notes

1. Generally, the titles of these metal sculptures are selected, almost casually, from mainstream films, as Trockel seeks to separate a work from its name—that is, to indicate the structure of narrative without recourse to the specifics of its story.


Born in 1952 in Schwerte, Germany, Rosemarie Trockel studied painting with Werner Schirra at the Werkkunstschule in Cologne from 1974 to 1978. Since her debut show at Galerie Phirnemae Magiers (later Monika Sprüth, Cologne) in Bonn in 1983, she has exhibited widely in Europe and North America and was included in such major shows as the Venice Biennial (1993, 1995, 1999), and Documenta X (with Carsten Holler, 1997). Recent one-person exhibitions were presented at the Sammlung Goetz, Munich (2002), De Pinto Foundation for Contemporary Art, Tübingen (2001), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2001), the German pavilion in the Venice Biennial (1995), and the Kunsthalle, Hamburg (traveling throughout Europe, 1998). She lives and works in Cologne.

selected bibliography


Private Collection

Rebecca Comay will lecture on Rosemarie Trockel at Dia on Thursday, December 12, 2002, 6:30 pm.

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site map and checklist

1. Phobia. 2002 5 aluminum plates black cotton trimming installation size: 8' x 8' 1/2 feet courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

2. Beyond the Valley of the Dolls. 2000 50 aluminum plates installation size: 15' x 19' 1/2 feet courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

3. No Woman No Cry. 2000 50 aluminum plates installation size: 11' x 14' 1/2 feet courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York


5. Blackboard Jungle. 2002 72 aluminum plates installation size: 11' x 6' 4 1/4 feet courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

6. Treasure of the Sierra Madre. 2002 77 aluminum plates installation size: 9' x 12' 1/2 feet courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

7. Men's Spleen 2. 2002 video projection with sound black and white, 10:30 minutes courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York


9. Men's Spleen 3. 2001 video projection with sound color, 1:50 minutes courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

10. Men's Spleen 1. 2000, video projection with sound color, 7:20 minutes courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

11. Men's Spleen 6. 2002 video, silent color, 1:30 minutes courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

12. Leaving Las Vegas. 2002 video projection silent color, 5:13 minutes courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York


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Rosemarie Trockel
Spleen

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When you are young you think of being an activist, a political activist. This raises the question of whether you really want to do something for other people or to demonstrate a kind of self-will. When I started to work on Big Bang that whole discussion came back because she is such a controversial figure—and she recalls Mother Courage. It's very interesting that she has this quality of being a model for everything. And yet she is her own practice, from the symbolic and associative role she has long accorded herself, to her abiding fascination with a panoply of instantiations of the idol, cult figure, and star in the contemporary cultural imaginary.

When I started to work on Brigitte Bardot that whole discussion came back because she is such a controversial figure—and she recalls Mother Courage. It's very interesting that she has this quality of being a model for everything. And yet she is her own practice, from the symbolic and associative role she has long accorded herself, to her abiding fascination with a panoply of instantiations of the idol, cult figure, and star in the contemporary cultural imaginary.

Formulated with the terse concision of a television infomercial or an MTV clip, these works always deconstructing her own role, even if not always in a very reflective way .... 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 straightforward, not so clear: it's made out of circumstances, including your own perspective. There is no model for how to deal with a model. Memorable, too , is how both Brecht and Trockel use musical interludes to orchestrate an installation around a sequence of architectural interventions. Five free-standing walls, whose outer surfaces are amored in an interlocking pattern of mobile metal plates, cut a path through the refurbished warehouse gallery. On the obverse of each is a projection, scaled to site. In the recesses of the space, two vitrines contain maquettes for unrealized books and catalogues. Adjacent is a brief ambient looping video, Leaving Las Vegas (2002), shot by a camera cruising slowly through a silent storage site where abandoned refrigerators await recycling. This ghostly footage is suggestively, if indefensibly, connected with the sheathed sculptural walls.

Manu's Spleen 1 (2000) is set in a cemetery. After two consorts have shifted a corpse in an open grave to one side, making room for a second incumbent, Manu jumps in and falls back, prone, as if she too were dead. Just as abruptly, she clammers out, and the trio leaves as casually as it had arrived. Though the conversation is never heard, a heart-stoppingly poignant melody accompanies the episode, its haunting refrain lingering in the viewer's mind long after the credits have rolled. Attractive, relaxed, Trockel's protagonists are blithely immune to any suggestion of the macabre or gothic horror: emotional cues are instead triggered by the unforgettable soundtrack.

In contrast, Manu's Spleen 5 (2002) treats the medium of video as a convenient device for recording a quixotic geste, an agile improvisation resistive of a fluxus performance or action. Here, as elsewhere in the series, the unassuming modesty of the endeavor, the disarming lightness of touch, and the comic tenderness betray Trockel's signature sensibility. Beguiling yet cryptic, Manu's Spleen is a key role model in Trockel's current pantheon, among the most potent and persistent of whom is Brigitte Bardot. BB: those ubiquitous initials inevitably conjure the French actress who has long teased and taxed admirers as well as detractors, provoking wildly diverse responses from such disputatious feminists as Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Duras. They also belong to the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, whose Mother Courage is similarly contested. War profiteer or misguided maternal protector? Exploiter or history's victim? Or ...?

The whimsicality permeating Manu's Spleen 4 is matched by a disorienting capriciousness in Manu's Spleen 3 (2001), which addresses birth, albeit obliquely, and aesthetically creatively, by implication. At a baby shower, a pregnant woman, again Manu, blows out the candles on a cake amid much hilarity and excitement. As she puffs, the burst of a balloon is heard, and her stomach simultaneously deflates. Usually considered a condition of hysteria, this is matched by a disorienting capriciousness in the alluring strains of Madonna's recording of "Don't Tell Me" played backwards, in rewind. The whimsicality permeating Manu's Spleen 4 is matched by a disorienting capriciousness in Manu's Spleen 3 (2001), which addresses birth, albeit obliquely, and aesthetically creatively, by implication. At a baby shower, a pregnant woman, again Manu, blows out the candles on a cake amid much hilarity and excitement. As she puffs, the burst of a balloon is heard, and her stomach simultaneously deflates. Usually considered a condition of hysteria, this is matched by a disorienting capriciousness in the alluring strains of Madonna's recording of "Don't Tell Me" played backwards, in rewind.

Like Brecht, Trockel laminates multiple references and narratives. For example, Friedrich von Schiller, Carl Dreyer, Robert Bresson, and Peter Tchakovsky (among the numerous others who tackled the subject of Joan of Arc) were critically engaged in the debate a countercultural aura redolent of the sixties, the era in which the Kunstverein and Kunsthalle were established. In contrast, Manu's Spleen 4 (2002) distills and condenses Brecht's play into a six-and-a-half-minute video projection. Its cast of hybrid characters center on Courage (played by Manu) who, dressed in a Courreges outfit, primp and preens in front of a frying pan/mirror. Kattrin, her ill-starred mute daughter, is melded into that quintessential female martyr Joan of Arc, whose most heretical acts, in the judgment of the prosecuting ecclesiastical authorities, included her refusal to remove her men's attire and resume clothing appropriate to her station (and gender)? The prostitute Wottle, who alone profited from the war by finally marrying a colonel, is conflated with Jackie O: fittingly, she spends her time polishing and servicing a giant cannon.

L.C.