

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Fionn Meade, "As If Not: Looking Back To Go Forward With Rosemarie Trockel,"
ModernPainters, July/August 2012.

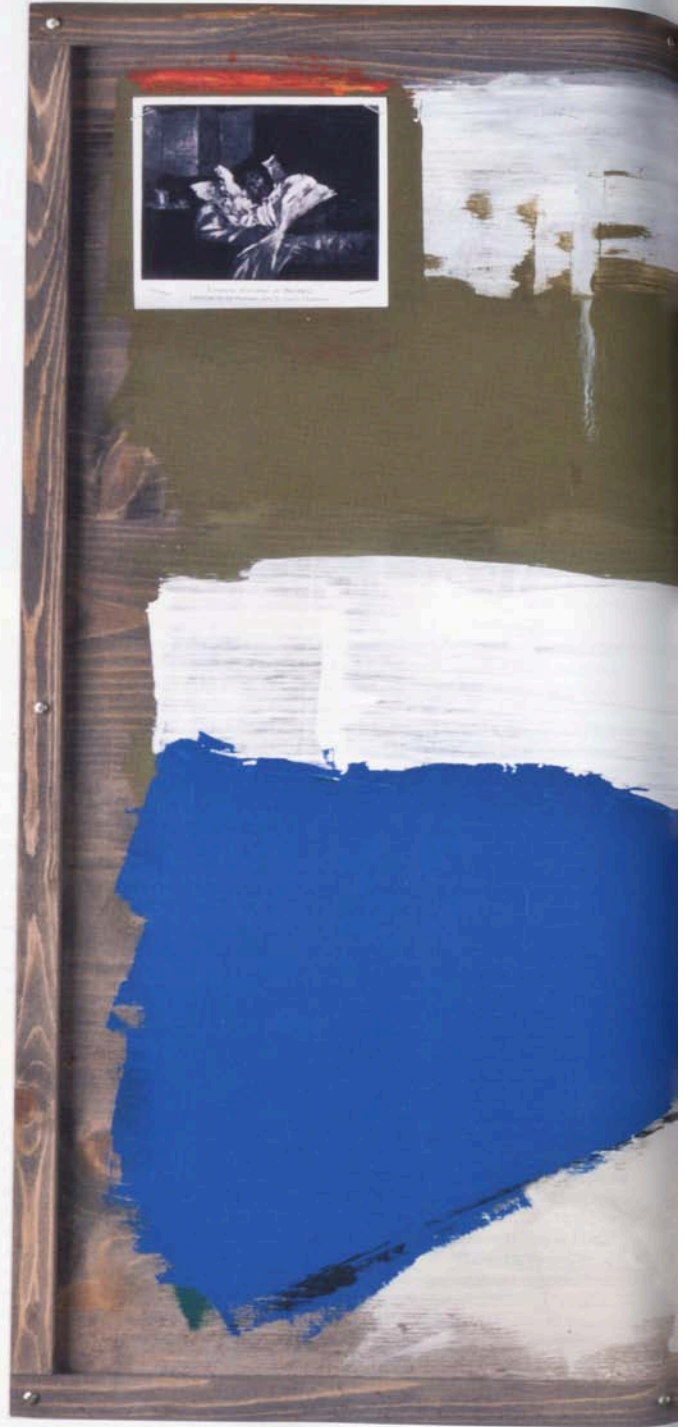
AS IF NOT

LOOKING BACK TO
GO FORWARD WITH
ROSEMARIE TROCKEL
BY FIONN MEADE

THE COSMOLOGY OF GERMAN ARTIST

Rosemarie Trockel is a constantly shifting inventory, substituting iconographic, linguistic, and material transformations for the expected guises of identity and representation. Advertorial images and pop figures exist alongside typologies and taxonomies culled from history, the natural sciences, cinema, anthropology, and the artist's own hybrid index of drawings, collages, and moving images. And yet to Walt Whitman's biological envisioning of self and world, "I am large, I contain multitudes," Trockel's incisive productivity might offer Emily Dickinson's rejoinder on creativity: "Don't you know that 'No' is the wildest word we consign to language?"

As "Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos" opens at the Museo Centro de Arte Reina



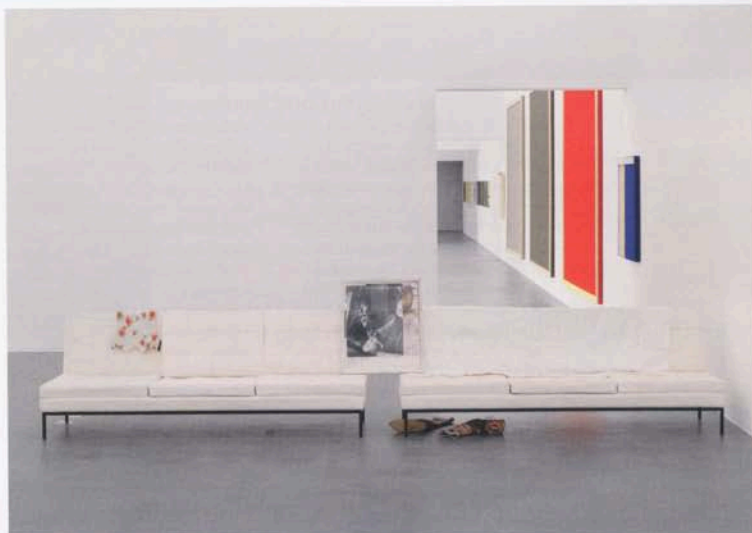
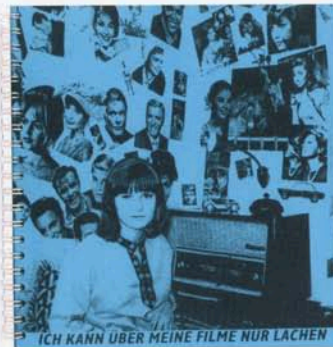
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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
 "Spleen," installation
 view at Dia Art
 Foundation, 2002.

Mr. Schneider,
 2006. Mixed media,
 35½ x 23 in.

"Deliquescence of the
 Mother" at Kunsthalle
 Zurich, 2010.

Daddy's striptease room,
 1990. Mixed media,
 19½ x 27½ x 19½ in.

"Deliquescence of the
 Mother" at Kunsthalle
 Zurich, 2010.

*Ich kann über meine
 Filme nur lachen*
 ("My Films Just Make
 Me Laugh"), 1993.

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aware, middle-class teenager adrift in the so-called *Wirtschaftsuunder* or "economic miracle" of West Germany's rapid rebuilding in the 1950s and early '60s, it was accompanied by a card conveying in Trockel's own words how the book's distortion of the image was meant to "somehow lose the provincial, homemade, miserable atmosphere of the whole photo and situation." Both ironic and heavy with pathos, the cover and caption bear out Trockel's "as if not" approach to her own past.

In looking to the framing and deframing of the magisterial "Deliquescence of the Mother" at Kunsthalle Zurich, curated

here, with older works hemming in Trockel's Wunderkammer-like constructions, they confronted the viewer like a tribe. The works looked back, refusing historical linearity in their apparition-like assembly: a swollen head sculpture, *Hydrocephalus / Wasserkopf II*, 1982, for example, sat before the sleek, black ceramic finish of a thirsty outstretched leg, mockingly titled *Geruchsskulptur 2* ("Aroma sculpture 2"), 2006, and elbowed in alongside a diminutive goblinlike creature, *Kiss My Aura*, 2008, hunkering below the overflowing hang of an unruly knitted work, *Untitled*, 1989. Archetypes of mother and father (masculine

the large-scale "knitted painting" series that preceded the vitrine interventions greedily absorbed all remaining surface light with densely patterned monochromatic gestures. By lining each room of the exhibition with work from former decades, Trockel insisted on a dialectical tacking between new work and uncanny returns from the past. Both familiar and unfamiliar, the gatherings of her pieces were made strange through proximity, compressed into a singular gesture that confronted the viewer as known, imprinted, and animistic, before being parceled into stylistic nuance and comic asides.

Filtered and atomized throughout the entire exhibition, the liquefaction of the mother is Trockel's versioning of self. By literally and precisely marginalizing her own works, she refuses to be periodized and thereby completed, insisting instead upon boundary conditions that can be reconfigured and made cruel. Initially supine sculptural works like *Watching and Sleeping and Composing* and *I on my sofa*, both 2007, propped up more of Trockel's eye-ful encounters, just as over 20 collages (from an ongoing body of them begun in 2004) montaged bodies into a contortion of masked and stripped-bare gestures. Fragmented figures from video stills, photographs, and copies of past drawings alongside unique drawings worked their way into the painterly gestures of the recent collages. Contrasted with the tribal effrontery that was the vitrine's comic yet haunting presence, the collages recall Trockel's earliest vitrine sculptures but with renewed compression, speed, and conflation of reference. Much could be said of the Beuysian symbolism that ambiguously resides within these recent works, mixed with the fraternizing proximity of Martin Kippenberger's displays, both integral parts of a yet to be fully traced genealogy of influence—not to mention the formative importance of Trockel's publication and exhibition collaboration with Monika Sprüth, *Eau de Cologne*, 1985–93—but the specters are resolutely Trockel's within these encapsulated gestures.

"It is the probity of the artist—feeling (herself) unable to push the ego to the point of representing that which is unnarratable—who then assumes parody as the very form and pattern of mystery," Agamben writes. As "A Cosmos" readies itself to unfold in New York, the voices and images that arise from the memory of these past exhibitions reveal a dialectical approach that must be looked to and listened for elsewhere. For Trockel continues to clear and open up one of the most distinctive paths through the excess sampling and relativity of the contemporary. Retrospective gazes and staid desires for coherence have been absorbed into the work itself—into the very surfaces, structures, and shadows of its fiercest refusals and constant renewals. ■■

S.h.e., 2000/
2005/2010.
Installation
view at
Kunsthalle
Zurich.



by Beatrix Ruf, it is rather the "this is too much" side of Trockel's sensibility that takes over through dissipation, liquefaction, and condensation. From the lockdown style of collages that ran the perimeter of one back room in the show—including such phantomlike images as *Mrs. Mönipaer*, *Mr. Schneider*, and *Ornament*, all 2006, and *Nobody Will Survive 2*, 2008—to the two oversized vitrine structures piercing two of the middle rooms of Kunsthalle's long and narrow floor plan, the sound of muffled laughter cut through the impeccable sequencing, order, and transparent barriers of glass and Plexiglas. Trockel turned the retrospective gaze and desire for an overview inside out as works from each decade of her career and wide-ranging media stood close together in ethnographic-style vitrines.

Even as past works were "surveyed"

and feminine) were absorbed in the angular looking back of Trockel's round-up, exposing the cultural codes and clichés that underscore our need for empathic identification while also giving heterogeneous form to the lack that arises in her regular diffusion of gender, ego, and character.

And so *Daddy's Striptease Room*, 1990, a perversely labeled cardboard box housing a model of the Cologne Cathedral, occupies a large-scale vitrine with *Miss Wanderlust*, 2000, a rough-hewn nubile sculpture that kneels and peers out from the vitrine with binocular extensions in place of eyes. Likewise, the ceramic wall sculptures that adorned an entire room of the exhibition eschew the rules of representation, failing to return a stable reflection in their polished, mirrorlike platinum panels, offering instead the tiny deportations and tactile gleam of cracked surfaces. Similarly,