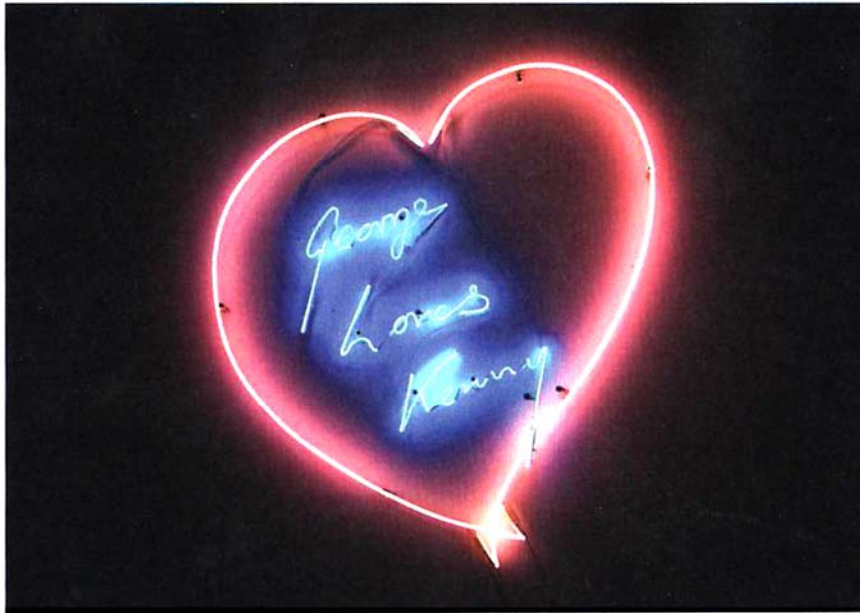


THE TALK

174 Kenny Goss brings Y.B.A.'s to the U.S.A. BY HANNAH WALLACE



Patron saints Tracey Emin's valentine to George Michael and Kenny Goss.



The Texas Tate

KENNY GOSS BRINGS Y.B.A.'S TO THE U.S.A.
HANNAH WALLACE PAYS A VISIT.

The British artist Tracey Emin asks me if I can stay on the line as she finds her lip gloss and makes herself comfortable on the bed in her suite at the Ritz-Carlton in Dallas. "I've shown in New York and now I've shown in Dallas, and that's it," she says, sounding incredulous about her United States presence. "This is after 15 years of being an artist!" It may be Emin's first trip to Dallas, but it will not be her last: two of her biggest fans — the former director of a cheerleading supply company and his boyfriend — have just opened a foundation for contemporary British art in the city's Uptown neighborhood.

"I promised Kenny and George that I'd come for the last weekend," says Emin, the Y.B.A. (Young British Artist) who missed the opening of her first American show outside of New York because she was in Venice representing Britain at the Biennale. (She has since exhibited in Beverly Hills, Calif., where her show "You Left Me Breathing" opened in November.)

Kenny is the Dallas native Kenny Goss; George is the pop star George Michael. The couple, who have been collecting contemporary art for 11 years, opened the Goss-Michael Foundation in late June with "A Tribute to Tracey Emin" — a splashy and raucous exhibit of her often confrontational work, which

includes a giant pink-and-blue neon heart that reads "George Loves Kenny." Everything in the show, except for a chair, belongs to the foundation, which is curated by Filippo Tattoni-Marcozzi.

Goss is a handsome, dimpled 49-year-old who looks at least 10 years younger and likes to say he doesn't have an artistic bone in his body — "I can't even dance!" And yet he's made it his mission to bring an artistic edge to Dallas, though not at anyone's expense. "It's not like we want to shove sexual work in people's faces," he explains, thinking perhaps about Emin's sexually explicit female nudes. "If they don't come through the door, they have the option of not looking at it!"

Over the past decade, Goss and Michael, who commute between London and Dallas, have amassed a collection of mostly British art that's worth \$200 million. Though they tend to buy the work of Y.B.A.'s like Emin, Chris Ofili, Tim Noble and Sue Webster, and their friend Damien Hirst (it was reported that they considered buying his diamond skull), they also have works by Richard Tuttle, the Canadian artist Evan Penny and the photographer David LaChapelle. They even own the piano on which John Lennon composed "Imagine"; Michael bought it at auction in 2000 for \$2.1 million. Goss is very social by nature, but when he

tried running the Goss Gallery, on Cedar Springs Road (where the foundation is now based), he soon discovered that collectors were more apt to buy work from established dealers in New York or London. And as much as he liked gallery openings, which attracted the Dallas gay community and some George Michael fans, those closest to him say Goss was never keen on the retail side of the business.

The decision to transform the gallery into a foundation, tax benefits notwithstanding, stemmed from the realization that the major Y.B.A.'s were largely absent from Dallas's museums and private collections. The noted Dallas art collectors Howard and Cindy Rachofsky say they are "delighted" by the new direction the couple are taking. "Kenny caught the bug for this British art," says Howard Rachofsky. "And I appreciate the fact that, instead of building a redundant collection, they are attempting to build one that has a focus and a personality that fits with them."

But a foundation also allows Goss to give back to Dallas. He and Michael, who are active on the London charity circuit, are planning an artist-in-residence program and will fund two \$5,000 scholarships: one in Michael's name (for music) and one in Goss's name (for art). Joyce Goss, the executive director of the foundation (and Kenny's sister-in-law), says Michael "really likes it here" in Dallas and is actually very involved in the foundation, albeit behind the scenes. "George listened to all 20 of the music submissions and ultimately decided who should get the scholarship," she says.

The foundation installed an impressive Hirst exhibit in late October (to run until May) that has two of the artist's formaldehyde tanks, including "St. Sebastian, Exquisite Pain," a 12-foot-high vitrine containing a black calf pierced by arrows. Goss was quoted in *The Art Newspaper* as saying "St. Sebastian" is "almost autobiographical for George." When he and Michael visited Hirst's studio in Gloucestershire, he continued: "I just fell in love with him! If I meet the artist and really relate to him, it makes a huge difference to me. I understand where the work comes from a little better."

With no need to make money, Goss and Michael clearly enjoy getting to know artists, and in the end that profits the artists, too. "They will end up having a much better show, possibly, than at a commercial gallery," Emin says. "Kenny and George's only motive is to show the work." ■