



▲ Tracey Emin's neon piece *More Passion*, 2010, now hangs in Number 10 Downing Street, the official residence of British Prime Minister David Cameron.

## 'Passion' for the Prime Minister

Tracey Emin's neon lights up 10 Downing **BY ELIZABETH FULLERTON**

Condom-strewn beds, masturbation paintings, and embroidered quilts spilling intimate secrets: Tracey Emin is the queen of confessional art. But now BritArt's one-time enfant terrible has reached the pinnacle of respectability, installing an artwork in Number 10 Downing Street, the official residence of British Prime Minister David Cameron. This past August her vivid red neon work *More Passion* (2010) was mounted above a doorway leading to a state reception room on the first floor, the staircase to which is lined with portraits of former prime ministers.

"I chose *More Passion* because I wanted the neon to represent me as well as give Number 10 a bit of edge," Emin, 48, told *ARTnews*.

The artist, who has previously made neon works that spell out such provocative phrases as "Is anal sex legal?" and "People like you need to fuck people like me," gave the piece, which measures approximately 15 by 44 inches, to the Government Art Collection for display initially in Downing Street, according to the collection's director, Penny Johnson.

"It gives Number 10—a place of

work, history, and masculinity—a warm, inviting glow," Emin explains. "Neon always makes people happy. It's the reaction to the actual argon and neon moving around. So it should make people at Number 10 happier."

Some in the political establishment have grumbled that it makes the building resemble a nightclub. "It is a stately place and I don't think it's a place you put neon lights," says Lord Peter Temple-Morris, a former senior Member of Parliament.

The Government Art Collection, comprising more than 13,500 works by

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artists from J. M. W. Turner to Damien Hirst, supplies artwork to British government buildings in the U.K. and abroad. Although contemporary pieces from the collection lent to Downing Street usually rotate every six months, *More Passion* will remain indefinitely.

Emin has drawn fire from other artists for her close ties with the Conservative government, but Cliff Lauson, who cocurated her retrospective at London's Hayward Gallery this past summer, feels the criticism is unfair. "She's a hugely vocal advocate for the arts," he explains, "and that's why, I think, the government listens to her."

According to Ed Vaizey, British Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, Emin combines the ability to be a voice for young artists with an ability to engage with the Conservative leadership. "There seems to be this affection for her at the very top," he notes.

Emin's let-it-all-hang-out style propelled her to media superstardom in Britain. While she has aroused derision among some art critics, she has steadily gained a foothold in the art establishment. In 2007 she was elected an Academician of the Royal Academy of Arts, whose ranks include David Hockney and Anish Kapoor. A solo exhibition of her work will open at Turner Contemporary, in her hometown of Margate, in May, and the Brooklyn Museum and MOCA, North Miami, have exhibitions scheduled for 2013.

Some might think that Emin's decision to hang a piece in Downing Street jeopardizes the artist's subversive credentials. But fellow Royal Academician Cornelia Parker disagrees. "The artwork has its own integrity," she explains. "I like to feel you can infiltrate the system."

In fact, Emin's journey to Number 10 began long ago. "When I was eight years old I sent the then prime minister, Ted Heath a poem," she recalls. "He wrote back to me. What goes around comes around." ■

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