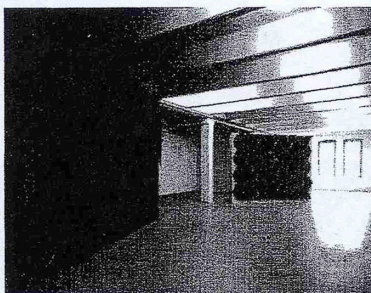


GLADSTONE GALLERY

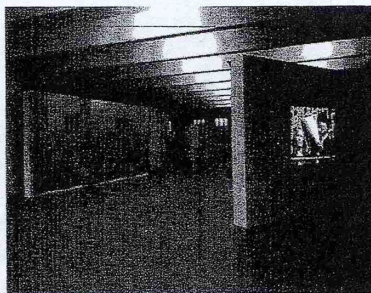
Narayanan, Vivek, "Rosemarie Trockel's Suspicious Kitchens," *NY Arts*, January-February 2004

Rosemarie Trockel's Suspicious Kitchens

Vivek Narayanan



"female craft"—into high art, represented "womanhood" not in terms of simplistic feminist clichés but as a complex intersection of social, biological and political rhizomes and, finally, explored parts of the domestic sphere (kitchens, for instance) as somewhat sinister places that can never be divorced from the violence of the larger society that begets them. Moreover, form and content in Trockel's work are not so easily separated; instead, like the two sides of a Möbius strip, they are constantly surprising and transforming into each other. Her interest in interlocking patterns derives from her interest in knitting which derives from her interest in women's work, so far so good, but then she chooses to knit a balaclava, which suggests war and violence. Her interest in stoves leads her to present stovetops as abstract forms; later, as in the



pling" manner, sometimes in a more jarring, disjunctive way. In every case, for this viewer, the surface of the installation creates a wish for flatness that is delicately, disturbingly refused: it becomes hard to take in the shifting plane of the mosaic as a whole. This kind of disturbance reaches its height in the aptly named *Phobia* (2002), which consists of only five highly reflective plates at different angles to the wall, two of them bordered by a black cotton trimming, which falls, in one place, behind and in front of the plate. The body of the viewer, reflected in the tiles, is a splintered self; the cotton re-introduces Trockel's knitting motif; and the cutting of the trimming by the sharp-looking tile becomes an upsetting rupture.

On the other side of each wall, five videos in the series *Manu's Spleen* ride, by contrast, on a sur-

male body in an open grave, while a body double, fingering her necklace or answering an inopportune telephone call, looks distractedly on.

These videos play with the formal idea of flatness, since movement in them occurs almost exclusively from left to right, never toward or away from the camera. They also ask difficult questions. *Manu's Spleen 4* (2002) is, for instance, both a reading and a bizarre re-staging of Brecht's *Mother Courage*, with Manu in the title role, the saintly Kattrin recast as Joan of Arc, and the prostitute Yvette, "performed" by Jackie Kennedy—selling her country, perhaps—while an older and younger Brigitte Bardot serves as prompter and duplicitous model. *Mother Courage's* canteen cart is hung with reflective pots and pans; once again in Trockel's work, the domestic arena is circumscribed by war. Whatever is going on here, it is not merely politics, theory, or abstraction, even if it derives from all three; it is a sensual, spellbinding hall of mirrors. Or, to quote Trockel's own quixotic script for *Manu's Spleen 2*, "I am speaking for myself as the other! Actually I have never been asked, so I want to give a misplaced answer to a question that hasn't been addressed to me." It is precisely this sense of unasked questions and misplaced answers that fuels the sophistication and mysterious completeness of Rosemarie Trockel's art. □