She Lay Down Deep Beneath the Sea: Tracey Emin at Turner Contemporary
26 May – 23 September 2012

The exhibition *She Lay Down Deep Beneath the Sea: Tracey Emin at Turner Contemporary* also brings together a selection of studies of female subjects by JMW Turner and Auguste Rodin, shown alongside works by Tracey Emin in the Irene Willett Gallery.

JMW Turner (1775–1851)

The selected drawings and sketchbooks by JMW Turner, loaned from the Tate collection, reveal a lesser-known side to Turner’s character. The nineteenth century critic John Ruskin, one of Turner’s main proponents, found erotic subjects among the thousands of sketches in the Turner Bequest. He was shocked, seeing them as evidence of a ‘failure of mind,’ and he claimed to have destroyed them all. This was not the case; when a number were exhibited in 2000, they again shocked visitors and the media. In fact, drawings of this kind were not unusual among Turner’s contemporaries, though they were rarely exhibited, considered instead a private part of an artist’s development.

Turner’s erotic drawings were made in a number of locations, including life-drawing classes at the Royal Academy and on his travels to Europe. The intimate watercolour study *A Sleeping Woman, perhaps Sophia Booth* (c. 1830–35) may depict Turner’s landlady and companion in Margate. He stayed frequently in her boarding house, which was on the site where Turner Contemporary now stands.

One of the earliest examples of Turner’s erotica in the exhibition, the drawing of *Erotic Figure Studies* (c.1805), is also one of the few examples to exist outside of a sketchbook. It was stored in the Secretum of the British Museum, along with other erotic material, when the Turner bequest moved from Tate to the British Museum in 1929. Turner often made sketches of the same motif from different viewpoints, as in this series of sketches focusing on the anatomical details of the sexual act.

The *Academy Auditing Sketchbook* (c.1810–23) contains Turner’s most inventive range of sexual couplings between men and women, as well as groupings involving several figures. None of the sketches in this book is developed beyond the most rudimentary outline. Given the explicit nature of the sketches, it is perhaps surprising that Turner’s executors allowed this sketchbook to enter the Bequest uncensored, albeit with a warning that it was ‘not to be opened carelessly’.

*Colour Studies (1) Sketchbook* (c.1835) is one of a pair of sketchbooks, along with *Colour Studies (2)*, and contains nearly 60 colour studies, many highly indistinct. These drawings have a warm and intimate atmosphere, ‘as if we are permitted inside the bed curtains that appear in several of the sketches’ (Ian Warrell,
Exploring the ‘dark side’: Ruskin and the problem of Turner’s erotica, The British Art Journal, volume IV, No.1). Warrell also compares these sketches to some of Rembrandt’s late etchings, suggesting that Turner may have been influenced by the work of the Dutch artist.

*LIFE CLASS (1) SKETCHBOOK* (c.1835-40) features studies of the female nude alongside general views of the Life Class, as well as a sheet depicting three studies of sexual intercourse (included in this exhibition). The sketchbook also includes a number of views of Margate, demonstrating, according to curator and Turner expert Ian Warrell, a link between Turner’s increasingly frequent visits to Margate during the 1830s (coinciding with the beginning of his relationship with Mrs Booth) and the sexual side of his character (*Exploring the ‘dark side’,* p.40).

The chalk and gouache drawings *Reclining Figure* and *Recumbent Figure* (c.1844-5) were originally part of the *Whaler’s Sketchbook* (c.1845), which combined sketches reflecting Turner’s interest in whaling during this period, with three studies of a nude or semi-nude female.


**List of works:**

JMW Turner
*Seated and Falling Figures*, c. 1824
From *Academy Auditing Sketchbook*
Pencil on Paper
Courtesy Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

JMW Turner
*Reclining Female Nude*, c. 1834
From *Colour Studies (1) Sketchbook*
Pencil on paper
Courtesy Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

JMW Turner
*Figures*, c. 1832
From *Life Class (1) Sketchbook*
Pencil on paper
Courtesy Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

JMW Turner
*Erotic Figure Studies*, c. 1805
Pencil, pen and ink on paper
Courtesy Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856
JMW Turner
*Lovers*, 1827
Chalk and pen and ink on paper
Courtesy Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

JMW Turner
*A Sleeping Woman*, c. 1830
Pencil and watercolour on paper
Courtesy Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

JMW Turner
*Reclining Figure*, c. 1844-5
Chalk and gouache on paper
Courtesy Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856

JMW Turner
*Recumbent Figure*, c. 1844-5
Chalk and gouache on paper
Courtesy Tate: Accepted by the nation as part of the Turner Bequest 1856
Drawn was as important and as obsessive an activity for Rodin as was modelling in clay, pursued for its own sake, rather than as preparation for sculpture. The drawings on display here, which date from 1890, were begun in front of a live model, directly ‘from nature’. Rodin concentrated on the contours of the body, encouraging the women who came to his studio in Paris to move about as naturally as possible. He preferred to record their more casual, spontaneous movements, like taking off a blouse or imitating a dancer’s exercise. Initially, he drew without taking his eyes off the figure or looking down at the paper. Afterwards, Rodin reinforced lines or traced the silhouettes onto a fresh sheet and often added a flat tint of flesh colour.

The depiction of a woman’s genitals and of lesbian love was unprecedented and shocking for the time as were the exaggerations and distortions to the figures seen at close range. Rodin’s ability to conceive of a body removed from any indication of surroundings reflects his priorities as a sculptor. This lack of context differs from painters like JMW Turner, or later Edgas Degas, who however minimally suggest a setting – a woman bathing or an encounter between lovers in a landscape.

*Seated nude, legs apart* c.1890 D4260  
*Woman slipping on a garment* c.1890 D4399  
*Nude with a long scarf, a shell at her feet* c.1890 D4283  
*Sapphic Couple embracing* c.1890 D4275

These four ‘transitional’ drawings (between ‘early’ and ‘late’ styles) date from 1890–96. Rodin worked rapidly in ink, wash and gouache, sometimes adding bright orange watercolour for the hair and pink for the body, or a prop like the shell, meant as analogy to Venus arising from the waves, a reference to the Greek art which he greatly admired. Frequently female models were encouraged to pose together, here a slender girl on the lap of a seated woman.

*Reclining woman (date unknown)* D4558

This sheet was begun as an overhead view of a reclining woman. The tint that fills her body is overlaid with a thin wash of pale aquamarine blue, her legs shown in duplicate, as if moving underwater, not unlike the pose of the ‘floating’ woman on her back in Turner’s *Whaler’s Sketchbook*. Rodin would frequently re-orientate the direction of a sheet. During the transformation of a ‘life’ drawing into a meditation with dreamlike visions and sexually charged memories, chance blot or shapes were as likely to inspire the metaphors and associations as anything planned in advance. In this he and Tracey Emin share a confessional, process-oriented sensibility, for example, the association of masturbation and flowers in
her tapestries *Rose Virgin* and *Keeping you in mind*... and the frond-like fingers emerging in Rodin’s close-up ‘landscape’ of a body.

*Nude woman on her back, legs apart* c.1900 D1486  
*Francesca da Rimini, date unknown* D3884  
*Nude woman on her back, legs spread, date unknown* D6189  
*Reclining couple, date unknown* D5035

Rodin wished to ‘test the extent to which my hands already feel what my eyes see’. There are literally thousands of drawings of women’s bodies, the artist’s intensity and praise for their individual beauty encouraging a liberated atmosphere in the studio. In his sculpture as well as his drawing Rodin was one of the first male artists to portray female arousal and sexual gratification. The drawings of a sensuous woman are often labelled ‘Psyche’ after a mortal woman of great beauty, a rival to Venus. When Rodin added words from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Pierre Louÿs’ *Chansons de Bilitis* or Octave Mirbeau’s *Le Jardin des Supplices*, he deliberately implied that the women were in a lesbian or ‘Sapphic’ relationship. The annotation ‘dans le 7e ciel’ refers to the circles (or heavens) described by Dante in *The Divine Comedy*.

The name ‘Françoise de Rimini’ was added to the drawing of a reclining woman perhaps because it dates from c.1900 when Rodin agreed to make several over life-sized, marble copies of the original *Kiss* on behalf of collectors. The original inspiration for *The Kiss* was the tragic story of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta, the narrowing gap between the faces of the young couple suggesting an interrupted embrace.

*Enlaced couple* D4600  
*Nude on her back* c.1900 D763

It is very difficult to date the drawings except when they are identified by period photographs or exhibition records and dedications. The use of the stump to blur and soften the forms is associated especially with the period 1900–10. Graphite lines and matte ochre wash darken various sheets; here, the outer boundaries of the couple’s soft bodies are contained by a broad-nib ink line, reinforcing the sense that these female lovers exist in a subterranean or cosmic zone.

Text by Catherine Lampert
List of works:

Auguste Rodin
*Femme nue enfilant un vêtement / Woman slipping on a garment*
c. 1890
Graphite, ink, wash, gouache and pastel on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

Auguste Rodin
*Femme nue assise, aux jambes écartées / Seated nude, legs apart*
c. 1890
Graphite and watercolour on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

Auguste Rodin
*Femme nue au long voile, une coquille à ses pieds/ Nude with a long scarf, a shell at her feet*
c. 1890
Brown ink and grey wash on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

Auguste Rodin
*Couple saphique enlacé / Sapphic couple embracing*
c. 1890
Graphite, brown ink, watercolour and gouache on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

*Femme nue allongée / Reclining woman*
Date unknown
Graphite, watercolour and gouache on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

*Francesca da Rimini*
Date unknown
(annotated ‘Françoise de Rimini’)
Graphite and watercolour on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

*Femme nue sur le dos, de face, jambes écartées, main sous la cuisse / Nude woman on her back, legs apart, hand under her thigh*
c. 1900
Pencil and graphite on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

*Femme nue sur le dos, maintenant les cuisses écartées / Nude woman on her back, thighs spread*
Dans le septième ciel/ In the seventh heaven
Couple de femmes nues allongées/ Reclining couple
Date unknown
Graphite and watercolour on paper
(annotated ‘dans le 7° ciel - bas’)
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

Couple enlacé / Enlaced couple
Date unknown
Graphite and watercolour on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris

Femme nue, sur le dos, maintenant les jambes en l'air / Nude on her back, legs in the air
c. 1900
Graphite on paper
Courtesy Musée Rodin, Paris