

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Koether, Jutta. "Rosemarie Trockel." *Flashart*. No. 134. May 1987.

ROSEMARIE TROCKEL

JUTTA KOETHER



MOSCHUS, 1984.
OIL AND SPRAY ON CANVAS, 70 x 200 CMS. COURTESY MONIKA SPRÜTH, KÖLN.

Jutta Koether: *We have reached a pluralistic phase of art, where everything is allowed. Countless currents and trends exist side by side. Should an artist not even more urgently set out the formal boundaries for his work?*

Rosemarie Trockel: It isn't important to set out limits for yourself. What is more important is to make clear the ideas you are dealing with. I work within an integrated structure. Now and then I produce pictures, sculptures and objects, and I consider it important (in order to make my position clear) always to return to the main lines I very often depart from. I don't believe that an artist should give explanations, we mustn't understand art that way. However,

things must be set within a totality which doesn't leave any doubts about their direction. Frankness does not imply interchangeability.

JK: *What demands do you make on your work?*

RT: That I don't get lost in frivolity, and that my assertions—every stroke is one—should be understood.

JK: *Do you consider an attitude of opposition to be a component of art?*

RT: Of course. But facing every artist is the paradoxical task of achieving beauty without gloss.

JK: *What is the relation between you and the "models" of modern art as far as the question of artistic conduct is concerned. I*

refer, for instance, to Duchamp's Negation of Art as Life-Work or, at the opposite pole to Joseph Beuys's Enlargement of the Conception of Art in Social Sculpture.

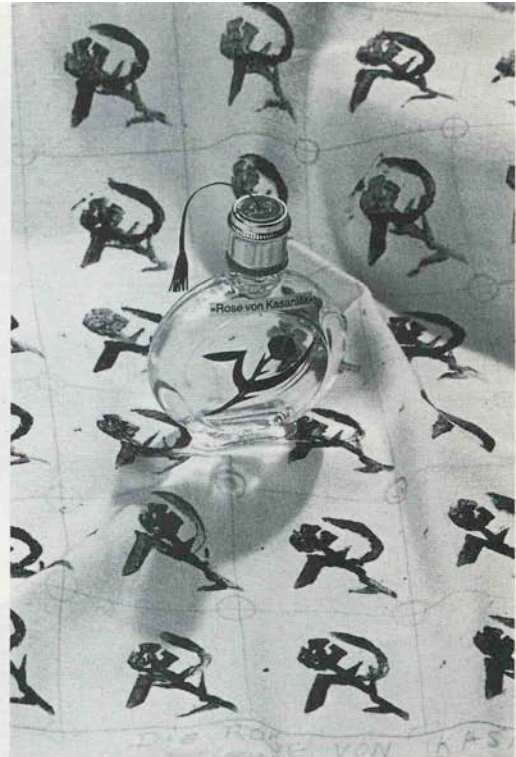
RT: Unfortunately, there are too many cases that have shown that the historical models were only used and consumed to bolster the theories of younger artists. For me and in my position as a woman it is more difficult, as women, have historically, always been left out. And that's why I'm interested not only in the history of the victor, but also in that of the weaker party. The masks, for example, consist not only of what they say or intend to say, but also of what they exclude. They have absence as their subject.

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Koether, Jutta. "Rosemarie Trockel." *Flashart*. No. 134. May 1987.



UNTITLED, 1986.
WOOD, DISPERSION. 129 x 100 x 15 CMS. PHOTO ULI GROHS, KÖLN.



THE ROSE OF KASANLAK, 1986.
PHOTOGRAPH.

JK: Do you keep up-to-date on developments in art?

RT: I keep my eyes open, of course, and I trust them more than the words of the critics and writers in art magazines.

JK: Despite, or perhaps precisely for, their anti-individual technique, these pictures are, at the moment, arousing emotions (you use the swastika between Norwegian knitting patterns, the hammer and sickle, etc.) as well as stirring up questions. Was this your intention and, if not, what is your present position towards this double "boom"?

RT: This is certainly not only a question of anti-individual technique. The patterns I use are, in principle, ones I come upon in knitting books, papers' like *Brigitte*, and designs for tapestries, fabrics, etc. In fact, the meaning of the concept "pattern" is the model to be copied. These knitted pictures, then, differ from conventional iconography. If I knit in a garment or sweater the hammer and sickle, for instance, there is a depreciation of the ideology bound up in identifying the logos for product propaganda and ideological propaganda. We must understand fashion not only as an adornment of the body, but as acting for the body of society. The business of the "boom" is surely connected with the fact that people see a nearness to the "Neo-Geos". In my work, the wave-designs of

Op-art (Bridget Riley certainly has had a great influence on Op-art fashion) do not only have this art-historical connection. The serial patterns, just as the social conditions in which they originated, are of interest here, rather than the formalism of the right angle.

JK: Did a definition precede the qualifying of the symbols? Symbols like the wool trademark and the Playboy Bunny are of course clear, but with political symbols like the swastika and hammer and sickle it becomes a more difficult.

RT: It is wrong to qualify, but right to depreciate. The aesthetic attitude in these knitted pictures is one of depreciation, and indeed the depreciation relates not only to the material, but also to the symbols.

JK: You work with what is "taboo" (knitwear/design). But, in the meantime, even this has become an element of artistic work among other artists (Armleder, Grünfeld).

RT: At this point I should like to make a distinction. The aesthetics of the fifties, nowadays the object of ironic treatment by many artists, don't really interest me. But if something is fundamentally "taboo" that isn't only a question of taste. Materials, procedures and motives are meaningful aspects of the female and are, accordingly, looked upon as inferior and taboo.

JK: What value do works of art hold for you?

RT: Art works are focuses of time. They provide information about the relation between art, culture and the state. And the question of the meaning of art is bound up with this. But works of art only achieve this through their being objects of desire, through their beauty.

JK: You were asked to contribute to the column exhibition at Jule Kewenig's. You hung three brooms from the ceiling and, therefore, as well as presenting a work of art as a souvenir and/or ready-made you disappointed the expectations of the workshop.

RT: As for disappointment it was certainly a good side-effect. As far as the work itself is concerned a broomstick has, in my opinion, absolutely the same supporting function as a column. It plays a supporting role—one which today should no longer be tolerated.

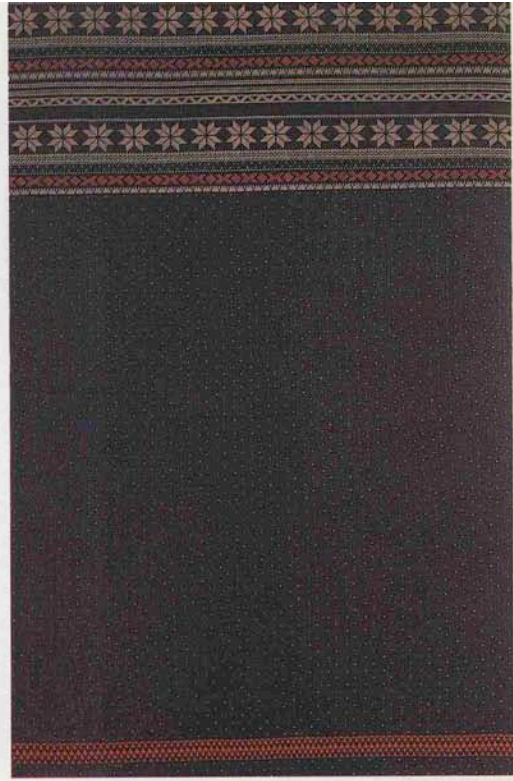
JK: You're using an increasingly varied number of techniques: Drawing came first and even restricted painting. What decisive impulse caused you to give these up or, more exactly, to pursue them only occasionally (wall painting, perfume-pictures). The aim was to provide yourself with as big a radius of action as possible. It was to maintain the tension between concrete statements, between committing oneself (in concrete figurative drawings, in definite objects like vases, and in the very concrete

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Koether, Jutta. "Rosemarie Trockel." *Flashart*. No. 134. May 1987.



BALAKLAVA (ED. OF 5), 1986. WOOL.



UNTITLED (ED. OF 3), 1986. WOOL. 200 x 140 CMS.

knitting, especially the masks), and a "mystery", that is, the claim that art must leave something open, that it must provide a "further", a kind of promise.

RT: A weakness in concentration caused me a lot of trouble in my childhood and youth. I still have this weakness of not sticking to one thing. Otherwise, I have not abandoned certain techniques. Rather, I yield to myself. If someone lets a thing lie fallow for some time, that doesn't mean that he's given it up. He has the opportunity to stand at a distance and once more to approach it. It's not a question of giving up, but of giving in.

JK: In the 1985 Cologne Art Fair in the special section for young artists, you displayed an offensive, shoddy and pompous perfume series which came to grips with the stimulation problem. Now once again, you have used this idea in another context.

RT: That's right. Once in an exhibition in Bulgaria, I provided a bottle of perfume with the words "Rose von Kasanlak", with a rose with a sickle adorning the label. Against my will, a political issue ensued. The name of the perfume was, by chance, the same as that bestowed by the population on a political dissident who had lost her life. The work, in this way, acquired a new meaning. It moved from the level of art to that of *realpolitik*.

JK: Wilfried Dickhoff attributed to you "a

resistance to reality". Is the varied choice of means "resistance" of this type?

RT: Reality is what prevails. Reality is falsehood. Reality can also be truth. What is important is that you give yourself the possibility of keeping open all means that are needed for the treatment of reality.

JK: Some have written about your works (see the Bonn catalogue), strongly emphasizing the erotic content, especially that of the drawings. What significance does "eroticism" or "erotic content" have for your work? And how would you assess, in this sense, the written discussions about your work?

RT: In my opinion, the words of a critic say a lot about me, but also a lot about him, and this is important and exciting for me. I can see how various people interpret my work. The selection of very different texts for me has a seismographic quality: it shows where and to what extent the consciousness of male and female writers has changed. On the one hand there is the work and, on the other, the assimilation of the work through the spectator. And it is clear that everyone picks out what he is most preoccupied by. Only friends in the broadest sense have contributed writings to my Bonn catalogue (George Condo, Willi Dickhoff, you, Jutta, Bettina Semmer and Reiner Speck). However eroticism is, in fact, a chief motif in my work. Clearly men

like to deal with it especially. It resides in the nature of the thing that women had, or still have, more or less the function of an object.

JK: With this "offensive", with the so-called women's art, do you want finally to get over this painful difficulty? Does part of your work deal with this analysis of women and women's art?

RT: What is most painful, what is most tragic, about the matter is that women have intensified this alleged inferiority of the "typically female". The stumbling-block lies, therefore, in consciousness itself. Art about women's art is just as tedious as the art of men about men's art. Sniping at madonnas is as questionable as the eternal citing of the Black Square by Malevich.

JK: What resources do you consider the most important for your art?

RT: Love and grief.

JK: What role does irony have in your work?

RT: Irony appears when I have to get malicious. It's a vice that keeps me from ending up a cynic. ■

(Translated from the German by John Lunden)

Jutta Koether is an artist and freelance writer who lives in Cologne. She is a regular contributor to *Flash Art*.