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Emin Inc. Rachel Wolff

Britain's original bad girl artist is back with a new retrospective, a new business, and a new (sort of) attitude.

Artist Tracey Emin has always been a somewhat polarizing figure. The London native burst onto the scene in the 1990s with such deeply personal pieces as *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* 1963-1995, a tent to the inside of which she stitched the names of her many former bedmates. She was loud and unapologetic (other works referred to past abortions, and one included her own trashed and soiled bed), she made famous friends (Kate Moss, Stella McCartney), and she became a regular at posh London hangouts like the Groucho Club. Professional success came as well. She was short-listed for the Turner Prize in 1999, she represented Britain at the 2007 Venice Biennale, and, shortly thereafter, the Scottish National Museum of Modern Art mounted a major retrospective of her work. Still, the public—and the critics—always appeared to be more interested in her tabloidworthy exploits than in the art itself. And she never got much love from the art world powers that be in her hometown. Until now.

This month Emin, 47, will have her first solo museum show in London, at the Hayward Gallery at Southbank Centre. The exhibition, "LOVE IS WHAT YOU WANT," spans her entire career, with drawings, embroideries, sculptures, installations, videos, and neon works, as well as a new interactive piece in which gallerygoers are invited to ask the famously candid artist anything. (Emin's responses will then be displayed in the gallery.)

"It's bad, isn't it?" Emin says of the tribute's tardiness, speaking by phone from her studio in London's East End. Her tone is deceptively sweet; Emin is known for her bite. It's a Monday afternoon, and she has spent much of the weekend recovering from the opening of her new exhibition (a collaboration with the late Louise Bourgeois), at Hauser & Wirth Gallery, where she says 3,000 fans lined up on Bond Street just to get a peek. "But then I've never had a museum show anywhere in America, either." That too is about to change; a major exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art is slated for 2013.

Emin harbors no delusions as to why museums are just now starting to take her and her work more seriously. "Part of the reason is because my work was always considered controversial," she says. "Now people are starting to see it as more establishment, so they're giving it more space. Also, you've got curators who are willing to stick their necks out because I'm of their generation. They don't see anything radical about what I do. They just see it as good art."

Her increasing acceptance is a phenomenon she's looking to capitalize on. In June, Emin and her team will set up shop in the London department store Selfridges to sell the limited edition prints and products she makes through her own mini label, Emin

International. (Think mugs, hats, and totes, all emblazoned with Emin's drawings and signature scrawl) It's a smart branding move and one that has roots in the Shop, a boutique she co-founded in 1993 with fellow Young British Artist Sarah Lucas. The two manned the counter at the East End shop only when they felt like it, peddling ashtrays and T-shirts, as well as less tangible items including investments in their "creative potential," all for about 20 pounds a pop.

Yet despite her recent success-both commercial and otherwise-Emin has been jittery about the Hayward show, her biggest in London to date. "Some people seem to have already decided that it's not going to be very good," she says. "But that doesn't matter. I just do what I do." Plus, the scene outside her Hauser & Wirth opening has helped bolster her confidence: "Three thousand people couldn't have been wrong."