

Garth Greenan Gallery 545 West 20th Street New York New York 10011 212 929 1351 www.garthgreenan.com

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Contact: Garth Greenan
(212) 929-1351
garth@garthgreenan.com
www.garthgreenan.com

Rosalyn Drexler: Occupational Hazard



Sueño Revista (Rosalyn and Sherman in a Rousseau), 1989

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to announce *Rosalyn Drexler: Occupational Hazard*, an exhibition of paintings at **545 West 20th Street**. Opening on Thursday, September 7, 2017, the exhibition is the first presentation of Drexler's work since her recent retrospective at the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University (2016; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2016–2017; Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University, St. Louis, 2017). Eleven of the artist's bold, psychologically complex paintings will be on view, as well as a selection of never before seen source material.

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The show will focus on Drexler's work since 1986, a remarkably prolific yet underappreciated period in the artist's oeuvre. In these paintings, while favorite themes from her sixties repertoire persist—violent transactions, dubious business, murders, and sex—her subjects/compositions are more surreal and open-ended. Frequently, the figures wear masks or face away from the viewer. For Drexler, masking underlines the interchangeability of her cast of criminals, businessmen, and politicians, and further dramatizes their menace. Artists, whether friends (such as Andy Warhol) or not (such as Jean-Michel Basquiat), and artworks by herself and others, also figure into these paintings, echoing the intensification during the 1980s of Drexler's reflexive preoccupation with the art world. In an homage to Henri Rousseau, *Sueño Revista (Rosalynd and Sherman in a Rousseau)* (1989), Drexler inserts herself and her late husband, the artist Sherman Drexler, into an emulation of *The Dream* (1910). Replacing Rousseau's exotic nude with an image of herself bewitched by the music of some magical Shermanesque creature, Drexler celebrates her love and artistic subjectivity as seduced daydreamer.

One of the most significant works in the exhibition, *Portrait of the Artist* (1989), underlines the importance of both painting and writing to Drexler's creative persona. It features a masked figure in a painterly frame with brush in hand and a "beanie with an airplane at the top." The airplane symbolizes the "traveling mind of a writer," the artist explains. In particular, the mask highlights Drexler's association with theater; it also points to the hide-and-seek/hide-to-reveal game so fundamental to her work since the sixties, as well as to her lifelong role-playing as both a woman and an artist. Its "useful clothes" effect a potent cross-dressing that echoes the artist's generous embrace of all kinds of difference, as often revealed in her plays and novels. Despite the red boots and polished nails, the suit and tie render *Portrait of the Artist* into a desexualizing reprise of Drexler's earlier, subtly transgressive *Self-Portrait* (1964). This is one of the artist's great strengths. For all their luridness, her narratives remain ambiguous. Viewers can speculate about the story, but that is all they can do because the story never fully reveals itself.

Born in 1926 in Bronx, New York, Rosalyn Drexler first began exhibiting her work during the late 1950s. Since then, she has had 20 solo exhibitions, including at Reuben Gallery (1960, New York), Kornblee Gallery (1964, 1965, 1966, New York), and Pace Gallery (2007, New York). In 1986, a retrospective of her work—*Rosalyn Drexler: Intimate Emotions*—opened at the Grey Art Gallery, New York University. Another survey exhibition, *Rosalyn Drexler and the Ends of Man*, took place in 2006 at Rutgers University's Paul Robeson Gallery (Newark, New Jersey).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Drexler's paintings were featured in many important museum exhibitions, such as *Pop Art USA* (1963, Oakland Art Museum, California), *The Painter and the Photograph* (1964, Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University), *American Pop Art* (1974, Whitney Museum of American Art), and *Another Aspect of Pop Art*, (1978, P.S. 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, New York). In 2010, her work figured prominently in Sid Sachs' landmark exhibition *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958–1968* (2010, University of the Arts, Philadelphia), as well as *Power Up: Female Pop Art* at the Kunsthalle Wien. More recently, Drexler's paintings were included in *Pop to Popism* at Australia's Art Gallery of New South Wales (2014–2015, Sydney); *International Pop* (2015–2016, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis); *Human Interest: Portraits from*

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the Whitney's Collection (2016–2017, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York); and *Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952–1965* (Grey Art Gallery, New York University).

Drexler's paintings are in the collections of many museums, including the Albright-Knox Art Gallery; the Allen Memorial Art Gallery, Oberlin College; the Colby College Museum of Art; the Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College; the Grey Art Gallery, New York University; the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution; the Museum of Modern Art; the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University; the Wadsworth Athenaeum; the Walker Art Center; and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

In addition to her work as a visual artist, Drexler is also an accomplished novelist and playwright. She published her first play in 1963 and her first novel in 1965. She is the recipient of three Obie Awards, as well as an Emmy Award for her work on Lily Tomlin's television special *Lily* (co-written with Richard Pryor).

Garth Greenan Gallery is pleased to represent Rosalyn Drexler.

Rosalyn Drexler: Occupational Hazard will be on view at **Garth Greenan Gallery, 545 West 20th Street** (between Tenth and Eleventh Avenues), through **Saturday, October 21, 2017**. The gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. For more information, **please contact the gallery at (212) 929-1351, or email info@garthgreenan.com**.

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