

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Avgikos, Jan, "Rosemarie Trockel," *ARTFORUM*, May 2001

ROSEMARIE TROCKEL

THE DRAWING CENTER /
BARBARA GLADSTONE
GALLERY



Rosemarie Trockel, *Used Face II*, 2001,
acrylic on paper, 15 3/4 x 12 3/4".

These exhibitions of drawings paired a retrospective look with a contemporary view. "Metamorphoses and Mutations," at the Drawing Center, featured dozens of knockout works on paper, many from the '80s, of hybrid, fairy-tale creatures: monkey men; scraggly witches; snouted clowns; a freaky, windblown bird that stands upright; a s/he charmer in fetching Western gear, balls a-poppin'. At the same time, many of Trockel's portrait drawings are grounded squarely in the real world: She gives us the kid down the block, the woman next door, all the members of the family, somebody's baby. Trockel swings between extremes with incredible aplomb. Over the years she has honed a mean between the abject primitivism of Joseph Beuys and the visionary fantasies of Sigmar Polke, yet her interest in quotidian domestic experience and family life, which the boys never approached, genders her art from the outset.

In contrast to the earlier sketches, Trockel's most recent drawings, featured in "Manu's Spleen" at Barbara Gladstone, are light and sunny and settle comfortably into a contemporary groove. A profile, a gesture, a beautiful angle, a moment caught forever—these astutely observed and deftly rendered images might well represent the good life. No more spooks in the night for her—or are there? Two digital videos, *Manu's Spleen I*, 2000, and *Manu's Spleen III*, 2001, reiterate scenes of what normal people look like and perhaps what they do, but with macabre twists.

These first two of a projected series of ten videos, to be produced in nonsequential order, feature a young and beautiful protagonist, Manu. In *Manu's Spleen III*, she's hugely pregnant. We encounter her at a festive gathering at someone's home; the table is set with candles and a party buffet. There's much gusto, glasses are held high, the video is shaky; there's Manu with her belly, the center of attention. It's a handsome group of people (Trockel's friends in real life). Suddenly, there's a loud pop, Manu's big belly goes flat, everyone roars with laughter, and the short loop begins again. Oh, it's a party. Oh, it's her pregnant belly. Round and round we go, and then "pop goes the weasel." In *Manu's Spleen I*, Trockel focuses on the other end of the life cycle. We're with Manu and two friends, walking to the local cemetery. Our destination is a plot freshly prepared for a funeral service. A young man is laid out in the wide, shallow grave. Manu lies down beside the corpse and plays dead. Meanwhile, for what feels like a very long time, her two companions just hang out—smoking, talking on a mobile phone, waiting. Finally it's over: Manu's done being dead. She gets up, brushes herself off, and with her friends starts back to wherever she came from.

Trockel's videos are like her drawings—quick visions, little daydreams, nonsensical like so much of life, but relentless in their address to life's happy-sad fullness. That's where spleen comes in: The organ was once considered the seat of mirth and merriment, yet at times was contradictorily designated as the center of melancholy and negative emotions. "Spleen" is as close as we ever come to a story line in Trockel's art and, once again, she demonstrates it's more than enough.

—Jan Avgikos