

Foreword

by Tracey Emin

I wish this book had come out fifteen years ago, because then the lido at Margate might have been saved.

I started going there when I was eight, and it was just so exotic. It made Margate seem like the Mediterranean. Not like an English seaside town but somehow incredibly glamorous. It had a diving board that made me think of Elvis Presley.

The pool was shaped like a half circle, with a curved tier of seats overlooking the water, like a theatre. They used to hold all these competitions. And there was a giant inflatable ball in the middle which me and my friends could roll over and around all day.

I remember also that it always felt safe there, because there were lifeguards and because it was a closed-in environment.

Like a haven. Like a sanctuary.

Also great was how the water would alter with the different tides. Because Margate Lido was a tidal pool, a mix of fresh water and seawater, its consistency would change all the time. As kids we used to get quite excited by that.

As an adult I swim almost every day now. When you jump into a pool, whatever negative energy you might be storing up, you just leave it behind at the water's edge. It releases so much stress.

But where I live in east London there's nowhere to swim outdoors, and I really hate that. Swimming outdoors is such an absolutely amazing sensation, especially in winter when the water is heated.

Since I left Margate I've swum quite a bit in the Oasis, in Holborn. That's quite something, swimming in the centre of London, surrounded by buildings, all these people cruising around the pool. I suppose it must be the mix of sun, water and air. It's a very sexy combination.

I've also swum in the lido at Saltdean. I was there once with Julie Burchill, who goes there a lot. Just her and me, and maybe a couple of other swimmers. We couldn't believe how somewhere so fantastic could be so empty.

So I think we have to remind everyone of how important and wonderful lidos are, and in order to do that we have to build more

of them. In fact there ought to be one in every park, along rivers, in every part of the city. I still don't understand why we seem to have stopped building them.

That is why a big ambition of mine is to design a chain of lidos by the Thames, using a mix of river water and fresh water. They would be oval shaped, with an egg-like roof, which opens up when the sun comes out. And when that happened all the radio stations in London would make an announcement. 'The London Ovals are opening!'

A bit like Tower Bridge.

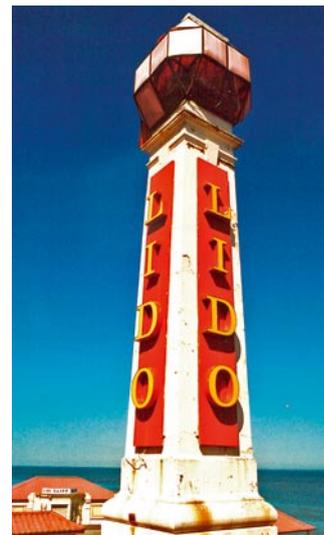
And when you fly into Heathrow the pilot would tell passengers that if they looked to the right they could see Buckingham Palace, and if they looked to the left they could see Tracey Emin's London Ovals.

Most of all, for me, the thought of lidos brings back memories of being happy as a child.

I think everyone should have that in their lives. So we should not be closing lidos. We should be saving them, and building more.

So here's to *Liquid Assets*.

Let the nation swim!



The beacon at Margate Lido, built in 1927, stands sentinel over the north Kent cliffs, long after the lido itself ceased operating in 1977.