

## Rosalyn Drexler: Likes a little humor with her humanity

AMY SUTHERLAND JUNE 10, 2016

Artist, novelist, playwright, critic, Rosalyn Drexler obviously never felt compelled to limit herself to one genre over the past six decades. That is why she's won an Obie Award and an Emmy Award as well as created enough paintings and collages to warrant a retrospective. If you missed the recent exhibit of Drexler's pop art, "Who Does She Think She Is?," organized by Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum, the show travels to the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, N.Y., this fall. The exhibit catalogue is available from the Rose.

BOOKS: What are you reading currently?

DREXLER: I was re-reading Kafka's short story "A Hunger Artist," and I also just read part of Joan Didion's "After Henry," a collection of essays dedicated to her longtime editor Henry Robbins at Simon and Schuster who died in 1979.

BOOKS: Who are some of your favorite authors?

DREXLER: Balzac, whom I read as a kid. I found out about sex by reading his "Droll Stories." I didn't understand the book but thought it was funny, with what these people were up to. I very much enjoyed Gabriel García Márquez's "One Hundred Years of Solitude." The last book of his I read, "Memories of My Melancholy Whores," however, was slow and not as exciting as his other stuff. I love Nathanael West's "The Day of the Locust" and "Miss Lonelyhearts," and Samuel Beckett's "Endgame." I never stopped crying after reading that because at the end one of the characters climbs a ladder and looks out the window and reports he sees nothing.

BOOKS: Are there any other books you've cried at?

DREXLER: Colette's books "Cheri" and "The Last of Cheri," the story of an affair between an older woman and a young man, but I wouldn't say I was sitting there balling. I don't sit around crying about things.

BOOKS: What is your favorite kind of book?

DREXLER: I like a book with a little humor and some humanity, like "Miss Lonelyhearts." My very favorite book is "On Being Blue" by William Gass. It's all about the color blue. It's not very thick, but it's very intellectual and has a sense of humor. I also really liked Edmund Wilson's "The Twenties" and "Kiki's Paris" by Billy Kluver and Julie Martin, another book about the '20s. That one has lots of pictures. The '20s was such an exciting time. It reminds me of our '60s.

BOOKS: Are there any writers you wish were better known?

DREXLER: The Polish writer Bruno Schultz, who wrote "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass." He was a marvelous writer and artist. He was somewhat of a magical-realism writer like Marquez. He was shot and killed by a Gestapo officer.

BOOKS: Did you grow up with books in your house?

DREXLER: There was one novel there: Mussolini's novel "The Cardinal's Mistress." I don't know why we had it. It was not a household with books though my father had graduated from Columbia University. He was a botanist and pharmacist. My mother did get me two books, one by Mark Twain and one by Charles Dickens. The newspaper had a promotion and sold books for 25 cents each. I don't remember which books they were, but they had embossed covers. They were beautiful. Then we had a Dickens, a Twain, and a Mussolini.

BOOKS: Where did you find books to read?

DREXLER: My aunt belonged to a book club when I was 12 or 13. All the ladies would sit in the park and play mahjong. I would excuse myself to use my aunt's lavatory. I was really going up to see her books. I would sit there reading what she had, such as "And Quiet Flows the Don" by the Russian novelist Mikhail Sholokhov.

BOOKS: How long would you stay at your aunt's reading?

DREXLER: Long enough to secretly read at least a chapter before returning to the park. It was all so long ago. This November I'll be 90 years old. I no longer have to sneak away to read a book.