

**ROSEMARIE
TROCKEL**

An Paenhuysen and Ulli Groetz travel with the exhibition *Rosemarie Trockel*. Together they created this booklet. An with words and Ulli with pictures.

An exhibition by:



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Show it on the map and make a mark!

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?



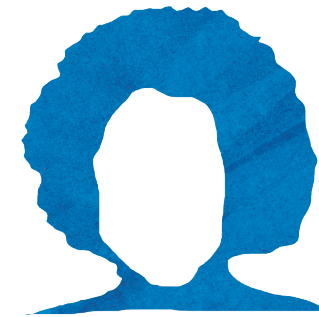
This is a traveling exhibition. Each exhibition is the same, yet different. Depending on the unique properties of each space interacting with the art works, new connections come about and another story is told.

In this booklet you can find the basic elements which make up the exhibition, in the form of icons. Each icon is a distilled visualisation of an art work. This way, you can connect the dots and create your own journey throughout the show. (In other words, also you can travel through the exhibition!)



WHO IS ROSEMARIE TROCKEL?

The figure of the artist always triggers the imagination. Who is the person behind the art? Why did she make this or that piece? You might also look for the artist in the work. Is she the one with the blue eye? Or what about the woman with the curly hair?



After photographs by
Rosemarie Trockel,
1996

Let's see. Here are some facts about Rosemarie Trockel: She was born in 1952, in Schwerte, a small German city. After studying sociology, anthropology, religion and mathematics, she decided to become an artist. In 1974, Trockel went to art school in Cologne to study painting, but quickly expanded her practise to making Super-8 films. And she didn't stop there. If you look around the exhibition, you'll see some unusual material like wool, eggs, hair and even a hot plate.

IS ROSEMARIE TROCKEL

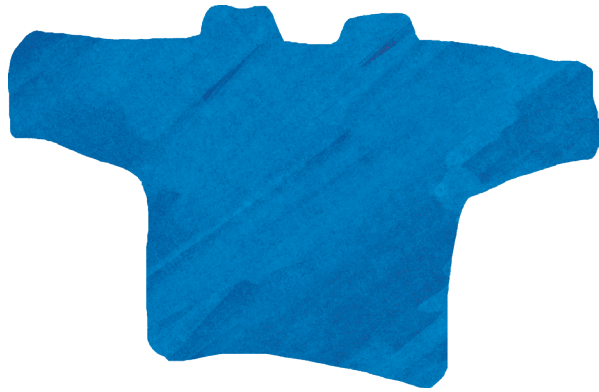
A

FEMINIST

ARTIST ?

YES, BUT...

If you are a woman and an artist, that doesn't necessarily make you a feminist artist. But context is crucial. Rosemarie Trockel started her artistic career in the 1980s, in a rather male-dominated art scene. Together with her friend and gallerist Monika Sprüth, she launched an art magazine, *Eau de Cologne*. It featured artists like Jenny Holzer, Louise Bourgeois, Barbara Kruger, Cindy Sherman, and Louise Lawler. As you might notice, these happen to be all female artists. When Trockel and Sprüth were asked by journalists why there were no men featured in the magazine, they simply said that no male names had come to mind.



After a design by
Rosemarie Trockel
in *Eau de Cologne*,
1989

It is often said that Rosemarie Trockel was the only woman artist in Germany to build an international career in the 1980s. Such was her prominence that in 1999, she became the first female artist to represent Germany at the Venice Biennale. Yet Trockel prefers her art not to be interpreted exclusively through the lens of gender. Nor does she like to be categorised as a “female artist.” If you think about it, we rarely use the term “male artists”. Is there such a thing as “men’s art”?

“I felt more drawn to what was happening in New York. In Cologne a lot of energy was wasted in power struggles, while in New York the equal status of women artists seemed much less contested.”

Rosemarie Trockel
in conversation
with Isabelle Graw,
Artforum, March
2003

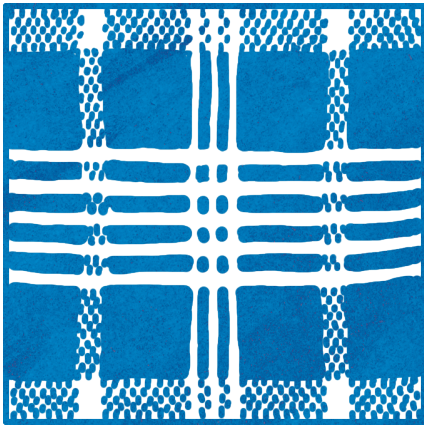
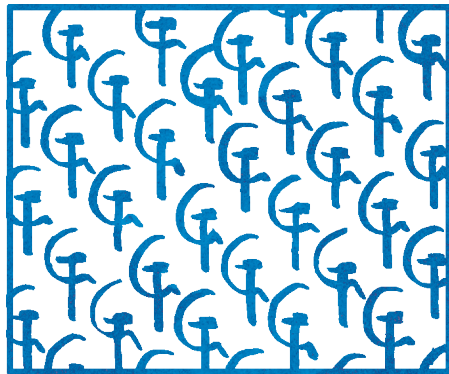
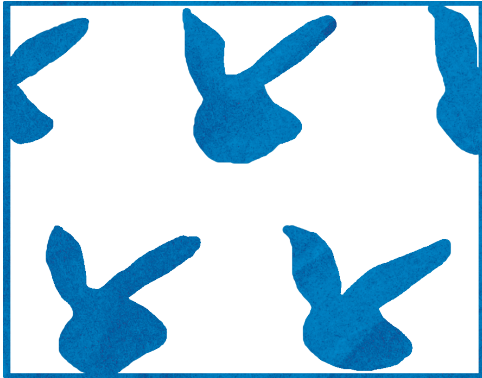
KNITTED PAINTINGS

Untitled, 1992



The mere mention of the term “women’s art” immediately evokes images: it relates to the body and is autobiographical. It usually involves private artefacts, personal histories and the use of one’s own body. Often, in the eyes of the viewer, “women’s art” is eroticised, fetishised or exoticised. At the beginning of the 1980s, Trockel noticed that a lot of “women’s art” used wool, which the art world establishment looked down on with disdain. What would happen, she wondered, if instead of oil paint, she used cheap wool as a medium? And would it make a difference if those knitted paintings were not the result of handcraft but made with a machine?

The motives for her knitted paintings were often patterns or logos, like the Playboy bunny or a Soviet-style hammer and sickle. Proving the maxim that repetition forges a sense of stability and authority, logos are typically used to not only promote products or ideologies, but invest them with resonance and impact. But when a logo is rendered in wool, would its value be diminished by the material’s humble status?



Various patterns
after the knitted
paintings by
Rosemarie Trockel

Rosemarie Trockel made knitted paintings of everyday items, like kitchen towels. She also went to the other extreme, as in the case of her interpretation of Kasimir Malevitch' iconic *Black Square*, its metaphysical premise now made of wool. Trockel adds to this Rene Descartes's legendary epigram "Cogito Ergo Sum" - "I think; therefore I am." Incidentally, in 1988, at her first exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Trockel came up with a motto of her own that points in a different direction:

*"Finally to intuit,
not only to know."*

The knitted painting in the exhibition shows an enlarged ink blot, also known as the Rorschach test, invented by the Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach in 1921. It became a popular psychological test in the 1960s. What you see in the blot is supposed to reveal something about your psyche. The symmetry of the blot facilitates the interpretation process. Yet, in Trockel's painting the blot is depicted only partially. This obstructs an easy reading (but you can always give it a try!).

PAINTING MACHINE

Untitled, 1990



Not only did Trockels create knitted paintings with machines, she went a step further and in this exhibition you can also find her painting machine, equipped with 56 brushes. If you go a bit closer, you'll see that each brush has a small mark on its side. These are the names of the artists who donated a tress of hair to make the brush, including Martin Kippenberger, Barbara Kruger, Georg Baselitz and Cindy Sherman, amongst others. Each brush is unique, and so was the machine's function - it was used only once, to produce seven paintings. But you would be forgiven for questioning Trockel's motives in creating the device - surely a machine removes authorship and with it, any sign of originality?



After a drawing by
Rosemarie Trockel,
1978

Let's have a closer look. The use of hair locks in the painting machine can be seen as romantic: a sign of love or devotion. And because hair does not decompose, it's also a symbol of immortality. So, are the locks of hair playing around with the idea of the painter who, with a stroke of genius, creates eternal art? Yet, the machine itself with its steel rollers, recalls a carwash in which the canvases have been brushed. (Looking at the result, you might find that Jackson Pollock's drip paintings come to mind).

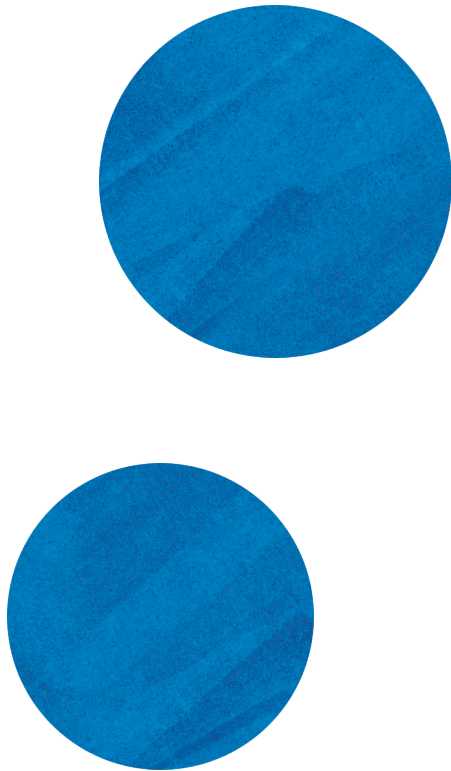


After drawings by
Rosemarie Trockel,
1996 and 1997

Hair recurs frequently throughout Trockel's oeuvre. On many occasions, she depicts anonymous figures from behind, which we assume are women. But this is not because the long hair represents female seduction. Rather, it seems to assert a sense of freedom. Take, for instance, the drawing depicting a woman's back, surrounded by a halo. The position of the turned figure invites the viewer to identify and look towards what, in this case, seems to be a radiant light.

HOT PLATES

Untitled, 1992

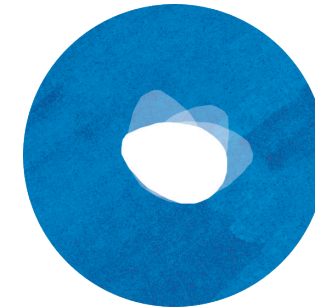


From a distance, the black dots on the white background look like an abstract painting. When you come closer, you see the painting is actually made with hot plates. Hot plates belong in the kitchen, which was for a long time considered the exclusive domain of women. In the 1980s, Trockel brought hot plates into the art space, first positioned horizontally on the floor like sculptures and then, hanging on the wall. The paintings are a playful reference to Minimalism. This art movement, which emerged during the 1960s, focused on geometrical forms and industrial materials, rejecting narrative and emotion. With the hot plates, Trockel introduces not only the feminine (of which there was a significant lack in the Minimalist movement) but also humour.



Fountain, after the
lost original by
Marcel Duchamp,
1917

A sense of humour can also be found in Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), which brings us now from the kitchen to the bathroom. The readymade was Duchamp's intellectual statement, making clear that art is no longer about the pleasure of the eye. It is about the idea, the metaphysics behind the art work. But *Fountain* is also funny: when you turn a pissoir (the stream of urinal water going downwards) upside down it ends up being a fountain (the stream of water going upwards). Like Duchamp, Trockel took a quotidian object and changed its position and thus perception. In the 21st century, the urinal is made obsolete by the unisex toilet. Now, how about the hot plate?



After the video
*Eggs, trying to get
warm* by Rosemarie
Trockel, 1994

Obviously, hot plates are designed for heating. And they do so in the 1994 video *Interview*, in which you can see a heated conversation between interviewer and interviewee. Is this Trockel who's being interviewed? Rosemarie Trockel is known for having a particular distaste of interviews. Actually, she was interviewed only twice, in 1987 and 2003, and in both cases, the interviews were done by friends. In the video *Egg, trying to get warm*, the hot plate features an egg rotating and gaining speed. The combination of the egg, the suggestion of heat, and the acceleration brings an erotic element to the conversation. Perhaps the artist wants to arouse our desire?

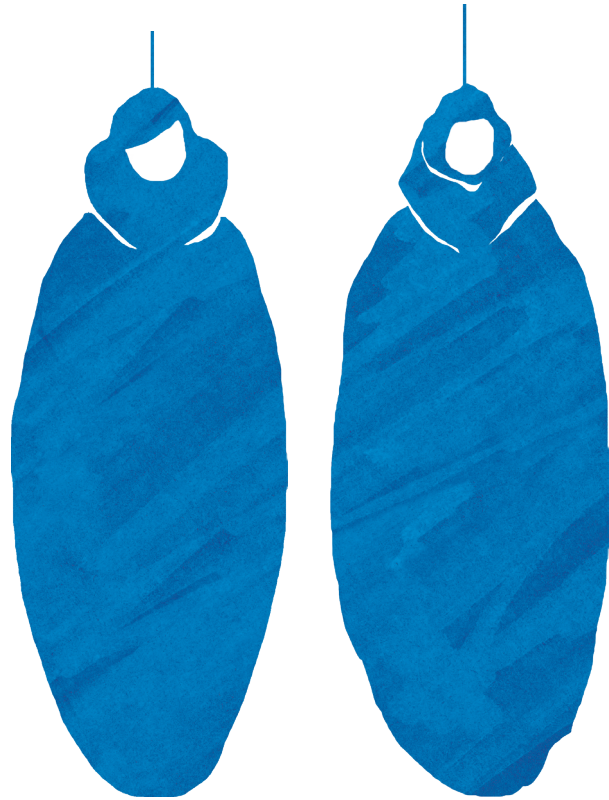
SLEEP

Untitled, 2000



A man stretched out on top of a car, a young man having a nap with his hand on a gun, a boy resting his head on the table. Depictions of sleeping people are not rare, but in the history of art, it is usually women who are depicted on the sofa or on a bed, being a muse. Even Rodin's *The Thinker* is not entirely passive: his arms are muscular, signifying action. So, it's especially interesting to note how Trockel's drawings augment her subjects with specific props - the gun within reach, the car waiting for a ride and so on.

To watch someone sleeping is special. The sleeping person is not really there in the physical world but is somewhere else, in a different state of being. There is a fine line between sleep and death. And if you think about it, isn't everyone an angel whilst asleep? The funniest yet most disconcerting drawing in the series shows a skull, but with eyelids closed.



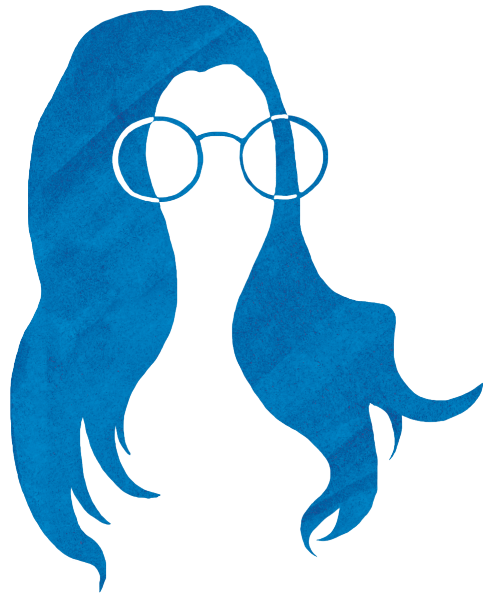
After the installation
Sleeping Pill by
Rosemarie Trockel at
the Venice Biennial,
1999

As part of her Venice Biennial presentation in 1999, Trockel created an installation entitled *Sleeping Pill*. If you have ever visited a Biennial, you will know that there is a lot of hustle and bustle going on. Nobody has “sleep” on their busy program. But Trockel installed cots in the German pavilion, in which visitors could sleep, perchance to dream. It could be said that sleep is the most sensual form of protest.

In the arts, sleep has been used as a tool for subverting the capitalist 24/7 lifestyle. Most famous is Andy Warhol’s film *Sleep* from 1964, showing his partner, poet John Giorno, asleep for about five hours. The whole film is quite impossible to watch, since there is no action to drive the narrative forward. The lack of entertainment prevents the viewer from escaping into the fantasy world that a film usually offers. Instead, you’re left rousing yourself from a state of utter boredom, as an antidote to the Cult of Distraction.

MODELS (B.B.)

Untitled, 1993

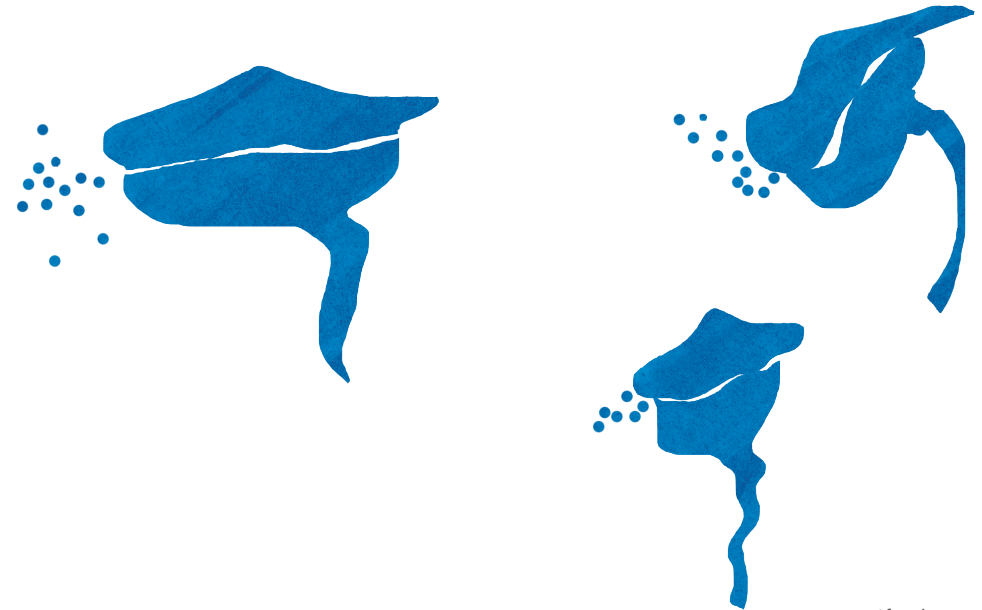


Nobody owns the initials BB as much as French actress Brigitte Bardot. Yet, the same initials also belong to Bertolt Brecht, the Weimar-era German playwright, known for his epic theatre. In the series *BB*, Rosemarie Trockel blends the facial features of both BBs. Being an icon entails a certain rigidity. But like the amorphous ink blot, or the egg losing its form on the hot plate, Trockel blurs solid forms. By superimposing the two BBs, identities are multiplied.

Brigitte Bardot herself took on many roles throughout her career, from cinema starlet to singer, model to animal rights activist. Above all, though, she was most famously perceived as a sex siren. Yet even feminists like Marguerite Duras and Simone de Beauvoir were fascinated by Bardot. In her video *Fan Fine*, Trockel interviewed women who mimicked the actress.

“The fact of being a model doesn’t indicate whether it’s a positive model, whether it’s good or bad. A model is not straight forward, not so clear: it’s made out of circumstances, including your own perspective. There is no model for how to deal with a model.”

Rosemarie Trockel
as cited by Lynne
Cooke, “In Media
Res,” in: Rosemarie
Trockel, Sammlung
Goetz, Munich
2002, p. 23.



After drawings by
Rosemarie Trockel,
1995

Trockel uses different means to elude easy ways of seeing and interpreting. In the exhibition, she presents a series of black and white photographs depicting body parts with such ambiguity that a conclusive reading is impossible. In many of her drawings, she triggers the imagination of the viewer by juxtaposing work from different dates of origin next to each other, creating open associations. Take the photograph of the woman with the blue eye. Why is she shown next to those drawings of mushrooms, with their strange, phallic shapes?

ART CRITICS

Untitled, 1994

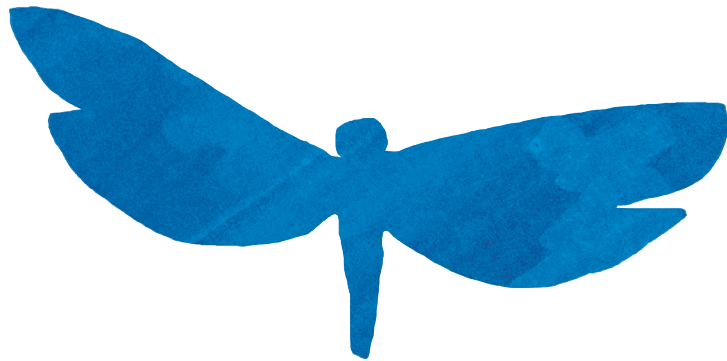


Plain A4 papers carry, in capital letters, the names of famous artists; (Frank) Stella, (Stan) Douglas, (Mike) Kelly and (Richard) Serra. Below these are the portraits of what seem to be, at first sight, the artists themselves. But there is one problem: there are four artist names and only three portraits. If you look at the labels, you will see that the portraits are untitled. They are positioned as supporting the artists above. Are they possibly referring to art critics who helped popularise the artists?

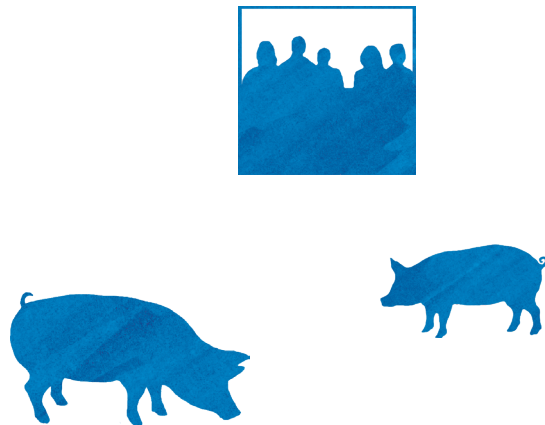
“Who is the best artist?” is also the question that Rosemarie Trockel circles around in her video *Continental Divide*. The question turns into a list of artists, while inserting here and there, her own name into the series. The tactic is reminiscent of the avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein who wasn't shy about referring to herself as a genius. Usually, someone else has to do it for you. But both Stein and Trockel were DIY advocates.

MOTHS

Untitled, 1992/93

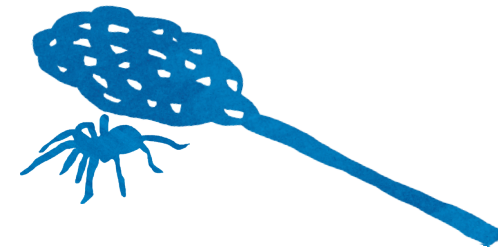


Moths are generally unloved thanks to their hungry larvae's appetite for fabric. But Rosemarie Trockel, with her interest for humble, everyday materials and beings, designs a cashmere house for them. The screenprints show the holes the moths made. In her video *A la motte*, a moth is shown eating its way through the fabric before the process is reversed and the holes close up once more. This breaking down and building up can also be read as a metaphor for the artistic process.



After the installation
*A House for Pigs
and People* at
documenta X,
1997

The relationship between humans and animals is also the topic of *A House for Pigs and People*, created with the artist Carsten Höller at documenta X in 1997. The house is divided in two, one for humans and one for pigs. A mirrored glass between them allows the humans to observe the pigs. But the pigs can quietly live their pig life without having to look at the humans. This is not the only animalistic intervention in Trockel's canon - her 2012 solo show *A Cosmos* at the New Museum in New York, featured three paintings made by Tilda, an orangutan in Cologne Zoo. Trockel titled them *Less Savage Than Others*.



After the video
Mother Mother by
Rosemarie Trockel,
1992

Elsewhere, Trockel uses a tarantula to replace the pubic hair in Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World* from 1866, and her video *Mother Mother* features a spider being chased with a swatter, apparently around a kitchen - a darkly comic depiction of a harried mother, rushing to complete her chores (This trope of a spider symbolising motherhood, eggs cocooned in silk and so on, pops up across art history, for example in the famous *Maman* series by Louise Bourgeois). In any case, now we're immersed in eggs and weaving, we've arrived back at the start of our journey. On the next page, feel free to spin your own thoughts on the show and the work you've seen!

NOTES

ROSEMARIE TROCKEL
Selected Drawings, Objects and
Video Works

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