

Projects 11 : Rosemarie Trockel : The Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 13-April 3, 1988

Author

Trockel, Rosemarie, 1952-

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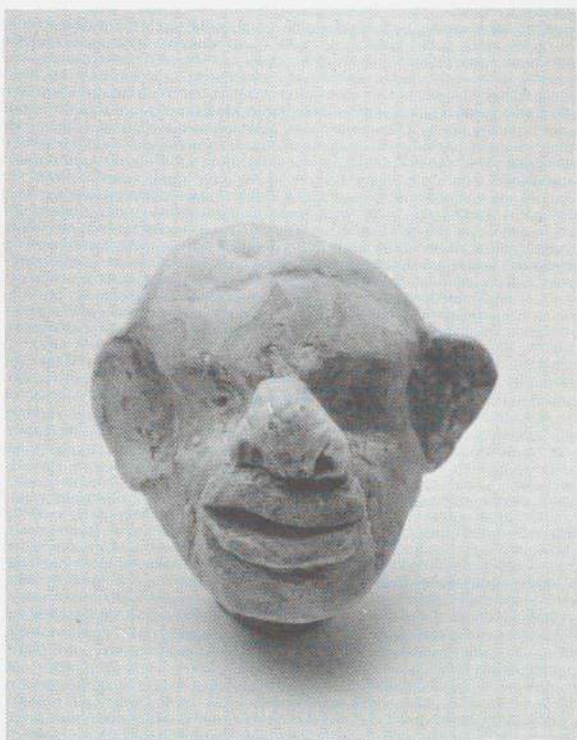
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The Museum of Modern Art
New York
February 13–April 3, 1988

projects: rosemarië trockel

11



Detail of Untitled. 1987. Plaster.
Courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie,
Cologne

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projects

Designed to present recent work by contemporary artists, the new **projects** series has been based on the Museum's original **projects** exhibitions, which were held from 1971 to 1982. The artists presented are chosen by the members of all the Museum's curatorial departments in a process involving an active dialogue and close critical scrutiny of new developments in the visual arts. The **projects** series is made possible by generous grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Lannan Foundation, and J. P. Morgan & Co. Incorporated.



Untitled. 1984. Synthetic polymer paint and ink on graph paper, 11 x 8" (27.9 x 20.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York

rosemarie trockel

Rosemarie Trockel of West Germany is one of the few contemporary European women artists whose work has received exposure in the United States. Highly original and idiosyncratic, her art eludes categorization. She prefers to work concurrently in a variety of mediums, and has treated a broad range of forms and themes in drawings, paintings, sculptures, fabric pieces, and installations. Trockel acknowledges Sigmar Polke and the late Joseph Beuys as important influences, and resonances of their work are apparent throughout her oeuvre.

Trockel's themes stem from a variety of sources. Many derive from her investigations of the place of the woman artist in what historically has been a male-oriented art world. Some of her work overtly alludes to the status and role of women—"the weaker party," as the artist describes them—in society at large. The oven that figures prominently in the present installation, for example, brings to mind traditional images of women as housewives. Trockel's recent knitted pieces, which are fashioned of machine-woven fabric and stretched and mounted like canvas, further evidence the artist's subtle feminist voice. Here Trockel manipulates a traditionally handcrafted medium to challenge received notions about what is typically designated as "women's work."

The meaning of Trockel's art is not, however, presented in simple, straightforward terms. It is rather the result of an intricate visual strategy whereby the combination of seemingly unrelated images elicits multiple associations that reverberate on aesthetic, social, political, and art-historical levels. In all of her mediums, Trockel frequently creates provocative juxtapositions, grouping diverse objects whose meanings then become contingent upon one another. In one drawing a human skull in silhouette rests atop a monkey's head; in another an apelike creature appears to be reading a

book. In a knitted diptych the pattern of one panel is comprised of repeated rows of the Playboy bunny; the pattern of the other, the virgin-wool logo. The implications are numerous. Like Haim Steinbach, Jeff Koons, and Annette Lemieux, whose art hinges upon the transformation of an object's content, Trockel provides us with images without explanation.

Since the early eighties Trockel has worked primarily on paper, and it is in this medium that she develops the ideas that later find their way into her sculpted, painted, and knitted pieces. The motif of the vessel, an essentially feminine form that connotes reception, recurs throughout the drawings in myriad guises, from the mysteriously fantastic to the frankly banal. The form of this container easily evolves into other objects. Some, such as animal or human heads and skulls, are immediately recognizable; others have more amorphous forms and elusive identities. In one group of spray-painted canvases and conventionally rendered drawings from 1984 Trockel's imagery consisted largely of perfume bottles as seductive and provocative as those featured in advertising campaigns, which raised socioeconomic issues. Trockel's exploration of the form and concept of the vessel has also encompassed sculpture. The vessel has taken on numerous identities in this medium, including tall, phallic vases with openings, suggestive of eyes, that render the object useless as a container and imbue it with a strange, human quality. As part of Trockel's strategy, meaning is again open to interpretation.

The sculptures in the present exhibition have an eerie and compelling presence. While they recall earlier work in form and medium, they signal a new direction that has developed out of the artist's interest in evolution and the origin of the human species. In some of the pieces presented here Trockel has replicated artifacts she has seen in reproduction or in archaeology and



Detail of Untitled. 1987. Mixed mediums. Courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne

anthropology museums. These dry and porous plaster objects have a fossil-like quality that gives them a false authenticity, creating a tension between nature and culture. Her use of the vitrine, a container commonly used in museums to protect very old or fragile objects, further invests the forms with archaeological significance and complicates their address as contemporary sculptures.

For this installation Trockel has also assembled a body of drawings, executed from 1982 to the present, that is largely the result of her research on the evolution of the human species. These drawings do not constitute a formal series, but can be viewed as continuing entries into a journal that has spanned the artist's career. Her compositions range from quickly sketched lines or rapid brushstrokes that capture the essence of a thought to carefully rendered images that incorporate traditional techniques. These works are drawn on a variety of papers. Some have clearly been torn from a notebook, while others have a more formal quality. Often compared to the ephemeral drawings and watercolors of Beuys, Trockel's works on paper also bring to mind the dreamlike images of Odilon Redon and whimsical fantasies of Paul Klee.

Trockel's affinities to earlier twentieth-century artists notwithstanding, her art is firmly grounded in the eighties. In a work on graph paper she silkscreened fragments of the word "vendetta" in a repeated fashion. Although not unmindful of the word's highly charged definition, the artist was primarily attracted to the visual presence of the letters. A word so manipulated can be likened to an emptied vessel. Here, as in much of Trockel's diverse work, it remains for the viewer to supply the meaning.

Jennifer Wells
Curatorial Assistant
Department of Painting and Sculpture



**Untitled. 1987. Silkscreen on graph paper, 8 x 10" (20.5 x 25.5 cm).
Courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie,
Cologne**

biography

Born Schwerte, West Germany
November 13, 1952

Resides in Cologne

education

Werkkunstschule Köln, 1974–78

selected individual exhibitions

1987

Galerie Tanit, Munich

1986

Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne

Galerie Friedrich, Bern

1985

Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn*

1984

Galerie Ascan Crone, Hamburg*

Galerie Stampa, Basel

Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne

selected group exhibitions

1987

Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf;
Columbia University, Leo Castelli
Gallery, Sonnabend Gallery, New York
*Similia/Dissimilia**

The Tate Gallery, London
*Art from Europe**

Pat Hearn Gallery, New York

1986

Arnhem, The Netherlands
*Sonsbeek 86**

The Sixth Biennale of Sydney
*Origins, Originality + Beyond**

1985

Museum moderner Kunst, Vienna
*Kunst mit Eigen-Sinn**

Museum Ludwig, Cologne
Herbstsalon

Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne
*Eau de Cologne**

selected bibliography

Koether, Jutta. "Interview with
Rosemarie Trockel." *Flash Art* (Milan),
no. 134 (May 1987), pp. 40–42

Schmidt-Wulffen, Stephen. "Rosemarie
Trockel." *Flash Art* (Milan), no. 132
(February/March 1987), p. 111

Spector, Nancy. "Pat Hearn Group
Exhibition." *Artscribe International*
(London), no. 67 (January/February
1988), pp. 69–70

*The exhibition was accompanied by a
catalogue