

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.
2. A related visual-verbal pun transformed Jeanne d'Arc into Brecht's Joan Dark, messianic member of the Salvation Army in early-twentieth-century Chicago, in *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1928), his radically revisionist life of the medieval martyr.
3. This collaged soundtrack is composed of some twenty extracts. For a fuller discussion, refer to Lynne Cooke, "In Medias Res," in *Rosemarie Trockel* (Munich: Sammlung Goetz, 2002), pp. 23–29.

Born in 1952 in Schwerte, Germany, **Rosemarie Trockel** studied painting with Werner Schriefers at the Werkkunstschule in Cologne from 1974 to 1978. Since her debut show at Galerie Philomene Magers (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 (1999, 1996), Istanbul Biennial (1999, 1995), and Documenta X (with Carsten Höller, 1997). Recent one-person exhibitions were presented at the Sammlung Goetz, Munich (2002), De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, Tilburg (2001), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2001), the German pavilion in the Venice Biennial (1999), and the Kunsthalle, Hamburg (traveling throughout Europe, 1998). She lives and works in Cologne.

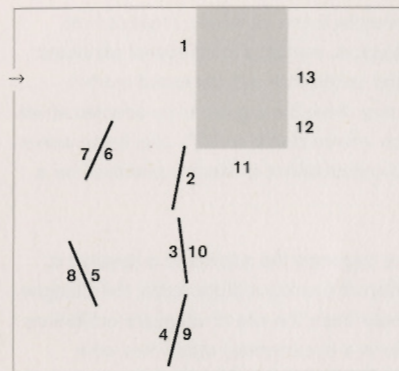
selected bibliography

- Pro Test: Rosemarie Trockel Manus Spleen 2*. Cologne: Walther König, 2002. Text by Rosemarie Trockel.
- Rosemarie Trockel*. Munich: Sammlung Goetz, 2002. Texts by Josefina Ayerza, Lynne Cooke, Ingvild Goetz, Reinald Schumacher, and Stephan Urbaschek.
- Ross, Christina. "Vision and Insufficiency at the Turn of the Millennium: Rosemarie Trockel's Distracted Eye," *October*, no. 96 (Spring 2001), pp. 86–110.
- Rosemarie Trockel: La Biennale di Venezia 1999*. 2 vols. New York: Nabe Press, 1999. Texts by Wilfried Dickhoff, Gudrun Inboden, Ralph Melcher, Joan Simon, Jeannette Stoschek, and Lisa Zeiger.
- Rosemarie Trockel: Bodies of Work 1986–1998*. Hamburger Kunsthalle, in association with Oktagon Verlag, Cologne, 1998. Texts by Simone de Beauvoir, Wilfried Dickhoff, Marguerite Duras, Yilmaz Dziewior, Sebastian Egenhofer, Birte Frenssen, Gudrun Inboden, Melitta Kliege, Catherine Lampert, Holger Liebs, and Uwe M. Schneede.
- Parkett*, no. 33 (September 1992). Collaboration with Rosemarie Trockel. Texts by Véronique Bacchetta, Anne M. Wagner, and Barrett Watten.

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: 8½ x 6½ 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: 10 x 19½ 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 16¾ feet
courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
4. *Rancho Deluxe*, 2001
15 aluminum plates
installation size: 9 x 10½ feet
courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
5. *Blackboard Jungle*, 2002
72 aluminum plates
installation size: 11¾ x 6¾ 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 12½ feet
courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
7. *Manu'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
8. *Manu's Spleen 4*, 2002
video projection with sound
color, 7:42 minutes
courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
9. *Manu's Spleen 3*, 2001
video projection with sound
color, 1:50 minutes
courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
10. *Manu's Spleen 1*, 2000,
video projection with sound
color, 7:20 minutes
courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
11. *Manu's Spleen 5*, 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, 5:12 minute loop
courtesy Monika Sprüth Galerie, Cologne, and Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York
13. *Maquettes for unrealized books and catalogues, 1983–2000*
Private Collection

Rosemarie Trockel
Spleen
October 16, 2002–June 15, 2003



Dia center for the arts
548 west 22nd street new york

Rosemarie Trockel Spleen

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-admiration. 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 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.

—Rosemarie Trockel

Defined as “the seat of emotions and passions,” *spleen* is the seminal concept informing a cycle of short video projections, based on a young woman named Manu, which Rosemarie Trockel has been involved with for some time. For their presentation at Dia she has orchestrated an installation around a sequence of architectural interventions. Five free-standing walls, whose outer surfaces are armored 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 indefinably, connected with the sheathed sculptural walls.¹

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 clambers out, and the trio leaves as casually as it had arrived. Though the conversation is never heard, a heart-stoppingly plangent 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.

The whimsicality permeating *Manu's Spleen 1* is matched by a disorienting capriciousness in *Manu's Spleen 3* (2001), which addresses birth, albeit obliquely, and aesthetic creativity, 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, here false pregnancy threatens to become a collective mania, in that its unmasking fails to interrupt this effervescent celebration. Indeed the brief episode repeats twice more, to the alluring strains of Madonna's recording of “Don't Tell Me” played backwards, in rewind.

Once again, what should have been a disturbing, even uncanny, event refutes straightforward interpretation. Slyly and glancingly, *Manu's Spleen 3* intimates that even those culturally

constructed notions that inscribe the most fundamental forms of female creativity into the social can be freed of their debilitating pathological, mental, and emotional attributes. Similarly, as evidenced in the inaugural video in the series, that self-obsessed morbid melancholia romantically credited to male genius may prove but a guise to be adopted at will. Formulated with the terse concision of a television infomercial or an MTV clip, these works position the viewer as a dispassionate witness to constructions of identity premised on a labile role-playing.

In *Manu's Spleen 2* (2002), the eponymous figure becomes the adjunct to a speaker at a demonstration protesting the proposed demolition of two key cultural icons, the Cologne Kunstverein, and Kunsthalle which for decades have been the site of vanguard exhibitions and related programming. Shot in black and white in a documentary mode, this work features the renowned actor Udo Kier, a native of the city, whom Trockel invited to read a speech she wrote for both this video and as her own contribution to the ongoing campaign, to which she is passionately committed. Conflating invention and actuality, fiction and history, *Manu's Spleen 2* eludes easy classification; for, while following Trockel's directives, the actor, in his own right as a local citizen, simultaneously contests the political decision. Their dress, mien, and manner add a further twist: he and Manu infuse into this debate a counter-cultural aura redolent of the sixties, the era in which the Kunstverein and Kunsthalle were established.

In contrast, *Manu's Spleen 5* (2002) treats the medium of video as a convenient device for recording a quixotic geste, an agile improvisation redolent 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 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 . . .

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, primps 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 men's attire and resume clothes appropriate to her status (and gender).² The prostitute Yvette, 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 canon.

Like Brecht, Trockel laminates multiple references and narratives.³ For example, Friedrich von Schiller, Carl Dreyer, Robert Bresson, and Peter Tchaikovsky (among the numerous others who tackled the subject of Joan of Arc) were critical to her composite creation. Equally determining were certain constants in her own practice, from the symbolic and associative role she has long accorded dress, costume, and couture, to her abiding fascination with a panoply of instantiations of the idol, cult figure, and star in the contemporary cultural imaginary. Memorable, too, is how both Brecht and Trockel use musical interludes to punctuate the unfolding of a tale, as commentary or counterpart. A constantly interrupted radio transmission, made by Kattrin switching the dial from station to station in a frantic attempt to understand the infamy unraveling across the world, is the vehicle for Trockel's brilliantly compacted soundtrack. Her mise-en-scène is modeled on the defining performance by the Berliner Ensemble in 1949, in which the isolated cart is turned in one direction while being hauled in another. War's inevitable fodder, the sons Eilef and Swiss Cheese are quickly dispatched. Garbed in flesh-colored leotards to enhance their immature innocence, they are seduced by the gaping throat of the canon, sacrificed to a voracious Phallus. Identical blonds occupy the prompter's box, a chorus comprised of Bardot and her double.

In *Manu's Spleen 4*, the osmotic flow of desire and dashed hopes, of irony and earnestness, again pertains to the work's repositioning in the 1960s. The failed utopian dreams of the Cold War—with its doomed offspring, liberation and resistance movements—are poignantly conjured in John Lennon's yearning refrain “imagine all the people.” Since war and business are, according to Brecht, but two sides of the same coin, the postwar world was faced with a historical predicament of unprecedented gravity. Initially deceptively lyrical, ultimately deeply disquieting, Trockel's prescient reworking of Brecht's classic is unnervingly timely.

Mentors at once flawed and inspirational, de Beauvoir, Duras, Bardot, and others offer exemplary, if not prescriptive, explorations of gender roles. But, in their multiple, almost contrary, approaches to the concept of the role model, such antithetical figures indicate why it is so difficult to identify a theoretically consistent, analytically grounded feminist agenda within Trockel's practice. In her art, the feminine and feminist constantly intertwine and refract, persistently confounding dogmatic formulation. This ceaseless probing of received notions, clichéd conventions, and institutionalized values is effected by subterfuge, beguilement, contradiction, and rigorous circumvention of the portentous, monumental, and allegedly significant. Forswearing a foundation in what are deemed essentialist truths, the Spleen series is premised on the belief that what is in contention are not visions of reality but stereotypes and archetypes, those pervasive and topical representations that only masquerade as unproblematic and unassailable.