During the decade and a half in which the German artist Rosemarie Trockel has risen to prominence, her work has managed to baffle and intrigue in equal doses. Her inspiration ranges from the bizarre to the mundane, from the so-called missing-link Maco mermaid box to the erotic underwear of domestic appliances. Proven in ability and output, she has produced macabre sculptural tableaux of cast fossilized skeletons in specimen-case glass vitrines alongside elegant silk scarves adorned with the innocent faces of art-world babies. Knit panels, arrangements of found objects, clothing, sculpture, and drawings, as well as photographic and video pieces, create a body of work that is both unprogrammatic and distinctly feminized. The ghosts of Beuys and Duchamp may be glimpsed behind many of these sculptural and conceptual enigmas, but the forefathers of contemporary art are rarely cited; rather, they are invoked. With the subversive irreverence and fearless intellectual ambition particular to a woman delving into a patriarchal past, her approach to her art refuses simple explanation.

The 44-year-old Trockel, who lives and works in Cologne, is one of the few woman artists of her generation to re-
“There is a tremendous confidence to her art, which has to do with leaving questions open.”


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“Irony appears when I have to get malicious”

Alongside Trockel’s irony and wit is her abiding interest in nature and anthropology. Animals, from drunken dachshunds in party hats to “house pet” spiders, have all figured in her symbolic universe at one time or another. For the show at Gladstone this fall we are promised a forest of video monitors showing abstract and narrative fragments culled from nature and the world around her. Exactly how the piece will take shape, we can’t know for sure. Trockel went into seclusion while preparing for this summer’s Documenta show in Kassel, Germany, and would not elaborate on the new work. Perhaps she was tiring with the refusal to communicate, but maybe it’s just that in commentary as well as in art, the best questions are those left unanswered.