

Works in Progress

A very small sampling of the female artists now in their 70s, 80s and 90s we should have known about decades ago.

By PHOEBE HOBAN

ROSALYN DREXLER

Rosalyn Drexler, 88, has worn many hats. Born in 1926 and raised in East Harlem and the Bronx, she traveled around the country in the late 1950s as a wrestler: Rosa Carlo, the Mexican Spitfire, an odd incarnation documented by Warhol in a series of silkscreens, “Album of a Mat Queen,” in 1962. Since then, Drexler has happily digressed. In the 1960s, she became a novelist and an Obie Award-winning playwright. In the ’70s, she wrote for film and television, winning an Emmy for a Lily Tomlin television special. And she adapted the blockbuster film “Rocky” into a novel (under the pseudonym Julia Sorel).

Drexler first emerged onto the art scene in 1960 with a series of sculptures created using plaster and found objects, admired by critics and fellow artists alike. Always interested in a wide range of disciplines, she switched to painting and, by the early ’60s, was well known for her brightly colored, cartoon- and film-noir-inflected paintings. Like fellow Pop Art practitioners Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Tom Wesselmann, Drexler incorporated images scavenged from the media, especially magazines; her technique was to collage and paint over them, allowing just a hint of the original to show through.

The multiplicity of Drexler’s career has meant that her painting has often taken a backseat. But, she says, “I never wondered which was more serious. I was always so full of work and happy to be working. I was not thinking about my, quote-unquote, ‘career.’”

Drexler continues to paint to this day; however, it is her early work that has recently garnered renewed critical consideration, re-establishing Drexler as one of the key figures of Pop Art. “It’s like a miracle, the attention that’s being paid and the people writing about the work,” she says. “I am finding out more about me than ever before.”