



Rosalyn Drexler, “Vulgar Lives”

BY ANNE DORAN MARCH 18, 2015

Rosalyn Drexler, now in her eighties, has been a novelist, playwright, Emmy-winning comedy writer and, for a few months when she was in her twenties, a lady wrestler. Drexler has also been an artist. This show of paintings made between 1959 and 1991 focuses on themes that have preoccupied her in all of her endeavors: gender roles, relations between the sexes, crime, politics and power.

In the 1960s, Drexler produced a variety of Pop Art that was more narrative and political than that of her male contemporaries. Then, as now, she took images from newspapers, magazines, films and television and enlarged them as paper prints, before collaging them on canvas and overpainting with acrylics.

At first, these images were presented against monochrome backgrounds. The figure in a painterly portrait of the artist as a pinup girl in garters and a frothy tulle skirt, for example, is suspended in a field of flat orange. But by the 1980s, Drexler was combining multiple pictures into surreal tableaux, such as *Night Visitors* (1988), which depicts a comfortable living room with a big picture window with a view outside of an approaching group of men in black suits.

Drexler looks especially prescient in the gallery’s backroom, where a group of collaged studies from 1960 conjures the cutout pictures on colored backgrounds made in the 1980s by Pictures artist Sarah Charlesworth. Drexler’s collages, like Charlesworth’s, aren’t icons so much as they are interrogations of the mass media and its effects. And while Drexler’s work became increasingly inner-directed, it remained sharp-eyed about the differences between American life and its public image.