

Rosalyn Drexler: Who Does She Think She Is?**Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts****February 11 - June 6, 2016****Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo****October 22, 2016 - January 29, 2017****Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, St. Louis****February 10 - April 17, 2017****By Sarah Parrish**

The title of the spring 2016 exhibition at Brandeis University's Rose Art Museum poses the question, *Rosalyn Drexler: Who Does She Think She Is?* The answer is far from singular: the pop artist's retrospective presents a provocative point of view informed by her intersecting identities as a painter, sculptor, author, athlete, woman and mother. Curated by Katy Siegel and Caitlin Julia Rubin, the presentation builds on recent exhibitions hosted at local universities that have similarly reevaluated the contributions of women in pop, including the Tufts University Art Gallery's *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968* (2011) and the Harvard Art Museums' *Corita Kent and the Language of Pop* (2015). As with these shows, Brandeis presents a subjective historical glimpse into 1960s America. Yet, Drexler's art resonates equally strongly today in its representation of a media-saturated society that is alternately sexist and sexy.

Drexler's exploration of gender, eroticism, and violence in film, television, and print media structures the exhibition's two floors. The paintings to the right of the museum entrance introduce couples in amorous poses. The interactions between figures become progressively more ambiguous and ominous as one circles the room, ultimately erupting in aggressive assaults on the opposite wall. On the lower level, visitors find work from an earlier stage of the artist's career. Here, a section devoted to female sexuality and identity is brilliantly positioned directly below the romantic scenes on the main floor, while Drexler's portraits of men in power—and herself in the boxing ring—mirror the section devoted to violence overhead. Rather than reinforcing conventional stereotypes that equate women with emotions and sex and men with physicality and force, the exhibition layout extends Drexler's inquiry into how identity is mediated through mass-culture.

In her paintings, Drexler typically uses a Photostat machine to enlarge found images sourced from magazines, posters, newspaper, and other printed materials, samples of which are displayed at Brandeis. After affixing the copied image directly onto the canvas, she overpaints vivid fields of color. The accumulation of text in *The Dream* (1963), for example, produces a surprising sense of facture that is visible in person, but often absent from reproductions. The interplay between visible brushstrokes and unmodulated forms underscores the tension between embodied experience and the visually and conceptually "flat" stereotypes of the actresses, pinup girls, and businessmen that Drexler takes as her subjects. Of course, she was not only a painter, and examples of her acting, writing, and early sculptures are also on view. Constructions like *Fat Lady* (1960) not only offer a twist on 1960s assemblage, but also foreshadow the resurgence of craft and ephemerality in twenty-first-century sculpture.

Instead, it is the books that fall flat in this show. Glass vitrines convert Drexler's vibrant narratives into inert artifacts, though their tantalizing presence will hopefully encourage curious visitors to leaf through original copies available at the front desk. Equally engaging reading is provided in the exhibition catalogue, which features content by Drexler, Siegel, Rubin, Michael Lobel, Jonathan Lethem, Stephen Bottoms, Hilton Als, Allison Unruh, and Kalliopi Minioudaki. Unruh and Minioudaki frequently write on women pop artists, and though their commentary is as thorough and probing as ever, one wishes that additional voices would enter the conversation. Following the Rose Art Museum's thoughtful presentation, it can only be a matter of time before others rise to the challenges posed in Drexler's art.



Installation view, *Rosalyn Drexler: Who Does She Think She Is?* Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts.