

SASKIA NEUMAN GALLERY

Emma Jönsson
Pure Steam
20.08 – 26.09.2026

The bathhouse is a place where the body leaves traces without leaving imprints. The water washes away the visible, but the memory remains. In Emma Jönsson's recent work the artist returns to bathhouses in Paris through the slow movement of the needle. Images imagined from memory are transferred onto dark velvet, a material that absorbs light and lets the motifs emerge from the depths. The embroidery does not become a depiction of the place but an extension of its time, where each stitch corresponds to the gradual recall of memory.

The bathhouse belongs to civilization's oldest communal spaces. From the Roman *thermae* to the *hammam*, *sentō* and the municipal *bains-douches* that emerged in Paris in the 19th century, the bath has been a place where body and mind meet. Here hygiene coincides with ritual, rest with discipline, intimacy with the public. The bathhouse is a room where the individual becomes part of a collective, where the intimate and the private are challenged. The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard describes in *The Poetics of Space* (*La Poétique de l'espace*) from 1957/64 how spaces continue to live within us long after we have left them. Lived spaces are kept in memory and imagination, and the places we return to are not necessarily fixed architectural reproductions, but sensory experiences where light, sound, temperature and movement weave together into memories. The Parisian bathhouses in Jönsson's embroideries appear precisely in this way. Perspectives shift, details become clear while others dissolve. The works do not depict the bathhouses as they actually look, but as they have subconsciously been lodged into the artist's body, and memory.

The embroidery amplifies this displacement. Unlike painting's immediate gesture, the image is built through meticulous patient repetition. By way of forms and symbols the needle becomes both a brush and a tool for thinking through the material. Each stitch records not only a shape, but also the time required to remember and bring it forth. The dark velvet simultaneously changes the conditions of the image. Velvet has historically carried associations with church textiles, princely garments, theatre curtains and upholstery. It is a material for ceremony, power and staging. However, the black and dark-blue surfaces also function as an optical depth. They absorb light rather than reflect it, so that the embroidery seems to emerge from innate darkness. The images almost appear like developing prints, where the memory slowly becomes visible, and tactile.

The bathhouse has long fascinated artists. In Paul Cézanne the bathing figures become timeless and arcadian, while Pierre Bonnard turns the bathroom into a space for everyday intimacy and the memory of light. In Félix Vallotton's work a psychological charge arises where architecture and body are in a quiet interplay. But art history also contains other stories that relate to Emma Jönsson's visual world and practice. Artists Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassatt make women's everyday rituals of care and interior scenes worthy subjects,

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beyond the traditional nude. For Louise Bourgeois the textile becomes a bearer of memories, vulnerability and bodily experience, while Anni Albers describes weaving as its own language where the hand's knowledge and the material's logic create meaning. Artists Faith Ringgold and Tracey Emin use the textile tradition to tell stories, where the seam becomes a way to preserve and transmit experiences between generations.

In this tradition the thread becomes more than a material. It becomes a way to think, recollect and orient oneself in the world. The embroidery does not function as an illustration of the bathhouses but as a bodily method for returning to them. The works therefore situate themselves at the intersection of several histories: the bathhouse in cultural and architectural history, art's recurring fascination with the bathing body, and the textile tradition of slow-knowledge production, care and material memory. Velvet and embroidery do not only carry the image but actively co-create its meaning. Emma Jönsson's imagery moves beyond the bathhouse. It is an investigation of how places continue to live within us and how architecture is stored in the human body. How thread, textile and physical rhythm can give form to what otherwise exists only as a sensation.

Emma Jönsson received an MFA from HDK Valand in Gothenburg in 1998. Her most recent solo exhibition *Waiting — Väntan* at Saskia Neuman Gallery in Stockholm received prominent engagement and reception from both the public and the daily press. Her works are represented in several public and private collections; including Stockholm Konst, Örebro Municipality and Firestorm Foundation. *Pure Steam* is Emma Jönsson's second solo exhibition at Saskia Neuman Gallery.

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Emma Jönsson — in her own words

In the summer of 2025, in August, I was in Paris to explore and investigate the capital's bathhouses. I wanted to do a project centred around the Parisian baths. I had been given a room at the Swedish Institute, in the old palace with its beautiful windows and the grand stone staircase in the house's left wing.

I was familiar with the bathhouses from an earlier visit. Earlier, in 2018, which was an extremely hot summer in Paris, I stayed at the Cité Internationale des Arts and visited several different bathhouses to swim, cool body and soul. I found that I liked their special atmosphere with chlorinated water, people swimming and that other thing I find hard to put my finger on. It was precisely there the idea for the project was born. I wanted to find out what that was.

My favorite among the bathhouses is Piscine Pontoise in the middle of Paris. There, a kind of magic arises. It is a tall old building with a glass roof where light pours in. In the middle of the building the turquoise-blue pool is placed. Along the walls, one and two stories up, a row of blue-painted wooden doors runs through. Behind them are changing cubicles with a small bench and a hook. The smell of chlorine and dampness. Bathers wear the obligatory swim caps. The whole institution is painted yellow and blue. It was here I spent my time that summer of 2018. Swimming and thinking.

One day I learned that the mayor of Paris had arranged to clean the heavily polluted Seine. What a fantastic feat I thought. I was impressed by the construction of piers and pools, the changing booths and the bright yellow lifebuoys. The gaze moved across the water, vault after vault, bridge after bridge. Boats passed. An overarching feeling of freedom and desire filled the overheated city that summer.

Another place that came to mean a lot to me and my project is the medieval museum Musée du Cluny. There, underground, are the remains of an almost two-thousand-year-old bathing establishment, from the time when Paris was called Lutetia. There are deep vaults, generous bathtubs with lion reliefs, and the walls bear traces of mosaics. A place and atmosphere that in its day offered Lutetia's inhabitants relaxation, cleansing and socializing.

2018 was the year my fascination and the idea for the Parisian bathhouses and their significance for the city and its inhabitants was born. Through drawings and sketches over the years they have slowly started to take their proper form. When I stayed at the residency in 2025 the work continued by painting the sketches with needle and thread on the dark velvet. In 2026 the project is not yet finished, but ready to be presented. In the exhibition visitors will encounter my own interpretations of memories, thoughts and feelings from time spent at the bathhouses and along the Seine's long, winding cobblestone banks.

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Emma Jönsson 2026

Emma Jönsson (b. 1961, Katrineholm, Sweden) is an artist based in Floda, Sörmland. Her textile embroideries resemble narrative painting, where the encounters between palette and material become part of the overarching narrative. The works often use carefully selected velvet that functions as the embroidery's canvas. Sometimes it is left as is, sometimes it is dyed and altered by the artist. Through careful stitches a composition of symbols flows across the velvet. Jönsson depicts people, animals, plants, architecture and nature in peculiar contexts. The visual language looks toward a tradition of surrealism, magical realism and fantasy.

The scenes in the works reveal a personal gaze and view of events that take place in the world as well as in the private sphere. There is a clear emotional engagement with other people's experiences and conditions that ties Emma Jönsson to an art-historical legacy. The Norwegian - Swedish textile artist Hannah Ryggen used her artistic practice to understand and illuminate the tragedies and hardships of the world. In complex and detailed tapestries, she gave her perspective and commentary on the fascist tidal wave of the 1930s. With similar empathy, Jönsson creates images of tragedies and injustices in the world through pictorial storytelling. While inviting reflection and confrontation, the works also allow viewers to dive into visual narratives where water can be heard trickling, birds singing and light breaking through the darkness of night.

Emma Jönsson received an MFA from HDK Valand in Gothenburg in 1998. Her most recent solo exhibition, *Väntan*, at Saskia Neuman Gallery in Stockholm received prominent engagement and reception from both the public and the daily press. Her works are represented in several public collections such as Stockholm Konst, Örebro Municipality and the Firestorm Foundation. Emma Jönsson is scheduled for a solo exhibition at Saskia Neuman Gallery in autumn 2026.