

GLADSTONE GALLERY

McDonald, Ewen. "Rosemarie Trockel." *World Art*. 1994.

Rosemarie Trockel

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, SYDNEY
MARCH 30 – JUNE 5, 1994

The Rosemarie Trockel exhibition is one of the most elegant and intellectually rigorous to be presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. It joins a handful of others – including "Headlands," "Zones of Love," and the contemporary German show – exhibitions representing a serious approach to contemporary practice. Significantly, the Trockel exhibition is the first major survey show of an individual, internationally regarded contemporary artist.

Exhibitions such as this do not materialize from thin air. Despite the signage telling that the show originated through the City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, there is little acknowledgment of its inception. Not only was it organized by curator Greg Burke as the opening exhibition for the relocated and newly renovated City Gallery, the show coincided with celebrations for the centenary of women's suffrage – two important factors played upon within the exhibition itself. All of this may be circumstantial to the Sydney installation at the MCA, but it is significant background material (and documented in the catalogue). For one, the exhibition could not

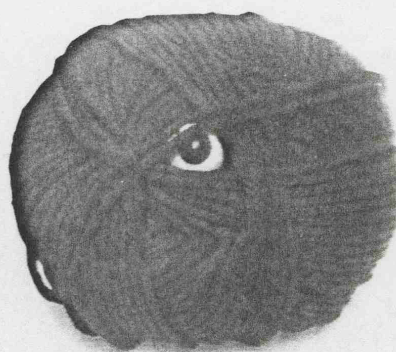


Balaclava, 1986,
wool and cardboard

have taken place without a persistent eye – an uncompromising attitude equal to that of Trockel's. The installation and the high quality catalogue reflect this. Equally, the collaboration between curator and artist cannot be underestimated. It is the attention to detail that makes this exhibition satisfying – especially important when one considers the complexity of the work itself and the diversity of the audience the museum attracts.

The work itself is a survey of connected projects from the mid-'80s to the present, with some pieces done specifically for the New Zealand show: the carpet piece, *Snow Body*, and the video piece, *Poi Poi*, the latter influenced by the New Zealand film-maker,

Len Lye. The oblique, and sometimes complex, inter-relationships contained within the selection makes the actual installation an important aspect – the cross referencing between pieces becomes a physical task for the viewer. Moving through the exhibition, one realizes more fully the specific challenges taken on by individual pieces. If individual pieces suggest there can be no such thing as "fixed meaning," then the factors of proximity and placement are incorporated to heighten the awareness of difference. A crucial point in Burke's selection (as well as introducing Trockel's practice 'in the flesh' to this part of



'I see red wool' tinted wax 1985, 1992, wool, glass, plastic

Trockel's objects are poised
between the personal, the
local, and the global.

the world) has been to present a body of work that simultaneously criticizes what writer Hélène Cixous calls "the fantasy of unity." Installed in the two main upstairs galleries at the MCA (a different arrangement to that in the one large gallery space in Wellington), the link between between the two parts is carefully orchestrated. It may not have had the added dimension provided in Wellington by the former library/ now art gallery site (where Trockel's work brought to mind the words chiseled into stone and set within the

old library facade outside the gallery space – *Philosophy, Religion, Sociology and Science...*); but the encased white shirt, with its pins and resident spider, webbing away, stood sentinel between one room containing pieces loosely linked under the 'domestic or home sciences,' and the other, with its museum cases, objects and knitted works – characteristically played upon a complex network of inter-relationships and meaning.

This mixing of 'the ideal' (the socio-politically inspired and playfully misquoted El Lissitzky) with the mundane (the mouth sculpture with its cast of chewing gum) is a

way of presenting the familiar in unexpected ways, to provoke reconsideration of dominant cultural meanings. With wit and humor, Trockel takes on the dilemmas of representation – what it means to be an artist in a particular time and place (a female artist in post-war Germany), characteristics that simultaneously inform and 'paralyze' the work in the sense that they become frozen in time. By incorporating the structures of the museum so completely, Trockel is able to present a view of things – garnered from the world of

things – and by 'showcasing' them, they are returned to us as specimens of contemporary Western culture.

An interesting point (and one often lost beneath the more obvious allusions to the domestic and to aspects of feminist art practice) is that Trockel simultaneously comments on the nature of the museum itself. It is no wonder that the work is so trans-culturally adept.

What appeared at first as a site-specific project successfully takes on another museum context in another culture. Its power lies in the way that space works between things – between object and reference – and the way that objects are so carefully poised between the personal, the local, and the global.

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