Danto, C. Arthur. "Rosemarie Trockel." *The Nation*. 1991.

riage and invited them to appear with him on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. They did. Under Donald's face appeared the tag line "Transsexual Wife Abuser" and under Madge's, "Frigid Lesbian." When they complained later, the producer told them it was just a tease to hold the audience. They were so dull and ordinary that nobody would have watched otherwise.

Feeling used, they withdrew from counseling. One day Donald brought home *Self-Exit: The Ultimate Way to Peace of Mind*, which had broken all previous sales records for a suicide how-to book. It included a Quality of Life Quiz, which determined whether or not your life was worth living.

When Madge saw the book she looked at Donald, and he looked at her.

"Madge," said Donald quietly. "I think it's time."

"Yes, Donald," said Madge. "It's time."

And so they collected all their self-help books in a great pile in the backyard and burned them. All except *Self-Cremation: How to Save on Your Own Funeral*, that is. And then they lived happily ever after. □

ART.

ARTHUR C. DANTO

Rosemarie Trockel

There are certain respects in which there is a stronger affinity between Leonardo da Vinci and Marcel Duchamp than between them and their respective contemporaries. I like to think that Duchamp, who gave himself a female identity as Rrose Sélavy and had himself photographed in drag, acknowledged this affinity by drawing a mustache on the Mona Lisa, his predecessor's most celebrated image (which some scholars have argued is a self-portrait of the artist disguised as a woman), and by memorializing Leonardo's propensity for secret codes by adjoining the mysterious letters L.H.O.O.Q. to the wittily vandalized postcard. But what I have chiefly in mind is that each of them redefined artistic practice in such a way that the production of works of fine art, such as paintings, was only a subgenre of art making. Leonardo was clearly the stronger painter, but to define Leonardo's style as a visual thinker we have to find some position outside the paintings from which we can view them, the strange inventions, the visionary fortifications, the metaphysical speculations, the arcane inscriptions, the caricatures and the treatise on painting as a single corpus animated by a mind too restless to restrict its domain to mere picture-making. And it is this that connects Leonardo with Duchamp, whose *Nude Descending a Staircase* was an effort to represent motion more advanced than Leonardo's studies of rolling water and rearing horses and rushing clouds, and whose *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* employs contrivances—a chocolate grinder, for example—as fantastic as any of Leonardo's mechanical imaginings. Duchamp's is a style of mind and spirit, of cognitive audacity, of witty transformation too protean to find satisfaction in pictorial representation. He liberated artists, as he would have said, from their addiction to the smell of paint, and showed them a practice as free from the traditional weight of the materials of the artist as poetry is. Indeed, he excluded almost completely from the appreciation of his art any reference to hand or eye. But with this withdrawal of touch and aesthetic delectation, he vested the objects of his art with the aura of enigma even when they were outwardly as ordinary as snow shovels and urinals. As with Leonardo, his achievement was the creation of mysteriousness, for which the Gioconda smile has been the standing metaphor.

Since Duchamp, it has been possible to be a visual artist without being a painter, a sculptor, a draftsman or even a photographer, or without displaying much by way of skill in the incidental employment of these crafts, as long as one has the right sort of transfigurative intelligence. His two greatest followers have been Andy Warhol and Joseph Beuys (there are even photographs of Warhol as a double transvestite—dressed up as a woman dressed up as a man, to prove his Duchampian affiliation). The genius of these two artists lay in their magical gifts, eliciting meanings of the deepest human sort from the most unprepossessing of objects—soup cans and Brillo boxes in the case of Warhol, fat and felt in the case of Beuys, who managed to fuse these substances with the whole desperate weight of our most basic needs. And both these were political artists in ways alien to Duchamp and to Leonardo. I once heard Meyer Schapiro lecture on Leonardo as a Renaissance man by drawing attention to things in which he had no interest whatever, politics being one. Leonardo famously advised artists to "flee before the storm," and Duchamp certainly lived as if in compliance with this imperative. But Warhol and Beuys, in their admittedly different ways, were concerned to alter political attitudes and even moral consciousness. For all its squalor, Warhol's Factory was an experiment in utopian living as much as was Brook Farm. And Beuys transformed the art school in which he was a professor into a prototype for a new society. Both used unpromising materials—grainy film, silk screen, dimestore photographs in Warhol's case, dirt and rust in that of Beuys. Warhol was perceived as a revolutionary in Europe, for whose market he obligingly and cannily painted a series of Hammer and Sickle studies in 1977. Beuys was perceived as a pretty scary figure in America, with his signature felt hat, open vest and the free-associational urgencies of his discourses—a figure out of Beckett. But it is only necessary to recall the large retrospective exhibitions of Duchamp and Warhol at the Museum of Modern Art, or of Beuys at the Guggenheim, to appreciate that we are dealing with a form of artistic creativity of an altogether different genre than that of Matisse or Motherwell or Pollock or de Kooning. These were aggregates of puzzling objects, often aesthetically repellent but always conceptually exalting. They were shows one had to think one's way through, one object at a time, but that touched feelings and aroused wonder in ways inaccessible to the more conventional modes of artistic expression.

Rosemarie Trockel is a young German conceptual artist who belongs in this descent, a third-generation Duchampian who occasionally makes an internal acknowledgment of this kinship. She is not especially a photographer, but photographs play a role in the heterogeneity of her work, each item of which seems to define a distinct and often novel genre. One of the photographs connects her endeavor with that of Duchamp in a way that requires some knowledge of the latter in order to grasp what is being gotten at. *Rose of Kasanlak* is a kind of political still life, in that it shows a perfume bottle with a modified hammer-and-sickle logo as label (the bottle would be familiar in Eastern Europe as containing a sort of attar known as "Rose of Kasanlak"). It is placed on a cloth decorated with the same logo, and the ensemble is shot with a sort of fashion-photograph glamorousness. The logo itself is modified: The hammer has been replaced with a rose. I suppose inscribing a rose in the

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familiar position of the hammer connects flower with power in some way, or at least it insinuates a feminine component in the dour and threatening emblem that has lost its power to intimidate and has become a sort of political trademark. Nietzsche wrote in his wild autobiography that it is necessary to philosophize with a hammer, and I suppose Trockel is showing how it is possible, through replacement, to philosophize with a flower. In any case, some sort of dialogue is being transacted through the altered logo, on the subject of radical politics and female power—but the deep references of the work connect it to art, and specifically to that of Duchamp. One of Duchamp's unforgettable works was a modified perfume bottle whose label reads, impishly, "Belle Haleine." This is a pun on "Belle Hélène," and quite untranslatable, since "Beautiful Breath" does not in English carry the sounds of "Beautiful Helen." (Duchamp was fond of puns of this sort: A window he had painted black is titled *Fresh Widow*, which is like saying "French Window" with a bad cold, but which in any case cannot be translated into French, not least of all because French windows are not called that in French.) Duchamp has reprinted on the label a photograph of himself as Rrose Sélavy, and it is perfectly clear that Trockel wants to take the opportunity of connecting Rose with Rrose and Rosemarie herself with Marcel himself, trumping his hammer with her flower. It is in any case a marvelously intricate image that looks, at first glance, like a fashion ad for a magazine designed for Communist ladies but that yields instead to a metaphor connecting male with female, art with politics, feminism with revolution. And as with Duchamp, it speaks with the spirit of play.

The *Rose of Kasanlak* image perhaps connects the two artists in a further way. The modified perfume bottle has been placed, as just described, on a folded cloth with a regular, all-over pattern of sickles and roses. If Duchamp is saluted with the former, Trockel is identified with the latter, for her best-known pieces are hangings with logos woven in. These, too, are invariably impish. *Made in Western Germany* is a particularly handsome hanging, possibly self-referential in that its logo, densely and regularly repeated, is "Made in Western Germany," in bluish-green thread against a dark green background. Usually, of course, stickers declaring "Made in USA" or "Made in Japan" are not part of the products whose provenance they specify, but this weaving makes such marginal information its central meaning: The product consists of the information regarding its country of origin. But there is clearly something absurd in an industrial product whose usefulness is confined to such information. (Trockel is not to be imagined sitting before her loom: She designs the woven-works and has them fabricated, which could not more vehemently exclude reference to the hand; a work by her called *Woven by Hand* would surely be self-falsifying.) One assumes it was produced in "Western Germany" for export to a country that hardly can have much use for it, especially since the "weavers" appear not to have full command of English—"Western Germany" sounds like "Northern Dakota." Or in fact it is exported not as an industrial product but as a work of art—I surmise from the catalogue information that it is in an American collection. It is in any case an image made of words, and as elegant as it is puzzling, as funny as it is serious, its handsomeness a means to communication rather than an object of aesthetic pleasure.

I enjoyed walking through Trockel's show at the University Art Museum in Berkeley with its co-curator, Sidra Stich, though I found myself frequently disagreeing with what I felt were Stich's somewhat heavy feminist readings of the work. For example, she is convinced that weaving is traditionally women's work, and that some reference to this is woven into such works as *Made in Western Germany*. A great many of Trockel's works are in fact woven and do in fact make sly feminist points, but their being the product of a loom does not seem to me especially to contribute to this. There is, for example, *Dress*, made in 1986, which indeed is a feminine garment by a female artist, and woven of pure wool. It proclaims its essence by employing as its sole ornament the familiar pure-wool logo, that triple loop manufacturers use to proclaim the truth of their products—a sort of schematized ball of yarn. This garment has in fact two pure-wool logos, each quite large, and placed precisely where the weaver's breasts would be, and an ambiguity of denotation gets immediately set up as to whether the logos refer to the cloth (why the two of them?) or to the female body under the garment. It is here, it seems to me, that the feminist text is to be located, rather than in the fact that women knit things more, as a general rule, than men do. The viewer, for different reasons depending upon wheth-

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er male or female, is made slightly uncomfortable by the awkwardly placed logos and at the same time is amused by the treacheries of placement. In a way, the pure-wool logo becomes a sort of metonymy of the female breast and hence of the way men think of women in Trockel's work. There is a woven-work of 1985/88 in which the pure-wool logo is repeated over and over in gold against red, making it seem a counterpart to *Made in Western Germany*, in that it appears to have made something marginal to the work itself its motif and raison d'être. Except that the pure-wool logo loses its purity here, for Trockel has had woven into the other half of the hanging the familiar bunny logo of the Playboy world—and there is a field of rabbits facing a field of schematized yarn-balls. The bunny logo sexualizes the wool one.

Sometimes the reference to breasts in Trockel's work is actually frightening. An untitled piece from 1988 uses a waxwork replica of a store mannequin, a bust of a woman with salient breasts and a pretty but vacant head. She is set onto a sort of platform with two flatirons, the plate of each pointed toward a breast. It becomes an immediate image of torture, and a horrifying one at that: The woman does not even have arms with which to fend off the menacing irons. And yet Trockel could have written under the vulnerable organs, in the manner of Magritte, *Ceci n'est pas un sein*—"This is not a breast." It is only the wax effigy of one. The wax would merely melt, and besides, these are only effigies of irons and they are in any case not plugged in. You can't torture a statue! And yet the mind cannot think the woman out of the mannequin any more than it can dissociate the balls of yarn from the breasts in *Dress*. One has to see this as a woman threatened rather than as a sort of still life with two flatirons and a mannequin. What we certainly cannot do is agree with the catalogue, which writes that "ironing, the stereotypical 'woman's work' of the laundress and the housewife, is here figured as an assault on the female body." This converts a deep and unsettling work into a flat ideological slogan. Trockel is too nimble a visual thinker, too subtle an artistic activist, to be trapped into banality: She *uses* banality to ascend to works that, even when their theme is Woman, are sparkling, allusive, subtle and multileveled. And at the same time each of her works has the power of a visual mystery. There is nothing wrong with art being political, only with political art having the single meaning of the political cartoon. One does not want to walk through an exhibition like this with a sort of curatorial lexicon in hand, nailing down symbols, viz., "weaving = woman's work," "ironing = drudgery, usually performed by females."

Consider, for example, an extraordinary work of 1986 that is a sort of glass display case—or perhaps an ornamental and reappropriated aquarium—on ele-

BLIND CATS

Loud Italian teen-age boys
cram the train to Brindisi,
their departing jeers and obscene
fingers and fists bobbing
at the strangers along the platform.
One yells for cigarettes and a pack
catapults over upreaching hands.
Another, his face fuzzy and scarred
by acne and a sickle moon
only something sharp can make
grins as a sandwich comes around, his turn
a furtive peck at first, then a bite
so big it is violent. Such libidinous
unease in their balanced sway
against the rocking train's momentum,
such candor in each leer, marks them
with an understanding of themselves
at once theatrical and private
as they gaze bluntly at the rushing
countryside and roam the crowded cars.
They gather into knots to light up
and murmur over a photograph
of Jim Morrison, his shirt unbuttoned
like theirs, the rock star fevering in their eyes,
lean as the lover who refuses to eat.

Annoyed by such zeal, how like you to break
our moment's locked ironic stare,
open your novel and begin reading
standing up, cornered in the narrow aisle
filled with half-naked boys
and me: a scene
comic and tense with colliding desires:
to be good-looking, genuinely cherubic
and demonic; or to be not American
or a tourist; to be joined
by the touch and lowered voice that says
we are lovers, watch us.

On Nissiros we will meet
after another day apart, each having wandered
the island with that meditative,
scattered mind of imminent break-up, and hesitating
you will tell me about finding two kittens
licking each other, their eyes
diseased and as useless
as the frail comfort they afford each other
huddled on the volcano's sulfurous lip.
How long did you watch them
before this unexpected privilege
granted you the clarity to see
the failure of our need, a secret
yearning to be tender in our helplessness?
How long did you hold back
before you looked at me
and said *Don't look at me like that*?

Joshua Weiner

Danto, C. Arthur. "Rosemarie Trockel." *The Nation*. 1991.

gantly curved legs. In it we see seven ladle-like objects, uniform in size, suspended from that sort of overhead rack one finds in professional kitchens: what the French call a *batterie de cuisine*. The spoon ends of the ladles are seashells cast in bronze, but are attached to the sort of prosaic handles that ladles usually have. In the lexicon just referred to, seashells are supposed to mean vulvas; and though nobody, having made this identification explicit, goes on in the catalogue to say that cooking is women's work, the bare sexual identification is pretty reductionist. In fact, the shells in question are conch shells, and could as easily symbolize the phallus as the vulva. Or, if we insist on sexual translations, the conch shell seems indissolubly male *and* female: The fact that we see them from underneath may mean that men have a certain female underside, just as Duchamp sought to bring out. This indeed is far closer, one feels, to this artist's general attitude toward the sexes. She has, for example, employed in one of her works an African fetish that is at once vulval and phallic, as if to underscore our common humanity as well as our sexual differences. (She has woven pluses up one side and minuses the other of a pair of unisex longjohns, a kind of comical emblem of the unity and oppositeness of the sexes.) But once more this leaves the visual impact of her work out of consideration. It has the mysterious inconsequence of something dreamt. It conveys a sort of visual silence, as of a secret hidden, and inasmuch as the hiddenness is the work, the approach is to feel rather than solve it.

The ladle work is called *Untitled*, but Trockel's titles, when she does bestow them, do not usefully resolve questions. They add, if anything, to the mystery. One work, for example, is called *Pennsylvania Station*. It is composed of an abstract stove, reminiscent of the nonfunctional, furniturelike confections of the American artist Richard Artschwager, alongside what looks to be the packing case in which it came. So the two pieces—or components—seem to be united by juxtaposition in some sort of container-contained relationship. But there is a third component, at the bottom of the packing case—a sort of charred and overcooked mermaid. The carbonized monster bears an uncanny resemblance to the screaming figure in Edvard Munch's celebrated image *The Scream*. Its mouth is open in a stifled cry, its hands are covering its ears. It is in some ways a frightening image and in some ways a comic one. After all, the idea of an overcooked mermaid raises the specter of culinary ineptitude in connection with a species it would not ordinarily occur to anyone to pop under the broiler. (Or should mermaids be poached?) Perhaps the mermaid, half-fish, half-human, is a symbol of our own bimorphic nature? Or is it all female, and martyrized by the kitchen stove—woman's work *noch ein Mal*? Whatever one offers by way of interpretation leaves unanswered what the various linked and warring meanings have to do with Pennsylvania Station.

New Yorkers, who got a taste of Trockel's work in one of the Museum of Modern Art's "Project" exhibitions, will, unfortunately, not get to see this show: After it closed on September 8 in Berkeley, it was to open at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (September 28–November 10) and then at the Power Plant in Toronto (January 17–March 1, 1992). It is composed of seventy-five works, some more conceptually intricate than others but each penetrated with the same spirit of political comedy and artistic intelligence; few can be classified under traditional rubrics, nor do many resemble one another as objects. The style is one of cognitive and moral address, but each has to be worked out on its own terms, though of course there are some inner resemblances—woven-works, for example, and as a subgenre, what one might think of as garments of the sexual wars: the dress, the longjohns, but also some improbably long stockings, some two-necked sweaters for couples who look for an outward symbol of the tightness of their relationship. And then there are hoods of the kind familiar from newspaper photographs of terrorists, with openings for eyes but not for mouths—balaclavas into which Trockel has woven various logos: the swastika, the Playboy bunny, the plus-and-minus signs. Some of these are displayed as sets, as if you can wear them for various occasions of terrorism or of play. And then, in a category of its own, is the Painting Machine of 1990, which looks like a loom, perhaps, but in fact has fifty-six brushes, each made of a lock of hair from an identifiable artist (Cindy Sherman, Martin Kippenberger, Alex Katz, etc.). These are suspended at one end, and, when dipped into paint, make delicate calligraphic marks on pieces of paper pulled through the mechanism. The contrast is vivid between the fierce ironwork of the contrivance and the brushes, emblems of touch and sensitivity, and the locks of hair, connoting sentimentality but put to some artistic use. And finally there is a whiff of politicized absurdity in a machine's being put to the use of making art, in its own way, I suppose, a beating of swords into plowshares. Like everything, it dances with meaning.

What I most respond to in Trockel's work is the sense that she knows all about us—knows us at our smallest and at our worst—and somehow conveys the sense that we are forgiven. This combination would once have been thought of as a womanly virtue, when the Blessed Virgin was thought of as the paradigm woman, and it is certainly comforting to see it in our generally unforgiving era, and to reflect that there are still morally gifted individuals who embody it. Trockel is tough, at times as acidic as Duchamp, at times as frightening as Beuys. But she is also kinder to those she accuses—us—than either of them could possibly be. □

EXCHANGE

(*Continued From Page 394*)

guage he used to describe it did indeed reflect the breezy athletic imagery, involving kill zones and football fields, common to P.R. men for the merchants of death. Either Klare, Walker and Stambler, using identical language, were aping the same military-industrial source or this is the way they naturally think themselves, which is an absurd proposition. A good 90 percent of Klare's article most certainly was an awed account of the performance of high-tech arms, sandwiched by a couple of thinnish slabs of moral outrage. The factual matter between those slabs was mostly wrong.

Klare seems to be acknowledging this in his letter, which is a triple-decker slab of outrage about my all-around swinishness but which makes only one substantive point, namely that I incorrectly describe the BLU-82/B "Daisy Cutter" as "a giant bomb filled with conventional high explosives." Klare's problem here is that in his original article's section on fuel-air explosives he cited as "the most potent weapon of this type" the BLU-82/B "Daisy Cutter," which he described as "a 15,000-pound bomb filled with an aqueous mixture of ammonium nitrate, aluminum powder and polystyrene soap." But as anyone in the Pentagon would have told Klare if he called them up, the "Daisy Cutter" has nothing to do with fuel-air explosive. Klare did get the contents right from whatever source he was consulting (probably Walker and Stambler's May article, since they use the same words), but obviously he had no idea what they were. These are the ingredients for one form of high explosive of the conventional sort (thriftier than some World War II or Korean War high-explosive mixtures because the ammonium nitrate is cheap) and most definitely not for fuel-air explosive.

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Klare's second mistake here is to assume that fuel-air explosive mimes nuclear explosive, which it doesn't. As I noted, Klare didn't take the trouble to find out that though, like nukes, fuel-air bombs have long-duration pressure pulses, the pressure is low and if you are in a bunker or armored vehicle the pressure coming through the vision slits would be insufficient to collapse your lungs. His "nuclear replacement" theory doesn't hold up.

I praised the Iraqi troops for having the good sense and courage to desert in large numbers. Klare seems to prefer to think of them only as victims, killed in numbers that might have reached 100,000 dead and 300,000 wounded—a number he cites from a Pentagon statement.

I was, and indeed remain, cautious about those figures, just as I was, and remain, cautious about very high estimates of direct civilian victims of the bombing, which I put at 4,500. This was a figure suggested by my brother Patrick, who spent much of the war and many months thereafter in Iraq as a reporter for *The Independent*. Patrick said that questioning of Iraqi villagers in the postwar period plus visits to hospitals suggested that military casualties might be far lower than imagined, with the Iraqi troops blessedly saving themselves from the follies of their leader and the might of the foe by desertion or surrender. As I remarked in the original column, prisoners of war from two Republican Guard divisions reported 100 and 1,000 casualties respectively.

One of my problems with the articles by Klare, Walker and Stambler was that the emphasis on high-tech military equipment obscures what has been killing, is killing and will continue to kill Iraqi civilians, namely the embargo, imposed long before the war began and continuing to this day, and also the assault on Iraq's infrastructure. Like most other people I made mistakes in forecasting how the war might go, but at least I did correctly stress the reduction of Iraq to pre-industrial status, also the smashing of the water and sewage infrastructure, which I called germ warfare.

The embargo, as maintained by the Bush Administration long after Iraq has quit Kuwait (and recently given an enthusiastic endorsement by *The New York Times* in its September 11 editorial "Keep the Cuffs on Iraq"), is killing people every day, shortening life expectancies, increasing infant mortality, finishing off sick people because drugs aren't available, gnawing away at an entire people because Iraq cannot resume any sort of productive export economy. It is against this, and not military technology, that outrage and political protest might most effectively be concentrated. Time and again people tend to forget what deadly things economic embargoes are. Ask any Nicaraguan. After a while, just because they don't go off with a big bang that supposedly wipes out all life on six football fields, embargoes take on the color of normalcy and people forget their appalling consequences, or the criminality of those imposing them.

Alexander Cockburn