

27 | ARE SOME FEMINISTS (E.G. TRACEY EMIN) A PAIN IN THE ARTS?

Art is making something out of nothing and selling it.

Frank Zappa 1940-93 American composer, singer-songwriter, electric guitarist, record producer and film director

The vast majority of the most talented artists up to and in the modern era have been men, a phenomenon that has been explored by numerous writers including Steve Moxon in *The Woman Racket*. The domination by men has existed for centuries despite the uncanny ability of lady researchers on the BBC radio programme *Woman's Hour* to find 'female artists who are all mysteriously unknown now but who were at least as good as and as well-known as the top male artists were at the time no really they *were*' for any art form, in any country, in any century.

Is the existence of women-only artistic competitions (such as the Orange Prize for Fiction) the ultimate testament to the superiority of men in the arts? No. The ultimate testament is the feminist artist Tracey Emin, a Professor of Drawing at the Royal Academy, despite her obvious inability to draw any better than the average five-year-old. She is the creator of such works as *My Bed*. From Wikipedia:

'My Bed was first created in 1998 [Author's note: by this definition of 'create' I myself have created works of art every morning for over 50 years...] and was exhibited at the Tate Gallery in 1999 as one of the shortlisted works for the Turner Prize. It consisted of her bed with bedroom objects in an abject state, and gained much media attention. Although it did not win the prize, its notoriety has persisted.

The artwork generated considerable media furore, particularly over the fact that the bedsheets were stained with bodily secretions and the floor had items from the artist's room (such as condoms, a pair of knickers with menstrual period stains, other detritus, and functional, everyday objects, including a pair of slippers). The bed was presented as it had been when Emin had not got up from it for several days due to suicidal depression brought on by relationship difficulties.

Two performance artists, Yuan Chai and Jian Jun Xi, jumped on the bed with bare torsos in order to improve the work, which they thought had not gone far enough. They called their performance *Two Naked Men Jump Into Tracey's Bed*. The men also had a pillow fight on the bed for around fifteen minutes, to applause from the crowd, before being removed by security guards. The artists were detained but no further action was taken. Prior to its Tate Gallery showing, the work had appeared elsewhere, including Japan, where there were variant surroundings, including at one stage a hangman's noose hanging over the bed. This was not present when it was displayed at the Tate.

My Bed was bought by Charles Saatchi for £150,000 and displayed as part of the first exhibition when the Saatchi Gallery opened its new premises at County Hall, London (which it has now vacated). Saatchi also installed the bed in a dedicated room in his own home.

Craig Brown wrote a satirical piece about *My Bed* for *Private Eye* entitled *My Turd*. Emin's former boyfriend, former Stuckist artist Billy Childish, stated that he also had an old bed of hers in the shed which he would make available for £20,000.⁹

Had 'works' such as *My Bed* been produced by a male artist, we'd never have heard of him.