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# TWO COATS OF PAINT

## INTERVIEW

### Interview: Emma Soucek on curiosity and loss

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Emma Soucek, spottieottiedopalicious angel, 2019, paper pulp, collage, acrylic paint, glue, 75 x 90 inches

Contributed by Linnéa Borgo / On a hot Brooklyn afternoon, [Emma Soucek](#) and I met at Safe Gallery to discuss her [two-person show](#) with the late [Maddy Parrasch](#). The three of us had been students at Rhode Island School of Design before Maddy died in a car accident shortly after she had completed her thesis in December 2018. We talked about Emma's synergy with Maddy, and the work, rich with emotional and physical texture, that it allowed them to create, as well as the importance of material, audience, and loss.

**Linnéa Borgo:** *Hi Emma thanks for having me! So tell me how this show came about?*

Emma Soucek: It started in the fall when I had just moved to New York, and Pali Kashi, the founder of Safe  
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Gallery, and Blair Blumberg, the Sales Director, came to my house. I didn't have a studio at the time because I couldn't afford it. We discussed doing a show as well as the possibility of studio space. Then **Maddy died**, and that changed my life completely. It flipped it upside down in a lot of ways. In adjusting to that, Pali and I were talking and we realized that Maddy's work worked really well with mine. You remember, in school we were really each other's artists; there was no one else in the whole world that I actually shared with. We were around each other all the time so she knew my work like the back of her hand.

**LB: What I remember from your relationship is that it was an artistic one but it also extended beyond that, perhaps into something spiritual.**

ES: We were in love kind of. We were just so enamored with each other. We spoke the same language.



Maddy Parrasch, Untitled (35 Monoprints), 2018, 35 ink monoprints in wooden frame, dimensions variable

**LB: You two were always so prolific in studio together. There were hundreds of drawings all over the place. I'm interested in how your ideas bounced off of each other. It felt like you had a sort of communal or symbiotic art making practice.**

ES: We studied together in Rome which really changed our communication. Even when we were in **Jackie Gendel's** class at RISD, I don't know if you remember the bread sculpture. It was supposed to be like Jenga, the game. I went to Stop & Shop to get all these loaves of bread, and then Maddy said "OK, after you make the sculpture I'm going to make a painting of the sculpture." She would use my drawings as drawings for her paintings. It was less about the actual collaboration. It was more about the excitement. We were just excited about stuff. Her last favorite was Jack Whitten, **that show at the Met** just blew our minds. You can see it in her ceramic work too. He was just amazing.

**LB: That excitement that you talk about, the sincerity is really evident in the work. There's something about play, especially with surface and texture that seems to be really important to you.**

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ES: It was a curiosity. We use material in a very similar way. It's all about material for us. It was also tactility. I think a lot of it has to do with how our bodies move. I feel like painting is just an extension of the body in a lot of ways. I think Maddy knew that because her practice was full body, I mean it was ceramic, which takes strength in your arms. And the same with my work because I work from the floor and you have to be moving around. It's like a dance.



Emma Soucek, Hung Up On My Baby, 2019, paper pulp, collage, acrylic paint, glue, 60 x 64 inches

***LB: Can you talk to me a bit about your pulp making process?***

ES: The process is still pretty similar to how it was in school, it just blew up. It expanded my whole practice but also narrowed it. I use a kitchen blender and fill it 3/4 the way with water and then glue and construction paper. A lot of my paper comes from 99cent stores. I dye paper too, it's basically the fibers that I'm looking at when I dye paper. But the color can get frustrating because the color of construction paper naturally is pretty beautifully dyed, and I'm talking low level 99cent store paper – the fade is like a whole other thing for me so sometimes I'm frustrated that I have to dye it with paint and it ruins that subtlety, but it would fade too fast if I didn't.

**LB: Kevin Zucker, our professor at RISD, who wrote the press release for the show, wrote about you and Maddy going to Padua.**

ES: Yes, we also went to Assisi, we saw both Giotto chapels. I went back after she died. We had both agreed that they were the most beautiful paintings we had seen in our lives so far. It just completely changed the game. Because you don't see material and color like that. I think all our work after that you could just call reactions to Giotto's frescoes. It's something about the embedding of the fresco. It wasn't about the story for us. And then there were the borders, he does these crazy edges and borders and things you would never expect.



Maddy Parrasch, Untitled, 2018, ceramic slab, 14 x 11 inches

**LB: *It's interesting that you mentioned embedding, it almost feels like you're trying to embed something into your work, creating an amalgamation of all these fragments to preserve something. There's also a nostalgic quality to your choice of imagery.***

ES: I'm embedding color. It's the physicality of the work too. It's incredibly personal. It deals with trauma and people that I see in the world. It makes me think of Louis. Louis was a diner that Maddy and I were obsessed with in Providence. The owner is an artist. Every inch of the wall is covered in something. It's like you walk in and it's a library. And we found peace in that. We could draw there. They used to have markers on the tables. Then we started doing their signage. So then at the end of the first summer of the year I spent with them, I had just started making paper pulp and I made this paper pulp heart that said Louis' for them. A while later, Jake Shore, my boyfriend at the time and I went back to the restaurant and they had put it under plexiglass with some photos of old staff members, and a guy who died. Just collaging their own thing, and I thought that was so genius so I offered to do this for all of their tables. There was this one table where all the fire fighters used to sit that I did, there was another one with Andy Warhol.

**LB:** *It feels like in all your art making your art has a really intentional audience. Some of it is for one person like Maddy or some of it is for a few people like the firefighters at the diner.*

ES: People at Louis come often, they're regulars, I try to deal with class a little bit in my work. But I'm not really commenting, I just wish everyone could see the work. I have a real problem with exclusivity in the art world. It's bullshit, and it's not where the best work is. So my audience was Maddy. She was the only one I would listen to. Maddy, I would change a painting for. But of course she didn't make me change anything, because we both understood that our vision is our vision.

**LB:** *Did you have regular critiques with each other?*

ES: Well for example, the painting *Around and 'Round in Circles is a Ride That Goes Somewhere*, I worked half on before she died and half after. It's actually an old painting from school. The red bin photo is from this website, a forum from my town in Maine where they sell shit back and forth and they have really good photographs because people will post pictures of their items, it's super interesting to me, and you can get so much information from them. Maddy said the red bin was her favorite part so I kept it. And I asked her opinion on the bears, which she liked. She was alive for those two parts of the painting but not the stripes. That painting was really hard to have made. It wasn't hard to make it, it was actually the easiest one to make, because I had so much emotion to let out at the time that all you can really do is make. But it's hard to look at. It's sort of dizzying.



Emma Soucek, *Around and 'Round in Circles is a Ride That Goes Somewhere*, 2019, paper pulp, collage, acrylic, paint, glue, 50 x 56 inches

**“Maddy Parrasch / Emma Soucek,”** curated by Blair Blumberg and Pali Kashi. Safe Gallery, Brooklyn, NY. Through July 1, 2019.