



Excerpts from the 1971 Journal
of Rosemary Mayer

Edited by Marie Warsh

Soberscove Press
Chicago

Editor's Introduction (2020)

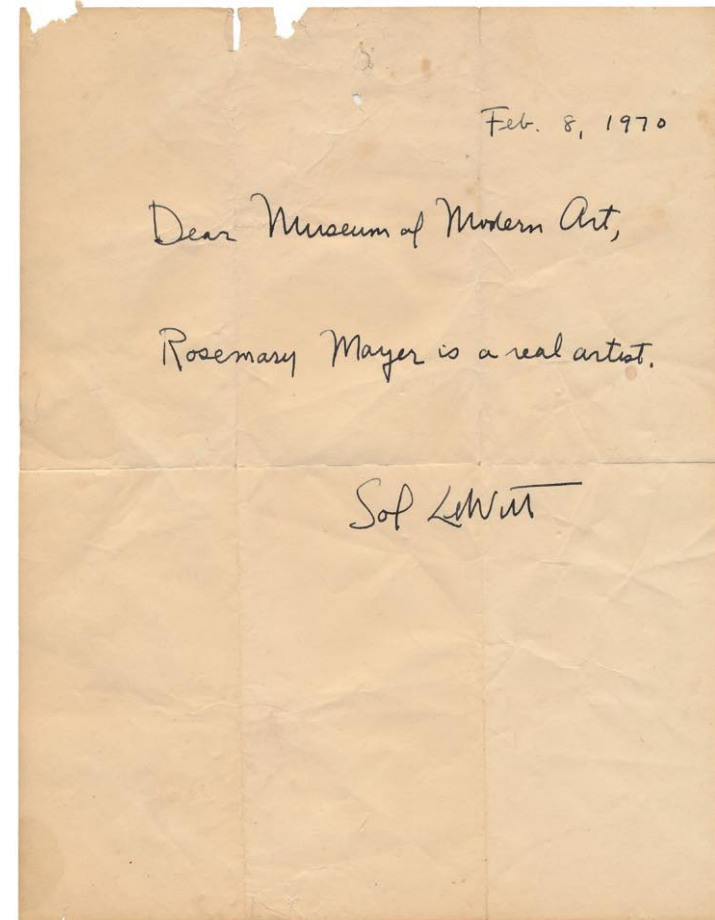
Preparing this introduction to the expanded edition of *Excerpts from the 1971 Journal of Rosemary Mayer* has been a process of reflection. A lot has happened in the three years since the first edition was published: additional shows and publications of Rosemary's work, new research by scholars, and a website. In some instances, it was the journal that led directly to new projects. Julia Klein, publisher of Sobercove Press, read and loved the journal and subsequently sought out the estate with the idea for a publication about Rosemary's work. This resulted in *Temporary Monuments: Work by Rosemary Mayer, 1977–1982*. Published in 2018, the book consists of documentation of Rosemary's ephemeral installations and sculptures, and it is the first presentation of this body of work. This project led us back to the journal, when Julia suggested that Sobercove publish a second edition. In addition to making the publication more widely available, this project also offered the opportunity to share more of Rosemary's writing about her life in 1971. The goal to reveal more, I am now realizing, made this project feel very different than when I was working on the first edition.

When I compiled the first edition, exactly three years ago, Rosemary was relatively unknown as an artist. The project was conceived as part of her first major show since the 1980s as a way to provide an introduction to Rosemary and a context for her work—

and to give her a voice. Between the pages of her journal, I found a curious document that spoke to her own desire and struggle for visibility as an artist—a handwritten letter from 1970 by Sol LeWitt, addressed to the Museum of Modern Art, that declared “Rosemary Mayer is a real artist.” I like to imagine the scenario in which this letter was conceived—perhaps at a dinner party at which Rosemary expressed frustration about the lack of interest in her work, leading LeWitt, known for his generosity with other artists, to offer this endorsement. Small holes at the top of the document suggest that it was tacked to the wall, perhaps in her studio, a reminder for someone whose confidence in herself often wavered. Reflecting on the editing process for the first edition of *Excerpts from the 1971 Journal of Rosemary Mayer*, I realize now that my intent was to show that Rosemary was indeed a real artist.

At first I was apprehensive about introducing her through her journal. It felt like a great responsibility, overwhelming at times, to have access to this material and to figure out how to present it. While I wanted to portray her honestly, I also wanted to respect her privacy. In a journal from the late 1970s, she wondered about who would eventually read her journals, but she was not writing for an audience. While working on this project, my perspectives kept shifting—from niece, to art historian, to co-manager of Rosemary’s estate—in a way that was somewhat confusing. I worried that her incessant expressions of self-doubt would turn people off. I decided to keep it short.

But Rosemary’s struggles, which I was worried about sharing, were what readers responded to most. Many artists and women, and particularly women artists, expressed feeling like they could really relate to Rosemary’s artistic development and were struck by her honesty and self-awareness. Art historian Katie Geha, who curated a show of Rosemary’s work at the University of Georgia, Athens, was impressed by the convergence of art and daily life that defined Rosemary’s world. Geha wrote to me: “I find comfort in the



Journal Excerpts



Friday Jan. 1, 1971 6:30PM

Yellow satin & white paint is an illusion (is that the right word) of light like blue one is of liquid.

Very funny state tonight. Restoned fr. last night w.o. new grass.—

New thoughts: to stop being invulnerable—before everything could get to me—now nothing can—the next step is to let selected aspects of the real stuff of days get to me. New Year's thought—

Since last Sat.: No work—emptied the walls, hung up about 6' square of dacron but nothing. I labeled another (duplicate) set of slides & I am all prepared to go up there on Tues. I really think I'll do it.

V & K may have found a loft.¹ They are too busy.

Sun. I went to Bay Ridge & saw Noberini.² Boring. Gossip.

Mon. nite John & I went to see Gimme Shelter.³ Mick Jagger worship.

Wed. found out the drawing place isn't buying until after Jan. 15.

Another one in the Voice to check out on Thurs. Mon. Hannah is giving me some material.⁴

1 Artist Vito Acconci and his girlfriend Kathy Dillon. Rosemary and Vito married in 1962; they separated in 1968 but stayed friends for several years.

2 Mary Noberini, a classmate of Rosemary's from St. Joseph's College, which she attended from 1960–62.

3 Artist John Campione, a close friend and occasional lover.

4 The poet Hannah Weiner worked as a lingerie designer for A. H. Schreiber Co. and would often supply Rosemary with fabric. Rosemary calls her "H" throughout the journal.

The Aloneness hit me briefly this afternoon. To have continuity with no one.

Thurs. nite cooked dinner for John. Scallops & fennel & sweet potato. A good meal. But he was wrecked fr. being stoned. Too low keyed a New Year's Eve. John has a girlfriend, whose good points, he says, are "sweetness" and being flat-chested.

Thurs. January 7, 1971

It's freezing. Cookie cooking. Hazy-headed either fr. Thursday collapse or maybe it's too much V & K—Look what the cat's done. New cat—Leibinity—all those monads stretching in the morning sunshine.

Drying hair in Ridgewood backyard.⁵ Pecan-Apple-Fennel Cookies—but they taste dull.

I took the slides to Bykert & Curtis says he will be there in Mar. to look. They are at Paula Cooper's now.⁶ The Cultural Center is still up in the air.

I made a diagonal piece an almost square rectangle turned on the diagonal & I will make more rectangular pieces turned diagonally—w. string for folds & the paint—it looks so much like sails—bec. it's loose. Paint almost horizontal—a little off—I like it that way.

Things to think about—illusion—does it still happen w. o. a flat surface? It seems I've solved all the problems I set out to—getting my idiosyncratic choices out of there, taste and arrangement—making something that makes itself—letting things be themselves—finding a way that gives room to let colors play—the process makes the art—but now maybe it's fine to take this so far and go further—the diagonal rectangle—will allow the fabric to drape whc. I've

⁵ This may be a memory of growing up in Ridgewood in Brooklyn.

⁶ Rosemary was contacting some of the more prominent galleries at the time and inviting them to see her work. Bykert Gallery, located on the Upper East Side from 1966 until 1975, was one of the most influential. "Curtis" refers to the art dealer Klaus Kertess, the co-founder and director. In subsequent entries, Rosemary refers to him as "CC" or "KK" and again as "Curtis." Paula Cooper established the first gallery in Soho and, in 1971, was showing the work of Lynda Benglis, Robert Grosvenor, and Joel Shapiro.

always wanted to have happen but would never see my way to letting happen—there never seemed to be justification

With stain (long oblong shape) horizontal—they will look like water—definitely very liquid—& placid & natural as opposed to the very un placid diagonal—whc. reminds me of sails and the string helps that connotation.

!Imagine that!-----> A piece that's 2 pieces of fabric—2 dif. fabrics -----

Macy's tom. for fabric

Have to think up some way of putting down a lot of close colors all next to one another—watercolors and gouache.

Narrow minded bastards who think objects are only decoration—automatically assuming that bec. a thing is attractive or interesting to look at it's not anything else. Real visual art has to continue—it's a human need—to see challenging beautiful things—& beauty is in the nature of materials as equally as it is in thoughts, process, structures, activities, reactions.

Beauty—Taste? Compare art & architecture—No one would want a Rauschenberg building—Robert Morris' stuff looks like buildings—old rect. bldg.

Paint drips, tin cans, rust, tires, old junk—pitted beams—that's a sensibility— the means & there's a message all that JJ shit about frontality & the plane & flatness & painterliness—paint flat stuff w. chiaroscuro strokes—the artist's elegant marks—

In Oldenberg's drawings too—elegant marks. Amazing Rothko & Newman are dead—there's an elegance—but not so personalized

as to show the hand, the brush—but the way w. paint—

Things are down to the basics now w. me—no, they were with the canvas & orange paint pieces—they're going on now to new stuffs—new fabrics—the paint's still the same—more play w. colors now.