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Tracey Emin
'Every Part of Me's Bleeding'
Lehmann Maupin
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BY ROBERTA SMITH

If Tracey Emin could sing, she might be Judy Garland, a bundle of irresistible, pathetic, ferocious, self-indulgent, brilliant energy. Since she can't, or doesn't, she writes, incorporating autobiographical texts and statements into drawings, monoprints, watercolors, collages, quilts, neon sculptures, installations and videotapes. In her art she tells all, all of the truths, both awful and wonderful, but mostly awful, about her life. Physical and psychic pain in the form of rejection, incest, rape, abortion and sex with strangers figure in this tale, as do love, passion and joy.

Ms. Emin is among the more open and contentious of the group known as the Young British Artists. Her best-known artwork is a small dome-like tent applied with the names of everyone she has ever slept with, beginning with her twin brother. She is also one of four candidates for this year's Turner Prize, given annually for outstanding work by a British artist. When the Turner short list was made public last week, the announcement cited her current solo show, her first in New York.

This accomplishment is hard to assess, although its impact is undeniable. Stylistically, it ricochets between various Post-Minimalist conventions, early feminist art and installation art. In a neon sculpture reminiscent of something by Bruce Nauman and titled "Very Happy Girl," Ms. Emin announces the dimensions of her current boyfriend's penis. She adds a small footnote to the history of installation art by transporting to the gallery a small, wonderfully decrepit beach cottage from the Cornwall coast, where she spent time with an earlier lover. Another installation piece presents a filthy bed, strewn with debris, over which hangs a noose. The most visually convincing artwork, and the one that seems to have involved the most time and work, is an applied blanket of bright felt titled "Psycho Slut."

The best thing here is simply Ms. Emin herself, as conveyed by the blurry, improvised videotapes that document her life. Accompanied by the artist's quiet voice-overs, these tapes show the beach hut in its original site, travel the route to and from the London

hospital where she had a botched abortion or tell of her traumatic yet triumphant departure from the seaside resort of Margate, where she grew up. "C.V." recounts her life from the moment of conception, while the camera roves about her London flat, presenting it as a series of random messy still lifes. In "Interview," Ms. Emin interviews herself, playing devil's advocate and questioning her self-centeredness and excesses.

Ms. Emin's nihilism is so intensely passionate that it amounts to her life force. It is carried, as this entire exhibition is, primarily by language, by aphoristic assertions and monologues that are part Jean Rhys, part Jean Genet. In this day of multiple media and blurred boundaries between disciplines, it still seems that she might be less an artist than a writer, whose autobiography and hard-won philosophy of life would work best in book form. But in whatever form Ms. Emin chooses to work, one thing seems clear: she's all voice.