

In *Untitled (Wollfilm)* (1992), a female torso turns in a central window in a much larger and dark projection plane. With each movement, a thread, which is clearly being pulled from outside the frame, unravels another row of stitches in her woollen pullover. After a time, the background picture plane, which becomes identifiable as a stitch, begins to separate from top to bottom until the naked torso becomes one with the empty projection plane. In this video, Rosemarie Trockel calls into question important art-historical conventions and codes and models from the history of ideas and gender stereotypes with a witty formal ease and meticulous attention to detail.

Rosemarie Trockel, who was born in Schwerte, Germany, in 1952, has been producing her stylistically heterogeneous works in a wide range of media since the 1970s. Her oeuvre, which has assumed an important and unique position at international level and encompasses drawings, two and three-dimensional picture and material collages, objects, installations, “knitting pictures”, ceramics, videos, furniture, pieces of clothing, and books, cannot be reduced to a single artistic genre or style; its common denominator is the intensity of its content, which incorporates an equally wide-ranging network of associations and discourses, and extends from the premises of western philosophical, theological and scientific debate and various role models and symbols to the standardisations and canonical manifestations of art. All of this content is formulated from a precise and explicitly female perspective. However, the artist also outwits feminist platitudes and leads them ad absurdum – for example, in the “hot plate” works, which she has been producing since the late 1980s and which deliver a forceful blow to the minimalist aesthetic, and with her now trademark “knitting pictures”, which present an ironic take on both the cliché of the agreeable, craft-based and mechanical form of art created by women and the traditional art-historical conventions.

However, Rosemarie Trockel’s “female” perspective extends beyond a feminist gesture. Her works are the expressions of an author who – starting with the coding of her own individuation – distances herself from systems that impose both social and sexual identity and gender-related constraints.

This is repeatedly expressed in works concerning the polar opposites of the conscious and unconscious and the culturally formed and unformed, including, for example, the numerous works she has created with and about animals: i.e. the series of animal films produced between 1978 and 1990, the models and houses developed for various animal species since the late 1980s, the project *Haus für Schweine und Menschen* developed with Carsten Höller for documenta X 1997 and the bronze-cast “Gewohnheitstiere”, including *Gewohnheitstier 3 (Dackel)* (1990), which contrast the unconcealed presentness of animals with the controlling awareness of humans. Elisabeth de Fontenay sees “anthropocentrism under house arrest” in Rosemarie Trockel’s animal works while Markus Steinweg detects the thematicisation of the relationship between “animal vivacity and

human intellectuality”. Moreover, the artist’s repeated works on the theme of sleep – for example the installation for the German Pavilion for the Biennale di Venezia in 1999, her numerous drawings and works on paper, and the new series of sofa works (*Watching and Sleeping and Composing*, 2007) – explore the potential of sublation, or as the artist herself likes to put it in rather pompous terms, taking a sideswipe at the pronouncements of Joseph Beuys: the liquidation of the restrictive control mechanisms of the conscious.

«Verflüssigung der Mutter» is the title given by Rosemarie Trockel to her exhibition at the Kunsthalle Zürich, which, following on from her Swiss debut at the Kunsthalle Basel in 1988, an exhibition of works on paper in the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel in 1991 and a presentation of her video works at the Centre d’Art Contemporain in Geneva in 1994, provides comprehensive insight into her œuvre and features works and groups of works produced from the early 1980s on and works created specifically for the exhibition.

The exhibition is presented as a well appointed sequence of spaces, in which groups of works can be experienced in an ordered minimalist form: furniture and ceramic wall works, large-format monochrome knitting pictures, collages, videos and a re-interpreted extended installation *S.h.e.* (2000/2005/2010), in which the entire range of media used by the artist is combined in a dynamic cabinet. This retrospective “overview show” is presented in two oversized “display cases” built into the walls of the Kunsthalle, which the artist developed as a central installation for the exhibition: the cabinets contain signature works like the knitted trademarks, egg works, felted wool monsters, for example the armchair *Atheismus* (2007), and exemplars from the early group of plaster objects (*Hydrocephalus / Wasserkopf II*, 1982). Also presented are a very wide range of “hot plate” works, for example the cardboard hot-plate record player with a knitting needle stylus (*Untitled*, 1991), mouth sculptures (1989), *Daddy’s Striptease Room* (1990), figures, body fragments and everyday objects. These refer to the “weighty” themes of the exhibition and set them in motion with lightness and ease through the interaction between the condensed “display cases” and the fluid spatial layout.

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