Fionn Meade, “As If Not: Looking Back To Go Forward With Rosemarie Trockel,”
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by Beatrice Ruf, it is rather the "this is too much" side of Trockel's sensibility that takes over through dissipation, liquefication, and condensation. From the lockdown style of collages that run the perimeter of one black room in the show—including such phantasmal images as Mrs. Minzer, Mr. Schneider, and Ornaments, all 2006, and Nobody, Will Survive% 2008—to the two oversized vitrine structures piercing two of the middle rooms of Kunsthalle's long and narrow floor plan, the sound of scuffled laughter cut through the impossible sequencing, order, and transparent barriers of glass and Flexiglas. Trockel turned the retrospective gaze and desire for an overview inside out as works from each decade of her career and wide-ranging media came close together in ethnographic-style vitrines.

Even as past works were "surveyed" and feminized were absorbed in the singular looking back of Trockel's round-up, exposing the cultural codes and clichés that underscore our need for empathetic identification while also giving heterogeneous form to the lack that arises in her regular diffusion of gender, ego, and character.

And so Daddley's Stippled Glasses Room, 1990, a percolated cardboard box housing a model of the Cologne Cathedral, occupies a large-scale vitrine with Miss Wanderlust, 2000, a rough-hewn marble sculpture that kneads and peels out from the vitrine with biocenial 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, the large-scale "knitted painting" series that preceded the vitrine interventions grossly absorbed all remaining surface light with densely patterned enchromatic 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 anamnesic, before being parsed into stylistic nuances and comic asides.

Filtered and atomized throughout the entire exhibition, the liquidation of the meek 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 Am Myself, both 2007, propped up more of Trockel's eye-level encounters, just as over 20 collages from an ongoing body of these begun in 2004) montaged bodies into a confection 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 collage. Contrasted with the tabulae erasanta that was the vitrine's comic yet haunting presence, the collages recall Trockel's earliest vitrine sculptures but with renewed compression, speed, and condensation of reference. Much could be said of the Baudrillardian symbol that ambiguously resides within these recent works, mixed with the fraternizing proximity of Martin Kippenberg's displays, both integral parts of a yet to be fully traced genealogy of influences—not to mention the formative importance of Trockel's publication and exhibition collaboration with Monica Spruth, Eros de Leones, 1983—95—but the spectres are resolutely Trockel's within these encapsulated gestures.

"It is the profanity of the artist—feeling (herself) unable to push the ego to the point of representing that which is unrepresentable—who then assumes parody as the very form and pattern of mystery," Agamben writes. As "A Cosmic" reads itself to unfold in New York, the voices and images that arise from the memory of those 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 stand desires for coherence have been absorbed into the work itself—into the very surfaces, structures, and shadows of its fiercest refusal and constant renewals.