



REENA SPAULINGS

Created 2004; based in New York, New York

Reena Spaulings is a fictional artist (and art dealer) created under the auspices of the New York gallery Reena Spaulings Fine Art, cofounded by John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad. Spaulings's work—which includes painting, sculpture, performance, and music—is made by a shifting group of collaborators, many of whom are represented by the gallery. By entering the art world in reverse—first forming a gallery, then becoming an artist—Spaulings confronts the problem of how to maintain integrity in an environment that is overwhelmingly under the sway of the market, both financially and creatively. Furthermore, her fictitious status questions the art-star system that operates in conjunction with this market.

Spaulings's first exhibition, in 2004, consisted of pages torn from a Michael Krebber catalogue and stuck on the walls of Reena Spaulings Fine Art; for the second (also 2004), a mirrored sign was placed above the gallery's storefront with the words ROBERT SMITHSON. In 2005, Spaulings exhibited *The One & Only* at Haswellediger & Company in Chelsea, which constituted an encroachment on another gallery and involved a proposal to change its name to Tsao-Kotinkadiwa and other formal impositions on the space. Thin steel pipes were removed from Reena Spaulings Fine Art and installed at Haswellediger, dividing the space in two. Painted flags, some covered in mussels and tar, hung from flagpoles topped by decorative eagles; one large brick-patterned flag was placed just inside the entrance to the gallery as if to obstruct access. Eagles and mussels were key imagery for the Belgian Conceptual artist Marcel Broodthaers, and Spaulings's use of them highlights his strong influence, particularly his problematization of such issues as art's exchange value and the sacred myth of artistic creativity.

Spaulings's recent "money paintings" are enlarged figurative and abstract renditions, made to scale, of various currencies, including a United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration banknote; these banknotes were printed for circulation exclusively within the Lithuanian camps that housed displaced persons immediately after World War II. Other money paintings include *Swiss 20* (2005), a deliberately badly painted wash of purple and yellow depicting a Swiss franc, and *Black Ruble* (2005), in which a murky black sludge covers most of the painting, leaving visible some shapes that hint at the note's design elements and a small cluster of crudely drawn figures. Drawing a parallel with Marx's description of money as a "real abstraction," these paintings refer to their own unquantifiable, yet precise, market value—as well as to the social function of the artist, since Reena herself might be considered a real abstraction.