

Emily Sundblad

born 1977 in Dalsjöfors, Sweden; lives in New York

Biography

Visual Arts

Music

In the Exhibition

2003: BFA Parsons The New School for Design, New York

2003–2006: Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program

2004: Creates the Reena Spaulings collective art space with John Kelsey

...less

Visual Arts

Emily Sundblad, visual artist, singer, and gallery owner, staged herself as a chimera of the art world, using her dazzling appearance specifically for a postmodern strategy of hide-and-seek as well as a criticism through affirmation. Many of her activities are not performed in her own name and are also often done in the collective. Under the pseudonym Reena Spaulings, she made her first appearance with John Kelsey on the international art scene in 2004. The two create artistic works under this name, while also using it for the collective art space operated by the two of them and other artists (including Jutta Koether, Rita Ackermann, and Ei Arakawa) in downtown New York City. Reena Spaulings is also the name of the protagonist of a novel by the international author and filmmaker collective Bernadette Corporation, to which John Kelsey also belongs. As a painter, Emily Sundblad has been appearing more often under her own name in a series of solo exhibitions since 2011. She makes quick sketches of scenes from everyday life and chooses classic subjects such as floral still lifes or portraits. Her works appear to bring a direct experience to the canvas, supplemented by her written notes—fragments of thoughts, notes, names. Her color palette and choice of themes are reminiscent of the pop art of David Hockney, as well as the delicately sketched, glazed paint style of Elizabeth Payton.

Seen from the perspective of American pop culture, one might think that Emily Sundblad is part of the »It-Girls« of Lower East Side New York. Lifestyle themes like love, luxury, the youthful drive for freedom, and escapism influence both her artistic work as a painter and her activities under the Reena Spaulings label to a great degree. But, as much as she makes use of clichés from upper-class lifestyle and scene chics, it would be wrong to see that as the essence of her art. The artist flirts with the image of her person in order to pursue a strategy of critical affirmation that focuses on the mechanisms and especially the money cycle of the art business.

Her best-known commentary is in her 2005 »Money Paintings.« *Money Painting (Dollar)*, *Money Painting (50 Euro)*, and *Money Painting (Swiss 20)* are abstractions of banknotes that would not be immediately recognizable without the title reference. The intention is clear: the speculative value of art becomes a pictorial subject with its image being smuggled back into the art market. In the case of Emily Sundblad / Reena Spaulings, the flow of capital is also short-circuited by her double occupation of artist and gallery owner.

Author: Lona Gaikis



Emily Sundblad, »Money painting (Dollar)«, 2005
Oil on canvas, 64.37 × 49.21 × 0.79 inches. Phillips, London; image via mutualart.com; © Emily Sundblad

...less



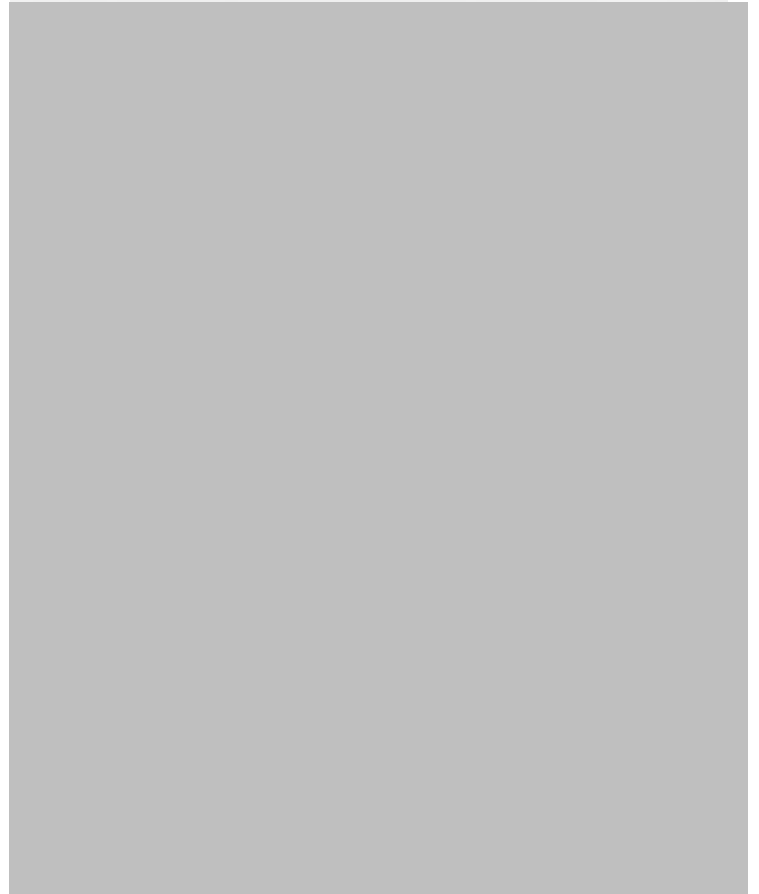
Emily Sundblad, »Money Painting (Swiss 20)«, 2005
Acrylics on canvas, 35.88 × 77.88 inches. Phillips, London; image via mutualart.com; © Emily Sundblad

...less



Emily Sundblad, »Not Yet Titled«, 2016
Oil on canvas, 64.37 × 49.21 × 0.79
inches. Xavier Hufkens, Brussels.
Photo: HV-studio; Bild via dailyartfair; ©
Emily Sundblad

...less



Emily Sundblad, »Advisors, Detail 1
(Eleanor Cayre)«, 2016
Acrylic paint auf Dibond, 34.02 × 25.98
inches. Private collection. Photo:
Campoli Presti, London/Paris; image via
museum-ludwig.de; © Emily Sundblad

...less



Emily Sundblad, »Buffalo Ballet«, 2018
Oil on canvas, 28 × 30 inches. Anton
Kern Gallery, New York. Photo: Courtesy
the artist and Anton Kern Gallery, New
York; Bild via dailyartfair.com; © Emily
Sundblad Courtesy the artist and Anton
Kern Gallery, New York

...less

...less

Music

Sundblad's everyday, personal experiences in the New York scene only play a subordinate role in her activities as a singer. Together with colleagues such as pianist Pete Drungle or guitarist Matt Sweeney, she stages reinterpretations of familiar lyrics, giving rise to musical collages that view the tradition of music as a form of collective experience and social practice, which are renewed in the process.

If Sundblad's visual art activities harbor an artistic method of hide-and-seek, music also offers space for the game with role images. In particular, the artist engages with concepts of the feminine in her performances. In the early days of Reena Spaulings, it was often pointed out how the project, alias Emily Sundblad, with her youthfulness and lust for life and her love of the »It Girl« embodied the most desirable of all the figures of late capitalism: the youthful girl. But in fact, she represents a critique both of the world of consumerism and of art.

As a singer, Sundblad is neither author nor composer, but simply her medium in the moment of the performance. She brings illusions to life and offers a view into the romanticizing worlds of desire.

In the Exhibition

Emily Sundblad

Concert at Albus Greenspon Gallery, New York, 2011, with Pete Drungle and Ensemble, Emily Sundblad (voc.), 4.10 min.

Film: Loretta Fahrenholz

The music and lyrics of Sundblad's musical performances are usually cover versions of love ballads, country songs, or hits from American folk music. But the artist also reinterprets classical compositions, such as the second movement of Franz Schubert's Piano Trio D 929 in E flat major op. 100 (Andante con moto).

The haunting melody, known from Michael Haneke's film *The Piano Teacher* (2001) or Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975), is a symbol of blazing desire. The singer, Sundblad, then overlays the no less love-sick lyrics of »Love Hurts« by the Everly Brothers from the year 1960 to Schubert's piece. Accompanied by Pete Drungle and two violinists, she gives an intimate chamber concert, which celebrates love in a classically romantic way, but whose illusory character cathartically smashes her new interpretation. After the disappointed rapture, the song ends with the insight that love is just a destructive self-deception:

»I know it isn't true, I know it isn't true

Love is just a lie made to make you blue

Love hurts

Ooh love hurts«

(Love Hurts, 1957. Text: Boudleaux Bryant)

Author:

Lona Gaikis