulted in unexpected pregnancies and abortions. She anecdotally recounts episodes from these years in a unique form of confessional works of art that often resonate with their audience. As the art critic Roberta Smith has written, *'the best thing is simply Ms Emin herself, an artist who tells all, all the truths, both awful and wonderful, but mostly awful, about her life.'*⁵

Viewing:

28 June – 1 July 2014, Christie's King Street

Auction:

Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Sale, 1 July 2014, Christie's King Street

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Images available on request

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in 2013 that totaled £4.5 billion/ \$7.1 billion, making it the highest annual total in Christie's history. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers around 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £760.5 million (\$1.19 billion) in 2013, an increase of 20% on the previous year. Christie's has a global presence with 53 offices in 32 countries and 12 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Mumbai. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in growth markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.

⁵ R. Smith, 'Tracey Emin'. *New York Times*, 11 June, 1999