

**T**oday, we should be thinking about  
the artist Rosemarie Trockel  
(b. 1952, Schwerte, Germany).

Men and women tend to assume a lot of things, especially when it comes to men and women. Trockel doesn't favor one over the other, but she points to the contradictions and inconsistencies inherent in both. She targets the norms that constitute identity and disperses them into fragments that refuse to add up.

Luce Irigaray's phrase is true of Trockel's entire artistic position—*no metaphor completes her*. That absence is her subject.

Trockel knits monochromes, patterns,  
and masks. Trockel displays wigs,  
mannequins, and limbs. Trockel distorts  
chunks of glazed ceramic. Trockel films  
bodies at rest and bodies in motion.  
Trockel draws faces, lines, and animals.  
Trockel makes books and photocopies.  
Trockel mixes liquor with furniture.

Her works are acts of metamorphosis—  
migrating from the marvelous to the  
monstrous, and back again.

Most of us learn to inhabit our place in the world thanks to the many standards, patterns, and models that try to dictate our behavior or direct our subjectivity. But to know one's place in the world is a dangerous affair—it only leads to complicity and consensus. Trockel prefers to threaten the integrity and security of our personas, maintain some distance, and stay out of character.

Remember, she says, *there is no model for how to deal with the model.*

Trockel inserts contradictions and disagreements everywhere: she aligns the exotic with the everyday; surrealism with ethnography; painting with machine; instincts with ideas; ornament with politics; fashion with mathematics; affection with aggression.

What matters here is freedom—  
freedom from heuristic models  
themselves: the masculine, the feminine,  
feminism, the civilized, the primitive...

Lurking behind these modern classifications are animal instincts and primal emotions. The spleen is very much within us, in all of its passionate fury. Yes, behind each human is still an ape.

*Watching pigs alive must remind the gaze that it is always life which is at stake. That one should look at a distance. With caution. With respect. And with the thoughtfulness which might create room for one's own survival. In all its vulnerability. (Troedel & Höller, A House for Pigs and People)*

Watch the spider, too: its irregular and inconsistent gestures are about survival as much as about vulnerability; about form as well as formlessness; about instincts as well as intelligence. About drawing. Rosemarie Trockel draws every day.

Conceptual art, these days, tends to avoid vulnerability. Instead, it likes to adopt a detached elusiveness and calculated self-reflexivity. It's often austere and immaterial, and when it dares to be beautiful, it does so with the confident/cynical flair of the dandy.

Trockel, on the other hand, is a conceptual and critical artist whose thoughtfulness never eclipses her vulnerability, and who is fearless in her sincere engagement with beauty and desire.

Her task, as she puts it, is to achieve beauty without the gloss—where pleasure is present, even if it goes against the grain. In her work, care is never too far removed from hostility, and *jouissance* is often cruel. The marvelous, once again, is always also monstrous. Trockel's is a dismembered beauty, a disfigured beauty, a compromised or violent beauty—an absent beauty, a beauty without.

The fourth season at The Artist's  
Institute, with Rosemarie Trockel, runs  
from February 5 to July 15, 2012.