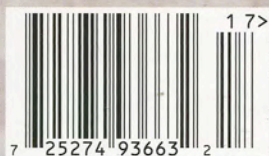


VERY

VERY 17



Originally from London, **Penny Slinger** left her life in the Caribbean for Boulder Creek, California in 1994, where she has been living and working since. In London she is represented by Riflemaker, in New York by Broadway 1602. pennyslinger.com



£6.50

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THE EXORCISM WORKS (1970 – 1977) PENELOPE SLINGER

"My roots were in surrealism. Nowadays one may call it the 'shadow work,' or 'descent work.' At the time it didn't really have a name, but the surrealist approach is the closest because it is about delving into the subconscious and the unconscious. I like calling it 'looking at the skeletons in the cupboard so that they no longer have power over you.'"

"The Exorcism series was conceived as a book which was published in 1977. In a way, it was my own psycho analysis. I was at that point in life when one tries to 'individuate oneself' - establish 'who one is' as opposed what are the projections of others and what you have inherited from the society you are born into."

"In 1970, my then-boyfriend and I were granted access to Lilford Hall in Northamptonshire. The place had a rich history. The late Lord Lilford was a prominent ornithologist who had kept birds, including falcons, at Lilford. This large, now empty, derelict mansion house seemed to me a perfect symbol for the power of the patriarchal establishment and at the same time for the feminine - in being a house which is like a womb. It also was a home to ghosts and dark shadows, hence 'An Exorcism'. I was trying to evoke all these things and navigate my way through them so it would become a death and a rebirth of the self."

"I was very fascinated by classic tales, like *The Secret Garden*, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* - what they have in common is that you are going through into a magical world.

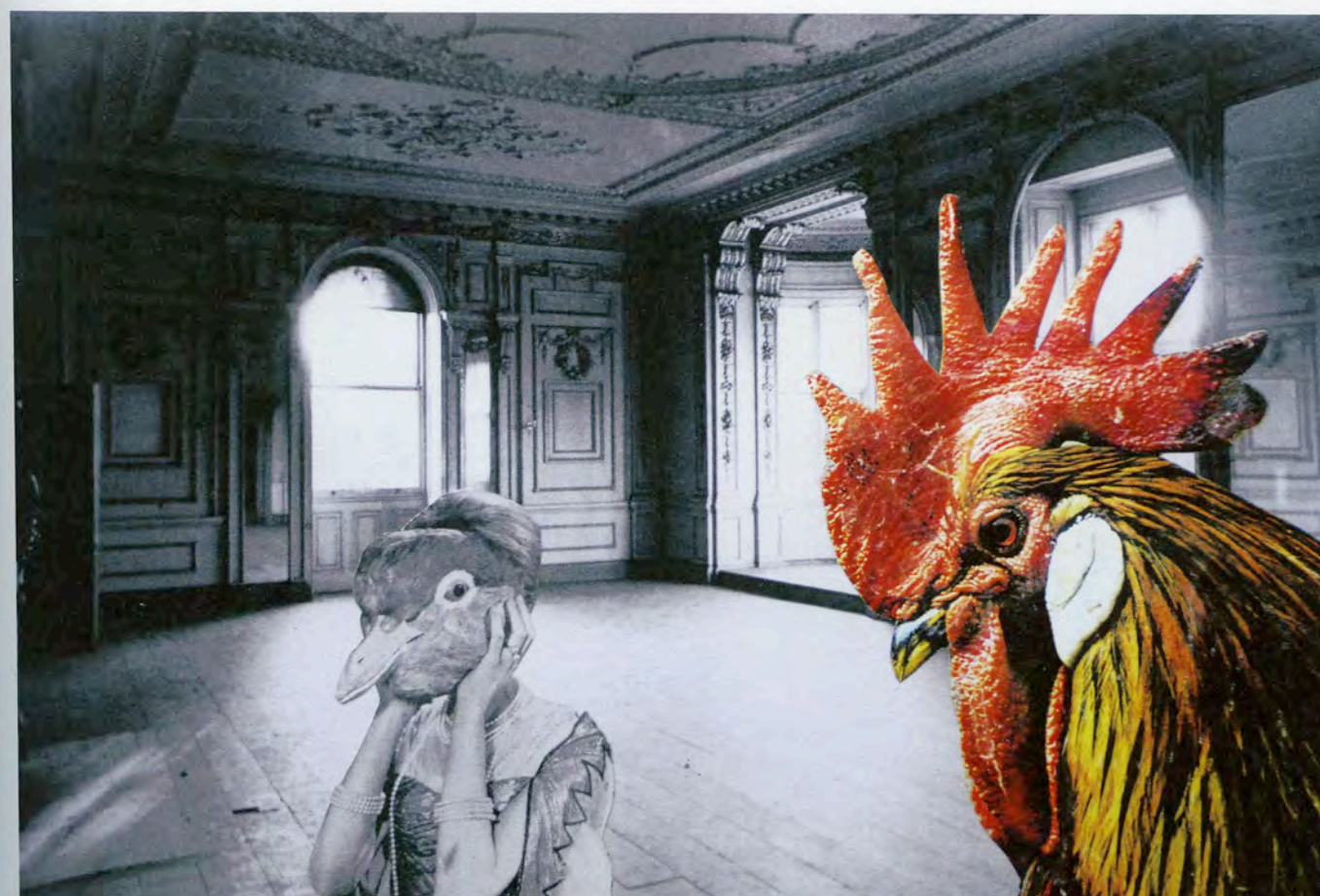
Often it was an attempt to escape from a mundane world and it was quite foreboding that there was this other world of the imagination they could enter and have revelatory experiences in."

"The first images show the exploring young woman coming into the deserted mansion, and the first door she opens, she finds closed up with a brick wall. This is a terrifying image: the imagination is no longer accessible, we can't go into the magic world anymore. Then there is also a man, holding the key. This is the beginning of the detective story - why is the door blocked, and why is it somebody else who has the key?"

"vNotions that cannot be explained by reason can lead to a new understanding, resolve opposites rather than keep them in duality. A paradox can trigger a revelation."

"The phantasies often had darker tones because they were looking into the shadows. References like *The Story of O* had a gothic flavour, set in a dark house. It was very misogynist, but at the same time portrayed the surrender and abandonment of normal ego limitations in order to find the essence of the true self, which one can sometimes find when going beyond the boundaries of convention."

"I wouldn't call myself a feminist as such, although some people have liked to label me thus because I have always been involved with female empowerment and a sense of an equality for what we are as women. Where I would say I differ from the political side of



feminism as it was emerging at the time, is that I didn't think our best bet would be striving for the same power and rights as men, but more to be recognized for the real power, insight, wisdom and intuition that is the birth right of women. At the same time I think that anything that is too gender specific I think is actually a cul-de-sac because we both have male and female qualities within: it is both evoking and uniting those qualities that real creativity is all about. So to me a work of art is uniting the inner male and female - it's like a love-making with oneself that produces a child in the form of a work of art."

"The political side of feminism is very important, but not enough about the whole being. I like sensuality, sexuality, and a lot of feminism had to become so strident that it was denying a lot of these qualities. I wanted to reclaim them and express them - to own them and see a woman as a sensual being in her own right, not as an object but a subject of her sexuality."

"It started when I was a student and finding myself in what was still a very male centric reality. In the Exorcism work, the fact that the huge mansion was derelict and deserted was for me evocative of the situation of the feminine in this particular edifice, that we call our society. The visual language I situated myself in here was very much a European and surrealist blend."





"Around the same time I also joined an all women's theatre group, the first one ever in England, which was started by Jane Arden. The group was taking all the issues and challenges but instead of talking about them it was making a creative statement."

"We did a lot of dredging deep into the unconscious and those places where oppression and resistance was felt in order to come up with archetypes and bring them to the surface, often in a rather grueling way. At that time it seemed relevant to shock people into recognition."

"The group was called *Holocaust*, the theatre production *A New Communion for Freaks, Prophets and Witches* and the film we made *The Other side of the Underneath*. As the titles indicate, it was all about looking into that seedy underbelly, finding the limpets and pulling them off and examine them."

"With the name 'Holocaust', Jane Arden wanted to express that the oppression of women was as strong a case as something as absolutely horrendous as the Holocaust. She also wanted this project to be seen as a huge disturbance, to try and shift the energy around the subject. It was pretty brutal and intense also for all of us who were in it - that was a sign of the times we were in."

The next Penelope Slinger solo exhibition at Riflemaker will present the recent body of work as completed over a fourteen year period. The *Dakini Oracle* presents 64 forms of the divine feminine - feminine wisdom embodied as multicultural, multidimensional archetypes — www.riflemaker.org

"It is all about being able to reach your true potential. We are very much bound in our social structures and tend to be de-potentialized, we limit ourselves. Fears keep us down. One of those fears of course is death. Everyone has to overcome that to some extent to be free enough to actually live, which is why I have been addressing taboos such as death and sex."

"Once this work was completed and we had a death and rebirth, the question turned to 'what does the reborn self look like?' and in the early 70s I had seen an exhibition of Tantric Art at the Hayward Gallery, which to me was an absolute revelation. It had the same shocking and confrontational aspect of surrealism and similar symbolisms like bird headed beings, but it seemed to be the evolution of that."

"I turned from dredging the self conscious to trying to paint the skies of the superconscious in the languaging and imaging of the East. I started to expand to a full colour palette and my imagery took on a different kind of architecture. *Mountain Ecstasy*, the next collage book, went into the mountains and the sky. It was for my own self an opening, so I wanted to describe it visually as well - this joy of entering the technicolour dream with the restrictions gone, none of the bondage, just liberation and freedom."

Page 16: *Alluring* (1977), 50 x 35 cm, page 17 - top: *He crows, he crows*, *he crows* (1977) 50 x 35 cm below: *Eat My Words* (1973) 24 x 19 cm
This page: *Athena Appears* (1977), 46 x 30 cm
Opposite page: *Feathered Friends* (1977) 46.5 x 32 cm
All images: photographic collage on card, courtesy Riflemaker.

