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Oral history interview with Rosalyn Drexler,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Rosalyn Drexler on May 17 and June 2, 2017. The interview took place at Garth Greenan Gallery in New York, NY, and was conducted by Christopher Lyon for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Rosalyn Drexler and Christopher Lyon have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is Christopher Lyon interviewing Rosalyn Drexler on May 17, 2017 at Garth Greenan Gallery at 545 West 20th Street. So, um, yeah. So I wanted to just say that, you know, because as it is the Archives of American Art, the focus of the interview is the artwork.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But it seems like your career has been so interwoven with, you know, art, and writing, and performance, and all your different activities, and I didn't—I don't want to neglect anything that you might want to talk about.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's the same mind. The humor and the intensity, once I get into a project. Just the actual enjoyment of doing the thing, see. And the, and many opportunities opened up for me that I accepted. And it was like a charmed, creative—like, I have not received, like, some bad rejections. You know, like, my first book, it was very interesting. A friend of ours, William Klein, the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah, the photographer?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. He's not French, he just went over there and stayed there. But he's from the Upper West Side, New York. So, a friend of ours. And he had another friend who wanted to go into publishing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah—

ROSALYN DREXLER: And he showed him just the—all I had was a paragraph or two, and this guy said, "I want to publish you." I said, "Okay." He said, "I'll be back in two years, and get me the book." I said, "Oh, okay." He came back in two years. He's a guy—and he had published *Unsafe at Any Speed* [00:02:00] with Nader.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, right.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And he said, "Well, where's my book?" He said, "I'll give you a contract, okay." I said, "Okay." I said, "But you do know that I've never written a novel, or, you know, any extended—I've written some articles." He said, "Well, you will." And so I had this contract. The guy was serious. And I said to myself, Okay, you're a great reader. Now you have to write. So I said, What is the most important thing in writing? Honestly, humor, and invention. And memory, of course. Of course, first books more or less have some biographical content in them, you know. So I did this. I found a way to amuse myself in the writing so that I enjoyed it, and I laughed at it, and I found it honest. So he came back, and he said, "Okay, now we're just going to publish it." I think it was called Grossman Publishers or something like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah-hah. And this is *To Smithereens*?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, it was *I Am the Beautiful Stranger*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *I Am the Beautiful Stranger*, right, right, right. I'm sorry.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And Gregory Corso happened to read the book. And once I was in Paris—I forget the name of the hotel. But he left a message. He said—and he thanked me, "Madam Drexler for writing an honest—a book that I could relate to. I am so happy that you wrote this." And then I realized, he said, "It brought me back to my days at" whatever the name of the—when he was a youth, he was incarcerated for some time for—you know, god knows. Nothing of importance. But anyway, so he found honesty in the book. I never expected [00:04:00] Gregory Corso—and his bunch of people. You know, Kerouac and whoever. That he found honesty and something he could relate to in my first book.

I said, boy—I said, This is a marvelous thing. That a really—what you think is just yours rolling around can really

be important to other people that you least suspect. And of course that's my feeling about art. The big surprise is somebody finds it important to them or even alleviates a bad afternoon or evening, you know. And finds something to look at, and decides to absorb a work. And this is very important. You know, I mean they try now to say—who—I mean, politicians that I don't agree with—that art is not important. I think art is so important, because it really gets into you. It appeals to you. And it's not just an afternoon amusement. Well, it could be. You know, hey, let's go to the museum. Let's take the kids. You know? But so what? You never know. Even one of those kids could look at something and say, Wow, I don't know what that is, but Mommy, take me here again. I want to see more. You never know.

Because I know when I was a kid, my father took me to a museum, and the thing that appealed to me most was a Chardin peach. And it was so beautiful, and so fuzzy, and so juicy, and so perfect, that I did fall in love with the painting. What is it? You know, and stuff. And the other thing that moved me into painting was the newspaper used to have a special on prints, 25 cents [00:06:00] a print, that their readers could get. And my mother bought me a Turner seascape that also—I said, This seascape, it's misty, and it's mysterious, and look at all the ships. They're not moving, but there's the weather and stuff. So that was another piece of art that I saw, the Turner. And my mother also—they had for about 25 cents or 50 cents, books. So she got me a Dickens. I'm not sure which ones. Maybe something *Chuzzlewit*? And something else. And Mark Twain. She got me—I don't know which one. But so what, I was reading that. And so it was very nice.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I want to be sure to get some very straightforward biographical things here, just to—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Okay, we'll wait.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, no, no, no. I'm more interested, much more interested in just hearing you speak. But I want to be sure that I don't forget to ask you some factual questions.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, please do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you were born on November 25th?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I was born November 25, 1926. I missed all—I was too young to enjoy the hot '20s. I read about the '20s now. I say, Gee, I was just a kid. I didn't even know that was going on.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And your given name is Rosalyn Bronznick?

ROSALYN DREXLER: You mean—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Your sort of birth—

ROSALYN DREXLER: The birth name, yeah. Bronznick. I never used it. I got married and used my husband's name. And uh, because it didn't matter to me what name was hung on it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And how was your first name spelled as a child?

ROSALYN DREXLER: R-O-S-A-L-Y-N. [00:08:00] And it was not Rosalind like Rosalind Russell. But it was a popular name at the time.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I just wanted to be sure I got that straight.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. And you were raised in East Harlem? In the Bronx? Or is it strictly the Bronx?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, I wasn't—I wouldn't say raised. I've lived in different parts of—when I was very, very young. Yeah, my grandparents on my father's side had a secondhand shop in Harlem. And that was around the time that I had my tonsils out. Because I remember being there, and then they took me home, and I got all kinds of toys from my relatives. A gardening set and a bouncy ball.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think I just got some ice cream.

ROSALYN DREXLER: What?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I just got some ice cream when I got my tonsils out.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, that was the immediate thing at the hospital. And they made me wait. I was the last one they took into get them—because I seemed the least worried about it. Because I was looking out the window at everything that was happening. And so they said—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What a memory you have. That's terrific.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No. Well, think of what I may have forgotten. [They laugh.] Memory. Yeah, I mean, I didn't know—I haven't thought about this until this very second. Yeah, I was so—they took me in. They took care of—they took my doll away. They said, "She'll be safe." Gave me the doll, gave me the ice cream, which was wonderful. And then my parents took me back to where we were staying at my grandparents' place. And, uh, so, where was I? Where was I brought up? I wasn't brought up there—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Your home was in the Bronx, though, right? Originally.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And then we moved to the East Bronx with—Claremont Parkway. And a lot of wonderful—and then to Mosholu Parkway, which is a step up. You know, the West Bronx.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: OKAY.

ROSALYN DREXLER: [00:10:00] But the East Bronx was where my mother took me shopping. I forget what the market was called. It was an outdoor market. And she got me little celluloid dolls with movable arms and other paper dolls with tabs so I could dress my dollies up. And that was fine for me to go shopping for dolly clothes. And it was very, very crowded and full of life area at that time. And—oh, I don't know why. I got—my Uncle Moe—my rich Uncle Moe used to come and take my sister and myself for rides in the park in his big car. And he'd get us tutti frutti ice cream cones, which—I really liked them. There was the three-cent cone and the five-cent cone. I mean, yeah, everything was different. And around the corner was a Y that I used to go to. And I used to take out the games. And the game that I liked best was—you couldn't read a thing that was there unless you held it up to a mirror, and then the sentence was revealed. To me that was like so mysterious, and I loved that. Hey, what does this say? I don't know what it says, but I will hold it up to a mirror and see the mystery thing. And around that time—talking about mysteries—on the radio, *Little Orphan Annie*, they had a decoder ring that they would send to the—Little Annie decoder ring. So I got the decoder ring for the secret messages. And I was a funny kid. For a while I thought I was a detective. I'd run up and down the street looking into the basement, looking for clues, sending [00:12:00] orders to nonexistent, you know, assistants. And I was just a kid playing this mysterious game of, you know, child detective. Anyway, so that's going a far distance from—the Y was a very nice place to go. And then not far was Bronx House, where I used to go.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What is that?

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's like a place where—that had activities going, for local activities, and kids' games, and courses of things. And in a closet I found a press-down thing, a rubber—of a Mickey Mouse image. And I couldn't stop—I would say, Oh, god, now—look at what I can do! I can make all these pictures of Mickey Mouse on paper.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's really interesting. So it's like a stamp, kind of?

ROSALYN DREXLER: A stamp, yes. It was—I forget. It was—must be a rubber stamp, I suppose, of Mickey Mouse. It was just hanging out in the closet. And I was very impressed with being able to make multiples of the image. And I did like Mickey. I thought he was—I thought it was so cute and so funny. So that was very—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That was in his first flush of fame, I imagine.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, he was involved with Minnie a lot.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah, yeah, Minnie.

ROSALYN DREXLER: You don't like Minnie?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm kidding. [Laughs.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Flower in her hat. [They laugh.] And high-heeled shoes and little tail. She was quite something.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah—

ROSALYN DREXLER: So what were you—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I was just going to ask if you could tell me a little bit about your parents. Your father was a pharmacist?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. Yes. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And his name was George, is that right?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. His name is George, [00:14:00] was George, remains George.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is George, right.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Is George. Yeah, and he had to go to college and take courses like that. And he was born here in the United States. And my mother came over on the good ship *Tretoria* [ph] with her mom and maybe another sister or two, I don't know. But I know that her mother was hungry, and they were on—they came up out of the hold, you know, to get some air, and she managed to find somebody who would—who gave her a banana. And it's the first time they ever tasted a banana. She took care of her mom. And they came to the United States, where a brother was already—had already come there in order to establish—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see. And what was their home country?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I'm not sure. It was between, you know, Russia and Poland. Yekaterinoslav guberniya. Guberniya, Yekaterinoslav guberniya [Governorate of Yekaterinoslav]. And they came because the pogroms, to escape, you know. So anyway, they were here. And my mother—oh, not my mother, my grandmother had a little candy store in Harlem. And the whole family lived in the back of the candy store.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And your mother's name was Hilda?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Hilda, Hinka, Hannah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah, all those?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Whatever you want to call it. I don't know what it is in Russian.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes, okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. And she was—she loved to design hats and she was a real mama. And she made terrific food.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did she speak Yiddish at home?

ROSALYN DREXLER: They did. And they spoke Russian. And they [00:16:00] did this in order to keep secrets from the children. So there were a lot—so we had to ascertain just what it was all about, you know? We would make up the most—the oddest stories—of course, it couldn't possibly be true—about what they were laughing so much about. I mean, once one of my uncles at one of the family gatherings, they were all looking at a ring that he had. They were looking at it and laughing. And it turned out it was one of those rings you look in and something sexual is happening in the—where a stone should be. I don't know what kind of a ring it was, but it was risqué. And risqué '20s, I guess. So—or late—or early '30s. But, so that—at that point, that was what the adults were laughing at, at one point. So.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The way you describe yourself, you must have been a very observant child.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Always. Always. Like, I'd go to my grandparents' house on my father's side, the Bronznick side. And I would look in all the drawers to see what was in the drawers, what they kept there. And I looked under the bed. And under the bed, in a box full—it was a box full of diamond tiepins, gold, all kinds of jewelry and stuff. And then I—afterward I found out, later, what it was, that my grandfather, you know, with the—in Harlem with the secondhand store—must have been buying stolen goods, you know, and whatever he was in—I don't know, I was a kid, I don't know, but I'm sure it was nefarious. And he was also a landlord. He took me once [00:18:00] when he was collecting rent. It was so murky and dark, and I just wanted to go back home. But why he would introduce me to his tenants, I have no idea. So he's a guy who taught himself to play the violin. My father taught himself to play the piano. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you were a musical child, is that right? I mean, you sang and—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I sang—I got into the High School of Music and Art on voice. And when I was there, I found that most of the people who were studying voice were better than I was. You know, I mean, I'd listen, Oh, my god. There I was with my childish soprano voice, singing out of tune. Or singing popular things and not opera. When I was there they had—Madame Schumann-Heink was a visitor.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh! I know that name.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's a long time ago.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, I mean by repu—I mean, I've heard the name, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know. But as a kid, even as a student there—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. You must have been frightened.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I thought it was the most awful thing. I had no way of—I had never been to an opera. And I had no way of knowing whether it was good, bad, or crazy.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So she gave a recital at the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: She gave a recital at the school.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, got it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And—a lot was going on at the school. But nothing—I was not involved in the arts. I mean, they had a big—it never occurred to me that I could be an artist. I mean, I thought that's pretty marvelous, even from public school. These kids would bring in dioramas, intricate, and would do painted flowers, and—I don't know whether they did it themselves or their parents, their relatives helped them make it. But it was so marvelous to me that I never imagined I could do anything like that. But it goes to show you, [00:20:00] you can't imagine everything that might happen to you. It's so tricky.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I read that Chico [pronounced "cheek-oh"] Marx was an uncle.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Chico [pronounced "chick-oh"].

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Chico, sorry.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, don't be sorry. You have to be informed to know that, and most people are not. [Laughs.] I didn't mean anything by it. Yeah, he was—by marriage, through marriage.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: On your father's side?

ROSALYN DREXLER: On my father's side, yeah. And my mother thought he would take me to Hollywood, because I had—she thought I was such a great singer. So I think, I think I was 13 years old or something. Barely budding breasts, you know, a slow developer. And we—every year or every time he'd come and he'd stay at the same hotel. I forget the name. And so he took this opportunity to embrace me. And that was my introduction to getting down to Hollywood, which I never did. But, I mean, you know—it—you know. That's all right. But then his wife and my Aunt Mary, on another visit, they were discussing literature and stuff. Now I—even though I was a young woman, maybe 14 years old, something, I said, "Oh, are you talking about Balzac's *Droll Tales*?"

And they said, "Where does this kid come from?" I mean, you know, what—and they shut down. Because, you know, I read that, and D. H. Lawrence, and anything that was sexually interesting, I read it. That plus books on leprosy. [Laughs.] I'd go—like, our family doctor, [00:22:00] I'd visit, and I'd wait for my turn. But he had all these books on the shelves in the waiting room. And I thought that was most interesting, and I had all sorts of social ideas about leprosy. What—[They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's so comical.

ROSALYN DREXLER: What is the comic—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't know. I mean, it shouldn't be. It's a sad thing, but—I do have to, just before I forget, remark that you are wearing a Mickey Mouse watch.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yes. That's beautif—that's Minnie.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: A Minnie Mouse watch, sorry.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, my daughter gave it to me. She's gone. She's dead. But, yeah, it's an heirloom Minnie. I have to put a battery in so it works, but I don't care if it works. I just like to look at it, and I get the time from my iPhone.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There you go. There you go. May I see it? It's really—just the face of it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Wait, I want to give it to you.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. Wow, this is an old one, huh?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah. It's an heirloom Minnie.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow, quartz.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's worth something, but I don't know what, except that I like to look at it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It is terrific.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I've recently done some erotic Minnie and Mickey with very funny comments.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. I hope Disney doesn't come after you. [They laugh.] Just let me ask this. There's a suggestion in one of the essays in the Rose catalog [*Rosalyn Drexler, Who Does She Think She Is?*, 2016] that you had some resentment towards some of these wealthy, wealthier relatives who—did they condescend to you, to your family? Or did they—

ROSALYN DREXLER: They wouldn't even know what condescend meant. No, they didn't. But my mother was the youngest of the sisters. There were three. So they had that attitude toward young sisters. So when they played mahjong [00:24:00] out in the park, mama was not invited. When my aunt had one of her card parties, my mother wasn't invited. She used to make—bake great cookies. But my Aunt Sarah had heart trouble. And she was the wife of my rich Uncle Moe. And my mother loved her so much, and she was always helping her in their—with her sister. She was a very kind woman, my mother. And only—when I got my period at the age of 13, she was over at my aunt's, and I resented it. Because she wasn't there, I couldn't tell her immediately, "What should I do?" You know, this is happening. So that straightened out pretty fast. Where were we? I've been all over the place.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I was just curious. You know, sometimes you read things, and you make assumptions about—you know, that you had a certain determination that you were going to succeed, that you were going to show that you could, you know—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You must have had a considerable amount of determination to do it?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know. Where did it come from? [Laughs.] I can't ask you. It's just—it's something that's there in the individual. And yes, I didn't like the idea that there was a division of rich and poor. I didn't want to be poor. I wanted to help my mother. Like, she once ordered the most beautiful mahogany table, and it had a protective thing over it. But she never had enough money to get chairs. So, you know, those little things are—I mean, I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They stay with you.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And I used to go to the movies with my mother all the time. And they would have contests. And once she won something. I was thrilled to pieces [00:26:00] that she won something. It was a makeup kit or—and also there was free dish nights. No, but the point is, I didn't—I really never wanted to be poor. And more than anything, I spent a lot of time in the library. And the very titles were so exciting to me, that sometimes I couldn't take a book out because I was still reading the titles on each shelf. I said, Oh, and someday I would like to have one of my books, you know, as a part of all of this wonderment. Because I had read every fairy tale book there was. They had the orange fairy tale book, the green fairy tale book, and so on. And I read all the colors. Lots and lots of fairy tales. And then went on to other books. Jack London—what is it—all the books about the wolf, and one about the dog, and—I read lots of stuff.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you have brothers and sisters?

ROSALYN DREXLER: What?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Siblings? Brother and sister?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. At the time I had one sister. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And—let's see, you mentioned going to High School of Music and Art. You went to elementary school in the Bronx?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, I did. I think there was a PS 92 or 94 for kids that showed promise. And then I graduated from PS 80 in the Bronx.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see. Okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And then I got into—it was announced, everyone who got into Music and Art. I got in.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then you did go to Hunter College for a semester, was it? Or a year?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Before I got married, yeah. [00:28:00] I—I got high marks in school. But you needed a second language. And also my math score was not the greatest. I'm particularly disinterested in math. And so I went. I said, Okay, I can do this. So I took Italian, which I loved, and a math—I don't know if it was geometry or algebra, whatever—and a literature course, a writing course. Well, I scored real high on the math, surprisingly, and then the language came second. And they didn't give me very high marks on writing skills, whatever it is. Whatever it is. And so then—well, before that, I left music and art. They wouldn't let me graduate my senior year, because I used to cut gym all the time and go up to the lunchroom. [Laughs.] And this woman who was in charge of the school said, "You know, no one will ever marry you unless you go to school." A real kook. So—okay, so I was going to school. And I—so I went to night school in order to get a high school diploma. And—I mean, diploma, diploma, a piece of paper. But then I met my husband.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. How did you meet?

ROSALYN DREXLER: In the park.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Mutual friends. This group met that group, Van Cortlandt Park. Yeah. And at that time I was studying at—the New Dance Group, it was called. And I became a wonderful dancer, and very strong. So I started showing off. [00:30:00] I was young, very young. Imagine doing that—I said, "Look, I can do these one-legged squats!" And they're just looking at me. And actually in the dance class, only the teacher and I could do one-legged squats. So that impressed my husband.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. [Laughs.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: I mean, he said, "Okay, let's go for ice cream cones." And I said, "Yeah, I'll pay for my own." That was impressive also. I paid for my own ice cream cone, and demonstrated my beauty and my strength. And what more could a young Jewish guy do to find his soul mate? So then we met and had this wonderful kiss.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And was he in school at that time?

ROSALYN DREXLER: He was—yes, I think he might have been. CCNY? And played basketball. And then, after that—I mean, he went to Berkeley to finish his degree.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I was going to ask you about that. And that was being—well, let's—let me not get ahead of —

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, it's too much material in one—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So I did want to ask you just one more question about your childhood. Your experience of theater or films in your childhood and how—whether this interested you?

ROSALYN DREXLER: The first film I ever saw was *The River*, Pare Lorentz.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding?

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's the teacher in probably this PS 92 or 94 was interested in introducing—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's a documentary, right?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. That was a documentary. And then I saw Jeanette MacDonald and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Nelson Eddy?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Nelson Eddy, in one of their extravaganza movies. So those are the two first things I saw, and through the school that wanted to educate young children. And the first and almost only stage thing [00:32:00] I ever saw, my rich Uncle Moe took my grandma and me and his wife in his car to see Second Avenue Theater.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh!

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yiddish. And I looked at it, and the only thing that impressed me is that numerous people would gather in a living room and start yelling at each other. [They laugh.] There was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That was the play?

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's what—well, to me, at the time, I never knew what was going on. It was in Yiddish, I think.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sounds like a Yiddish version of *You Can't Take It with You* or something. [Laughs.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Something like that. They were yelling. It was so excited. It was Italian, you know, also. It's like—so that was my first theater—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you see Vaudeville turns?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I'll tell you where I saw Vaudeville. The movie theaters that we went to, a real orchestra came up from the pit playing and introduced the burlesque part of the movie thing. So we had the reluctant dog who wouldn't run—go through the hoop or listen to his master. The master left the stage. And the dog proceeded to do every trick on his own.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's wonderful.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know. And so I saw all sorts of things with the burlesque. You know, the tumblers. And, you know, the fire-eater. Whatever was that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They would come between the films, or—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, before the film.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Before the film?

ROSALYN DREXLER: And then the film would go on. It wouldn't be a single film. It was always a double-header.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was two films. You know, and the—I mean, you really got a lot of entertainment. And then—that was interesting, because there was something called a theater matron in a white uniform up and down—to keep the kids in their seats and don't cause trouble. [00:34:00] Up and down, up and down. Because there was a—the early shows were—you were allowed to come in, just kids and no adults were allowed in the same area as the kids section.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Okay, so you were married in '45 or '[4]6?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Forty-six.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Forty-six, okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And I had my first child, Rachel, in '47. And I was 20 years old. And then it all began.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then—and just to—you had a son Daniel in—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I have a son, Daniel.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Have a son, Daniel.

ROSALYN DREXLER: He's still alive.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In '58, he was born?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. He was 11 years older than my daughter.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Younger.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, he was older than—no, younger. [They laugh.] Okay, okay. Sorry. Yes, you're absolutely right. And, yeah, so—yeah, okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did he—is he connected with the arts in any way, or has an interest in it?

ROSALYN DREXLER: He went to the New England Conservatory of Music.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really? Wow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And he took some time at the Berkeley thing. Maybe a summer semester or something. Nothing—but he's a trumpet player, and he's very much into jazz. So uh, and it's wonderful. Sometimes we perform together for each other. I sing and he will improvise and have some fun—have fun that way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, that's nice. And your husband passed away in 2014?

ROSALYN DREXLER: He did, '14. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Okay, Tell me a bit about him. What—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, he was a terrific conversationalist. And he was active everywhere. If there was an opening [00:36:00] of a museum, whatever it is. And he had many friends, in sports, like, also—like Jack Newfield, the journalist, was a good friend.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh really? Oh, I'm a big admirer of him.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Really?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, I grew up reading him in the *Village Voice* and everything.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. So he was a good friend of mostly Sherman, but me too. And they would have these—Jack would have these—every time a big fight came up, everybody was invited to his house in the Village. And they enjoyed—they were fight fans. I hated it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you—you picture fights in your paintings.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That doesn't mean I love them just because I—like, I might do toreadors, but that doesn't mean I—I can't—I want to see a bull killed or I want someone to fall—you know. But I'm interested in the activity in another way. You know, how does it look? Can I use it in a picture, and where would I place it? Whatever, you know. It doesn't mean I love it. I mean, I did professional wrestling for a while. I didn't love it. I hated it. But it was interesting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So in the later '40s, you and Sherman lived on 49th Street?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, when we first married, we lived not far from Pleasant Avenue, which was sort of Italian neighborhood, mafia.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In the Bronx?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, this is Manhattan.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Pleasant Avenue? Where is that? I'm sorry, I don't even know where it is.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know, I know. It was all the way east—something, I forget the—we lived East 116th or 117th.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, way—okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Something like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's a long time ago, you know, so— we lived there, and I know—we got married. And the kitchen—you walk in right into the kitchen, and then the stove [00:38:00] is on the right, the bedroom on the left. So I used to—he was a figurative painter, and I would pose for him. But not for long, because to make the place warm you had to have the stove on. And once the stove was on—and I was up close to the stove—the cockroaches would come out of the stove. So, I mean—so I decided, like, "Remember how I looked, will you please?" [They laugh.] I just—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You just didn't want to hang out there?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I didn't want to hang out in that particular area. Yeah—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Without any clothes on.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, so but that's what he was, a figurative painter.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so—and then at a certain point you moved to Midtown Manhattan?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah. All over Midtown Manhattan, I think.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. What I'm sort of closing in on here is by around 1950 you decided you were interested in judo, and you went to—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. You mean when I went to Bothner's Gymnasium?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes.

ROSALYN DREXLER: We were a couple—lived a couple of blocks away, west 40s. And so that was funny. Yes, I was doing actual, real judo. But then there was this girl there who said, "You want to meet"—I forget his real name, anyway. Billy Fox, or—"He has a troupe of girl wrestlers going across the country. And you could audition for him, and it might be a good thing." But also at this gym, it was amazing. There was a man on a unicycle who has his wife on his head. She fit into a donut that was on his head, upside-down. So he'd be bicycling around with his wife upside-down on his head. [00:40:00] And then there was a woman who came daily, an old woman, who had something where she was hanging from a device, and she was—put a ballet costume on, and she powdered her face all white. And she would do all sorts of ballet things. *Jeté, pas de*—whatever you want to call it. And her workout was that she'd—at the same time that the unicycle was going, there was this woman hanging there in the air, doing mid-air ballet, old woman. And then in front of the window there was a mat across the front of it. And you find that's where the midgets—they weren't midgets. They were just—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Dwarfs? No.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Dwarfs. Had an act that they were—a tumbling act, which they were practicing. So the tumbling act—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow, it sounds like a Fellini movie.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was!

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Doesn't it?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know, it—I didn't think so at the time, because I was part of it. And then this woman and I would practice the judo thing. And lined up at the door were all these men, you know, with their secret desires just looking and looking and looking. And, you know, it was like a strange combination. And this place also—you know, the exercise tables, they were about this high. An old wrestler used to come—Hackenschmidt? You don't know Hackenschmidt? [Laughs.] He would like get down here—he would leap up to—and then land on the table. He had that kind of strength when I saw it. He would go from the floor to the top of the table. And that was Hackenschmidt. So—oh, and underneath this gym, the automat, Horn & Hardart Automat. [00:42:00] Have you ever been to an automat?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I grew up outside of Philly. And my favorite thing in all the world was to go to the automat when we went in for our holiday visits to the city. I just loved it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: What particular food did you like?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I always got the chicken pot pie.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's great. I liked—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You put your quarters in and the little window goes *ding* like this.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And then you open—it had a knob and a glass door. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I just thought it was marvelous.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I used to like the creamed spinach.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, creamed spinach, oh yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And then the orange cupcakes, the orange glacé cupcakes. And other things. Salisbury steak. Whatever cheap kind of food they had, but it was so delicious. And I loved putting the change in, opening the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That was the best part. You put the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: How did it get there? Wow! This is magic galore.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It was great. Yeah, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And also—but where—this particular automat—see a lot of lonely people come in. They sit down at tables, and they're eating.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Their cup of coffee, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And then you can—but up the block—it's no longer there—was this place where they would shuck raw oysters, sell steak sandwiches, and all sorts of things. And they were long tables, where all the denizens of the neighborhood would come and sit down. And you didn't know who your companion would be at the table. And it was so—I remember for about 20 cents I got a pimento cheese sandwich that I thought was really delicious. But—so anyway.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. Umm, okay, so you—this is, I think, 1950 that you did this brief stint as a [00:44:00] —with the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: [Inaudible.] Yeah, it would be in the '50s, I think. I think.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I'm not sure.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —this didn't last very long, right?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Not at all.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Two or three months?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Not over three months, no.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Not over three months, okay. And you were in Florida?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I was in Florida—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And Ohio?

ROSALYN DREXLER: —and in Boston.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And Boston?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Boston I didn't get—they had too many people in the car, so I didn't go along with them to the stadium. I went to the ballet instead.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: What? What?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Between wrestling and the ballet, it's like, whoa!

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, well, I liked ballet. I mean—so I went. I saw a guy—Igor Youskevitch.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Did you ever hear that name?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Really? Okay. So I went backstage to congratulate him. [Phone chimes.] He was so wonderful—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This thing's making noise. Sorry.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Go ahead, I'll stop.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, no, no, I'm just turning the ringer off.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So—and then we went out for a snack.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding. Wow!

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And—was it then? Oh, yeah. Then—yeah, he took me up to his room. And for my request was that he do—let's—that he do beats in the air just for me. And I guess he was a little high after the—and so I saw him do this thing where I'm facing you, this close—up in the air, and—this kind of thing?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was like the most marvelous performance. And then I said, "We'll meet tomorrow for breakfast." And we met for breakfast. And that's it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What an encounter!

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, yes. I have many strange encounters. I don't remember all of them, but yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you find you have your best adventures when you're sort of by [00:46:00] yourself in a strange place and you just kind of encounter someone?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah. Do you feel that way?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I love my—being at home, and with my family, and everything like that.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know, of course you do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But I don't have the strange encounters that I have sometimes when I'm out by myself.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, well, I wonder what they are, but I'm not going to ask you right now.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Nothing, nothing, nothing risqué. But just meet people, and you—suddenly they're telling you their whole life.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know. I—do you have that capacity, that—they look at you and they start telling you their story.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They just—yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Just like me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That happens to you?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I just met you and I'm telling you my story. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, I have an excuse.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know that. I know that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. So how did the—Rosa Carlo, the Mexican Spitfire, that was your handle, yes?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, you know, flipping the phone book and putting a finger where it landed. If it didn't—if you didn't like it, then you flipped it again. So, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And there were some films of the late '40s, right? RKO films with Lupe Vélez or something like this, the "Mexican Spitfire"?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I never saw that. Lupe Vélez?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah, apparently.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's interesting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. But that wasn't in your radar?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, no, no. Very little was in my radar, except when we were down South and I started seeing these signs that shook me. Uh, so, drinking fountain, whites only. I mean, come on! Bathrooms, you know, bla—they didn't say blacks, said negroes. And then whites. I said, What is this arbitrary separation? What's going on? And then even in—where the stadiums where we were appearing, big sign, "Special section for [00:48:00] colored folks." And I said, How special are they talking about? And so I was very happy to cut my relationship with this traveling troupe of ninnies. Which I'm—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How many were there?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, it was a troupe of four, but then other people came—you know, we'd travel in one car and keep our heads down so people wouldn't know we knew each other. You know, when we were in the ring—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, right, because you were supposed to be—

ROSALYN DREXLER: We're enemies and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —mortal enemies, right?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Mortal enemies and—yeah. I was the baby face, because I didn't know how to do any of it, and they were breaking me in. And then they called me baby face, and—so they did all the hard stuff, until the crowd was saying to me, "Retaliate!" [They laugh.] How the hell—what—retaliate? What should I do? So I just retaliated. I had seen some things, and I did that. And then the crowd was very satisfied. After—when we first came into the arena, they'd be yelling all sorts of things. Some things in Spanish, which I figured meant tear her head off. You know, kill her. I don't know who they were speaking to, but they just enjoyed the intensity of the coming events.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, god. I can't even imagine—

ROSALYN DREXLER: And there I was. I was a shy Jewish girl. Imagine that, coming out from underground, climbing into the ring. And I hated to appear in public. It was an amazing thing. I can't imagine why I did that, or how it came out. But I got a book out of it, *To Smithereens*. Oh, did I—excuse me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. Okay, so let's see. At some point [00:50:00]—so you're in New York around 1950 and then Sherman goes to Berkeley to—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Or I don't know what—how the progression is, whether I had been in Berkeley for some reason and he came, or—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, the reason I'm putting it that way is that the two of you had a—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Our first—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —a joint exhibition in 1954, according to the chronology.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, I'm glad to find that out. No, I mean, you know, you forget. You know, the '50s—but that sounds—that's true. And it was the—yeah, we had the first exhibit together, which is a nice thing to remember. I had all the things that I—statues that I made from things that I found in the kitchen and in the—we would go to the place where people brought—left their furniture they didn't want and all that stuff. And I got the pick of the crop. And I was able to make my own museum, which—well, I said that to myself. And I wasn't in the art world or anything. I said, I don't have to go to a museum. I can make my own museum. So young, naive. But even—like I mean Claes Oldenburg made his own—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. The Ray Gun museum, or the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, not—that wasn't a museum. That—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The Store—

ROSALYN DREXLER: —was with Jim Dine, I think. The Store. We were all—all of us went to his Store and saw the Happenings. And my daughter was in a Happening, one of his Happenings, or two, yes. So I was in one Happening at the Reuben Gallery with Bob Whitman, Happening. So anyway, where were we as far as—there are so many things that happened in my life.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, so I'm just trying to get the chronology straight for the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I understand, yes. [00:52:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —fifties. So somehow you're in Berkeley in 1954.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And he was going to—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: UC Berkeley?

ROSALYN DREXLER: —to get his—Berkeley, yes. And so we had this show at—what was the name of that, again?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Something about the Courtyard Gallery?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, the Courtyard Gallery. And we had this show together, because I had made all these pieces out of found objects.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. And he would have been showing his paintings, and drawings, and so on?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, yes, yeah, he would have revealed his predilection for the naked female, I guess.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah. Did the two of you—must have looked at a lot of art and talked together a lot. Is that true?

ROSALYN DREXLER: He educated me. I mean, we—he would take me to museums and take me—he was taller, so he could take me by the shoulders and swivel me around. And then we'd both look at something. And I would talk about it with him, and he'd talk about it with me. So I began to be able to observe a work of art from many angles. Not just look and say that's nice, and go. But I started, with him I started doing a kind of analysis, whatever it was, seeing the work. We went to see everything. It was really fun, but— I enjoyed it so much.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were you living in Berkeley?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No. When that—no, this happened earlier.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean—

ROSALYN DREXLER: When I first married him, then we started going to museums together. And he was an artist. He was the artist. I didn't have an inkling that I would ever be lucky enough to create a work of art. I didn't know that it was in me. So at first I started doing sculptures.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And I did it with plaster. [00:54:00] And uh, that was—we were living in Washington Heights. And my son was already born, and he was in the playpen that was so—the living room was my so-called studio.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And I would—we would talk as I was working. He would—whatever baby sounds babies make. And then I heard the most delighted gurgle coming from his—and I looked over. He had stood up for the first time. He was wearing the little shoes, and his—you could see where—I still have the shoes. You could see where his toes were pointed down, so—and he was holding onto the bars, and he knew he had done something. He had stood up. He was always—you know. First time. And he was thrilled. And so I appreciated that. As I was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's so nice. So you were—you had the chance to be there and witness this—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I was with him.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: — because you were with him. You were in—you were making your work with him, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. That's great.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. I mean—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's such a moment.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's a great moment, yes. I mean, any human being—I don't have to crawl. I can stand up. I'm a human being! So that was really nice. I'm skipping around so much—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, no, that's okay. That's okay. We're not—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Let's see, so that was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So that would have been, maybe '59, '60, something like that? That episode with the child.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, it was before—it would have to be just before '60 or—when I was doing that. And then Ivan Karp was a friend of ours. And he came up to see my work, all the plaster stuff. And he recommended that Anita Reuben, who was just beginning a gallery, [00:56:00] could take me on as an artist. And she was starting a gallery because she wanted to show her sister's work. So doing that, she had—you know, Samaras, George Segal, Claes Oldenburg, Bob Whitman, and even some others. She had the crème de la crème, but it didn't satisfy her because nobody was interested in her sister's work. So. But I had this big opening in 1960. Showed about 82 pieces of—some sculpture, some wood things. And all this plaster, you know. So that was my first show at the Reuben gallery. But then she closed. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That also was a joint show with—

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, no, no, it was a one-woman show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It was a one-woman show, okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, yes. Had nothing to do with figurative art.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. The reason—

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was all my sculpture.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Maybe this was a second show. This is what I'm—here's a photograph that's captioned at least as—

ROSALYN DREXLER: No—yeah, that's me. And—but that's Jim Dine's—Jim Dine was also in that gallery at that time. So his—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Those are Jim Dine's.

ROSALYN DREXLER: —his drawings are Jim Dine.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, got it. Okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, and then—but I—yeah. Oh, you see this? This was a sculpture of a victim. You can't see—and I got rid of it for some reason. I think I got rid of a lot of stuff, because I couldn't keep traveling with it. [00:58:00] I mean, we had no room. And I didn't know anybody would ever be interested in anything.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Yeah, no, I mean, it's a huge—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I mean, it was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's a problem for a young artist today, you know? Like, what do you do?

ROSALYN DREXLER: What am I going to do with it?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What am I going to do with all this stuff? How do I store it?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know. I know. It's a problem. So they're finding things of mine.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, that's very helpful. That's—to clarify what was on the wall there.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Of the artists that were showing at Reuben, were there any who were—you know, you felt a particular affinity with? Not necessarily personally, but in terms of your art?

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's funny. All I can think of is personally. [They laugh.] I mean—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Or personally.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I think Lucas Samaras and I were working, and I think I chased him around the space. I chased him around the space. Because—you know, why? I didn't know. He had a thing where he couldn't touch

anybody. So like even to shake a hand was an impossibility.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really? God, that says so much about his art. All those objects that are so bristly you can't go at them.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, they're sadistic.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: His work could hurt you. And then he made these automatic photographic things. And before it developed, he would squish it around with his fingers to—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Polaroids.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And he got some good, interesting effects there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They're wonderful.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What was he like? Tell me about him. He's such an interesting character.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know what he was like. He was so into himself. And that's all I could tell you. That's what interested me, is that there was no way in. [01:00:00] You know? But now—he must have changed. I mean, he's old, teaching, and stuff like that. And showing at Pace. But I like him very much. I think he was a sensitive guy.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. What about Claes Oldenburg? What was he like?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I didn't know Claes very much. But in the same air and the same atmosphere of things happening. There was—like you say. The Store was wonderful. And then he did something with Jim Dine at Judson Church. It was this Ray Gun thing? Anyway—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Could be. Yeah. Those early sort of Happenings, performances, things, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Those early happenings were interesting. And then around that time I—as far as plays go, I used to go into—when my daughter went off to school, I'd go in her room, and then the sunshine would come in. And I would write—I would say, I don't know how to write a play, but I'm going to do it. Because—so I wrote my first play, *Laughing All the Way*. You know, because it—if it didn't amuse me, I wouldn't have continued. And so a friend of ours, Richard Gilman, who's the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes. Yale, right?

ROSALYN DREXLER: —Chekhov expert. Now he's—he died in Japan. He married a Japanese woman. Or that was one of his—his last marriage. She has a shrine in her place to him. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, he was the great authority that the—the theater authority. And connected with *The Drama Review*, and, you know, Yale, and all this kind of stuff.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah, he was highly regarded. He was our friend.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, very, very eminent guy, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So he looked at this, and he said, "I think you ought to show it to somebody at Judson Church." [01:02:00] He said, "They will do something with this. They'd be interested." And they—

[END OF TRACK 1.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: —were always interested in sort of avant-garde or off-kilt stuff. And so Al Carmines liked it very much. He's a wonderful composer and musician. And so they were going to do *Home Movies*. And he wrote the music. But he was the one—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And that's the title of it, right? *Home Movies*?

ROSALYN DREXLER: What? *Home Movies* was the first play.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is the title. I just wanted to make that clear.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, yes. *Home Movies*. And—wait. Oh yeah. So he was the one who suggested that I do the lyrics straight from the dialogues, here and there where I have to, in the play. That was a wonderful idea to me. Everything is new to me. You know, I said, Oh, that's great. Yes, I will find this and then he will write the—and on the spot he writes the music. I find the lyrics. He'd write the music. And it was that kind of an exciting, umm, creation.

And that was my first play. It was wonderful. I know one of the songs right now. It was Freddie Herko, who was a dancer, but then he was in the play, and had various costume changes. And he was talking to the wife of a man that he was having an affair with. But the wife was a friend of his mother, too. So he would sing—what'd he sing—[singing] "Mother told me about you, and then I told her about the gymnasium where I met him. He was rather close-lipped. I didn't know him well, although we used the equipment together. It was an inner feeling that we felt, an unspoken man-to-man sympathy. Based on the fact [00:02:00] that we spent so much time there, any overture would have seemed the innocent childlike aura of our relationship." It's like—that was one of the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wonderful.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And he was so funny when he did it. He was wonderful. And then of course there were other things that were—Amiri Baraka, when he was Leroy Jones, came to see this play many times, because I just said what was obvious that nobody else was saying about—between the, you know, the color field of whites and blacks, all that stuff. And um, I had a very—Barbara Ann Teer, who later had her own theater in Harlem—where are we?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't know if I marked it. There was wonderful photos of—

ROSALYN DREXLER: *Home Movies*?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —those productions. Yeah. I think it's here. But—here we go. Okay, here's some.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. *Home Movies*, that's—yeah, yeah. That's Barbara Ann Teer. And that's a—a stutter, a stuttering love song. I think the first time they had an actor do a stuttering thing. And that's the dancer I was talking about. And that's Gretel Cummings, who was very much like her character in Groucho Marx's film.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, yeah?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. You know. Yeah, okay. So—and that's George Bartenieff and that's Gretel Cummings. But what was I talking about?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you were talking about Leroy Jones, [00:04:00] Amiri Baraka—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, because I had all the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —coming to see the show, because you were dealing with—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, she—yeah, I was dealing very openly with that. And, uh, I actually had a song called "The Peanut Song," that people thought was—you know, it's—they always say, oh, invented the cotton gin, or the peanut things. So I had her just sing a song about all the different things you could do with peanuts. And we did it, sort of—[singing] "Peanut brittle." And she would go on, and on, and on with all the things, wonderful things blacks can do with peanuts. [They laugh.] And then she also sang a song about—[singing] "Sometimes I feel like I'm almost melted in the summertime of my race." There she's singing a song about she's in a cellophane—you know, hidden. And then—[singing] "Is there anyone here who likes something Mary, Mary, tell you what the Lord has done for me; nothing, nothing, nothing. Hallelujah." And then we—Everyone went crazy about the Hallelujah song. I don't remember all the words. You can see—you know, it's a long—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Are there recordings of this? I don't mean like commercial recordings, but some kind of a film of it or something?

ROSALYN DREXLER: You know what, the things—at that time, all my plays, nobody took pictures of them. And I got such audience response. It was—I remember my other—I think there—we have the only—Garth [Greenan] and I—the only handwritten music write out that Al Carmines did with the lyrics. And it's unusual, because you never used to—he was one of those brains. He would just do it and not write it out. But he could. But this I have written out. And no recordings, no pictures [00:06:00] of it. See some photographs. But that was a fun thing. Like the, just like the stutterer. [singing] "Charles Andult is my name, and I do it all the same. Stutter while I seek out fame. Repetition is my game." You know. "Take a straight and simple word, da da da da that you've heard. And you've da da da da da dum." Anyway, it goes on. And then he goes into like a prolonged stutter of when he tries to say the word love. "La la la." It's like, he's stuttering. He can't say "love," you know?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, that's wonderful.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's one of the songs. So it was really fun to be able to be myself and do something first time out. I didn't know what a play was, and I guess this taught me something about what a play is. But—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Learning by doing, huh?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Of course, yes. But the thing is, to have like a success, say with an audience, that's what you're trying to do, first time out, is a little shocking. Because—hey, what am I going to do after this? You know? And that's always been like that with me. First book out, great response. What am I going to do next? I feel like killing myself. You know? I mean, it's difficult. Second time—once you're out there, you have to prove yourself.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, so that's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you seem to have trusted your—I don't know. Trusted your ear, trusted your eye. You seem to have had sort of an inherent—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —faith in yourself. You know, you didn't question it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You just did it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, because I didn't think I had anything [00:08:00] to lose. See, I wasn't in anybody's loop with the art. I didn't go to Yale, or Black Mountain College, Provincetown with Hans Hofmann. And all these people learned how to speak about what they were doing, or what other people were doing, or what they should be doing. And they're always like working under the aegis of some pundit that—like, say, Hans Hofmann who would—I can't imagine letting anyone come up to your work and paint over it, [inaudible]. That's no way of teaching. Push pull. Push what? I'll push you! You pull me, I'll push you! I mean, the whole thing is so—it's ridiculous in a way. It's not like, say—Vuillard had a circle. And they all respected each other's work. And it was more or less different. But what they said mattered. You know, if you do a color, make sure it's a full color. If you want to do blue, do blue. If you want to do red—I mean, this is what they were saying even in—you know, right? Be out there. And of course, Vuillard, his early intimate work I really love. And he got a little freer and more comfortable with the later work, which was different, more open. But I do like his airless rooms and family. His mother sitting there in the bedroom. But it's beautifully painted. And his sister leaning against the side of the room. And it was so intimate, and it was so still. And I often wondered—he never got married, lived with his mother. So did Ensor, I think.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that true? I didn't know that.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. Lived with his mother and upstairs [00:10:00]—I think they did sell masks and things, the family, or the mother, I think. Anyway, we're getting off the beaten track.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, one of the things I'm curious about is that you're, from your perspective now, still talking about the early work incorporating found objects, and plaster, and so on. That that aesthetic seems to have been really, really pretty powerful in the later '50s. I mean, we all think of Rauschenberg, of course, but there are so many other examples. Is that something—were you—were there artists you were looking at? Was there work that impressed you?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Not that I remember.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Not that you remember?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, no.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It seems to have had a big presence for a short time, and then there was like that Bill Seitz's "Art of Assemblage" show at MoMA [Museum of Modern Art]. And, you know, that—and then pop art kind of like—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, well, things are so odd, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, pop art kind of like just obliterates everything that comes before it. It's—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I mean, that's so—yeah, I know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I know it's not really that way, but it feels—you know, when you read history books it seems that way.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But it's true. I was in the middle of all of my friends who were Abstract Expressionist painters.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you were close to Franz Kline and de Kooning?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, Franz Kline, I'll tell you. I didn't—I wasn't a Ruth Kligman. I mean—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Good. Good to know.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I didn't sleep with everybody I knew in order to make myself important. So that's what—Franz Kline brought up a memory of Ruth. But what—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So your friends, or you and your husband's friends were ab-ex people, right?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. We used to go to the—you know, that bar that everybody went to.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The Cedar.

ROSALYN DREXLER: The Cedar. And I had a show. [00:12:00] When my show was over—and I think there was a little sculptural piece that I had, a figure behind glass. It was very nice, very primitive. And Franz saw it, and he said, "Okay, I'll exchange—you know, come see me. I would like that piece." So I did visit Franz. And he gave me one of those—on a telephone book page, an ink—or whatever it was. It was a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. One of those—

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's a slash, you know, exciting kind of thing on the telephone. And so I gave him my piece, and he gave me that. And with that, we got a whole, two months' vacation in Provincetown paid for it. I'm sorry I ever sold it, but we didn't have anything. So that's what we did with the Franz Kline thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sounds like a good investment.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. But I don't know—and then he died, and I have no idea where that piece went. It was a very nice piece. But Franz—and then of course Ruth lived—she rented the same—on 14th Street. She—yeah. It was nice. It had a place in the back. You could go outside and sit. Right on 14th Street.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And Elaine and—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Bill.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Bill de Kooning were friends?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I didn't know Bill that well. Elaine was our close friend.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I see.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. And when Bill was sick, and there were rumors, I was on the Jitney going to—where? To Springs, yeah. Going across—and another artist came up to me very close and tried to get news of Bill de Kooning. [00:14:00] You know, what's happening there? I said, "I don't know." I mean, you know, why would I give personal information to anybody? So anyway, I used to go there with Elaine. We would have a terrific dinner with Bill once. I'll tell you how it was terrific. He was in decline. He had Alzheimer's or dementia of some sort. And so we were having this wonderful dinner, which Elaine had filled the refrigerator with great salads and stuff to keep Bill healthy. You know, at least keep that going. And we sat there. And Elaine said, "You know Rosalyn, Bill loves to hear music. Why don't you sing him some songs?" I said, "Okay." So I was singing songs from the '40s and '50s, like, you know, "Pennies From Heaven." He remembered each one, song, and he was singing with me. So we were singing together.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And it was very nice for him, very nice.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this would have been maybe in the '80s that this happened or something like that?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I guess so. I'm not good on dates.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm trying to remember when he died.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't remember either.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Or maybe it was the '90s.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Anyways. She—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Because she moved sort of back in with him and sort of took care of him, right? At the end of his—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. But she had her own house, too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did she?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah. But she had a room in Bill's—you'd walk up the stairs, and she had Bill there—a room there that she let us stay over in. And she said, "I wouldn't do this for anybody else." I said, "Thanks, Elaine." So. [They laugh.] I mean, you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: She needed some help [ph].

ROSALYN DREXLER: And I remember Bill had a—there was kind of a—collectors came to his place. We were there. And they brought him old books and pictures that he had done—from his father, [00:16:00] that he had done when he was a boy. And it was so sad. He'd sit there, and they put this heavy, heavy book on his lap. And he knows he was supposed to be pleasing. So he's smiling. He doesn't even know it's his work. Turning a page. Smiling. It was like—it was sad. It was a real sad moment.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So anyway, that's—I've had some experiences like that. Other things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, I mean, this is—it's so interesting to look at your biography comprehensively, because—you know, I think in 1961, you published the sketch for what became *I Am the Beautiful Stranger*. So you were having the shows at the Reuben Gallery. You were writing for—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Wait, wait. *I Am the Beautiful Stranger* maybe was later. In '64?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. I could—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This could be incorrect. But it's—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Anyway, you're close.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The, umm, maybe the sketch is what the publisher you mentioned saw and wanted to publish it as a book. Maybe that's what this is.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know. I don't want to recreate something that didn't exist.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It doesn't matter—well.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So the protagonist of that story is Selma Silver?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Of *I Am the Beautiful Stranger*?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, Selma Silver.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is this to some extent autobiographical? Or is it all—

ROSALYN DREXLER: A lot of it must be. But a lot of it is made up. Like the letters to this boy, the young boy, and his sensitivity and his realization that things might not be as wonderful as he would like them to be. And here he was, a kid incarcerated for some reason or other. And [00:18:00] then lonely Selma Silver was just beginning to realize her femalehood—I mean, just coming to life in some way after having read all about life. Now she was ready to partake. You know, and so she and this lonely kid got together by mail.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And that's not autobiographical.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Not.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So—

ROSALYN DREXLER: But possible.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You told one interviewer—and I'm just throwing this at you—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Go ahead.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —that you were divided. That you thought of yourself as a writer, the books are doing well, and—was there a moment when you had to, in a certain sense, kind of figure out where your allegiances lay?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, no.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, you were so active in the early '60s.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But nobody else cared.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: [Laughs.] I mean, I was active because it was so exciting. I wanted to do—I wanted to prove stuff to myself, and I think I did. My main tenets were to amuse myself, to be honest with what I think, and also to try new stuff, to be inventive. Not—like my book should not look like other people's books, and stuff like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And the plays are different. I enjoyed them—a favorite story of mine was the *Hunger Artist* by Kafka.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's wonderful.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It sure is. And it was only like a six-page story, and I wrote a full play called *Occupational Hazard*, which is if you're going to be a hunger artist, the hazard is—and the desired hazard—is to die of your hunger. [00:20:00] But then you will have done a feat that other hunger artists were not willing to do. And this is a lot like the life of an artist. I'll go as far as I have to go in order to be different, or better, or be noticed. And—but it's funny that some artists have actually taken that literally. You know, artists will set them on fire, artists who will give birth in a gallery, umm, artists who hide under a platform and then masturbate. I mean, I mean, come on, why call them artists? I don't understand that the word "artist" sometimes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROSALYN DREXLER: So anyway—why was I talking about this?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, uh, I was asking about the—you know, I guess your conception of yourself and what you—how you thought of yourself at that time.

ROSALYN DREXLER: All I thought was why put a label on what you are or, and what you do. And it's just as part of your life. I mean, you know, I make an omelet, I enjoy it. Or I do this or that, and take a walk in the park. Even if I looked for pebbles, different kinds of pebbles on the beach, it's all, I won't call it art. I call it doing something that you enjoy. It's a label, I mean, but I guess it's a good label.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I mean, the problem is people mistake labels for things and think that they have a reality to them, but they're—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's a real problem I think. Well, I mean, in your case you've been labeled a kind of Pop artist or proto-pop artist or some—that puts you in a slot, doesn't it?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, I don't want to be in a slot. I'm too fat [00:22:00] to be in a slot. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. Yeah, yeah. Well—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know what other people do, and I really don't care what other people do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Not trying—I mean, it's—

ROSALYN DREXLER: But they're trying to place you somehow.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. They're trying to—it's when they forget that they are words and think that they're things. That's when it becomes a problem, I think.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's interesting. That's a very interesting thought.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, you know—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I was just looking at a—I've written a lot about Nancy Spero, she's a big item for me.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so, someone—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Tell me about it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, well, just that someone sent me an article that had been proposed for a journal, and you know, my first reaction was, anything you want to write about her, great. Because she needs all the attention she can get. But, you know, I said, The problem with this article from my perspective was that the author was labeling her a printmaker, because she used stamping. You know, just what you were interested in, you know. And I said, "That's painting. She decided that was painting."

ROSALYN DREXLER: Of course. The sensibility was there. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so this woman was doing what MoMA has always done to Nancy, which is peg her as—in prints and illustrated books, or in Drawings, instead of in the Painting Department.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Instead of—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is a woman who made 220 foot things. That's not a print!

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know, I know. And the thing to do is to talk about the person who chooses to do, you know, the myriad work—what is revealed or not revealed in all the different works, rather than putting it in, like you say, into a pot, into a slot, you know. They have something [00:24:00] more human and creative to talk about. You know. So, yeah, I agree with you.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you did have a kind of interesting—it seems, but I don't know much about it—relationship with Andy Warhol, speaking of Pop artists. So he picked up on this photo of you as the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, I was surprised that he—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —the wrestler, and made it into a big silkscreen print thing.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And the thing is, I knew he did this, but—and he said, "Oh, Rosalyn, yeah." He said, "I want to give you one." So then I told this magazine—I knew that you couldn't then say, "Hey, he promised me a painting. Give it to me." So I made sure that it was mentioned in this magazine that he did. And he verified it and all that stuff. So when he died, I said, "Well, maybe I should pick it up." I thought it was only one. Well, they gave me the smallest one that he had done of me. And some collector that I do not respect has it. But what can you do?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I mean—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Andy liked it, and he wanted to do it. And he did duplicates of it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, he—so this is—I don't want to go on and on about it. But this was from a spread that a kind of magazine in the 1950s had done on you?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. I forget the name of the magazine. You probably have it in there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *Ultra* is what it's called. So like a men's magazine, or something like that?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, I don't know. Maybe women would be interested, too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, true. I shouldn't peg it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I really don't know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But Warhol [00:26:00] also—oh, I know what I wanted to ask you about. You tell a—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Jack Kroll took that photograph.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Who took it?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I thought Andy did it, but Andy just took the photograph that we had. Jack Kroll, the editor at *Newsweek*, "back of the book" [i.e., culture editor]. Intellectual, wonderful critic.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Jack Kroll?

ROSALYN DREXLER: *Newsweek*. He was big, important guy. Another—he reviewed my work, also, in *Newsweek* and other places.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Who's that? [looking at index of Rose Art Museum catalogue]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Is he there?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What's the name again?

ROSALYN DREXLER: K-R-O-L-L.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, Kroll. No. Huh.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Not even mentioned in my book?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Jack Kroll?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Jack Kroll.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He was a theater critic?

ROSALYN DREXLER: He was also a theater critic, but he was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, I know who you mean.

ROSALYN DREXLER: —the whole back of the book.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I know who you mean, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And art. He was just the most—smartest person.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. I mean, it was acknowledged. He was just a brilliant guy. So anyway—what brought him up again?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, so I was curious—so you tell a story and then—this was in an interview some years ago—about receiving a Rockefeller grant to travel. And this took you to Europe for the first time?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. I got four Rockefeller grants for some reason.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: All at the same time? [Laughs.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, no.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Just kidding.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No. It was—maybe I was a friend with Dr. Crawford who was dealing there at the time.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, I'm kidding, sorry.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, that was—yeah. I got to look at theater. But the grant was for the summertime, and everybody went away.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So no theater, huh? [00:28:00]

ROSALYN DREXLER: No theater.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, darn.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But we managed to amuse ourselves and see stuff I had never seen before.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Because this was your first trip to Europe, is that right?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So would this have been around '63, '64, somewhere in there? Does that ring—does that seem—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know, but it must be in there, in my—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It isn't, actually. I looked—or at least I couldn't find it if it is.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh. I didn't bring any material with me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But Garth knows all about that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: We'll look it up afterward.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Okay, okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: One of the things that's great about this is we get a transcript. Then we can go over it, and we can pencil things in.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, you can go and clarify.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: We can clarify.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But Jack Kroll is very important, intellect. He would critique some of my work. And he was a great critiquer, because he didn't force any opinion. He would ask a question—and then you would think about it. "Oh, yeah, I was thinking about that, too. I have to edit that." Or that—he's that kind of a—he's a great editor and friend. And—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So the mention of their—

ROSALYN DREXLER: If you notice, I knew a lot of men who were exceptional. Like, I mean, Kline, and the other Klein, the photographer, moviemaker.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: William Klein.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And Jack Kroll, and the Chekhov expert.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Richard Gilman.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Richard Gilman. And I mean, all of these people were, you know, great. If every young aspiring writer or artist could have like a few friends like that, how inspiring! And brings you up to—you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. Well, let me ask you about one of those. I noticed that [00:30:00] Lawrence Alloway played a role for you at a certain point.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. I don't—yes, he contacted me. And we went to a—afternoon we went to a bar. And we had food, or I don't know what. And we talked about art. And he was very persuasive and really liked Pop art. And when he got to the Guggenheim—is that the Guggenheim? He borrowed one of the paintings to keep in his office.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really? Oh.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, that was a nice gesture, but—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding.

ROSALYN DREXLER: —at the same time, the Guggenheim didn't buy the painting that, luckily, maybe I have it now, or had it. So anyway, yes, he was very—he wasn't an intimate, as you say. He wasn't in our small circle. But he was a person who showed himself as being a friend and knowledgeable human being.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you also—Tom Hess, I think, had things to say about your work.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Tom Hess also liked my husband's work.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, he helped him arrange one of his shows of paintings.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, nice.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. But Tom Hess—more than anything I remember Tom and Barney Newman come to see one of my shows.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow...

ROSALYN DREXLER: And at that time, artists came to plays that other people did. And it was like a real appreciation of the new, the so-called new. So I remember Tom came to see my show with Barney. And then we ate—had congratulatory, afterwards. And then I remember for my first play, Harold Rosenberg came. I treated him like an honored guest. But he had the gout. And so I [00:32:00] put him in an aisle seat, down front, leg out, whiskey in hand, or some kind of—and he was happy. He sat there, and he saw my first play. And he really dug it. Because people like that, they like to see something that seems unassuming, doesn't declare it's important. Do you know what I'm saying?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's really important, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So he was there to have a good time, and he had a good time, you know. So—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. That's so interesting.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Even Susan Sontag wrote about it in *Against Interpretation*. She was saying the joy and the whatever—but she was not able to connect it to her idea of what an important play was. It was just—she applauded its bonhomie and said the cast was also enjoying themselves. That's that *Home Movies* thing that I just sang you. The—mother told me about you. She didn't quite understand that theater can be loose and fun. That was news to her. But she—at least it's in her—she's a marvelous person. She was.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: She was a kind of terminally serious person, huh?

ROSALYN DREXLER: She's a what?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Terminally serious.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah. Terribly serious.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Very University of Chicago.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. You wouldn't say—yeah, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you—so, but in 1965 or so, you really stopped making sculpture, or stopped showing it pretty much.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Sculpture, I—when the gallery closed, then I wasn't doing that anymore. And I didn't know that women were not [00:34:00] bankable, and that's part of the reason I couldn't find a gallery. I said, Oh, it's because I'm doing this sculpture. Nobody wants it. I'm going to be a painter. They want me as a painter. You know, it's so childish, but maybe that's a good thing. It's like, trying to figure it out, but there are no answers, as a kid would do. So I said to myself, You don't know how to paint. What are you talking about? I said to myself, I'll find a way. It seems like an interesting thing to do. And so then I said, Well, the only thing—I've got to cheat. I said, I've got to trace. I've got to copy. I've got to cut out. And I'm going to do it, because at least I can get my idea out on a canvas somehow. And I got some movie posters. I cut things out of magazines—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that because the figures in the movie poster would already be of a certain scale?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Possibly. Or I saw it—where I would place it on a canvas, and what kind of a meaning this image would have.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you also have images [photo-CL] started up to increase the size? Just to—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, sure, sure, sure. I did repeats [ph]. I did shrinkage. I did expandage. Whatever I had to do in order to play with it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The backgrounds of these are so fascinating. The—let's see if there was one that caught my—well, here's the Chubby Checker one as an example.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. I had a success with that. And then it seemed—there was the original. They found that, which I feel they revealed my—now I'm really going to be punished. But little did I know it would become a whole [00:36:00] thing called appropriation. Yeah, you said it. You said it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, exactly.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But I needed to appropriate. I wasn't doing it for any—yeah, so you see, I used all of these—somehow I made it into a—it's a beautiful, big painting. I mean, it was hanging in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, in some show. And when you first get off the elevator, I saw it. And it was sparkling.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's great.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was lovely.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's great.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So I was happy with that. But, you know, this idea of—that's *Marilyn Pursued by [Death, 1963]*—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is terrific. That's really—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Thank you. The Whitney has that. They had something from early, early on, when the Whitney was the old Whitney, called *Day at the Races*. Big, beautiful painting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: One of the things that—I mean, you can't help but be struck by, is the paneling of the—you know—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —of these.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. Other people are in the same story, but not at the same time.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: On the one hand, it reminds you a little bit of those predella panels at the base of Renaissance altarpieces, where they'll have the big picture and then these little ones that tell you the story of how the saint got there. You know—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. Sure.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Except you're not dealing with saints here, are you? You're dealing with—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I won't—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —sinners, maybe, a little bit more.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I think sinners are saints, occasionally.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So the notion of these monochrome backgrounds, did that—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I wanted to bind the image in a warm cloak of artistry. Paint. So that—you know, the whole thing is—I captured the image, and then I [00:38:00] sort of embalmed the image. Like I captured it to be there for all time, and—so.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Captured it and embalmed it. That's nice. There was one particular one. It's a double-page spread in here. It's really wonderful.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, I like that one you passed. The blue—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Where was that?

ROSALYN DREXLER: —floating table thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, it's not that important. But—oh, maybe it was this—yeah, this was it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah. Where was that?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This one's in the Hirshhorn [*Home Movies*, 1963].

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, the Hirshhorn. Yeah, he bought about five or six of my paintings. But he did that whenever he visited. He would not just take one. He would take—"I'll take six." Joe.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Joe Hirshhorn?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. But there's also—there's a little bit of a—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Movie.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Speaking of Barney Newman, there's a little bit of a—you know, kind of like his [vertical "zips"]—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Never had anything to do with it. I just eliminated the sprockets. You see there's like a new—it's an action—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, like a film—

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's all a film thing. This would be a film medium shot. Then here's the action. And then here's what's causing the action, is this aggressive criminal. It's a story plate for me. It had nothing to do with artistic decision of—nothing to do with Barney Newman.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Not art his—not driven by art history, but by just your—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Very, very ordinary—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —narrative—telling a story visually.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, it's an ordinary thing. If I were—maybe if I did it again, I would put sprockets so people wouldn't make that mistake. [00:40:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, um—

ROSALYN DREXLER: We were somewhere—I forget. I was off somewhere.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you did continue to show this work until at least a little bit into the '60s.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Sixty-five?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Sixty-eight? I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Now you were—one of the things I was struck by is you were really working in some rare company at this time. There's—

ROSALYN DREXLER: What do you mean?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This Andy Warhol—where is it? I can't find—no, that's not it. That's your mat queen.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah. *Album of a Mat Queen*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's so wonderful.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, God.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What I was struck by—oh, here it is. Here it is. So this spread from *Harper's Bazaar*, 1963.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah. Andy took that. There I am.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And that's Henry Geldzahler.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you're in some pretty rarified company there. Donald Barthelme and—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, Barthelme was a close friend.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was he?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really? I'm such a huge admirer of his writing.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Great. Yeah, yeah, he was a friend of ours. And I think, originally, he was a friend of Elaine de Kooning's, an intimate friend. So we all—yeah. Yeah, yeah. Barthelme admired my writing, I know that. And he used some of the same kind of stories that he—strange and just interesting mind, twisted around—you know, he was—they taught him for so many years in the colleges, his work. And then—he was like a fad or something. Nobody mentions him anymore. [00:42:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I have a feeling that he's coming back into people's—you know, because he's so brilliant.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Maybe he's too brilliant. I mean, who's out there reading—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Good question. Well, we went through a long phase of people who were kind of doing the equivalent of kitchen sink drama. Everything was very emotional, and personal, and—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Miller.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —quasi-autobiographical. In recent writing, you know. And now I think people are—you know, Barthelme, he's just in a different universe from that kind of writing.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know. I know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But he's so funny.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. I think maybe he shares that with you. He's just incredibly entertaining.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. We were going to start a whole publishing company—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

ROSALYN DREXLER: —with Susan Sontag, Barthelme, and me. Why did I say Barthelme? What am I talking about?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, you were going to start a publishing company with him, and Sontag, and—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, and some other writer, important writer. Jack something. Anyway, it didn't go through, but it would have been an interesting idea for writers to have their own publishing company.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. That's a tough one. I mean, it's—the problem with being a publisher is you have to publish what sells, and that's not always what's good.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, God no. I never thought of that. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I spent a lot of time in publishing. But you—so in the early—you showed at Kornblee Gallery.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: For three years I think? In—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, more than that, probably.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —sixty-four, five, six? [00:44:00] In there?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, in there. But I'm—you can look it up exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Or four years? No—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: With Zabriskie Gallery in '63—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, I don't—I didn't have a one-woman show there. I showed with Doyle, Tom Doyle.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Tom Doyle.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Who's married to Eva Hesse.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Who was married to Eva Hesse.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you know her very well?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, I went up to the loft, and I was introduced. I didn't know who she was, what she did. He just introduced me and—I don't know who I was with—to Eva Hesse. But I had no hint whatsoever that she was an artist, because he didn't mention it. Okay?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Interesting. Okay. And just to tidy up Alloway, there's a mention of you being the person that suggested to him—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I didn't even know that his wife was an artist.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, Sylvia [Sleigh]?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, I didn't know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Really.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It never came up. [laughs]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's really surprising, wow. Yes, that you had suggested to Alloway the show of the Reuben Gallery artists for the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yes. I did.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You did.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I did, yes. And he said, "It's a good idea." And he did it. It was on the upper level. But it was in the Guggenheim. And that happened.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think that I have gotten kind of to the end of—as much as I can prepare now. It's almost two o'clock. I wonder if we could do at least one more session and look at some work together, and also talk about your—a little bit about your plays and books, and also look at your recent [00:46:00]—your more recent work. The work that you began—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. I mean, you don't even know the paintings from the '80s into the '90s.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. So I want—

ROSALYN DREXLER: They could set something up.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —to talk about that.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It would probably be some of the things in my next show. So you should see that things are different.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It'd be terrific. We could perhaps just look at them together and talk about them, why the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. Because I'm not just like the beginnings, which are pretty great. But I mean, no, to me it's like I'm—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, no, that's what I want to say.

ROSALYN DREXLER: —mysterious.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I want to—we've sort of gotten into the first part of your artistic career. Now we need to do the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: And I'm still working.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —recent years.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And Garth has discovered so many small pieces that I've done that I just gave away. You know, covering amounts of years. So he's very good at cataloging that kind of stuff.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Great. Okay. So we will call a halt— [00:47:00]

[END OF TRACK 2.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is Christopher Lyon interviewing Rosalyn Drexler on June 2, 2017 at Garth Greenan Gallery on 20th Street in Manhattan. This is our second interview. Okay. So, yeah. So it was—as I said, it was fun to—really fun to dive into *I Am the Beautiful Stranger*. And we had—so we're picking up now at around 1965. We had kind of gotten that far in our last go-around.

ROSALYN DREXLER: The date would be on the inside of this—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. I think it is '65, isn't it?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Because I don't really remember any of this. Nineteen sixty-five, you're right. Published then.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, for my husband. For Sherman. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's nice. And we had talked about your brief encounter with Eva Hesse, and you suggesting the Reuben Gallery show for the Guggenheim to Lawrence Alloway. Just trying to—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, that's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —get us back on the track that we were then.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, we went through that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so, even though we're focusing on fine art, I wanted to ask you a bit about your 1960s writing—and later writing, if you care to talk about it—which earned you a lot of attention.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so I'm wondering whether we can learn a little bit about your creative thought from looking a bit at your writings, or at least a couple of them at that time. You had described to me the genesis of *Home Movies*, with Al Carmines kind of taking it on and then—

ROSALYN DREXLER: And he was the composer. But he looked at the original script, and he said, "Why don't you just pull out [00:02:00] some of the dialogue and make songs out of them." I said, "Oh, this is a wonderful idea. I will do that." And I was open to anything, and he was a guy who was open to anything. Loved to create, loved to play. And so I had fun doing the lyrics that I chose. And he immediately—I would bring it to him sitting at the piano, and he'd do the tune almost immediately. So what could be better than that?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sounds wonderful. So he also—he and you collaborated again, in 1968, I think, on *Line of Least Existence*. And that was also done at the Judson Poets Theater.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was, yes. There was too much sounds of traffic coming in from—it was done upstairs, and there was a lot of noise, to me. I mean, it's not of any importance, but at the time. I didn't really like the production of that very much. I can't dwell on it. I don't know why. Maybe the characters were—the actors were ill-chosen. That happens in theater. Sometimes you make mistakes. And we're talking about occu—the—what—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *Line of Least Existence*.

ROSALYN DREXLER: *Line of Least Existence*, yeah. Well, that went onto be done elsewhere. It was done in Boston, a bigger production. And Danny DeVito had a role in it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, what fun!

ROSALYN DREXLER: And Judd Hirsch. Danny DeVito played a very adventurous dog.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, the dog Andy.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Andy.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. And he remembers the verses. I understand he mentioned it on [00:04:00] the radio. And he did the whole—one of his songs. He remembered from way back, the Philadelphia thing. And Judd Hirsch played the psychiatrist-pimp-pusher in that thing. So that was nice. And of course, it was done in Scotland.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding?

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was the first—actually the first rock play they had ever seen or heard. And of course, the critics said, "Much too loud." Or, in his own way. But naturally, it had to be loud.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. That was like the point, right? I love the stage directions, where there's a mic—you've got like a lavalier mic attached to the characters, right? And they—there's a whole—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yes. It was used [ph].

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —bit of comic business at the beginning where the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —they're yelling into the mic.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Frankly, I don't—it's a long time ago, and I haven't revisited the play lately. But, yeah, there was all that so-called invention and fun. A lot of fun in the play. And that's what DeVito remembers, is he had a heck of a good time in that play.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Unusually, the play was actually published in book form and collected as part of your collected plays before it was produced.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you—was it commissioned by the Judson Theater? Or did you just—this was your initiative?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No. We—I mean, you can't call it commission. Nobody got paid. Just people wanted to do it, and then we did it. And that was the fun of it all. So.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So Richard Gilman, whom you mentioned in our previous session, writes in his introduction [00:06:00] to that collection that your plays suggest more than anything else the early Marx Brothers. Which sounds—given what we talked about last time about Chico and so on, it sounds that—was he aware of your relationship with the Marx Brothers?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No. No, no, that never came into question or anything.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's kind of funny.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But what influenced me very, very early on was, I think, S. J. Perelman.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah, S. J. Perelman.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And Perelman wrote some of the Marx Brothers' films. It's as if I was kind of brought up with that kind of—you know, off the hip quips and humor, the strange humor. Freedom—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But very verbal. Kind of verbal play—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yes. Verbal play. And that's what really impressed me. I thought that was so much fun. And then when I was older, and I went to see Ionesco. *Jack*, or *The Bald Soprano*, or—I remember names of—way before he wrote *Exit the King*. So I thought, My God, this is freedom. This is wonderful. And I thought, you know, I'm very much interested in this kind of playwriting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. What I was struck by—and I'm trying to sort of make a connection to the artwork here, that—what I responded to in Gilman's introduction was a quote—and I think this is from—who says that? The girl in—what's her name? [00:08:00]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Ibolya?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, Ibolya.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I didn't know what you were looking—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm pronouncing that correctly? Ibolya?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know if I am, but Ibolya.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, okay. She says, "Don't you know that appearance is everything, and style is a way of living?" And which—the attention to surfaces. That you can read what you need to know. It's right there on the surface of things.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And this made me think of Oscar Wilde, who was always saying, you know, "Don't look for depths. It's on the surface." You know, there's a—

ROSALYN DREXLER: In painting, somebody said that a painting—oh, it was the Nabis, that group, said painting is—don't forget painting is just decoration. Is decoration.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. One of my all-time favorite quotes is Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. She says, "We live, I regret, in an age of surfaces." [Laughs.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Why would she regret it?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, I guess everyone else was trying to see—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Did she want depth in her life?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, no, no. She's not regret—I mean, everything to her is surfaces, you know. She says of Algernon, "He has nothing, but looks everything. What more can one desire?"

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, that's wonderful.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Isn't that great?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Anyway. The suggestion, if one wanted to make the extension, is, you know, that you are not hiding anything. That you are—everything is there—that one wants to know is right there to be seen.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Does that seem correct?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Unless there's more that people can't get to. I don't [00:10:00]—the surface is always connected to the underground, anyway. The surface is—unless it's the turf grass, you know, some golf course, fake. But maybe there is no such thing as what you're saying, as just the surface.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Umm, ok.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I mean, you know, the idea of surface comes to you. Where does it come from? It comes from an idea. And where is that idea anchored from? So something you can say is just on the surface, but then somebody comes along and says, "Well, this looks a little—gives me ideas about what this sentence means." Should I shut that fan off? Is that bothering you?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's in here. It's in the shop. I guess there's nothing we can do about that. Yeah, okay. Yeah, okay, okay. I'm being a little bit provocative. Just, you know, be curious to hear what you have to say.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I'm trying to meet that. Maybe I need another sip of coffee. I don't think I'm—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, no, no. That's—you also seem—I love that in the play you seem really disabused by the idea—disabused of the idea of artistic genius. This is—you have your Dr. Frack [ph] saying, "Geniuses, uh huh. But it's old fashioned to be a genius. There are no geniuses anymore. There's facility and publicity."

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's true. That doesn't mean there really aren't any geniuses. It just means in this play these characters might say that. And of course, I was actually saying it in the mouth of a character.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, that's what I was trying to get at here a little bit.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So it depends. It's just a word. Genius is just a word that means [00:12:00] something unusual that only one person arrived at, or arrived at first. And anything could be a genius. I mean, you invent a new kind of yogurt that cures all illness, I mean, a genius can do that. But like in medicine, all the research has come before the actual breakthrough.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So it needs—so it's really—achievement is part of a context.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, I do think so. Nothing happens all by itself, alone.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. So the—*I Am the Beautiful Stranger* seems like almost like a Cinderella story, but set in the Bronx.

ROSALYN DREXLER: A Cinderella story?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, she has this awful family—

ROSALYN DREXLER: But anything that happens to that character, the girl, it doesn't bother her. It just—she takes it as experience. She's an observer even as a young person. I mean, she has desires that she doesn't understand and stuff. But still, she has that wonderful facility of not letting anything—taking anything personally in a way that it would hurt her. I mean, she realized early on that other people have their objectives. And sometimes it has nothing to do with you, that may seem like it's directed toward you. And so that was kind of mature in that character, to have that outlook.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then, of course, she sort of meets her painter prince in the end.

ROSALYN DREXLER: In the park?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Is that in that book?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah. That's right. Just like Sherman and me. We met on opposing teams at Van Cortlandt Park. [00:14:00] He with his—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, he was with his group of friends, and I was with my group of friends. And somebody stopped and said hello. And that's all it took. And so we talked. And I was just taking dancing at the New Dance Group. And I was—I had developed a—did I mention this before?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't think so, no.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I developed a great one-legged squat, which only the teacher and I could do. And so I demonstrated that under a tree at Van Cortlandt Park. And my husband was very much interested in this display of female strength and facility. And so naturally we went for ice cream cones. [They laugh.] We were both very

young.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's great. Well, you mentioned the—S. J. Perelman, who wrote for the Marx Brothers.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Perelman?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Perelman. Perelman, right?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Perelman. Yes, like perilous Perelman. And—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And there are so many one-line zingers in *I Am the Beautiful Stranger*. I just—they're terrific. But some of them seem also to be like statements almost of a—of almost of a personal philosophy in a capsule.

ROSALYN DREXLER: God, like what?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Like, "She wants to whip me into a genius. I don't genius so easily." [Laughs.] This is about your piano teacher. Or not your piano—

ROSALYN DREXLER: What character was saying that?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Selma's piano teacher—Selma says her piano teacher wants to "whip me into a genius. Well, I don't genius that easily."

ROSALYN DREXLER: [Laughs.] Oh, there was a whole thing at home with my mother wanting—felt that I was very talented. And she got me this—Mister Belasco, [00:16:00] the great piano teacher. And he once said to my mother, he said, "She'll be something. But not a pianist." He didn't know what to say to her. She was so eager. And then I had the voice teacher come over. And I was singing with the voice teacher. And my mother thought it was—it'd be a good idea to introduce the two of them. But they weren't the least bit interested in each other. But she made this huge spread. And she did something that—she didn't give slices of tomato. She gave each person a whole tomato, and that was a kind of generosity. And she made all kinds of wonderful salads and stuff in order to encourage them to see—you know, in order to have them like me and discover me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, gosh.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So anyway, I was noticing all these things. And—you know. But anyway, when I went to other people's houses, and they prepared food, and I saw that they only had sliced tomatoes, I thought, My God, how stingy could people be. [They laugh.] I mean, you know, I was very young.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, right, right. Like, they should get a whole tomato.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Of course.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's a mention of the Aunt Bella character in the story striking out at other people. And you say, "To be alive is to attack, although to be alive is also to fall down." And I just thought, Wow, there's a whole philosophy in that!

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, that's right. You could do a whole essay on that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Couldn't you?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Right now, hearing this, I'd say, Gee, that's pretty great, but is it too wise for a young girl in this book to have that thought. But she's an unusual young girl.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: She's a—yeah, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So she will have these [00:18:00] thoughts and not really give them that much thought. She'll say it and think it was fine, and aren't I clever, and then go on to something else.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Okay. Another one, "There should be one tense, the present. Other tenses are fantasies."

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, that's very nice.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Isn't that good? This is just full of things like that.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, and my whole thing is, you know—how this publisher got me to write the book—he had only seen a paragraph that I wrote, I think, that a friend of ours—Klein, the photographer and movie maker, was

a friend of his—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: William Klein?

ROSALYN DREXLER: William Klein, thank you. And he was a friend of William Klein's. And William Klein was the one who showed him this paragraph. And he said, "I'm going to come back to you, and I want a book. You can write." I said okay. I said, "I always say okay, I'll take the challenge." He came back, and he said, "Where's my book?" I said, "Well, you know, look. I've never written a book. It seems I wouldn't know how to." He said, "Yes, you will." And he came to me with a contract. And he said, "I will be back to you exactly two years. And I want my book." Well, he was a little cuckoo, but the kind of—but, you know, I believed him, and I thought, Well, this is a great reason to write a book, first book. I said, How will I go about it? So I thought, It has to be honest. It has to be fun for me to do, and it has to be inventive. The main thing is to be true to your own voice, whatever that may be. I had to figure out what my voice was. And so then I set about [00:20:00] just like that, cold, writing this book. No one edited it. I had no help doing it. And it just had to—I was my own person who had to approve of this thing. And he just took it. He said, "Great. I'll publish it." And so it came out, and it got great reviews. That scared me. I said, Now what do I do for—what will my next book be about? Because this was partly autobiographical, as all first books sometimes are. And I don't even remember what my second one was. I don't think it was *To Smithereens*. I think that was my third book. So it was something else. It was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let's see. We've got the—okay, books. Articles, books.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Is it okay for us to pause?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, darn. These are in alphabetical order.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, well. Books. There aren't—there are only about nine, eight or nine.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. So *I Am the Beautiful Stranger* is '65.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Then the two plays, *Investigation* and *Hot Buttered Roll*, '69. *One or Another*?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. It was *One or Another*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that the second one?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. *One or Another*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Nineteen-seventy.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And that—I used a lot of things from my life in that book also. Like somebody kept leaving bullets outside the door and threatening or whatever it was. So we—even when I had to pass the kitchen window, I had to crouch down.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What?

ROSALYN DREXLER: And it turned out to be a teacher who worked in the same school as my husband, [00:22:00] who was a little off. Always carried a gun in his bag—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Good grief!

ROSALYN DREXLER: —school bag. And for some reason, he was threatening. And so the police said, "Well, unless the bullets have your name on it, we can't do anything about it." But then we found out that it was this schoolteacher, this guy. And his wife came in crying to us once—I mean, I guess he had done this before. And she offered us a book about Salvador Dali in order for us not to press charges. Well, that would have had the opposite effect anyway. [They laugh.] I—you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What a strange—wow—

ROSALYN DREXLER: But it was solved, and then—you never know. You live your life, and then these strange things happen. So I used some of that in this book, and also I thought I'd put in a kind of unsatisfied affair of the mind with a younger man, and not her husband. And he was a strange kid with—made his own telescope so he could see the stars, and he was a little schizophrenic. I had these interesting characters that I pulled out of people that I knew or knew about. So that was what that was about.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And uh—what was the third book? Oh, it was my wrestling book, *To Smithereens*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *Smithereens*, 1972, I think.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, *To Smithereens*. And so, in other words, I kept finding things to write about, because I couldn't just not acknowledge the fact that people were interested in reading what I wrote. So along the way—I don't remember his name—a great editor was going to take me on as part of his [00:24:00] sort of stable. But—and then he died, so couldn't—he published Joan Didion a lot. And that would have been too much of a break, because I would have then thought of myself as only a novelist. Instead I went on to do a lot of other things. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There is a little bit of a mystery, though—despite all this talk of surfaces—in *I Am the Beautiful Stranger*. And I wondered if it had some relevance to your artwork. And it's a little poem, really, at the end of one of the chapters. "I miss the child that never was. I miss the child that used to be. I miss myself right now. Where am I?"

ROSALYN DREXLER: Hey, that's pretty deep in a simplistic way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, but—I mean, even the title, *I Am the Beautiful Stranger*, I am a stra—you know, there's an element here of wondering where's the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know, where do I fit into—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —the essence.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Am I really here?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, exactly.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And wanting to—and also wanting the usual things. I wanted to be attractive and have somebody love me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Why not?

ROSALYN DREXLER: And so those letters that she wrote to this incarcerated young man—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, that's such—that is possibly the strangest part of that book. It's really fascinating.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, yes, but it was almost—it was just two lonely people, communicating in the best way that they could. I think the guy in the book who is incarcerated was—had a friend who was one of her girlfriends. That's how they got together. So I did that. And that part of the book, or this whole book was one the beat poet [00:26:00]—what's his name again—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ginsberg? Ferlinghetti?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, one of—another one. [They laugh.] I'm always forgetting. But anyway, he was also—had also spent part of his youth in a place like that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, uh-huh.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So I was in—are you sure I didn't tell you this story?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't think so.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Okay, I was in—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I have a short memory.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I was in Paris with Sherman at—and a message was left for me from this poet, well-known at the time [Gregory Corso]. "To Madame Drexler." And he thanked me for a wholly honest and moving book that I had written. And he related completely to it, and he thanked me for having written it. That was the best thing that happened to me concerning that book. That this guy who was a poet absolutely—you know, was moved by it and found it to be honest. And really matched his own experience as a kid, and put away for some minor infringement.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Who would that be? I'm trying to think of the writers associated with that. There's Kerouac, but he's not really a poet.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, he was not very—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There was—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Ginsberg was top of the heap.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Ferlinghetti and—

ROSALYN DREXLER: You know, those little books that were put out at the time of poets, he has one of them. The bookstore that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: City Lights Books?

ROSALYN DREXLER: —gallery that—no, the gallery put out a bunch of those.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Like little chapbooks, kind of thing?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. We'll try to remember that, because that sounds like an interesting thing that we should—we should try to capture it. [00:28:00]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, I have it. But I'm sure that Garth would—Garth probably isn't in here to ask him.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, I think they went out for lunch.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Uh-huh.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. So back to art, then.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, but I think that was a nice thing that happened to me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It satisfied my reason for having written the book, to reach somebody. I didn't think it would be a famous poet like that, but. Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. So in the—you know, in this book [Rose Art Museum catalogue], I see paintings from the 1960s up to about 1969. And then there aren't—there are no works reproduced in here between then and the late 1980s. So you—

ROSALYN DREXLER: But there was work done, just not shown. Because I was so busy with books and plays and teaching. I was asked to teach a writing course at the Writers' Workshop in Iowa.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really? Wow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And of course it surprised me that they would ask me to do that. But it seemed like a bunch of guys that I knew had influence there and thought that I should be teaching there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And did you do that—how long did you do that?

ROSALYN DREXLER: One or two semesters. No, I never stayed too long. I had to go back in my own life. I mean, not that it wasn't my own life, but—strange.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, you had such a substantial literary career. You've won three Obie awards. One for—besides *Home Movies*, one is for the *The Writer's Opera*, in 1979. And then one called the *Transients*. [00:30:00]

ROSALYN DREXLER: *Transients Welcome* was—they had two plays from that book. Jack Kroll wrote a wonderful preface to it. And—yeah, yeah. I'm trying to remember. One was *Room 17C*, where the cockroach from Kafka meets Willy Loman's wife, who's now on the road. And so that was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] That's funny.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And that was a wonderful discussion of life, and how she felt, and the romantic aspect of Samsa, the bug. And he says many things about what it means to be a, you know, a bug. And they have a romance, and they have a great meal. And Willy Loman's—and her son comes to interrupt the liaison. And he says funny things, and she says funny things about what's going on. And a cockroach—and then there's a fire,

and the cockroach declares that he's the only one left in this horrible universe. It's always the insect, always the bug that you don't—that you try to get rid of. That he's—whatever he says at the end of the play, it's kind of poetic. And he sings this strange song. Anyway. That's one of the plays that was done. And I'm not sure about the other one that was performed. It may have been about Cornell and the ballerina who visited Cornell. And it's kind of an abstract play where—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Gosh, I didn't know that. That's—I'm a great Cornell fan. So—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh. Yeah, well, this—[00:32:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So that would be—

ROSALYN DREXLER: You know that ballet star that used to visit him [Allegra Kent], I was interviewing her for many things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, shoot. What's her name, beautiful woman—

ROSALYN DREXLER: She was beautiful, but like all these ballerinas—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But she had this whole strange relationship with him.

ROSALYN DREXLER: —self-involved. Yes, she would visit. And you know Cornell much better than I do, but he would see people as if they were like ticket takers at a movie. You know, they were always behind this glass. They were always captured and placed. So she would visit him, and she told me lots of things about it, which I—and how her mother treated her, and she had a bad skin around where she slipped. So all of these little things are abstractly put into this little one-act.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Good grief. What is that play? Is this one of the *Tran*—not this is not one—

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's one of the plays in *Transients Welcome*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It is, okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. I rewrote it a little. I got—I didn't—wasn't using his brother properly in it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, so. But it's kind of a charming play. And they talk about the abstract, and you can't get out of the abstract. I don't know, one of those things that I usually say about things. You can only get out of the abstract what you put into it, something like that. So we had Cornell, and he was very—and they talk about the bus, what he does when he's on that bus to Utopia Parkway, what he sees out of the window.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, I remember going to see the house and you know, looking in the backyard for that tree that he used to sit under and everything.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. [00:34:00] But she spoke about him. But anytime she spoke about anything, it was really only about herself. And in the end, she took back a lot of the recordings I made of our sessions together. And she did this with another writer, too, so that she would have all the material for her own book about herself. She had all this stuff. And when we were working once—I had a pretty nice place in Manhattan Plaza. And I would prepare for her visit. Oh, she's a ballerina. So I would have flowers. I would have lovely hors d'oeuvres, and set her up as if she was the Queen of Sheba, you know. Once we were doing that, and a knock came on the door. And who came in, but the husband that she had been married to, who took all the photographs of Marilyn Monroe.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, the photog—oh, shoot. I know who you mean, yeah [Bert Stern].

ROSALYN DREXLER: We both know who we mean, but we never remember. But anyway, so her husband came. He wanted to see what's going on. He had—[inaudible]. And he insisted on taking us to dinner at his favorite steak place. And he had brought flowers for her. How did—how he found out that she was there being interviewed by me? And so he took us to his favorite steak place and insisted on—a lot of these guys—he insisted on doing the ordering.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Of course.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And that was that. He was kind of a strange fellow. And I understand that he got Marilyn Monroe drunk during his photographic sessions.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, God, what is his name? Shoot. This is really aggravating, because I did a book with him and included the Marilyn pictures. And you know, I interviewed him about [00:36:00]—he did, I think, the last session with her, which is really kind of like—yeah. But you've got your Marilyn painting.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I do. I do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *Marilyn Pursued by Death*.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It impressed me that she always had that fear in her. And she lost her mother, and she was—I don't know, brought up by who. She was always afraid of something was going to get her. And all this baby stuff, and wanting to better herself, and going to the Actors Studio, that was a whole important endeavor in her life. It didn't quite take. I mean, this Arthur Miller thing—there was the intellectual in her life. Great. Then Joe—was it Joe DiMaggio?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Joe DiMaggio, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Then there was the athletic thing in her life. And I mean, it was like—and then she had all the political guys. The two Kennedys.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Jack Kennedy, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, Jack and his brother Robert.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And Robert? Oh, my goodness.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah. But all the time this was denigrating to her, actually. But she couldn't stop it, because that was her calling card. I don't know, why are we—oh, we're talking about my painting. So I always had this feeling, that—so when this event happened at the Miller's property, and she was running away, I thought it was a—something—someone died in an accident on the grounds or something. And then this must have been her bodyguard trying to catch her from—you know, she was running away screaming. So but I changed it to *Marilyn Pursued by Death*. And so—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's very effective.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It took me a while to paint that picture. I don't know why. Harder for me to paint that picture. [00:38:00] But I got it done.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, okay, that sounds like a good transition here to—so the exhibition at the Grey Gallery in 1986, I think, did that encourage you to resume painting in a really active way, the experience of that? Or what got you started again? [Laughs.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: I had never really stopped. I was doing sketches, little things, little paintings, stuff like that. And I did a lot of stuff in the '80s, late '70s and '80s. So those paintings—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Has that been shown? Are those—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Not really. Just like Theater for the New City. You know, crummy couple of things. But um, so it's going to be seen—a lot of those will be seen in my next show. Like *Life: The Circus*, or whatever title I have. I don't know. But you should be able to see some of those—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I know. I'm like—

ROSALYN DREXLER: —in the—we're going to be seeing those—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, so maybe I will need to look at some things on their computer screen, because—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, because this is so-called work that I did. A lot of paintings. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let me pause us and see if I can get—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Garth and he can show us—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —somebody to show us the works. Because I—

ROSALYN DREXLER: In the computer.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —I'm not familiar with that work, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, you should be familiar with it.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: The book is not here, *Vulgar Lives*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't think so.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was a really good book, and it took a lot of things. When we were in Bellagio I was making notes about everything that happened. [00:40:00] So I used that, sort of an outline. And you never saw my book *Art Does (not!) Exist?*

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes, tell me about that. I just—I noticed it in the bibliography, and I see it here, but I haven't read it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, it's kind of—stuff like in advance of a lot of stuff that artists did after that, I thought. Because I was trying to get a grant, and—yeah. Murder by reason of insanity. [Laughs.] I shouldn't—oh, it's this little poem about one of the artists. "Here lies Maraini Julia. She's really dead, don't let her foolya. Shaman of the self in art. Say goodbye to head and heart of Julia. Amen." [They laugh.] I don't know. This is off now, right?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It can be.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Anyway. "Artists are crazy until proven sane." Too true. "Life called into being for video presentation is sometimes art." Different things that this woman is thinking. "Intensity frightens me." "The more I was with him, the less I wanted to be with him. He made love in a rush, throwing me to the bed, his heart beating fast. Over and done with. What remained was the odor of cereal and dry milk powder, mouse food. Never a sophisticated male cologne. Never a whiff of imported English soap. Like sleeping with a rodent." [00:42:00] [They laugh.] Oh, well, anyway. "Early sex education." "Pressed my cutout one-dimensional paper dolls together while I made kissing sounds. After which I let them share each other's clothing and sent them, appropriately-attired, on a whirlwind tour of the capitals of the world. My own life has not been privy to such traditional courtship rituals. At the age of eight, I was groped underwater at a city pool. At the age of nine, I was fondled by a relative in a suite at the Warwick Hotel. At the age of 10, I seduced an older cousin who later became a botanist. At the age of 11, I abstained, totally absorbed in reading Balzac. At the age of 12, an uncle put his tongue in my mouth. At the age of 13, I had lunch at an Italian restaurant with my family doctor, who had bad breath. Fourteen and up, I danced in the park for pennies. At 15, I retired." "Ancient computer." "For every evil under the sun, there is a remedy, or there is none. If there is one, seek till ye find it. If there be none, well, never mind it." Oh God. So anyway—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You had fun with this?

ROSALYN DREXLER: What?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You had fun with this?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I had a lot of fun with this book, yeah. I think you—with your kind of mind, you would enjoy it, too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I will. I will get myself one.

ROSALYN DREXLER: *Art Does (not!) Exist*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, let's see. This book [Rose Art Museum catalogue] is nicely done, and one of the features of it is these sort of dividers that they use between essays and the next thing. And one of them reads, "You could call me a click artist"—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Click?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Click. "I work from camera images. [00:44:00] I look through newspapers and magazines for photographs. And when one hits me"—I like the verb there. When it hits me—"I can visualize the painting immediately, even to size and color. I blow up the photos and paint right over them. It's a way of using found objects, I guess."

ROSALYN DREXLER: I was right. That's what it is. So I began by finding things, in the street, or go to lots, or look in my kitchen drawers for discarded objects and utensils. And it was all found objects. I mean, even when we vacationed in Provincetown one summer, and Ivan Karp had a gallery there. And he said, you know, "I could use a show." I didn't have any work there at all. I said okay. I always said—I always—when opportunity presented itself, I was always eager to meet it, and to do something. It always interested me to do something I hadn't

done. So I found a lot of stuff on the beach, and I made a whole show. Some of the beautiful sculptures are gone, because I couldn't keep taking them anywhere. But there is one that I like very much, a nautical thing because it has silver and blue on a piece of leather. Anyway, so I did a whole show of found objects. And this finding of pictures is also a found object. And it was up to me to use them creatively, or to have fun with.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So I wondered if we could look at some of the individual paintings, [00:46:00] and you can tell me what hit you and why.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. Are they bringing the other things in?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, I think he'll bring it in at some point. He said give them five minutes or so.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, I see. Well—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But that's—meanwhile, I thought we might have to make do with this and indeed we do. So we actually have this painting in the other room. And this is the—*You Know (Anthony Quinn)* is the title. Just doing that for—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so you're not so fond of this picture, I hear.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, I just—I was a little prudish about it. You know, it was—well, I didn't know it would be accep—I wasn't sure about how forward and sexual it was. And now of course, I would do Mickey and Minnie making love on canvas.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is 1962, I should point out. So this is still fairly early in your painting—in your process of painting, although you had made lots of artworks in the '50s.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I had fun doing it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So what struck you about this kind of wild poster of Anthony Quinn, and—

ROSALYN DREXLER: *The Unstoppable Man*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —bursting into flames or something. It's kind of wild.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know how or why I chose it. But I'm glad that's here, because now I see it. It was a direct steal, sort of.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But she came from somewhere else, this sort of—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, she did come from somewhere else.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —character in nightclub outfit or something.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Garters and black stockings. Before the big bust boom hit us. Now you can't see a woman without her bust being pushed up and out of the—her top. [00:48:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Not so common then, huh?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, no, no. Not at all. But why would you want to talk about this one?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Beyond anything you might have to say, I don't want to belabor it. There was a—I wanted to look a little bit at the gangsters in the book. There was that picture, and there are a number of—here's two recent pictures.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Two-twelve. This is '88, and this is 2012.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. So not so recent on this case, but nevertheless , late '80s [*Rub Out*, 1988]. And this is the famous picture of—I'm going to forget who it is.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Don't—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But he's been—we won't look it up.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Don't do it again. [They laugh.] He's been rubbed out in an Italian restaurant or something like that. [The original photo is of Dutch Schultz, mortally wounded, in the Palace Chophouse restaurant, Newark,

New Jersey, in 1935.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, that's right. That's right. And I have him levitating, you know. Where he's going, I don't know, but he has a very nice chair. And I love the tablecloth. So—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So maybe he's doing the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: —isolated.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Maybe he's doing the opposite of levitating, maybe he's sinking, too. [Laughs.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, yes, yes. Maybe he's just arrived.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Maybe he's just arrived. [They laugh.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: I guess.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So—but the colors are so striking. Your yellow tablecloth, and the red chair, and the blue background—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, that's what's beautiful about it. I mean, not even that it's the subject matter, but it's the placement of the image in the canvas that's—and the colors. I love color.

LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And let's see, I've—that's just a little thing I did recently. When my husband died, that's like, [00:50:00] you know, the ship that travels.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. Let's see, there's—*The Unstoppable Man*—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, here is the Ivan Karp thing—show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And this is Provincetown, then?

ROSALYN DREXLER: This is Provincetown. That's my husband with my son Dan on his lap. And this was a big wooden construction. And then I had—it was Heaven's Gate. You can't see. But I did a lot of stuff for that show. And, let's see. That was not—unfortunately, I don't have that much left.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. This is somewhat earlier work. We—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, that's earlier than we're going right now.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think we did talk—I wanted to focus a little bit more on the paintings this time.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Okay. Oh, here's the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah, here we go. Here's—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right, right, okay. So "Mad Dog Coll Terrorizes City" [reading "headline" of 1961 poster]. I mean, did you—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I didn't care—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you collect the movie posters?

ROSALYN DREXLER: I would—well, a relative of Sherman's was closing up shop, had an old movie theater down Lower East Side, and he was getting rid of some posters, which he gave to me. And I looked at them. I don't know if I used all of them. But that was an entrée into the world of cutting up posters.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah, okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Is this—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, this is going [recorder].

ROSALYN DREXLER: I'm not—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, you're fine.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So this one, *The Defenders* [1963], that was bought by a lawyer who I paid—he defended my daughter in some mini-case of—and I paid him by giving him this [00:52:00] painting. And he died recently, maybe a year ago. And we got the painting back and bought it back. So—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So now this is in the Colby College Museum?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Mm?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In the Colby College Museum of Art up in Maine? According to this.

ROSALYN DREXLER: If it says so, great. I mean, I don't remember whether we still have it or whether—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's an interesting collection up there. It's really—Alex Katz has a lot of stuff up there.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Alex Katz, I know Alex. By the way, I'm one of the people who likes his work. I mean—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I like his work and him.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Not that there aren't—I sound as if there's only two. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He's having a—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I'm one of the people—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He's having a moment, I think.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know, I like Alex very much, and I like his work.

LYON: Yeah I know, he—

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's—it looks simple, but it's very clean, and you can do what you want with it. You can look at it and enjoy it. And I guess I'm not that critical when I look at work. If I like it, once again, I like it. So I—he did a nice series of nighttime things with trees and stuff. I thought that was a very nice show. Different than his other stuff. His wife Ada and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I saw her the other day. Just—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, just crossing Broadway and—West Broadway. Near where their loft is.

ROSALYN DREXLER: How is she?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Frail, it looks like.

ROSALYN DREXLER: How old are these people now?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Jeez, I—well, Alex is—he's got to be in his late 80s [89 at time of interview], but he's in such good shape.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Of course.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He just like swims every day or something. He's in great—

ROSALYN DREXLER: They have a wonderful son, too, who's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, Vincent. He's terrific.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. So anyway, so this is *The Defenders*. And this is [00:54:00] *Mad Dog Coll*, I think.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. So he's taken from a poster here, right? And that would have been—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Where I found it, I have no idea. You know, all these things just came to me. You know, all this stuff would pile up in my place. Didn't get rid of anything. So, you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There was another interesting comparison here. They're not on the same—or on adjacent pages, but I wanted to—ah. So this poster—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is a little more sophisticated, the poster for *Toys in the Attic* with Dean Martin smacking Geraldine Page around or something.

ROSALYN DREXLER: A lot of fun that was. God.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And—page 147. And then you made a painting of that, which is really one of—it was a really effective picture [*Put It This Way*, 1963]. I wonder if you could talk about that a little bit?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, I don't think you'll see that subject played out in art before or after. I don't know. Even the—that you actually see it happening. It's almost like an action painting. And she's taking it, and he's just delivered the blow. And it's a kind of violence. It is violence. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, I hadn't made this connection before now, but there is a little bit of a parallel to Leon Golub's pictures of—from the 1980s, where—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know who Leon Golub is. And his wife is a wonderful—was a wonderful artist, too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Nancy Spero, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. But what were you saying? [00:56:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, you know those pictures that he made of mercenaries, and violence and people—and it's—there's some similarity. They're against the neutral background, and just the isolation of the figures, and so on.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. I don't know. All I know is that—I always have a little story about—they had nothing to do with me whatsoever. But then I had an article in *The Nation* that I wrote. Either it was about a movie that had just come out, and a political thing. And we were all out—I guess we had the same accountant, and he invited us out. And for some reason—and they greeted me so warmly. And the only way I could figure out that they would do this is that *The Nation* was such a liberal thing that they read all the time. And for me to be connected to it brought them close to me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That makes sense.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Politically they were really—very important to them.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes, yes. Well, Leon and Alloway were quite good friends. Leon thought the world of him. Thought—you know. And Leon was a smart guy. I always took that to be a really good sign for Alloway.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Alloway was very, very nice to me. I just met him, and we had drinks and talked about the show that he was interested in from the show at Reuben, up on the Guggenheim. And it came to be. And he had a painting of mine in his office all the time that he was there at the Guggenheim.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really? No kidding?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, kept it in his office.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, that's interesting.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But nothing else came of it. You know, I was there, and [00:58:00]—whatever.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, that seems odd in a way. Because the work was so visible at that time, that—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And also I had that kind of retrospective at the Grey. Grey Art—NYU thing. And it was a beautiful, beautiful show. And no offer—no nothing after it. But that's prevalent. That was prevalent at times. You know, I waited, and here it is.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Finally!

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. But it's like—an artist I saw that I loved—did I mention it?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Caroline Herrera.

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, Carmen. Carmen Herrera.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, Carmen Herrera, sorry.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. I admire her greatly. And I love that work. You wouldn't know it, it didn't—it has an internal narrative for me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, but her—you know, the clean lines, the primary colors—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, that's what I like.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is your aesthetic, kind of. Except that there wouldn't be a figure in her work, but—

CHRISTOPHER BARTON [Gallery Assistant]: I'm sorry. I thought we did have stuff on site from that time that was showable. We do not. [Inaudible.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, could you call Garth? Because he was going to do something for us along those lines.

CHRISTOPHER BARTON: I did. He should be back soon. And I just told him what you were interested in, what time period. And he'll be back and—we do have some stuff, but I don't—it's things recently recovered.

ROSALYN DREXLER: We can look at it in the computer, in his laptop.

CHRISTOPHER BARTON: Sure, yeah. Because a large amount of stuff went off site to PNZ [ph] that we had brought back. So he should be back soon. We'll see what he says. [01:00:00]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Okay, great. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER BARTON: Sorry.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Thank you. I'm sorry, too, because you should see—the work is so different. More playful and had to do with circus images.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really? Oh, I'd like to see that, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. It had the woman who's cut in half.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah! Okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I have a wonderful painting called *City Planner*. It's marvelous. And it opens up and it's just bare white, but the city planner is proud of his work. He's there. But the painting is a beautiful painting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You made a series of paintings, too—they're kind of curious—of men and machines toward the end of the '60s.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What is—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well—this is—I found it very interesting the absorption and the relationship of men to machines that they use, that they could control the machine. It didn't work, they could get rid of it. It was like a sexual relationship, but a cold sexual relationship, which is possible. So yeah, the concentration of men and their relationship to objects that work for them. Any kind of—you know. And then their interest in it and their connection to something they could control. That was the men and machines thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, here's that picture, yeah [*The Lesson (Men and Machines)*, 1962].

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And this is—here is the instructor. Once again, it's men with—these are movie machines.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, I just want to make a note that *Fresh News* [1965] from the Men and Machines series, 1965, is up in the adjacent room while we're speaking.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And then—that Men and Machines [01:02:00] painting, that was stolen from—and also an Alice Neel—

[END OF DAY 2; TRACK 1.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: [00:00:00]—painting was stolen from a show at Pratt. I think it was 1975.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. No kidding?

ROSALYN DREXLER: And then we got a call, my husband and I, that they saw the painting hanging on the side of a Frankfurter stand.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What? That's so strange!

ROSALYN DREXLER: And then we rushed down all the way to the Lower East Side to see if it was so. We could never find it. Well, it took years and years to get this painting back. Garth found it. I think it was on auction or—to people who had it. We didn't want to deal with it anymore—[inaudible]—so we had to buy it back. My painting that was stolen from Pratt. Alice never got her painting back. But she was always very—you know, "Oh well." And she knew that some—she thought some addict had stolen the paintings from Pratt. Oh well. She didn't care. And then an I. Rice Pereira painting was stolen at the same time. It was those three. And I probably am the only one who retrieved this painting, which I personally like a lot.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You don't know someone named Ann Kone do you, who was at Pratt at that time [director of the Pratt Gallery]?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. Okay.

ROSALYN DREXLER: But I never knew anybody who was around anything. It was like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you know Alice well?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Alice? Yes. Alice was a friend. And went up to her studio on the Upper West Side. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did she ever paint you?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No. She wanted to. She loved a dress I had. It was a green peasant dress. It was beautiful. And I never got back up to let her paint me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Snaps fingers.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know, because it would have been nice, and now she's gone. She was always a little [00:02:00] odd. And actually I didn't have eyes for her work at the time. Because they were out of proportion or something.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, kind of expressionistic or something.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, and had—so I wasn't educated enough to see how good they were, or how she—she caught people. This wonderful—that painting of Andy with all—

Q: Oh, isn't that incredible?

ROSALYN DREXLER: —of his bandages or whatever.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, and the scars—

ROSALYN DREXLER: That is incredible.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's an amazing picture.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. And then she did a number of people like that. And the only other sort of portrait painter that I knew and liked was Elaine de Kooning did terrific. She was a very fast painter.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was she?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. She did a lot of portraits of people that she knew. Yeah. I remember she did a painting of Pelé, the soccer champ. And also of Tom Hess, and Harold Rosen[berg]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Didn't she do a Kennedy for *Time* magazine?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, of course. She was down in Florida. And she did the portrait that is probably hanging up there. She was painting him down there and—I have a photograph of Caroline with her little easel and Elaine doing the president, and little Caroline is next to her doing whatever she did on her baby thing. Yeah, Elaine was down there doing the former president. Unfortunate.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Just returning to things that hit you like fists and bullets.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You're quoted, "I like to paint things in action. I'm a violent person myself, [00:04:00] but it's not a sublimation. It doesn't stop me. I mean, the pictures can be violent, and I can be."

ROSALYN DREXLER: Not that I like it. No, I'm just trying to think about what the truth is in that particular area. I mean, I don't actually think I'm a terribly violent person. I don't—I mean, I might get angry if I drop an egg on the floor, but—you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I take this to mean that you were saying that the viewer shouldn't suppose that you're sublimating something in the picture. That the picture is what the picture is, and I am what I am.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, absolutely. Never the twain shall meet.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] No, but that's important. You know, because the notion behind ab-ex, that it's somehow an effusion of an interior state and everything like that. You're really insisting on the autonomy of the picture. The picture is—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, of course. The picture is of itself. I mean, if it had legs, it would walk away. But—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But that's an important aspect of your creative position, so to say. Because not all artists subscribe to that. And that's a little bit what Gilman is talking about in relation to your plays. You know, that—he derides plays that pretend to be about something deep, and you've got to interpret them. He said there's no interpretation here. What you need to know is in front of you and—

ROSALYN DREXLER: And you can do what you want with the information—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's the thing.

ROSALYN DREXLER: —that you own anyway. So any person who looks at a work, they don't own the work, but they own what it means to them. Yeah. So I guess—gee, I'd love for you to see some of the '80s work. I mean, there's so much of it. [00:06:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It sounds like we may have to wait for a presentation. I thought he was going to put some images together for us.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I did, too. I don't want to hold you up. I mean, I am enjoying it. And I—your time?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm not on any schedule.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, you're not. I was afraid that you were—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, not at all. Well, the one thing I did want to talk to you a little bit further about in relation to all of that is the images of fighters—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Wait, I'm going to try to get him, find out what the heck's going on.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Let me—this is an extraordinary picture. I mean, it's—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I didn't—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: She's about to get it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. It looks like I did it, or I discarded it because I didn't feel that it was painted interestingly enough.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

ROSALYN DREXLER: But it's an evidence of something.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, what I was curious about was the—page 153-54, yeah—oh, and—so these are—there are some more recent works here.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah. I like that painting a lot [*Take Down*, 1963].

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, that's really interesting. So this—I'm curious about this—you talked before about action paintings. You know, you're trying to capture something, some moment of violence or action, or impact, or—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. I wasn't really interested in the emotional impact of it, or I wasn't into what is boxing. And then—you know. But I liked this. I liked to paint the loneliness of the activity and the quietness of the—what's happening? Hi.

GARTH GREENAN: Are you guys still talking? [00:08:00]

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes. We want to see—even in your laptop—pictures from the '80s? He has no idea whatsoever.

GARTH GREENAN: Oh, that's easy. We thought we were doing a good thing by leaving you alone.

ROSALYN DREXLER: What did he say?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Thought he was doing a good thing by leaving us alone. We're fine.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, but we haven't completed the—he has no idea of anything I've done, like the circus pictures.

GARTH GREENAN: That's easy. *Your Life: The Magic Show* [ph].

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, okay.

GARTH GREENAN: Hold on. So this is where I can be useful. All right.

ROSALYN DREXLER: My uncle did—I didn't mention this. My Uncle Moe—yes—took us down Second Avenue to see—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, to the Yiddish theater.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yes, you did mention that.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That was about it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. That was interesting. No, it just occurred to me—my wife does work at Lincoln Center, so she got us some tickets to see *Oslo* tonight. This big play about the attempt to make a peace agreement in the Middle East, and it's got a lot of attention, and so on, and so forth. But that made me think, I wonder if you go to the theater, watch any—

ROSALYN DREXLER: No. Now it would be more difficult at this moment. But we're going to take in some theater.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That sounds good.

ROSALYN DREXLER: With their help.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That sounds—

GARTH GREENAN: Well, because Brian has a theater background. Rosie [pronounces it "Rozzie"], the only reason it's taking me time is there are literally hundreds of objects, and I'm just ordering them right now.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah. Get past them and just show us a couple of paintings. [00:10:00] He has no idea of the style of—

GARTH GREENAN: I know, but I'm going to show you a ton of paintings. You're going to see Rosalyn Drexler unbound.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Would you like some water?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, no, no. I still have—oh, I still have a drop of coffee.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I couldn't—I have to say, that I couldn't believe how entertaining *The Line of Least Existence*. I was imagining a production of it in my head. You know, just sort of thinking, This would be such fun to stage.

GARTH GREENAN: Well, during her—so she's got an upcoming show, and that show will feature—we're going to have two different readings during the show directed by some pretty good—pretty decent people. Do you want me to go through the '90s, too?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, I think just—I was just interested in the '70s, early '80s, because I couldn't get a handle on that. If that's convenient.

ROSALYN DREXLER: So anyway.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That'll be great, the reading. But there's also—they're so physical, those plays.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's different. The plays—yeah, the plays are—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean, it's—you really want to—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, physical and visual.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. When is the last time that—

ROSALYN DREXLER: You haven't read *Occupational Hazard*, I suppose?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No. I have—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Or *Sweet Tooth*?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I have this book at home, the one—the Gilman collection.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I don't know what's in there. Probably some little early plays.

GARTH GREENAN: Which one?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This guy.

GARTH GREENAN: No, that's got *Home Movies*, *The Investigation*, *Hot Buttered Roll*, *The Line of Least Existence*.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. But I mean, it doesn't—yeah, *Softly* and *Consider the Nearness*. But it doesn't have the play with Cornell. [00:12:00]

GARTH GREENAN: That's *Occupational*—or that's *Utopia Parkway*, which became *Occupational Hazards*.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay.

GARTH GREENAN: So this is called *Mafia in the Abstract*. This is from 1970. There are three of these.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GARTH GREENAN: This is small, but it's great. And this is before you took a break. So you've got 55—so you can scroll—so this is how you can scroll through these.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh huh, okay.

GARTH GREENAN: You just use this arrow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Show a few more of these mafia—

GARTH GREENAN: Well, he can scroll—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I can pop through them, yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, you know how?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I can see what he's doing here. Okay. Huh.

GARTH GREENAN: That's 1980. That's called *Casualty*. *Friendly Fire*, that's 1980. This is 1982—

ROSALYN DREXLER: These are just small things I did along the way.

GARTH GREENAN: They're very good. This is called *Pink Champagne For Two*.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, god.

GARTH GREENAN: That was your title.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, yeah.

GARTH GREENAN: *Flight 007*, this is 1983. And then if you want the size, you just—

ROSALYN DREXLER: I would like him to see some of the ones that—the woman cut in half, and these circus ones.

GARTH GREENAN: All right, well I'm taking him through the decade. This is '83. This is called *Somewhere in the Night*. This is *Beware, Beware, God Sees You*, which is—you have Rosalyn with her whole kind of panoply. With the old ladies, the avenging angels. This is Rosalyn in Janis Joplin's coat. So this is around the same time as the other paintings with that kind of poignant mask that you see in so many of them. There's *Noel Coward*. These are things that we just found recently. All these little mask paintings. This is a beautiful painting that she did—

ROSALYN DREXLER: It's on its side. [00:14:00]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The masks also look a little bit like those Mexican wrestlers, the ones that wear the—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yeah, yeah. I didn't know that at the time.

GARTH GREENAN: This is how the orientation is, I think on the back, even though it's not how the real painting is. This is called *Cocaine Chow Mein Leave Your Victim in the Rain*, which is from song lyrics to *Starburn*. All right, so these are big paintings. This is *Glasnost*. This is 1988. And this is—I found the source image, which was a piece of newspaper that you crumpled up. And she took a photograph of it and enlarged it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, I crumpled it up and left it there all those years?

GARTH GREENAN: Well, no, and then you made a Xerox of it. I found it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Okay, thank you.

GARTH GREENAN: This is from a famous spread in *Life* magazine, I think.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, is that Andy and Basquiat?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah.

GREENAN: She did a couple. Here's *Marlene Dietrich in Hell*. That's 1988. This is '88, *Mafia Funeral. Masked Reader, Masked Trio, Money Mad*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That one's reproduced in here.

GARTH GARTH GREENAN: This is called *Nazi in the Garden*. This is a great painting.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That you saw.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, I saw that.

GARTH GREENAN: Yeah, *Night Riders*. Or—sorry, *Night Visitors*. This is *Our Lady of Doves*. This is a fantastic painting. Have you seen this one?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No.

ROSALYN DREXLER: What—

GARTH GREENAN: This is a great painting.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, I know. That was sort of an abortion thing. It was in a special show.

GARTH GREENAN: About abortion, at Exit Art.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I see the knife. Okay. I got it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And the blood from behind the screen. And the—[inaudible]—piece. You saw that?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm.

GARTH GREENAN: Yeah, that's Dutch Schultz.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What's with the Tlingit mask? Just became fascinated by it or?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Well, yes I did. Oh, look at this one. This is a big one. [00:16:00]

GARTH GREENAN: Yeah, this is—what is it, Reagan? It's Reagan—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Three presidents and Khrushchev, probably, at the end?

GARTH GREENAN: It's Reagan, Gorbachev—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, Gorbachev.

GARTH GREENAN: Because it's in the same time as *Glasnost*. But it's Reagan, Gorbachev, and probably Helmut Kohl, with some crazy machine behind them like *Men and Machines*. There's Andy. This is along the lines of—it's called *Thoughtful Bastard. Waiting Room. You Ain't Getting Out of Here Alive*. This is a very important painting. This is reproduced in a lot of books. There's one coming out recently—or coming out—I forget what it is. But it's Thames & Hudson or somebody, but it's Ana Mendieta. It's called *Ana Falling Was She Pushed*. That's 1989. *Chess Champs*, 1989. *Chuck Watches Rescue*, Mr. Close.

ROSALYN DREXLER: There's one of my favorites.

GARTH GREENAN: But you can see with *City Planner*, right, which is one of my favorite paintings, especially because it has the state of—looks like the state of Florida, which is responsible for so many of our collective woes. And this kind of lizard man. But this tree's background, right, is very similar to this, which is 1979. Sorry, I'm just going to skip way forward. It's just interesting for comparison.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Great. Well, this is—

ROSALYN DREXLER: You went past something. Yeah.

GARTH GREENAN: Okay, there you go.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That one was good. That—

GARTH GREENAN: So this is part of the series of works called *Life: The Magic Show*, which were all about the circus. [00:18:00] And you have this woman with garters here, the boobs, with these—horse-headed ringmaster, with these kind of celestial-looking acrobats. This was *The Greatest Show on Earth*. These were only shown once. We're going to have some of them in the exhibition this fall. These were shown at—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, this crummy place.

GARTH GREENAN: It wasn't really a gallery.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It wasn't a gallery.

GARTH GREENAN: It was called La MaMa La Galleria. Which, I think the only reason it was called La MaMa La Galleria is because Rosalyn said that. Well, La MaMa, you know, is an important theater, but—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So it's down at like Second Avenue there or something?

ROSALYN DREXLER: It was far east, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Way far east, somewhere.

GARTH GREENAN: This we recently unearthed. It's a beautiful little painting called *Little Horse, Who Made Thee*, which has this sort of Romulus and Remus thing going on with the teats.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, the teats. Yeah.

GARTH GREENAN: But you ever notice those sculptures of Romulus and Remus underneath the she-wolf?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Of course, of course. Underneath the—

GARTH GREENAN: This is a favorite.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So Andy and Basquiat going on a road trip there?

GARTH GREENAN: Yes, so *Maui Wowie* which is obviously a—[inaudible].

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, right. You mentioned this in our last session.

GARTH GREENAN: And then these are—Brian and I actually have them. These are these two Hawaiian shirts that Ros bought for Sherman. And if you look at the painting, each of the things—when you—to make the painting, she made—the enlargements for the collage elements are taken from copying his shirt, and then putting them on the—so you can see like each alligator, or flamingo, or check, or whatever is taken off the shirt. But this is all her. And the thing about this work, right, is all of the circus paintings—I mean, you should—this is an important thing. This is—these are just you. There's no collage in these paintings.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's true. Oh.

GARTH GREENAN: This is just you working from images.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. I'm sorry, what's the title? Oh, *Greatest Show on Earth*, 1989. [00:20:00] I'm just saying for the record. Yeah, okay.

GARTH GREENAN: Do you want me to get out of here and let him flip through?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No, I want to see the woman cut in half.

GARTH GREENAN: She's at the end. So this is your return to an earlier piece from '62. So this was like *The Artist or Rosie Watching Herself on TV. Midnight Blue*, I like this painting very much.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah. We're coming to a self-portrait. Oh, this is a—

GARTH GREENAN: So this was from the same—like *Vogue* magazine spread, or *Vanity Fair*, where it had Basquiat in his white silk pajamas, shortly after he died. This is *Nothing to be Gained Here*.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Fiercely protecting the poor guy. That's my self-portrait.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, that's so—can you talk about that a little bit? So it's got a helmet, and then there's an airplane, or a model airplane—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, and I have a paintbrush, and I have all the things going for me that are going for me in real life. I traveled a lot. And I thought a lot. And I have a paintbrush and my little red boots

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And a tie, and a blue shirt.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, which showed that I was not aggressively female.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And this interesting frame around it, which—the character is sort of breaking the frame.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh yes. I'm in and out of all of my lives.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How big is that picture?

GARTH GREENAN: Sixty by 30, 50 by 40, something like that. I can tell you right now. Forty-eight by 36.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So fairly substantial, yeah.

GARTH GREENAN: Yeah, standard sizes for Rosie are like 30 by 50. I mean, for larger paintings, 30 by 50, [00:22:00] 50 by 30, 40 by 50, 50 by 40. And then there's a handful that are 60 by 50, 72 by 60. But the biggest painting, single painting, she ever made was 72 by 96, which is in the pictures [ph], at least during the '60s.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] That's fun.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, that's weighing—

GARTH GREENAN: *Scales of Justice, Art vs. Sex*.

ROSALYN DREXLER: It shows that they're equal. I just realized the—no one is higher than the other.

GARTH GREENAN: You've got the paintbrush and the penis, and then possibly Hatshepsut, for whom you have an affinity.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Or—yeah. It's not Hatshepsut, it's—

ROSALYN DREXLER: You got a headache?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, no, I'm trying to think—Nut, the Egyptian goddess who weighs—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, yes. You can see the upside-down—that's what I was doing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, she weighs the soul against the feather.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's what I was doing, yeah. It takes an intelligent viewer to ferret me out.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, that's our acquaintance Nancy Spero. She was very into that stuff. That's why I know about it. Ah, there you go.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I like that one.

GARTH GREENAN: Yeah, that's *Woman Sawed in Half. From Here to Eternity*. There's several versions of that. [00:24:00] *Fate of the Nation*, summit meeting. All these scary actors. These are things that we've recently unearthed. This is *Jake, Vikki, and the Kids*, Jake LaMotta, the boxer, and his family looking like the Flintstones. Or Gauguin.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is an interesting picture.

GARTH GREENAN: In 1991. This is related to an early print called *Emilio Meets the Enchantress*, where his hair is curlier. And this is *Up in Smoke*, 1991. Anyway.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

GARTH GREENAN: So you can blow through—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, no, this is great.

GARTH GREENAN: Well, I'll leave this with you. You can blow through that. All right.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Thanks, Garth.

GARTH GREENAN: All right. I'll leave you guys alone.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How are we doing? My goodness, it's almost three o'clock. [Laughs.] Well, I had really intended to end with talking to you a little bit about the romantic pictures. So—whoops. Where is it. Oh, this one's really great. There are several of these pictures that are a kind of compilation, where you kind of assemble your—this one is *Beware, Beware, God Sees You*, 1986—where these different—they're found characters, but you've made them your own. And they return as if they are actors in some larger drama of yours.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's a fun way to think about it, yeah. Here I am controlling all of these images that I had in other work.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I love the wings, these kind of bat wings that these characters—whatever. [00:26:00]

ROSALYN DREXLER: But as you can see, I mean, I've done a lot of other—you didn't know I was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I didn't know you was so prolific. [They laugh.]

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But this puts a really different cast on your art career. That this has been like a constant activity—

ROSALYN DREXLER: Nobody knew about, in a way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —really since the late '50s that hasn't—that's gone underground for long periods. And yet it was—in your life, it was ongoing.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

ROSALYN DREXLER: That's upside down.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: These are great. This one's really interesting. Who is it reminding me of?

ROSALYN DREXLER: *Glasnost*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Painting the—oh, what's his name? Terrible. Why are we so interested in Basquiat and Andy? What's the fascination?

ROSALYN DREXLER: Great sympathy for them. For Andy, and then the story of Basquiat, dying at 27, buying the whole myth of the romantic artist, still that—you know, drugs and falling under that whole thing. I'm not sure how he fell into the drugs. He comes from a normal, educated, middle-class family. And then he met his end. I mean, a talent such as his. I don't know. I have great sympathy for that, and for his [00:28:00] falling prey to the story, as I—the story of the artist who—drugs, and dies young, and all that "romantic," in quotes, stuff. And Andy also falls prey to himself, and yet goes to church every Sunday with his mom. A very shy guy, actually, very shy, and needed the protection of everybody who came to him. I mean, he needed them as much as they needed him. And it was that kind of thing. You don't really hear much—maybe I don't know enough about Andy—of having a close relationship—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's true—

ROSALYN DREXLER: — a romantic, that wasn't—his strong relationship was with his mom. And all the other things that were going on around him, it wasn't—his life was an intellectual idea that it went riot. I mean, he started out, what, designing shoes and stuff for window dressings and stuff. And it just grew from there. And I think he was like behind it, and organizing it. And people were doing the work that most artists would do by themselves. And he was able to stand off, and observe it, and give orders. And it was like a merry bunch of discards.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you visit the Factory when he was there?

ROSALYN DREXLER: No. No. Never. Never. And that—the woman who shot him?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, Valerie Solanas.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Solanas, yeah. I have [00:30:00] the little booklet she wrote about cutting up men or something. She was really nuts, and she left a copy of the play called *Up Your Ass*. Which, I mean—I said, Wow! And this is the thing that she acted upon, that he had stolen her idea and blah, blah, blah. And didn't give her credit, and was using her. And Andy called my husband. He said, "I'm not sure, is this a woman or a man who—" You know, that's—she came knocking on—he wasn't—he was in a daze. He didn't know what the heck was going on with her. And he didn't even know it was really a woman. [They laugh.] So whatever. And still a paranoiac. She was—I don't know what. And finally shot him, the big shot. Shocked all of us. Well, anyway. Anyway.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. I think we'll stop there.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yeah, I think you have to—yes.

[END OF DAY 2; TRACK 2]

ROSALYN DREXLER: He gave me a script, and I improvised at the college. But when *SNL* began, I don't think that I was thought of as a particularly funny person for that kind of thing. And actually Lorne hadn't even begun. Michael was the one who was the driving force. Lorne [Michaels] had only done some short things in Canada. He comes from Canada. So once again, I was there. The opportunity—people didn't think of me as the funny guy that I really was. It was my kind of thing. So—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, you were a little bit ahead of your time. I mean, the kind of humor you do would—seems to me to be very, very relevant now.

ROSALYN DREXLER: I know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You know, with—now that women are—have really taken the lead, I think, in so much comedy. And also a certain kind of sexual honesty that maybe wasn't possible back then.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Oh, that—what's her name, Cho? The Chinese—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I don't know her.

ROSALYN DREXLER: She always does funny things about her mother and her personal life. And then they go into all these sexual stuff. And that's going to be tired after a while, too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. Nevertheless, I mean, when it's done as funny—in as funny a way as you did it, it doesn't get tired. I've found myself sitting there laughing while I was reading this stuff.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Thank you. That's—oh, thank you so much. I really appreciate that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I know. I mean it. I mean it.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Because I was at the Vanguard, the Village Vanguard, when [00:02:00] Lenny Bruce was arrested.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really? Wow.

ROSALYN DREXLER: And it was really awful. And he really didn't like—he didn't think, Oh, that's great, they're going to arrest me for my wonderful—but it was serious. They put him out of business then, at a live—so anyway. He was wonderful at the time. And he—but then the comedians that came afterwards thought they could get an easy laugh by talking about—using words that he was arrested for. In fact, I was banned in Boston. One of my plays—I think it was that same play that Sherman directed. But he didn't direct it in Boston. Another company did it. And if I had gone to Boston after the play had opened, they would have arrested me. And Jules Feiffer and other people had to write letters saying that I was not a pornographer, or whatever. You know why? Something—the lovers were in a car. The lights were out. But then there was lights flashing, and the car was bouncing up and down. So they closed the play in Boston, because something might have happened in the car. And I had to get letters. I couldn't go to Boston. I mean—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [They laugh.] Then again, why would you ? But still. Wow. That's amazing how things have changed.

ROSALYN DREXLER: Yes, yes, yes. But now—like Louis [C] K or the—he's wonderful.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He is terrific.

ROSALYN DREXLER: He doesn't rely on that kind of humor. He has a very interesting kind of humor.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, this really pointed social humor. He did an opening bit on [00:04:00] *Saturday Night Live* not long ago—

[END OF INTERVIEW.]