

Information and ideas to explore works from
IMMA's Collection

Strand 8: Tracey Emin
Untitled, from
'Other Men's Flowers', 1994

STRANDS

Prepared by artist Christine Mackey

Introduction

Strands is a series of information sheets devised in response to works from IMMA's Collection, where an artist is invited to develop a range of responses to works selected from an exhibition. The purpose of this series is to provide information and ideas for anyone – adults, children, teachers, lecturers, students – to encourage OBSERVATION, DISCUSSION and MAKING.

Each Strand focuses on one artwork from IMMA's collection and includes the following information:

- **about the artist:** who they are
- **background to the artist's practice:** how they make their work, what kind of work they make
- **for discussion:** some questions and observations about the artist and the work which are intended to prompt further looking, discussion and making
- **key words:** words used in the document which are explained further
- **activities:** a variety of suggestions for further activities and projects in response to the work
- **further explorations:** further information about the artist, artwork and related themes
- **further reading:** some suggestions for books, websites and other resources

These responses have been developed by artist **Christine Mackey** in collaboration with IMMA's Education and Community Department.

Lisa Moran
Curator: Education and Community Programmes

Christine Mackey

Christine Mackey is an artist and independent researcher who employs diverse disciplines, subject matter and tactics in devising works that can generate different kinds of knowledge of place - their hidden histories and ecological formations. Using diverse graphic sources and quasi-scientific methods, her work explores the interactive potential of art as a research and pedagogical tool; its capacity for social and environmental change and as a way of organising diverse knowledge systems for a 'social' model of practice coupled with diverse publics.

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One Foot in the Real World

12 Oct 2013 - 27 April 2014

Christine has drawn out strands from the current Collection exhibition **One Foot in the Real World**, curated by Marguerite O'Molloy, Assistant Curator: Collections. These responses reflect Christine's particular interests and they are intended to encourage further enquiry and response from individuals and groups, adults and children of all ages before, during and after a visit to the exhibition.

Drawing on IMMA's Collection, **One Foot in the Real World**, includes works that explore the urban environment, the everyday or the domestic. Prompted by the Eileen Gray, Leonara Carrington and Klara Lidén exhibitions which run concurrently, the exhibition addresses the psychology of space, scale and the body, gravity and transformation. Elements of architecture and design recur as points of departure in the works such as bricks, the keyhole, the window, the door and the table.

Untitled, From 'Other Men's Flowers', 1994
Lithograph on paper
Loan, Weltkunst Foundation, 1994

Tracey Emin Untitled, From 'Other Men's Flowers'

Untitled belongs to the portfolio *Other Men's Flowers* that consists of 15 text-based works using a **LETTERPRESS** printing press, title-page, introduction and a **COLOPHON** page by 15 London-based artists, curated by London gallerist Joshua Compston (1970-1996) whose space, Factual Nonsense, was closely associated with the emergence of the **YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS (YBAs)**.

The artists are: Henry Bond and Don Brown (whose works from this portfolio are also included in this exhibition), Stuart Brisley, Helen Chadwick, Mat Collishaw, Itai Doron, Angus Fairhurst, Liam Gillick, Andrew Herman, Gary Hume, Sarah Staton, Sam Taylor-Wood, Gavin Turk and Max Wigram.

The curator's brief, as devised by Joshua Compston, invited the artists to make a text-based work that would utilise letterpress printing. The text that the artists used to create their text pieces was inspired from common phrases, city slang, polemic essays and related literary forms that interested each of the artists in different ways.

Nine of the fifteen participants adhered to Compston's letterpress brief. Of the remaining six, four produced **SCREENPRINTED** images, one a **LITHOGRAPH** and one a **MONOTYPE**. The individual artists used different types of paper, all the same size (61 cm by 47 cm); some working in landscape and others in portrait format.

The portfolio was produced in two slightly different editions. The 'book' edition, of one hundred copies plus twenty artists' proofs, consists of fifteen prints, three title pages and a colophon page signed by all the artists, presented in a box. The text-pieces from *Other Men's Flowers* were printed by Thomas Shaw and Simon Redington and published by Charles Booth-Clibborn under his imprint, The Paragon Press.

Emin's contribution to *Other Men's Flowers* is a page of handwritten blue text reproduced as a lithograph on paper. The text is unusual as the artist herself is not the central focus of the piece. Emin's print is a moving portrait of Joseph Samuels, a friend of the artist's twin brother Paul. It is a tribute to the lost days of hanging around on the seafront, dodging the law, dabbling in drugs. It concludes with a harrowing description of Samuel's disturbing and violent death, possibly by the hands of some thug-like marines. These events are delineated in Emin's distinctive, spiky scrawl.



Tracey Emin

b. 1963 Croydon

English artist Tracey Emin was born in 1963. She attended the Medway College of Design, Rochester; Maidstone College of Art and the Royal College of Art, London. Using a range of media including paint, drawing, photography, needlework, sculpture, video and installation, Emin produces deeply personal works inspired by the events of her own life and the tradition of feminist discourse.

In the 1990s, Emin became known as a member of the YBA group (Young British Artists); a group of artists including Damien Hirst which changed the face of contemporary art in Britain. She was nominated for the Turner prize in 1999 and chosen to join the Royal Academy of Arts in 2007. The same year she represented Britain at the Venice Biennale. In 2011, Emin was made Professor of drawing at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Major solo exhibitions include the Hayward Gallery, London in 2011 and Turner Contemporary, Margate in 2012. Emin was made a CBE in 2013 for services to the arts.

Background to Tracey Emin's process

Drawing is the keystone to Emin's practice. She also uses and carefully manipulates a wide range of materials that are employed in different situations such as installation works, sculpture, photography, printmaking, needle work, video, autobiographical writings and performance. She has described her work as a process of being in control of things and has stated that, 'To me drawing is a natural extension of mental creativity, it's like handwriting. Without drawing I wouldn't really exist'.

Since the late 1990s, neon has also been a key medium for Emin, which she uses to transfer the visual passion of her expressive hand writing into illuminated wall-based texts, clearly expressing some of the basic feelings she has about human relationships. An accomplished storyteller and writer, Emin's life is her work and the parallel universes that relate to our own worlds. In this regard, her hopes, failures, dreams and success become our own. It is this ability to personalise her candid exploration of universal emotions that enables Emin to establish an intimacy with the viewer.

For discussion

It might be interesting, when viewing Tracey Emin's work from the portfolio series *Other Mens Flowers*, to also consider the works made by Henry Bond and Don Brown – artists also included in this portfolio.

When we consider that Emin, Bond and Brown were given the exact same brief from which to make a work, how do the artists' works differ from each other?

Can you identify the various printing techniques that each of the artists used?

What do you first notice about the composition of the text in relation to these three artists' works?

For example, are the text works formalised in different ways: hand written or printed, different scale or size of the words?

Would you consider Emin's text piece to be more personal than Bond's, for example?

How is Emin's work similar to letter writing, which may suggest an intimacy with the person that she is writing to/or about?

In this respect, would you consider Emin's work more like drawing?

Do you think these text-works should be read and/or visually comprehended?

Why do you think Bond uses capital letters for some words and for others they are set at normal type size?

Is he perhaps emphasising some idea/point and/or thought process?

What is the difference between writing words as a means of composing a visual art work and writing as literature as a means to be read?

If we consider that all art practice is a form of communication, does it matter what material and form this may take even if the outcome does not resemble what we think art should be?

The idea of a portfolio of works that includes different artists suggests an exhibition in a box – in reality how does scale affect our viewing of these works?

Why do you think that these text works by Emin, Bond and Brown are sparse in terms of colour?

Where do you think the artists acquired the text to compose these works?

Can you identify any common phrases, words of slang or references in existing literature or stories that you may know in these text pieces?

Key words

COLOPHON

A brief description or production notes of a publication relevant to the edition. In modern books it is usually located at the verso of the title-leaf, but also sometimes located at the end of the book, or a printer's mark or logotype.

CONCEPTUAL ART

Originating in the 1960s, Conceptual Art emphasised the idea or concept rather than the production of a tangible art object. The ideas and methodologies of Conceptual art continue to inform contemporary art practice.

CURATOR

A person who makes decisions with regard to the selection, acquisition, display and storage of artworks. A curator may be independent or freelance, or may be affiliated with a museum or gallery. A curator of Contemporary Art is concerned with display, research and preservation, but is also involved in experimentation and innovation.

DADA

An international, avant-garde art movement founded in 1916 which used a variety of media, including collage, sound, nonsense texts and absurd performances to protest against the social, cultural and political conditions prevailing in Europe during World War I. Originating in Zurich, the movement spread to Paris, Berlin, Cologne, Hanover and New York.

DRAWING

The art of representing objects or forms on a surface chiefly by means of lines using a range of materials.

FUTURISM

Early twentieth century movement which originated in Italy and embraced all things modern, including technology, speed, industrialisation and mechanisation. It also embraced violence and nationalism and was associated with Italian Fascism.

LETTERPRESS

Letterpress printing involves locking movable type into the bed of a press, inking it and rolling or pressing paper against it to form an impression. Predecessors of letterpress printing had been around for hundreds of years, in both the East and West, making prints from woodblocks and carved engravings. However, Johannes Gutenberg is usually credited with the introduction of movable type, which could be reset and reused. Movable type revolutionised printing techniques because each page of a book no longer represented an individually-carved woodblock or engraving.

LITHOGRAPH

lithography was invented in Germany in 1796. The technique involves drawing directly on a flat stone with an oil-based implement and then coating the stone with a water-based liquid. The applied marks repel the liquid, so that when oil-based ink is applied to the stone it fills in the image, allowing it to be transferred onto a sheet of paper. Since the 19th century, lithography has been widely used by commercial and fine artists as a means to produce multiple images, maps and texts.

MINIMALISM

An abstract art movement which emerged in the US in the 1960s which emphasised the use of simple, geometric forms and the use of modern materials often drawn from industry. Minimal artists rejected the expressive and subjective qualities associated with Abstract Expressionism emphasising the innate properties of materials.

MONOPRINT

Monoprinting, coined as a term in the late 19th century, involves drawing or painting in ink on a smooth surface, placing a page on top which, when removed, produces an exact reverse of the original drawing.

NEON

Neon art is a relatively new media utilising neon lights to create visually stimulating forms of art, often incorporating motion and interactivity. As a genre, the field of neon art is still emerging, with new techniques and technologies creating new opportunities each year.

PORTFOLIO

An edited collection of artworks.

SCREENPRINT

Screenprinting is a printmaking technique in which an ink-blocking stencil is applied to a screen, allowing ink that is wiped across the screen to selectively pass through to a printing surface. Before the development of synthetic materials, silk was used for the screen, giving this process the name silkscreen.

SURREALISM

An anti-establishment, literary and visual art movement founded in 1924 by André Breton and influenced by Dada, Psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious.

YBA (Young British Artists)

A group of artists primarily active during the 1990s, although the label, which derives from a series of exhibitions mounted in the mid 1990s at London's Saatchi Gallery, is still applied to some of its major members, such as Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and Jake and Dinos Chapman. Most were educated at the Goldsmiths School, of the University of London and introduced in the 1988 exhibition 'Freeze' curated by Damien Hirst. The YBAs drew from **Minimalism** and **Conceptual art**.

Activities

TEXT AS ART ART AS TEXT

Create a series of text-works by utilising old newspapers and magazines for example.

Cut out phrases, headlines and individual words to compose a work.

Think about the relationship between different words in terms of visual strength rather than in terms of making something read as a line of legible text.

Activities

AUTOMATIC WRITING AS TEXT AS DRAWING

There are many ways to consider how drawing relates to writing. In fact, if we think about it, our first marks on paper as children were what we now call scribbles. Automatic writing is not too far away from this process, indeed it was a way of producing spontaneous drawings, writings and/or paintings developed by the **SURREALIST** artists. They were interested in developing artworks from images and thoughts in the unconscious which could then be developed or interpreted. It was a way of making work that was not pre-planned or premeditated and which was therefore more spontaneous and fresh, making use of chance effects and random processes.

Consider finding a quiet place to sit and, using simple materials such as markers, pens and pencils, make random marks, gestures and words on paper.

You could even consider closing your eyes while doing this and listening to the sounds that may be in your environment, drawing and writing your thoughts, even expressing your feelings, perhaps conversations you had with people that day or even conversations you heard between people, on the streets, from the radio or tv.

Activities

WRITING THE CITY AS YOU MOVE

Henry Bond's work encompasses photography, writing and printing. One of the works that he became well known for was a series of photographs that he took on the streets of London titled *The Cult of the Street* (1998). In this publication, Bond photographs the street fashion of London at that time, capturing its youth, and in particular the young women, scowling and pouting. His subjects are often shopping and at leisure, and he happens upon them *in medias res* (Latin for 'In the midst of things' a narrative strategy to tell a story by starting in the middle) as they turn a corner or pause to pay for a purchase.

Rather than using a camera, why not consider walking down your nearest street with a notebook and pen in hand, writing down or drawing quick observations of the things and the people you see, the sounds you hear and the conversations you overhear with a particular ear for unusual phrases.

What words do you see in the street – look out for unusual signs, posters, even words scribbled on pavements.

In fact, you could also consider the pavement as your blank canvas – writing words or drawing images on the pavement slabs using chalk and documenting the process with your camera.

Perhaps you could even find a place on the street where, each day, you go to at a particular time and you write a phrase from a book you enjoy to read or a favourite film or something totally fresh from your imagination.

Take an image of the final work each day and perhaps use these images to make an animated video of the final work.

Activities

TEXT STENCILS

There are many ways to consider how words can be used in the making of art. A very quick and immediate way is to consider making a series of stencils with your friends.

What you will need are some sheets of card, pencil or pen, cutting knife, rubber roller (plastic bottle filled with sand will suffice if you have no roller or indeed a rolling pin) water-based paint or ground-up chalk mixed with water.

(Important note: spray paint is very toxic – both to you and the environment – so think about other options such as using a large brush with water based paint – it may take a little longer but your health is worth it). You can buy spray paint chalk which graffiti artists are now using – it's washable and has a lovely effect against concrete and other materials.

Begin by thinking about what you want to say or visually communicate?

Have a chat with your friends – perhaps it's a short poem, story or text or even an image can be developed between people on an idea about a place, person or news item that you recently read.

Draw out what you want to communicate onto the card with biro.

Make it large enough so that it could be seen from a distance and that it is easy to cut out. Place the card on a cutting mat and start cutting out your design.

Once the cutting is completed make a test print. Make sure the stencil is as flat as possible. Dip your brush in either the paint or ground-up chalk or indeed if you can buy the spray paint chalk all the easier.

Roam the streets with your friends – find a good place to make your stencil and take photographs of the finished work in-situ.

Activities

MONOPRINT DRAWINGS AND TEXTS

Emin uses a range of techniques to create her work and she has often emphasised that, for her, art-making is very much about using your hands to explore the material qualities of different mediums.

Emin has often used different types of printing, in particular monoprinting. This is a wonderful and easy way of making a multitude of prints – that is relatively inexpensive. Because monotype printing allows considerable freedom in the approach to imagery, this is considered to be a very versatile method.

Monoprinting is a process whereby only one print is pulled from the printing plate.

What you need:

- printmaking ink or a water-based paint
- paintbrushes
- sheets of plexiglass or Styrofoam trays (veggie or meat trays)
- paper
- optional: small paint roller

What you do:

Method 1.

Roll ink out onto the plexiglass, covering it completely.

Using the end of a pencil or a popsicle stick, draw an image on the plexiglass.

Place paper on the plexiglass and rub lightly.

Peel away the paper.

Method 2.

Roll ink onto the plexiglass, covering it completely.

Place paper over the plexiglass.

Using a pencil, draw an image on the paper.

When you peel away the paper, the image will have transferred itself. This is very similar to using carbon paper.

Further explorations

The relationship to drawing, writing and mark making is an incredibly rich area for further exploration.

One of my favourite works is by the artist **Stanley Brouwn** titled: *This Way Brouwn* (1960). This work involved Brouwn interacting with people he met in the street. He did this by asking people how to get to a particular point in the city from where he stood. He would then hand them a sheet of paper with a pen or pencil and the passerby was asked to make a drawing or map of directions – he asked the same question to different people. What is fascinating here is an artist making a work through his interaction with people – delegating the making of his work to anyone on the street. In a similar vein, he made a work in Amsterdam where he scattered sheets of paper on the pavement and waited for passerbys to inadvertently step on them. What you see were traces of people walking in the city collected as a series of footprints.

Throughout history, there has been a tradition in the visual arts of combining text and art. Medieval written manuscripts in Christian Europe were interlaced with pictures which helped to create layered meaning. The 18th-century poet **William Blake** published his writings with his own illustrations resulting in a syntheses beyond one or the other alone.

In the early 20th century **DADISTS** and **SURREALISTS** combined fragments of found text and appropriated images to open new paths. The **FUTURIST** artists' use of innovative typography exemplified their belief in the expressivity of language – the letter, the word and the phrase are seen and experienced and not necessarily read. Language is freed from the page as well as from its received meanings, forms and, in some cases, the duties of communication altogether.

From the 1960s to the present, artists as diverse as **Andy Warhol, Bruce Nauman, Barbara Kruger, Ed Ruscha, Ree Morton, Vernon Fisher, Kay Rosen, On Kawara, Duane Michels Jenny Holzer** and **Lorna Simpson** have all woven visual images and verbal symbols together with great force. Language as a medium – letters, words, and texts – were dissected, displayed as objects or arranged so that form and content were combined.

Working with language has also created an opportunity for artists to move more freely among disciplines, which sets up opportunities for artists to collaborate with poets, writers, performers and graphic designers.

Consider using this exhibition as a different way of thinking and making art by exploring the work and processes therein, led by the artists named above.

Further reading

Selected Publications

Tracey Emin, *I Followed you to the Sun* (Lehmann Maupin, New York 2013).

Tracey Emin, *My Photo Album* (Fuel, London 2013).

Larratt-Smith, Philip, *Tracey Emin How it Feels* (Malba, Buenos Aires, 2012).

Tracey Emin, *My Life in a Column* (Rizzoli, New York, 2011).

Tracey Emin, *Love is What You Want* (Hayward Publishing 2011) Texts by Cliff Lauson, Ali Smith, Jennifer Doyle, Michael Corris & Ralph Rugoff

Louise Bourgeois and Tracey Emin: Do Not Abandon Me (Caroline Nitsch, New York 2009-10)

Tracey Emin: One Thousand Drawings (Rizzoli International Publications Inc., New York 2009)

20 Years (National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh 2008); texts by Patrick Elliot and Julian Schnabel

Websites

www.imma.ie

www.imma.ie/en/subnav_123.htm (IMMA's What is_? programme)

www.traceyeminstudio.com

www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks?term=other+mens+flowers

www.henrybond.com

www.sadiecoles.com/artists-web-app/brown

www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B00CDJSUY4