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Chloe Wyma, "Critics' Picks New York: Rosemarie Trockel," *Artforum*, October 6, 2017

ARTFORUM

New York

Rosemarie Trockel

GLADSTONE 64
130 East 64th St
September 13–October 28

In both German and English, the past perfect describes a time anterior to another moment in the past. Conjugating “to be” in the temporally aloof, twice-distanced “had been” abstracts the relation between subjects and their prior actions. Titled after the German word for this grammatical tense, “*Plus Quam Perfekt*,” a solo exhibition of Rosemarie Trockel’s photographs, ceramics, and sculpture made within the last decade, embraces this grammar of estrangement, materializing it into things of austere beauty.



Rosemarie Trockel, *Studio Visit*, 2017, glazed ceramic, 24 x 20 x 2”.

Entering the gallery, the viewer confronts the issue of time in *Clock Owners* (all works cited, 2017), a vitrine displaying nine white ceramic

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masks. Arranged neatly in a line, they range in facture from pockmarked and *malerisch* to plainspoken and reductive, in mood from comic-grotesque to funereal. Hanging above *Clock Owners* is *Studio Visit*, one of four ceramic mirrors in the show. Its black surface, lustrous but irregular, returns the viewer's gaze with a dappled, dark reflection.

A mirror could be called the opposite of a mask: While one disappears the subject behind a prosthesis, the other makes us a spectacle to ourselves. The black mirror, also called the Claude glass in homage to landscape painter Claude Lorrain, was a popular eighteenth-century optical device. It endowed the scenery captured in its convex, tinted pane with a soft, golden tonality associated with Lorrain's landscapes, transforming nature, in advance, into art. As *Studio Visit* reaches back to the historical picturesque, it also returns to the present, conjuring the shiny exteriority of a dead smartphone screen.

"Presentness is grace," the modernist critic Michael Fried famously concluded in his 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood," polemicizing—contra the Minimalists—that immersion in abstract form transcends the banality and self-consciousness of the body. Trockel inverts the values of this historical, long-gone argument, making pastness graceful, even perfect.