

FLAUNT

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A DIRECT EXPRESSION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

An Interview With Artist Penny Slinger



The current exhibition at Los Angeles-based gallery Blum & Poe features multimedia artist Penny Slinger and her distinctive brand of surrealistic female decoding. For over forty years she has been harvesting her own sexual subconscious revelations and turning them into gems of depth and psychic parturition. More latter-day sage than diverging witch, her body of work is a mirror that shows the mysterious in all of us and the worth of its exploration.

From the very beginning you have put yourself out there, front and center, for scrutiny. You have tackled "psychic confrontations and transformation," as well as eroticism in relation to celestial intimacy. How did you become so brave, if not flippant? Is there anything left to fear?

I have never allowed myself to be placed in a box that would limit my potential. I think that is one of the biggest crimes committed against any individual, the crime of preventing them from being all that they can be. I believe in maximizing potential, and that is what a lot of my work is about. If we have personal or collective trauma that influences the development of the psyche then we remain stultified in our growth as human beings. One of the greatest blocks to development I perceived when growing up was the lockdown around sexual energy and all the overlays of guilt and shame. It prevents us from really harnessing our own power and ability to experience ecstasy. This ecstatic imprint is not only the pinnacle of sentient experience, it is the gateway to divine resonance. I don't like living under the Sword of Damocles, which is living in the shadow of fear. I have made a practice in my lifetime of addressing my fears when I perceive them. In general, I have never felt truly at one with the norm, so I put myself in the position of the "rejecter" (of social norms) and not in the position of the victim (the rejected).

Your success as an artist strikes me as a direct byproduct of who you are as a person. How has your empowerment of "divine feminine energy" hurt you at certain points in your career?

I have always seen my artistic output as a direct expression of my state of consciousness, a harbinger of it, so to speak. I had a natural dexterity, so talking in visual language was second nature to me from an early age. I think I always had a rich and fertile imagination—a flow between inner and outer worlds that art offers was always an integral part of my being. As for how my spiritual path has impacted my artistic career, this is a very interesting and pertinent question. There are definitely arenas in the field of art where "spiritual" is a dirty word. There are those who resonate with my early work, in surrealist mode, delving into the depths of the psyche but cannot relate to the tone of areas into which it evolved as I followed my path. I can understand that. But I can only try to share the nature of my perceptions and realizations as I see them. Seeing that potential in ourselves (and others) is a way of encouraging these energies into being. This is about a whole shift in consciousness that feels much more imminent now. Time will tell because the curve of my life does seem to follow a very natural path on the perception and understanding of the nature of the Self.

What is the natural route to "wholeness" for the young artist in this age of social media, our constant pseudo-connectivity, and instant gratification? Can you make any comparison from your early years in 1960s London to now?

Wholeness is a very personal matter, ultimately not dependent on the opinions of others. It is the relationship of the self with the Self that provides the real integration. But in our communication lies our joy; we all want to share our experiences and have the reality of them confirmed. In this age of the transience of social media, where all is so available and immediate, comes the trivialization of art through transitory means of expression. What remains, what is distilled from all of this? What has lasting value? All the tools we take for granted now were still novel in the field of art for an emerging artist in the '60s and '70s. I didn't really know of many people using photo collage, and the mixing of various media was fresh and exciting. Nowadays, variations of photo collage are the most prominent form of visual media we see. By the same token, back in England in those days, you would generally never see naked women except in pornography, "girly magazines," and books on fine art. A "nice girl" would not expose herself in this way. So I did. A lot has changed. In the sharing of images on social media the creator of the work is so often lost in the mix, and that's where the trivialization takes place. There is then no lineage, no connection to who made the work. I believe we need to forge new lineages, because they form the foundation for the future.

I see the psychoanalysis of the Self across the entire spectrum of your work. Do you ever consider the allowances an audience must make on an individual level to accept more than just the surface of what you are putting out there?

That "allowance" as you call it is the spaces in-between, the gaps in the world of appearance through which new realities slip in. I collage elements of the real world together to encourage people to fall through the gaps in their own perceptions and enter a world where fantasy and reality marry to create a new "surreality," an existing parallel to our own reality that is able to be stepped into through these very cracks in the surface veneer. From another angle, I believe that if you delve deeply enough within the individual, you come up with archetypal stuff—this is trans-personal and therefore can apply to anyone willing to take the risk and dive in themselves. Through my glyphs, I hope to help create those openings.

What are you doing for "fun" that has nothing to do with Penny the artist? Is there any separation? What does entertainment mean for you at this point in time?

At this point in my life I have fully embraced the idea that there is no separation between the artist and myself. It is who I am and where I have my fun. My work and my re-creation are intertwined with my vision and my joy in manifesting it in some form of art. I have also included everything in my life as part of my mandala of creation, so that I wouldn't be bored or frustrated when I wasn't creating art as such. My most pleasurable interactions with others are centered around some form of co-creation.

What is the end game of higher consciousness for you? Is there a name for it, is it tangible enough for the artist in you to describe in words?

The end game is that there is no end game. "In my end is my beginning," to quote T.S. Eliot. Higher consciousness as the guiding principle for earthly choices brings about the alchemical resolution of "as above, so below." This, I feel, is the only game in town for consciousness in action. For in this way all come into divine harmony and resonance, and we experience Heaven on Earth again, honoring the spirit in everything, as well as its embodiment. The veils would thin, and we would experience more and more subtle vibrations, allowing greater exchange between the manifest and imminent planes of being. Basically everyone would be nicer to each other and we would have a lot more fun.