



Installation view, 'Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos', New Museum, New York, 2012–13. Pictured left to right: Rosemarie Trockel, *Replace Me*, 2011, digital print, 32.5 × 40cm and *Untitled*, 2012, plastic, 350 × 100cm. Photograph: Benoit Pailey. All images © 2014 Rosemarie Trockel, DACS, London. Courtesy the artist; New Museum, New York; and Sprüth Magers, Berlin and London

Less Sauvages than Others: Rosemarie Trockel's 'A Cosmos'

– Brigid Doherty

'Models', said Rosemarie Trockel in an interview with Lynne Cooke some years ago, 'are a matter of one's own work. There is no model for how to deal with a model.'¹ This paradox – that an artist's own labours and creations determine not only how models are to be reckoned with but also what might constitute a model for those labours and creations in the first place – was made vivid in 'Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos' (2012–13), a superb exhibition curated by Cooke for the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid that travelled to the New Museum in New York and the Serpentine Gallery in London.² In displaying drawings, paintings and sculptures made by others as integral to the cosmos associated with Trockel's own art, the exhibition took seriously Trockel's understanding of works of art as having the capacity not merely to establish relationships of similarity and difference to models, but in effect to generate those models – in other words, to invert the operations of what is usually called 'influence'.

At some point in the planning of 'A Cosmos', Trockel floated the possibility of titling the exhibition 'Influenza'.³ The wit as well as the ambivalence of that remark are characteristic of Trockel's play with language. Calling the exhibition 'Influenza' would have restored a link between *influence* (in the sense of holding sway or providing a model) and *influenza* (in the sense of a highly contagious infectious disease). Derived from the late-medieval

Latin *influentia*, *influence* originally intended specifically an 'astral influence', as in an 'emanation from the stars'.⁴ Italians in the sixteenth century saw the operation of such an astral or occult force in the spread of an illness, calling the illness itself *influenza*; speakers of English and German followed. Trockel's proposal

to stage the exhibition of her works alongside those of others under the sign of influenza suggests the possibility of recognising the concept of influence and its effects as at once generative and sick-making; when read as potentially alluding to influence in its original astrological sense, it also warns against seeing any cosmos associated with Trockel's art as a rationally ordered system.

Among Trockel's book drafts shown in 'A Cosmos' was *First Influenza* (1995), which features on its cover a black-and-white photographic image of the gigantic illuminated Bayer logo, known as the Bayer Cross, which rises some 120 metres above the skyline in Leverkusen, Germany. Installed alongside the smokestacks of the Bayer pharmaceutical plant in 1933 as 'the world's largest illuminated advertisement', the original Bayer Cross went dark in compliance with wartime blackouts in 1939, and was dismantled shortly after the war.⁵ In 1958, when Trockel was six years old, a slightly smaller version – still visible today – was erected. Occupying an almost-astral place above the title on the cover of *First Influenza*, the logo emblematises the Bayer Cross's visual prominence as a sign of

Brigid Doherty examines the dynamics of authorship, influence and reproduction in Rosemarie Trockel's exhibition 'A Cosmos' (2012–13).

- 1 Rosemarie Trockel, quoted in Lynne Cooke, 'In Medias Res', in *Rosemarie Trockel* (exh. cat.), Munich and Ostfildern: Sammlung Goetz and Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002, p.23. See the discussion of Trockel's 'insistence on the complexity of models', and especially the interpretation of *Sprachwandel B* (2006), in Anne M. Wagner, 'Trockel's Wonderland', in *Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos* (exh. cat.), Madrid and New York: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía and Monacelli Press, 2012, pp.23–25.
- 2 'Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos', Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid (23 May–24 September 2012); New Museum, New York (24 October 2012–13 January 2013); and Serpentine Gallery, London (13 February–7 April 2013).
- 3 See L. Cooke, 'Modelling a Cosmos', in *Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos*, op. cit., p.43.
- 4 See 'influence, n.', *OED Online*, available at www.oed.com/view/Entry/95519?rskey=rbTAKN&result=1&isAdvanced=false (last accessed on 4 December 2013).
- 5 See 'The Bayer Cross', available at <http://www.bayer.com/en/the-bayer-cross.aspx> (last accessed on 4 December 2013).





modernity in the landscape of the artist's childhood memories, while the title's pun suggests a potential identity between the agencies of contagion and therapy in the glow of that fraught historical figure on the horizon and its call to a feverish child's imagination.

The show's eventual title, 'A Cosmos', alludes to the monumental, multi-volume *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* (1845–62) by Alexander von Humboldt, which he described as 'an earnest endeavour to comprehend the phenomena of physical objects in their general connection, and to represent nature as one great whole, moved and animated by internal forces.' At the same time, Humboldt acknowledged that his *Cosmos* aspired 'to the honour of being regarded as a literary composition'; he reflected on both influence and imagination with regard to his work, noting that the effect produced by his writing, which he believed to be due in part to 'a picturesque animation of style', was often 'more powerfully manifested in the influence it [exercised] on the sensitive minds of the young, whose imaginative faculties are so powerfully manifested, than by means of anything which it could itself impart'. In situating the ordering principles of Trockel's art in relation to Humboldt's *Cosmos*, the exhibition invokes an intellectual enterprise that presented its own aesthetic aims as central to its ambition 'not [to be] wholly disregarded even at a future age' in which many of its scientific conclusions would no longer hold.⁶ Thus, although (to the best of my knowledge) Trockel's art never references Humboldt's *Cosmos* directly,⁷ the exhibition emphasised the aesthetic dimension of scientific representations of the natural world in the work of Humboldt and others, framing for viewers new ways of regarding those representations today. Catalogue essays by Cooke, Suzanne Hudson and Anne M. Wagner also suggest affinities with *Wunderkammern* and the fantastical nonsense and down-the-rabbit-hole anthropomorphisms of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), while a text by Dore Ashton adduces free associations (or rather the conceit of free associating) to make a case for (or rather to assert the terms in which a case should be made for) the significance of Trockel's art in relation to the paradoxes of German history since the 1950s ('one can only make non-sense of this, which RT has always done'), and to 'her masters', from Bertolt Brecht to Marcel Duchamp.⁸

In each of its venues, the exhibition featured as a central element a room with walls finished top to bottom in white glazed ceramic tile, illuminated by ceiling-mounted fluorescent fixtures. From the ceiling also hung, upside down, a three-and-a-half-metre-tall plastic palm tree (*Untitled*, 2012) that appeared to allude to the *Décors* of Marcel Broodthaers, perhaps especially *Ne dites pas que je ne l'ai pas dit — Le Perroquet* (*Don't Say I Didn't Say So — The Parrot*). That 1974 installation included a live African grey parrot in a metal cage atop a white enamelled wrought-metal stand framed by two small potted palms, a table displaying Broodthaers's exhibition brochures and a recording of the artist reciting his poem 'Moi Je dis Je Moi Je dis Je...'. The untitled palm tree in Trockel's installation offered a deliberately silent homage to Broodthaers as both artist and poet. *As Far as Possible* (2012), another work within the so-called Ceramic Room, seemed to answer Broodthaers's exhibition of the live parrot and its faculty for imitating human speech by presenting mechanical birds and an aptly mechanical soundtrack. Altogether, Trockel fashioned a creepily clinical space that evoked the winter garden as a topos not of the bourgeois interior but of spaces of carefully monitored leisure in sanatoria and other disciplinary institutions. I found the room's atmosphere by turns disquieting and amusing. Thematic and formal links to works in other rooms offered both avenues of escape and reasons to keep coming back.

The photographic montage *Replace Me* (2011) occupied another wall in the Ceramic Room. In this work, Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (*The Origin of the World*, 1866) appears in black-and-white reproduction, outfitted with a massive tarantula that seems to

6 Alexander von Humboldt, 'Author's Preface' (1844), *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* (trans. E.C. Otté), London: Bohn, 1848, vol.1, pp.ix–xiv.

7 It's worth noting that Humboldt's *Cosmos* plays a significant role in the art of Hanne Darboven, whose work has been important to both Trockel and Cooke. Cooke curated the magisterial exhibition of Darboven's *Kulturgeschichte 1880–1983* (*Cultural History 1880–1983*, 1980–83) at the Dia Center for the Arts in New York in 1996–1997, and then oversaw its installation as part of Dia's permanent collection at the new Dia: Beacon in 2004; unfortunately that epochal work is no longer on display. For Darboven's engagement with Humboldt, see, for example, her *Urzeit/Uhrzeit* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), which reproduces, in an English translation by Joachim Neugroschel, the 1844 preface to *Cosmos*.

8 See Dore Ashton, 'Free Associating RT', in Rosemarie Trockel: *A Cosmos*, op. cit., pp.28–29.

Rosemarie Trockel,
Reborn with Spot,
2011, oil on canvas,
76 × 61cm. Courtesy
the artist and Sprüth
Magers, Berlin and
London

Previous spread:
Installation
view, 'Rosemarie
Trockel: A Cosmos',
Serpentine Gallery,
London, 2013.
Photograph: Jerry
Hardman-Jones.
Courtesy the artist
and Serpentine
Gallery, London



have taken shape as a Photoshop metamorphosis of the painted pubic hair of the original nude — a magnificent built-in fetish. Reproductions of Courbet's once-notorious painting appear in a number of Trockel's recent works. I see them as figures for an engagement with technological reproducibility in relation to the problem of origins and our desire to know them, an engagement that pervades Trockel's art.⁹ In another room of 'A Cosmos', a slightly scaled-down oil-on-canvas copy of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *La Grosse Maria, Vénus de Montmartre* (*Fat Maria, Venus of Montmartre*, 1884), which Trockel commissioned from a company in Vietnam specialising in the manufacture of handcrafted reproductions of paintings, offered another occasion to look between the legs of a nineteenth-century French nude, this time in a work that Trockel knew exclusively through reproductive media. Trockel herself painted a mark to the right of the model's left breast, and gave the work a new title, *Reborn with Spot* (2011).

Reproduction in several senses of the term also comes into play in two works on paper, both made in 1995, whose identical titles — *Mechanical Reproduction* — might be citing the English-language title of Walter Benjamin's classic essay on the topic.¹⁰ Hung nearby Maria Sibylla Merian's early eighteenth-century watercolours of insects and the plants

9 See Brigid Doherty, 'She Is Dead: The Disfiguration of Origins in Rosemarie Trockel's Collages', in Dirk Snauwaert (ed.), *Rosemarie Trockel: Flagrant Delight* (exh. cat.), Brussels and Paris: WIELS and BlackJack Editions, 2013, pp.134–48.

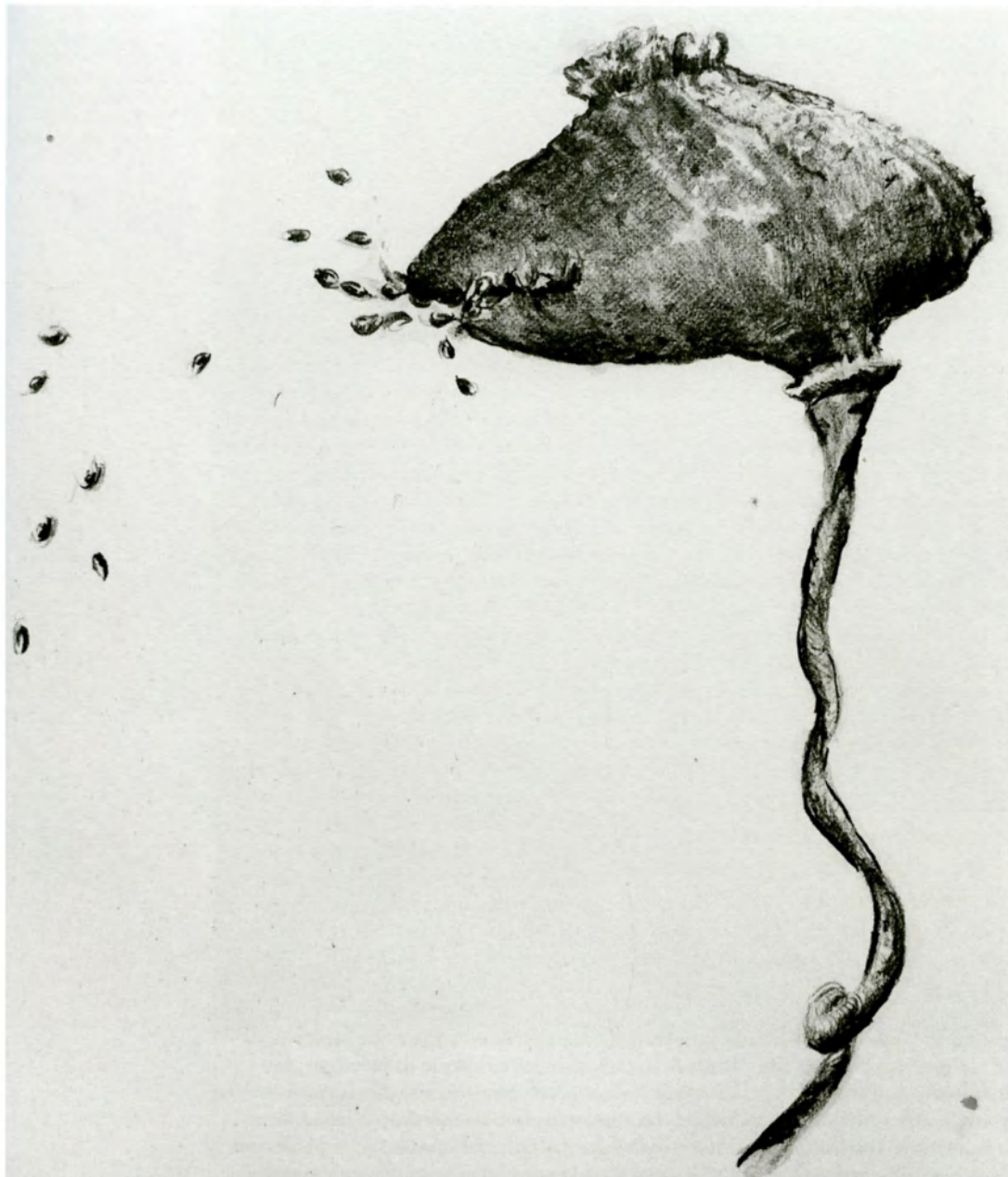
10 See Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn), New York: Harcourt, 1968, pp.217–52.



they inhabit, the *Mechanical Reproduction* drawings, one in pencil and the other in acrylic, each show a single poppy seed head on a twisted stem erupting and almost seeming to speak with its spill of seeds — as if in the throes of a self-induced hallucinatory intoxication or *Rausch*, to borrow the term Benjamin used in his reports on his own experiments with hashish.¹¹ Whether seen individually or together, the works readily show themselves to be handmade, and so their titles would appear to be, in that connection, ironic. Here, as elsewhere, Trockel's art asks viewers to recognise something like an indwelling mechanicalness in the natural phenomena they behold around them, and perhaps in their own natures as well: the dispersal of seeds as a proto-technological procedure; the making and viewing of art as processes potentially subject not only to reproduction but to automation; and anthropomorphism as the inscription of something maybe merely mechanical in the pictorial animation of plants.

Rosemarie Trockel,
*Mechanical
Reproduction*, 1995,
acrylic on paper,
20.5 × 25.5cm.
Courtesy the artist
and Sprüth Magers,
Berlin and London

11 See W. Benjamin, *On Hashish* (1927–34, trans. Howard Eiland), Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006.



Rosemarie Trockel,
*Mechanical
Reproduction*, 1995,
pencil on paper,
26 × 27.8cm.
Courtesy the artist
and Sprüth Magers,
Berlin and London

Also in the Ceramic Room was *Made in China* (2012), a rough-surfaced, vessel-like object in white vitrified ceramic. Installed at crotch level on a wall, *Made in China* couldn't fail to call to mind Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), while its title alluded to newer venues and technologies of industrial production and reproduction. In this way, it updated the rhetorical gesture of a number of Trockel's untitled wool pictures of the late 1980s, which presented the phrase 'Made in Western Germany' as a schematic pattern integral to their machine-knitted surfaces. Unlike those wool pictures, whose surfaces make plain that they were produced by means of industrial technologies, *Made in China* advertises its handmadeness, which derives not from modelling but from tossing clay from a distance of about a metre onto the floor, and sometimes onto parts of the emerging work itself, introducing an element of chance into an experimental additive process. Another wall of the Ceramic Room displayed a digital print of an electric stove burner, or hot plate, a common motif in Trockel's works of the 90s – this one outfitted with the cover plate of an on/off switch but missing the switch itself. Titled *Possibilities* (1999), the work

seems to want to supplement the disfiguration of Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* in *Replace Me* with a travesty of Friedrich Kittler's maxim for a media-theoretical ontology, 'Nur was schaltbar ist, ist überhaupt' (roughly, 'Only that which is switchable exists at all').¹²

Shown at the Serpentine Gallery in the same small side room as the *Mechanical Reproduction* drawings, the shadow-box assemblage *Music Box* (2013) features a plaster life cast of ethologist and primatologist Jane Goodall's left hand, its fingers laced with a length of white yarn, set on a shelf above a black-and-white screen-print-on-sheet-metal image of a chimpanzee wearing a three-piece suit, tie, hat and lace-up ankle boots, and posing, unlit cigarette in mouth, leaning on a console in a nondescript interior. Next to *Music Box* hung *Picnic* (2012), another shadow-box assemblage, in which a hand freely modelled by Trockel after Gilles Deleuze's rests on a shelf among an array of plant specimens. As with the yarn draped around the life cast of Goodall's hand, the brown woollen sweater cuff attached to the modelled version of Deleuze's puts a sculptural sign of a personage Trockel has long admired in touch with a material crucial to her own art. Fashioned after her recollection of the appearance of Deleuze's hand in a televised series of interviews¹³ and coated in black acrylic paint, the hand in *Picnic* recalls both the darkened, desiccated flesh of saints' relics and the leathery skin of a chimpanzee, setting up a play of associations among species and media as presented in *Picnic* and its pendant, *Music Box*.

'A Report to an Academy' is not the title of a work by Rosemarie Trockel. But it could be. It would fit right in with *Training* (2012), *My Dear Colleagues* (1986) and *The Same Procedure as Every Year* (2010). When I saw 'A Cosmos' at the Serpentine, it was *Music Box*, alongside a triptych of paintings titled *Less sauvages than others* (2012) and attributed to 'Tilda (Orangutan at the Cologne Zoo)',¹⁴ that put me in mind of Red Peter, the great ape narrator of Kafka's short story, 'A Report to an Academy' (1917).

According to his own narration, Red Peter 'broke out in human speech' after having learned from his human captors to drink brandy 'like a professional tippler' and to display human gestures 'like an artist'. By means of extensive training, he achieved success

Trockel's art asks viewers to recognise something like an indwelling mechanicalness in the natural phenomena they behold around them, and perhaps in their own natures as well.

as a vaudeville performer and 'reached the average cultural level of a European'. As he addresses an audience of 'exalted gentlemen of the Academy', Red Peter recognises that the human words he uses to sketch the 'apish feelings' of his past can only misstate those feelings and fail 'to arrive at the old apish truth'. People, Red Peter has learned, are 'so easy to imitate'. But human language — even, or

perhaps especially, when it turns to figurative images — cannot capture the experiences of his 'previous life as an ape'. 'To speak frankly, as much as I like to employ figurative images for these things, to speak frankly: Your apedom, gentlemen, to the extent that you have something of the sort behind you, cannot be more remote from you than mine is from me.'¹⁵ Trockel's shadow-box assemblages similarly link apedom and humandom. Moreover, they present something like visual analogues for the hesitations and repetitions of Red Peter's speech, acknowledging their own affinity for figurative images in forging associations between human beings and apes while insisting on the impossibility of arranging those associations in any sort of narrative form.

The page to which the cast of Goodall's hand holds open Trockel's artist's book *Footnotes* (1993) might be read as condensing Red Peter's situation into the phrase 'WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE WHAT / YOU ARE NOT'. This phrase appears above a photograph of a box enclosing a web spun by a spider to whom, as the footnotes in

12 Friedrich Kittler, *Draculas Vermächtnis. Technische Schriften*, Leipzig: Reclam, 1993, p.182.

13 *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* (1988–89), interviews with Claire Parnet, directed by Pierre-André Boutang; available in English as *Gilles Deleuze from A to Z* (trans. Charles V. Stivale), Cambridge MA, and London: The MIT Press, 2011.

14 Tilda was born in Borneo in 1967 and spent her youth as a cabaret performer in Antwerp before moving to the Cologne Zoo, where she and other great apes have had occasion to make paintings that have been sold to support various initiatives at the zoo. See 'Lotte und Tilda malen', <http://www.koelnzoo.de/zoo-aktuell/neuigkeiten/lotte-und-tilda-malen/> (last accessed on 4 December 2013).

15 Franz Kafka, 'A Report to an Academy', in *Kafka's Selected Stories* (ed. and trans. Stanley Corngold), New York: Norton, 2007, pp. 76–84.

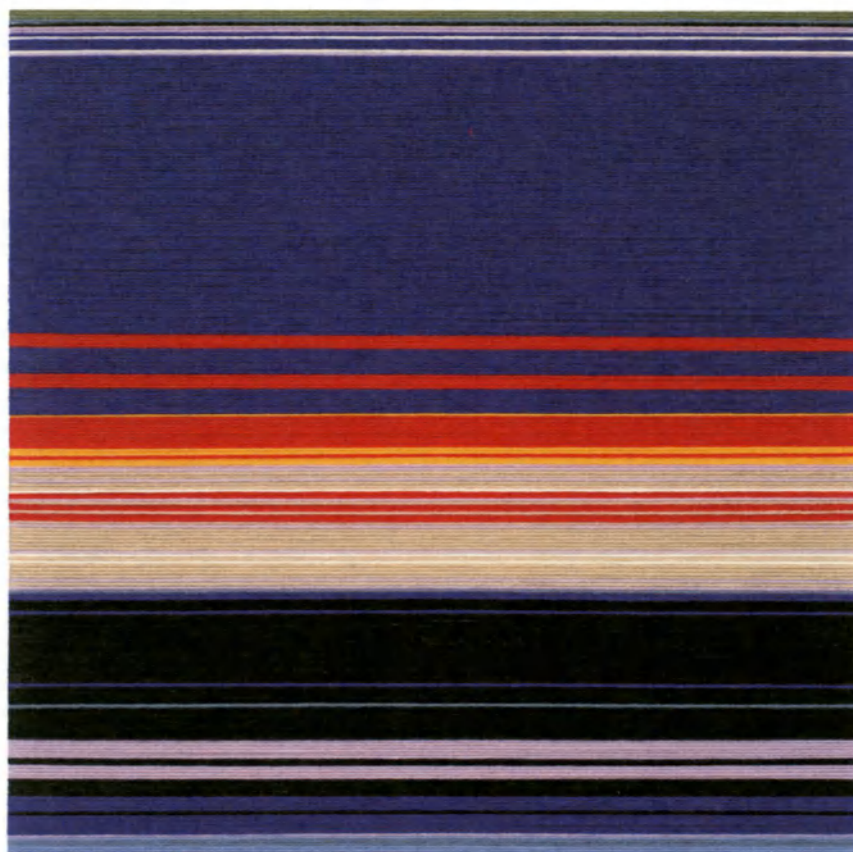
Rosemarie Trockel,
Music Box, 2013,
 wood, wax, Perspex,
 135 × 102 × 15.5cm.
 Courtesy the artist
 and Sprüth Magers,
 Berlin and London



Footnotes explain, one or another hallucinatory drug had been administered as part of a scientific experiment. *Music Box* thus sets up a relay between the yarn that forms part of the work itself and the spider-spun filaments depicted in the booklet. Also shown on the same page is a reproduction of a sheet of notes and drawings by Duchamp. The notes read 'Toile d'araignée comme exemple d'isolement / "naturel" d'une carcasse / (pseudo-géométrique) / d'inframince' ('Spider web as an example of the "natural" / isolation of a carcass / (pseudogeometric) / of infrathin'), and the drawings depict what seem to be splayed human legs, a pairing we find reconfigured in Trockel's *Replace Me*.¹⁶ The matter of what it is like to be what you are not preoccupies Trockel's art, shaping its relation to the so-called historical and neo-avant-gardes, as well as to the forms of non-human making it regularly invokes.

When the triptych *Less sauvages than others* was shown in Madrid and New York, its wall label parenthetically attributed the making of the paintings to 'Tilda, an orangutan in the Cologne Zoo', but the label's layout made plain that Trockel was to be recognised as the author of the artwork, within which one of the three canvases was displayed in a

¹⁶ Rosemarie Trockel, *Footnotes*, booklet included in the artist's book *Jedes Tier ist eine Künstlerin* (ed. Wilfried Dickhoff), Lund: AB Propexus, 1993, unpaginated. See also Marcel Duchamp, 'Inframince/Infrathin' (note 24), *Notes* (ed. and trans. Paul Matisse, preface Anne d'Harnoncourt), Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983, unpaginated.



Rosemarie Trockel,
Training, 2012,
wool, 110 × 110cm.
Courtesy the artist
and Sprüth Magers,
Berlin and London

custom-fabricated Perspex box like those that often enclose Trockel's own wool-pictures. (A painting by Tilda was also shown in Trockel's exhibition 'Flagrant Delight' (2012), where it appeared enclosed within a white, Perspex-covered box frame as the lone element of the collage *The Artist's Studio* (2011), without any form of attribution to the ape.)¹⁷ The change to the label for *Less sauvages than others* in London was striking: Tilda's name replaced Trockel's in the space reserved for the artist, identifying the ape, it seemed, as the author not only of the individual paintings but also of their installation as the triptych that bore a title Trockel has assigned to a number of her own works over the past twenty or so years. The title's framing within an English phrase of the plural French *sauvages* can be understood to indicate that some unspecified set encompasses objects that are less savage (less wild, less uncouth) than others are.¹⁸ However, each time I encounter the title *Less sauvages than others*, I find myself wanting to flesh out the phrase into something like this: 'They are not so much savages as merely others to us.' The sentence I make in my mind is not meant to name a situation either depicted in or exemplified by the work whose title gives rise to it. At the Serpentine, my associations to the words 'Less sauvages than others' led me to think of the relation of great apes, or what in German are called *Menschenaffen* (literally 'human-apes'), to human beings. The dressed-up chimpanzee in *Music Box* came to mind. And then Red Peter, whose situation might be seen as something like an actualisation or literalisation of the condition of being a *Menschenaffe*. He is not so much a wild animal as an other, both to the exalted gentlemen of the Academy and to us readers, just as we are others to one another, and to the author of the story, Kafka.

17 'Rosemarie Trockel: Flagrant Delight' was curated by Dirk Snauwaert at WIELS, Brussels (18 February – 27 May 2012), and travelled to Culturgest, Lisbon (13 October 2012 – 6 January 2013) and Museion Bolzano (1 February – 1 May 2013).

18 See also Wagner's discussion of Trockel's use of this title to 'evoke the world of sculpture' and to imply 'an aesthetic comparison' in which Trockel's art exemplifies 'a less-than-savage sculptural comportment [in which] sculptural excess can be tamed', in 'Trockel's Wonderland', in *Rosemarie Trockel: A Cosmos*, op. cit., pp.25–26.

Rosemarie Trockel,
Less sauvages than others, 2012,
series of three
paintings made by
the orangutan Tilda,
one of them mounted
in Perspex box,
each 80 × 80cm,
detail. Courtesy
the artist and Sprüth
Magers, Berlin and
London



'Ich berichte nur', reads Kafka's text as Red Peter's narration approaches its end: 'I am merely making a report; to you, too, exalted gentlemen of the Academy, I have merely made a report.'¹⁹ *Ich berichte nur*: literally, 'I just report'. That might be another way of suggesting, as Red Peter does at the story's outset, that his presentation is shaped by a fraught restraint concerning figurative language, a condition present in Kafka's writing at large. With its shift in tense from 'I am merely making a report' to 'I have merely made a report', the last sentence of 'A Report to an Academy' may or may not be confronting its readers with two potentially distinct first-person voices (that of Kafka the writer, who 'just reports' in the sense that he presents a short story as if 'merely making a report', and that of Red Peter the narrator ape, who as the text draws to a close has just finished making a report before an audience of exalted gentlemen).

Displaying, under the name of the ape as artist, canvases that bear the traces of Tilda's performance as a painter in a manner that recalls the presentation of her own works, while extending to those canvases a title also borrowed from her own oeuvre, Trockel at once disavows and acknowledges authorship of *Less sauvages than others*. She arranges Tilda's paintings as a triptych, frames one of them in Perspex and gives the work as a whole a name an orangutan (I suppose) could not have imagined. When, in the Serpentine version of the exhibition, Trockel opted not to name herself as the one presenting those paintings as a work of art, she cast Tilda in a role in the tradition of Kafka's Red Peter, and in effect represented herself as the ape's amanuensis — the human being who saw to the framing of one of the canvases, and provided a title that would fit with the rest of the exhibition. Within 'A Cosmos', Trockel's repudiation of conventions for the attribution of authorship emerged as part of a larger effort to establish something like a poetics, and perhaps also an ethics, of *influenza*: an approach to making and showing art in which models are a matter of one's own work, and one that aims to be contagious.

19 F. Kafka, 'A Report to an Academy', *op. cit.*, p.84.