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Gotham Art & Theater

By Elisabeth Kley

Notorious for her bad-girl YBA reputation and works of sculpture that make the notion of the "object" distressingly evident, Tracey Emin has somehow become an expert draughtsman along the ways. Her expressive lines are beautifully evident in the monoprints featured in "Only God Knows I'm Good," her fourth solo exhibition at Lehmann Maupin Gallery in New York, this show installed at the gallery's space on Christie Street on the Lower East Side. Drawn with a shaky, unselfconscious hand, her images have an automatic quality that took Paul Klee years to achieve, along with a pathetic sense of haplessness that brings cartoons by James Thurber to mind.

But Emin's subject matter, which conveys an overwhelming feeling of self-disgust and abandonment, is far from light-hearted. *In More Nothingness* (2009), a faceless nude female in stiletto heels sits in the center of the page with her legs spread, masturbating. "I CAN'T FEEL" is scrawled above her head, as if sexual excitement is the only sensation that can make her believe in her own existence.

Nearby hangs *Nothing Touches* (2009), a blanket embroidered with a drawing of a female figure whose face is blacked out. A spindly line that seems to outline a long skirt could also represent a pair of stick legs enclosing a void. The appliquéd flowers around her provide the only spots of color in the show (aside from a pair of glowing neon signs). Smudged monoprints, yellowed fabric and weathered wood provide the muted tones that otherwise prevail.

In *Strangeland*, her 2005 memoir, Emin describes her early teen-aged passion for disco dancing and sexual coupling. Competing in a Margate dance contest, her potential triumph was derailed by jeers and catcalls from men in the audience, most of whom she'd had sex with by the age of 140. The message is that promiscuous lust is normal for men, but for women, it's pathetic.

Playing in the back gallery is *Those Who Suffer Love*, a 20-minute-long animation. Sketches of a prone woman lying on a bed, seen from the vantage of the footboard, flash on the screen, while she jerkily spreads her legs and reaches for her genitals from the front, the back and either side, as if striving for satisfaction she can never achieve. In a reading for Performa on Nov. 8, 2009, Emin remarked that she hardly ever masturbates. "I'm approaching 50," she said in another interview, "and my sex drive is not what it used to be." Prices for the monoprints begin at £10,000, with other works costing as much as £170,000. The show remains on view till Dec. 19, 2009.