

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Frances, Richard, "Rosemarie Trockel", *Artforum*, Dec. 1997

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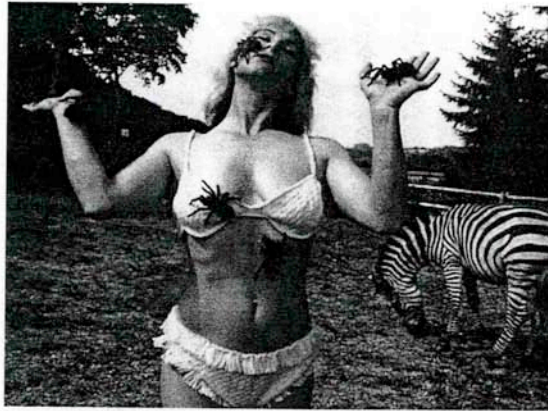
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ROSEMARIE TROCKEL BARBARA GLADSTONE GALLERY

When Rosemarie Trockel began showing in New York in the late '80s, her best-known work—machine-made woolen pieces presented as "paintings" and minimalist cubes with stove-top burners—seemed to categorize her as interested in the female domestic realm. She became known in the shorthand of the moment as "the knit person," but a certain chilliness or ironic distance pervaded these pieces; this somewhat mocking stance problematized easy feminist labels, suggesting instead a stranger, more idiosyncratic engagement with questions of female subjectivity in the process of making art.

Trockel's recent show affirmed those perceptions, attesting not only to strong developments in her work, but to the ongoing evolution of what used to be called feminist praxis; that is, the idea that what is most powerful for women (or anyone struggling against objectification) is to claim full and fully nuanced expressive agency. As feminism has come to rely less and less on didactics and theoretical props, however, Trockel seems free to engage more playfully with knitting as a medium.

The exhibit consisted almost entirely of video, most previously unseen in New York and some shown for the first time anywhere. The highlight was the twelve-minute projected work *Yvonne*, 1997, a collage of footage and stills in which Trockel's own eccentric line of knitwear—handmade, this time—figures prominently. Switching back and forth from black and white to color, and from silence to musical accompaniment, the work assembles a large and motley cast of Trockel's friends and family. A zaftig blonde in a retro bathing suit poses beside a swimming pool; a group of hippies hang out in the garden, jamming on recorder and



Rosemarie Trockel, *Yvonne*, 1997, iris print from a video still, 13 x 16 1/4".

guitar. A little boy plays piano; a professor holds forth in his cluttered office; a little girl dances. At first, the merry oddity of the characters and the shifts in camera work hold our attention, but soon we realize that each shot contains something made of wool: sweaters and funny hats, afghans, gloves, knitted pants and halter tops straight out of '70s pattern books. The garments do not define the people; nor are the people just mannequins displaying the knitwear. Rather, Trockel has composed a set of shifting portraits in textures. The clothes become a kind of semiological system, a series of quirky existential badges that mark the contours of Trockel's vision.

The ingredients set forth in *Yvonne* played out in other works—in *Tweedle*, 1997, for example, another projected video starring an animated piece of string. In the tradition of the great short films of *Sesame Street*, *Tweedle* contemplates line and shape as the string rolls itself into a spiral, unrolls, becomes a scribble, becomes a snake. Meanwhile, in the big gallery, an installation of twelve monitors showed as many individual works, dating from 1989 through this year. Again, thoughts about

filaments and weaving, shape and spatial relationships linked the disparate works. In *A la Motte*, 1993, time-lapse photography records a delicate white moth eating a hole into a sheet of black knitting; in *Parade*, 1993, a cadre of silkworms troop back and forth across the screen in a kind of instinctive calligraphy. *The Importance of Wearing Clothes*, 1996, parodies pattern painting with allover shots of brightly colored, shimmering plaids. *OT (Krefeld)*, 1995, begins with a tight shot of knit work unraveling; the shot widens and we see that the buff-colored fabric is a sweater worn by a female model. As the yarn ravel off her body, exposing her belly, the camera pulls back farther to show two young men exuberantly pulling the strings, which pile at their feet.

Throughout these works, Trockel maintains an attentiveness to texture and pattern, but the real pleasure of the exhibition was that we could see the artist arranging and contemplating her obsessions, without feeling that those obsessions need be second-guessed. A mature artist comfortably ensconced in her media, Trockel follows nothing but the threads of her own thought.