

Emma Sarpaniemi

Two Ways to Carry a Cauliflower

Jan 30 — Mar 9, 2025

Press Release

*“It is hard to swear when sex is not dirty
and blasphemy does not exist.”*

Ursula K. Le Guin(1)

Let us imagine that nudity and for that matter all that concerns our desires and feelings were not taboos to be hidden and shown only to a selected number of elected people we choose carefully. That this *transparency*, naturally filtered by a culture of mutual respect, kindness and acceptance, was natural, normal. Could we imagine in this context a view on sexuality and eroticism including all the grades of their perception? Including the tenderness and lightness that is never to be found in the hetero-male perspective we are forced to live in? Could we envision for a second the richness this would entail? Since we are there and we are imagining, let us imagine a world with no patriarchy, a world shaped by an equal and unfiltered perspective unto life, where genders and sexualities would really have no difference in value and treatment, and where all the diverse perspectives would be present at once, and equal. Could it be that also the way in which ideas and concepts might

be presented would then broaden to include more *languages* than only our current hegemonic and ever serious imperialistic language of intellectuality? Might this even translate into opening to ways of presenting culture which could also be lighthearted, where even laughter and awkwardness could find a place? We can now focus on a Finn in her thirties, she stands in front of us in the corner of a run-down room. She is dressed colourfully, standing on top of a large stuffed toy horse, and is lifting her skirt over her waist. The gesture is the one of a child playing with their dress, the age and hence the awareness implied by the act are not. Our gaze is instantaneously capturing that this playful act might also be sexually charged. Now, the correct interpretation to this image and act is obtained by lifting our eyes, and meeting the eyes looking back at us, serene, impassible, strong. These eyes are Emma Sarpaniemi's and in all her short but already remarkable career the Finnish artist has been placing herself in front of the camera in ways not too far from this one. She has taken up a tradition which, without the need of delving deeper in the past, has been richly pursued in many ways by others, but even more a creative effort which easily will be remembered as emblematic of this moment in human history: the photographic self-portrait. Said that, it is important to notice that she has not picked up *selfies* in order to reinvent them, or to invent something for that matter. She has picked up this loaded form of expression to bring us into a parallel world which is much like the world we tried to imagine at the beginning of this text, a world which is taking sexuality and erotism, intimacy and feelings and turning them into her own perspective of them and then projecting this into a myriad of

characters and situations, where fiction and reality, the artist's own self and her multiple personas intertwine. They are pictures where all of a sudden sexuality becomes both neutered and more powerful, surely antithetic to the male-gaze we are used to. A place where she is erotically in control instead of passive, tender instead of hard, playful instead of stern, profound instead of serious. As another incredible woman artist once wrote in maybe her best book: "[y]ou cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution,"(2) and in a similar fashion Sarpaniemi decided to do something different than to argue for a needed change in the world we live in, in the perspective we need to dismantle, in the walls we need to tear down, in the patriarchy we need to destroy. She decided not to write or conceptually convey feminist ideas in a paper, or adopt that serious language of our hegemonic culture, or re-appropriate its (male-)gaze, she decided instead to show us directly what lies beyond all this. And that is exactly what we find in the eyes looking back at us from each one of Sarpaniemi's pictures, it is this revolution: it is a persona, looking at us in power and in control, showing us her desires and her frailties, her playfulness and feelings and it is so that we meet her: colourful, witty, funny, but mostly empowered, in control of her body and her narrative. Emma Sarpaniemi is in each and every one of these pictures, setting new rules and terms of what is permitted and what is to be judged, her own rules.

Mattia Lullini(3)

(1) Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*, Harper & Row, 1974, p. 214.

(2) Ibid., p. 248.

(3) An apology is due for having a man writing this text, but, to quote again K. Le Guin, “[...] when you say you’re a feminist it annoys the bigots and the old farts and the prissy ladies so much, it’s kind of irresistible.” (From an interview with Guy Haley: <https://guyhaley.wordpress.com/interviews-2/ursula-le-guin-2007/> accessed on January 23rd, 2025).

This exhibition is also a collaboration between
PhMuseum Days 2024 and NEVVEN.

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Emma Sarpaniemi (b.1993, Helsinki) holds a BA in Photography from the Royal Academy of Art (KABK) in The Hague (2019) and has recently exhibited at The Finnish Museum of Photography K1 (Helsinki, 2024 and 2018), Turku Art Museum (Turku, 2024), Miettinen Collection (Berlin, 2024), Copenhagen Photo Festival (Copenhagen, 2024), Les Rencontres d'Arles (Arles, 2023), WAM Turku City Art Museum (Turku, 2023 and 2021), and European Month of Photography (Luxembourg, 2023) among others. Her work is represented in public collections including The Finnish Museum of Photography, The Finnish State Art Deposit Collection, Museum Folkwang, HAM Helsinki Art Museum, Turku Art Museum, Heino Art Foundation, and Miettinen Collection, to name a few. Sarpaniemi lives and works in Helsinki, Finland.

NEVVEN
Molinsgatan 11
411 33 Göteborg
+ 46 760 86 73 05
nevvengallery.com