

REMEMBERING MY FATHER BY DAVID MEANS  
WITH DONALD TRUMP AND HIS MISFITS BY PAUL WOOD

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#SAVEOURCHILDREN

ILLNESS IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA  
BY HELEN OUYANG



Bothner's Gymnasium, where suits lifted weights next to carnival performers, among whom there were, according to the art historian Allison Unruh's contribution to the catalogue, "dwarfs tumbling, an old lady in a tutu who hung from the ceiling, and a man who rode a unicycle as his wife performed a headstand on his head." In early 1959, Drexler began wrestling. A 1957 spread for *Ultra* magazine, "From the Private Photo Album of a Mat Queen," shows her modeling in brassiere and garters, and hunched in a staggered stance. Her expression is impassive, her hands open, and her fingers flexed, as if to say, *Come and get it!* Her friend Andy Warhol copied this image for a silk screen—a dozen ghostly, crouching Drexlers in red and blue, ready to vanquish life or scoop it into a crushing bear hug.

"I wasn't trying to be an artist, be a writer," she told an interviewer in 1975. "I wasn't even trying to be a wife. All these things are a sorta natural process to me." Drexler's notion of the natural was playful and dark, idiosyncratic and mass-produced. She began making sculpture in the mid-1950s, and a few years later turned to painting. Her method was bricolage. She would paste blown-up reproductions of clippings and photographs onto rich monochrome backgrounds and paint over them with acrylic. The sources she chose were generally "vulgar"—B-movie posters of G-men, gangsters, or molls, as well as newspaper advertisements, Weegee photos, and images of boxers. Many of her canvases feature a man and a woman locked in an embrace that could be rape or seduction, or one person stalking or striking or holding down another. Drexler's figures tend to be caught mid-gesture, with an arm flung out or raised high, but their bodies are often placed off-center, so that they seem to be falling into an abyss. "My pictures are like ice floes," she said, "jarred loose and floating nowhere. On them, the people act violently, but their foothold is melting."

Drexler does not treat her themes of power, sex, violence, abuse, and jealousy despairingly. "I perform rescue work," she said. "I peruse the sewer with wonder and love." And with a

wicked, deranged sense of humor. In her novel *To Smithereens* (1972), a proper named Paul hides out in the men's room at the movie theater, glued to the toilet and contemplating his pleasures: "As I so often ask myself, 'Dear God, why do I get hot for big?' The very question gets me hot. To be overcome by big! To be handled roughly by the last in line, the funky fat, the tough tomboy!" In the play *Room 17C* (1984), Linda Normal, based on Linda Loman from *Death of a Salesman*, shares a hotel room with a seductive cockroach named Sammy Greer (also him). When her son catches them together, he demands to know, "What does he have that Dad doesn't?" Linda's response: "Feelers! He has feelers!"

It's hard not to read a scene from the play *The Writer's Opera* (1979) as Drexler's ars poetica. Susan, a woman in her early forties, comes onstage pushing a shopping cart filled with newspapers and magazines. Armed with some paste and a pair of scissors, she begins cutting out words and arranging them into a list. She sings:

If you want to be a writer  
Learns to cut and paste  
Nothing is worth saving  
but waste.

Any small scrap  
might carry within it  
a great idea

So whatever you find  
that's broken  
splintered  
or loose,  
gather it up  
make it whole  
tape it down . . .

Intelligence and wit bind all of Drexler's work, as strong as crazy glue.

I can't say for sure, but I think Bernadette Mayer would approve of Susan's song. Mayer's new collection, *WORKS AND DAYS* (New Directions, \$15.95), mixes poems and journal entries, glorying in both the burgeoning of spring and the accidents and interruptions of language. "It's Arbor Day eve," she writes on April 24. "Words chosen at random by cutting circles in a piece of paper



placed over workshop's poems. Making syntax not sense, the illusion of sense. It's like going to the weight room. I think the bluebirds will occupy that house."

Mayer, who has been publishing what they call avant-garde poetry since the late Sixties, is an artist of rhythms and record-keeping. She is known for projects like *Maintenance Day*, a book-length poem she wrote in one day in 1978, and the gallery show *Memory*, which exhibited the rolls of film that she shot every day for a month in 1971. The first piece in *Works and Days* is a twenty-five-item list of "Payment for some Mohican land": 300 guilders in sewan, twenty scissors, one barrel of beer, etc. This prepares the soil for what follows: local history, some energetic railing against ecological disaster and Wall Street, complaints about "the guy who bought the field" and turned it into "a white man's manicured lawn," the assertion that "property is robbery," and reports from daily life. "Not only that, it's Sunday and the local paper didn't arrive," reads the entry for June 1. "Now it did: it's still Sunday though."

Talking about these poems is less interesting than hearing them, so I'll quote a stanza I like and you can read it aloud. This one is from "The Sexual Organs of the IRS":

I got a supernova for xmas  
It had two sides, it glowed, I shared  
It with my sister, it made our vaginas  
feel good

At first we were shocked like when  
you see a creek monster

"Searching" by Carol E. Richards