



PENNY SLINGER

AN EXORCISM REVISITED

ARTIST IN CONVERSATION WITH DR. KATHY BATTISTA

DIRECTOR OF CONTEMPORARY ART, SOTHEBY'S INSTITUTE OF ART

SEPTEMBER 10, 2012

OPENING MONDAY SEPTEMBER 10, 2012 6 - 8 PM

EXHIBITION SEPTEMBER 11 - NOVEMBER 30, 2012

HOURS TUESDAY - SATURDAY 11 AM - 6 PM

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FRONT IMAGE: PENNY SLINGER, ENTRANCE, 2012

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AN EXORCISM REVISITED

1977-2012

We are pleased to announce our first solo exhibition with British born artist Penny Slinger, who lives since the 1990s in California.

Penny Slinger started her career as one of the few celebrated women artists in the milieu of the late 1960s 'Swinging London'. She graduated from Chelsea College of Art in 1969, formulating her thesis on Max Ernst and finding her artistic identity in Surrealism. In her own words Slinger recalls that she "was fascinated by the seamless creation of mythological anthropomorphic figures in urban settings where the forces of nature disrupted the status quo".

Through her outstanding interest in Surrealism, Slinger became acquainted with the British painter, poet and biographer Sir Ronald Penrose, organizer of the International Surrealist Exhibition in 1936 (which built the foundation for the British Surrealist movement) and a cofounder of the Institute of Contemporary Art in London. Penrose, married to photographer and Surrealist muse Lee Miller, became a patron of the younger artist and introduced Slinger to his circles, in particular to Max Ernst and his wife, the painter Dorothea Tanning. Having been exposed at an early stage to this intense social and artistic influence, Slinger began to translate Surrealism into a radical new language – above all incorporating vivid and disquieting aspects of the underground and counter-cultural concerns of the late 1960s and 70s, as well as references to Ancient Egyptian imagery and the occult.

In 1969 she was invited to participate in the signature exhibition "Young and Fantastic" at the I.C.A. where she exhibited the radical and eerily Jungian sculpture "Bride in The Bath", based on a life cast in black resin. Slinger's interest was from the beginning clearly focused on a feminist re-formulation of Surrealism's potential for self-transgression, and on an emancipatory exploitation of the realm of sexuality. In the early 1970s, she engaged in various cross-cultural practices, undertaking the set-design and art direction, for the all-women experimental theatre group "Holocaust" as well as appearing as one of the actresses. The groundbreaking and excessive experimentation of this theater collective provided the base for Jane Arden's film "The Other side of The Underneath", recently re-released by the British Film Institute as a rare example of a 1970s underground film work directed by a woman. In 1971 Slinger also engaged with the costume design and art direction for Picasso's play "The Four Little Girls". Successful solo exhibitions followed at Angela Flower Gallery in London presenting Slinger's innovative and provocative assemblage sculptures.

Inspired by the collage work of Max Ernst, and in particular "La Semaine de Bonte" and "La Femme 100 Tête", Slinger published in the same year "50 % - The Visible Woman" – a book that blends visually and intellectually her poetic writing with feminist collage work. "I wanted to make a surrealist statement, from a woman's point of view. Each image and its poem represents a psycho-mythic confrontation, usually about the nature of how a woman is seen and how she sees herself."

"50 % - The Visible Woman" became a milestone for British feminism and a major inspiration for younger women artists who began working in the 1970s looking for inspiration and a radical voice. At the same time Slinger's book infiltrated the imaginative realm of popular culture. Upon its publication, 'Rolling Stone' magazine wrote: "This book will become as important on your bookshelf as Sgt. Pepper is on your rack... '50 % The Visible Woman' is a personification of

everyone's introspection, in a genre that until this time has been reserved for painting and film. Truly a landmark accomplishment in the blending of different art forms."

In 1977 Slinger prominently continued this approach of an art project realized in book form, with the publication "An Exorcism". This project will be at the core of our upcoming exhibition in New York. According to the artist's own words "An Exorcism" is a "surreal romance in photo collage". Roland Penrose wrote the preface for the book, which is structured into biographical chapters and events of a young woman's journey into a new state of consciousness. In most of the images Penny Slinger is using her own body and persona as a model; and the story infers an underlying autobiographical narrative while at the same time transgressing into newly imagined archetypical scenarios and surreal transgression: a form of cultural exorcism, fetishism and sexploitation which is motivated by a feminist perspective. The whole scenery of this crypto-biographical journey is atmospherically staged, - in the English Gothic setting of the stately home of Lilford Hall -, that combines the intense atmosphere of British neo-Romantic painting with the dramatic portent of a horror film.

Penny Slinger worked on this project with her partner of the time Peter Whitehead, who appears as a suave and satanic protagonist in some of the collages. Whitehead was an underground filmmaker who documented the counterculture in London and New York in the late 1960s; notably, 'Wholly Communion' (1965) and 'Tonight Let's All Make Love in London: A Pop Concerto' (1967) and directing in the same year The Rolling Stones film "We love you" responding to the imprisonment for drugs of socialite and art dealer Robert Fraser.

In 1973 Whitehead directed the fictional movie "Daddy", - a film newly reconsidered by feminist art historians -, based on Niki de Saint Phalle's father relation envisioned as an intimate yet absurd sequence of erotic taboo breaking mise-en-scènes. "Daddy" portrayed a woman's attempt to exorcise the influence of her sexually domineering father, in as much as Slinger's collage novel from 1977 portrays a woman on a voyage from being entrapped in a world of repression, phallocentrism and sexual dependencies to transgressing these conditions on a trajectory towards feminist mysticism, - Slinger's outlook at the end of the 1970s.

In her original conception of the "Exorcism" project, Slinger also designed an extended version of the book accompanied by texts she wrote, - a photo novella -, as well as an elaborate film script. The film remained unrealized and the photo novella deluxe edition of the book unpublished. Both elements - in their archival and procedural stages - will be part of the upcoming reconstruction of the "Exorcism" exhibition project at Broadway 1602.

After a long period of interruption of awareness in the contemporary art world for Penny Slinger's innovations and pioneering achievements, her work has recently been re-contextualized in the exhibition *The Dark Monarch: Magic and Modernity in British Art* at the Tate St. Ives (cat.), 2009 (curated by Michael Bracewell, Alun Rowlands and Martin Clark). In the same year Slinger's outstanding contribution to female Surrealism was re-introduced in the exhibition *Angels of Anarchy. Women artists and Surrealism* at Manchester Art Gallery (cat).

Broadway 1602 exhibited Penny Slinger's collage work and sculptures for the first time in 2011 in the group show *Threat. Women Post-Surrealists*.

Anke Kempkes

Exhibition: Opening September 10, 2012

Hours: Tues - Sat 11 am - 6 pm