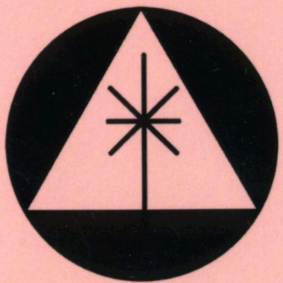


enter goddess penny slinger



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This volume is dedicated to the Goddess with endless love.

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www.golden-dome.org

info@golden-dome.org

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PENELOPE SLINGER was born in London in 1947 and graduated from Chelsea Art College in 1969 with a body of work made as a feminist reaction to Max Ernst's collages. In her own words, *"I was very dedicated to the idea of being my own muse - not being seen through the lens of a male artist, but seen through my own lens. I've done that all my life in my work - being the seen and the seer."*

Penny developed a strong collage practice whose chimerical logic of fragmentation continues to open up new angles of her own sexual, spiritual, and cultural identities. After a decade of great success as an artist in London, Penny left England in 1978 to pursue her spiritual path and disappeared from the fine art world. I noticed some of her 1970's collage work resurfacing in the last few years and invited Penny to speak about her life and art at The Women's Center for Creative Work in Los Angeles last year.

Penny spoke about her years in London making collages, installations, and group-therapy-on-acid performances with a group called "Holocaust". Throughout the 70s she spent time in India and Nepal making art and writing books on the subject of Tantra. The 80s found Penny living in Anguilla where she worked on preserving the traditions and artifacts of the Arawak people who are indigenous to the island. In 1993, when she was in the process of separating from her Tantric partner and spiritual teacher of 20 years, she had an experience of direct connection to the Goddess. She moved to California and eventually built a video production studio in Her honor.

Penny's art practice has constantly shifted mediums and viewpoints irrespective of art world trends or profitability, and as a result decades worth of work remain unseen by the art world. In all of its iterations, Penny Slinger's body of work is mutable, erotic, feminine, confrontational, and unapologetically *mystical*.

Since that lecture, I have found myself continually looking to Penny Slinger's art to reinvigorate my devotion to the sacred feminine and to access balance in a world that seems bent toward rewarding abusive masculinity. I was reared in a world that preached "God is male, and male is God" - Penny's work encourages me to publicly honor the Goddess more fervently and with more joy. Our male dominated human culture must swing in to balance lest it destroy itself.

This past summer I went to visit Penny at her home and studio, The Goddess Temple, a sprawling group of buildings constructed in honor of the Divine Feminine by her late husband Christopher Hills.

The Goddess Temple is hidden deep in a grove of redwood trees in the Santa Cruz mountains. The word "RESURGAM" is emblazoned on the awning of the main building in gold letters. Resurgam is Latin for "I shall rise again". I kept repeating "Resurgam" under my breath during my visit to her studio, like a prayer or a spell. I'm repeating it still.

"It feels of crucial importance at this time on the planet to bring everything back to the heart. This is one of the great principles that the Goddess represents. If all dealings in finance, business and commerce were to be first and foremost checked out by the heart, we would have a very different world now. The Goddess wants that world, and we in her service at the Temple have dedicated all we are and all we can do to help bring in this evolved perspective. It is all rooted in sense of self. How big is the self? Once one understands the vastness of the true Self, which includes all creation, then we will begin to treat all other beings, animate and inanimate, as extension of ourselves, not separate. This is the healing the Goddess wishes to bring to each individual for the health and well being of the planet herself."

- The Goddess Temple

ELIZA: Let's talk about this place, your home and studio. It's amazing here! Tell me about the "Goddess Temple" - what's the story?

PENNY: Christopher Hills built this place as his retreat property - he was guided to it by divination. With the energy here he did two things: he called it "The Garden of Forgiveness", because he had to do a lot of work on that. And then he dedicated it to the Divine Feminine. He built it to be a safe place on the planet to take the limits off and experience the Goddess' energy direct. He built this place on the principles of sacred geometry and connected it to the sacred energy of the redwood groves. After he passed I have held it in that way. This place has been known as The Goddess Temple - I'm Reverend of The Goddess Temple, which I established here under the umbrella of the Universal Church of the Master. Christopher had Cathedral of the Trees with the Universal Church of The Master, which is a sort of Gnostic healing church. I decided to go with The Goddess.

ES She needs strong reps these days. So, what kinds of work do you do for the Goddess here?

P Right. (laughs) There's an amazing energy here and I want to share it as much as possible. We've had performances and multimedia video recordings and parties on key dates like the solstices and equinoxes. It is all dedicated to Her. I'd been to a lot of raves and things early on, I saw there was a wonderful wave of energy that was cultivated and I really didn't see it go anywhere after the party. So the idea was, let's offer all this energy to The Goddess and draw energy from Her and put it back into the Earth. It was like a healing circle between The Divine and the Earthly realms. When I invited people here it was to be part of this sort of blessing really.

For the last few years we've been trying to see what's going to happen to the next phase of the evolution here. This space really needs to have some support beyond ourselves in order to be able to continue. And I do believe that it's very worthy of that patronage.

ES 100% worthy. This place is powerful.

P Because once it's had some upgrades done that it needs, it can be offered back out to share again in the form of retreats, gatherings, salons, and bringing artists here for sabbaticals.

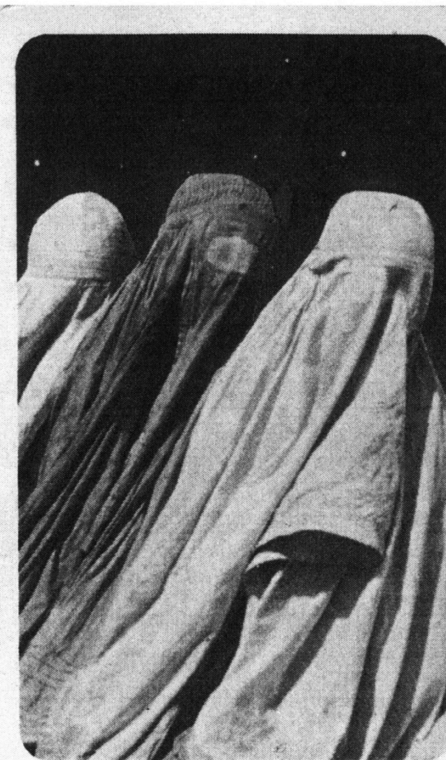
We need to make it more of a busy heart center for the new paradigm, which is what Christopher said it should be.

ES Great! (both laughing) I wanted to ask you about making your original 1970's *Dakini Oracle Deck* and what inspired that work, where those images came from. When I was a teenager, a mentor of mine gave me that deck and I've worked with a copy ever since.

P Yes. I'd always been interested in oracles. I'd loved the tarot, in particular, but I didn't like the way that a lot of people did readings with reverse cards and a kind of fatalistic sort of trip that seemed unnecessarily heavy. I wanted to make a tarot deck that would give people positive tools. I discovered Tantra and got together with Nik Douglas in the early seventies – he was the person who had the most knowledge as a Westerner of Tantra that I knew at the time. We had a great outpouring of co-creativity when we came together. We did the book *“Sexual Secrets - The Alchemy of Ecstasy”*, which brought Tantric teachings, Taoist teachings, and sacred sexuality to the Western world, because it wasn't really accessible at that time. And then we spontaneously started working on *“The Secret Dakini Oracle”* and created this deck of cards by using my collage techniques. We would use it on ourselves and our friends and it seemed to really work. We didn't give our cards the same kind of hierarchy that you have in the traditional tarot – everything is equal, just with different energy vibrations. The whole system was based on the 64 Yogini temples in India.

I was so excited and impressed by the feminine archetypes depicted there. They had bird and animal heads and multiple arms and vehicles and they were very surreal and amazing. That was the underlying system behind the cards, but the cards were just sort of energy glyphs.

All these years later, I wanted to do a more fully personified form of this, so that each of the energies took on the form of a female Yogini. And then that became the 64 Dakini Oracle, which I worked on in this century. It's an online oracle.



25 THREE-FOLD RIDDLE



2 ISIS / THE HIGH PRIESTESS

ES At your talk at the Women's Center for Creative Work, I was really moved by your collage book trilogy: *"The 50% The Visible Woman"*, *"An Exorcism"*, and *"Mountain Ecstasy"*. It was this really visceral violent arc of recovering your power as a woman in English society – or at least that's how I understood it.

P *"The 50% The Visible Woman"* was made while I was still a student at Chelsea College and I discovered Max Ernst and his collage books where he used the old engravings and was able to collage seamlessly so that you had this whole alternate reality. I did my thesis in response to those books and made a film and my own collage book. I hadn't seen anyone really using the tools that Surrealism provided to explore the depths of the feminine psyche and to lay that bare. So *"The 50% The Visible Woman"* was meant to show the bones and the guts in a very full frontal kind of way. I collaged pictures of myself and then I wrote poems to go over them. I was very dedicated to the idea of being my own muse, and not being seen through the lens of a male artist, but seen through my own lens. I've done that all my life in work – being the seen and the seer.

For *"An Exorcism"* I found this empty derelict mansion house called Lilford Hall, which for me represents the emptiness of the seat of power. What we see as power is this big, absent house. The emptiness and disrepair of the mansion was very evocative for me of all that I received from my British cultural heritage and value systems. Peter Whitehead and I made a film there in 1969 called *"Lilford Hall"*, which wasn't released until very recently. We were both going to work with photos we took there and do a kind of a his and hers collage. But our relationship broke up. When a relationship breaks up it's one of those times in your life where you go really deeply in to the who am I? What value do I have? Why am I in this situation? Well, you know.

ES Yes I do!

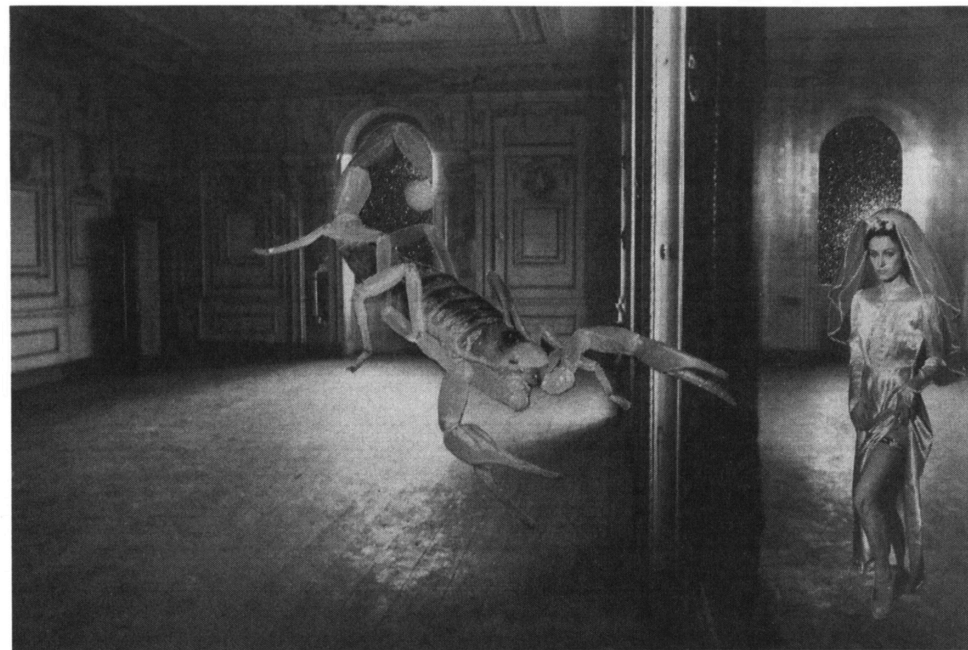


P So in that space I plunged into this book *"An Exorcism"*. And one of the very first images in the book is called, *"The Brick Wall Behind The Door"* and to me that was a really shocking image of when you open the door to the imagination to go through to your magic world and it's got a brick wall behind it and you can't get in! And in front of it, Peter as the man, the male archetype in the book, he's holding the key. The question was "why has the man got the key"? What are the things that are projected on to me by my whole cultural milieu? What are the things projected on to me by my partner? And what are my things? Who am I in all this? And how can I emerge out of this? It's like a death and rebirth cycle. I worked on it for 7 years. I mean it was a big work. I didn't only do the collages, I did a lot of writing. I did a whole film script about it.

After that, I discovered Tantra. I discovered Tantra at an exhibition of Tantric art, the first one in the UK back in 1973. When I was nearly complete with *"The Exorcism"* I met Nik Douglas, because I called into my life, "Who really knows about Tantra?" I went to India for the first time, Thailand, Nepal, all these places.

In our travels I collected images. *"Mountain Ecstasy"* was really just our playing and coming together. Me teaching Nik how to do collage. We met Peter Dean, who was working for Dragon's Dream. He is an artist himself. He did covers for Yes. He really loved the work and introduced us to Dragon's Dream Publishing and they wanted to publish *"Mountain Ecstasy"*. We were doing these pictures for our own pleasure. The direction of *"Mountain Ecstasy"* was, "Ahhhhh! Out of the house!" I've been reborn out of the house now to my own personal self and all of that western heritage of my cultural identity. It's now opened up to this multi-dimensional, technicolor dream where everything is possible. And everything is just juicy and erotic and full of bliss and the divine and the profane. Everything all at once.

That was the celebration that *"Mountain Ecstasy"* was. And they put it out as a book - it did get into trouble. Thousands of copies got seized by British customs and burned as pornography. I had a show in London and I had a show in New York after. It was too rich really for the British palate, too colorful.





ES Do you think the mystical content was too much? I did my Master's degree at Central St. Martins a few years ago and was ridiculed for my spirituality – my work didn't go over well AT ALL. You were an artist whose work I looked to for support during that time.

P Oh, yes! So you know. In general the Brits can't stand it. I mean, you can go to Glastonbury or something and you find the little pockets where all that Celtic mysticism is there and powerful. In terms of the general modern culture of the UK they can't stand anything spiritual! There's nothing that they like more than taking the piss out of someone if they say anything that sounds at all mystical. I remember when I did this DVD called "*Goddess Juice*", which was the first DVD we released out the Goddess Temple and I took it to the UK.

We actually did have a lot of copies carried by the Psychedelic Dream Temple in Camden Town. Other than that I remember showing it to some reviewer from one of the magazines and he said, "Oh no that's all peace and love; can't stand that stuff!"

ES Do you find that the fine art world is uncomfortable with mysticism that isn't made in the minimalist tradition? I've personally had a hell of a time being taken seriously. It's a little easier here in Los Angeles, but not much.

P I've found that. In fact a couple of my galleries told me I had to redo my website, which I did do. And I made it, I hope, much more art world friendly. They said "you mentioned Goddess too much and it's putting our buyers off".

ES It seems like the art world has been more interested in classifying you as a 1970s feminist. I've always wondered why the academic and psychological aspects of feminism might be palatable for art world folks, but you can't say the word "Goddess" if you want to be taken seriously. For me, the Catholic terror of having only a male God and a bunch of men mediating my experience with "Him" influences my work constantly.

P It is interesting when I look at the curve of my life and art. I began with intense self scrutiny and, if that is delved into deeply enough, the next natural step is to explore the more evolved and refined qualities – the sublime, the divine. That is personal alchemy in action. It happens to be the next level for humanity too as I see it.



ES I'm really interested in the work that you did with Jane Arden. The "*Holocaust: A New Communion for Freaks, Prophets and Witches*" play sounds incredible. Your description of working on "*The Other Side of the Underneath*" film is super intense. The film is built around a long sequence that is a sort of group therapy on acid, right? The melt-downs sound horrific. The emotional pain, psychic death, crucifixion...

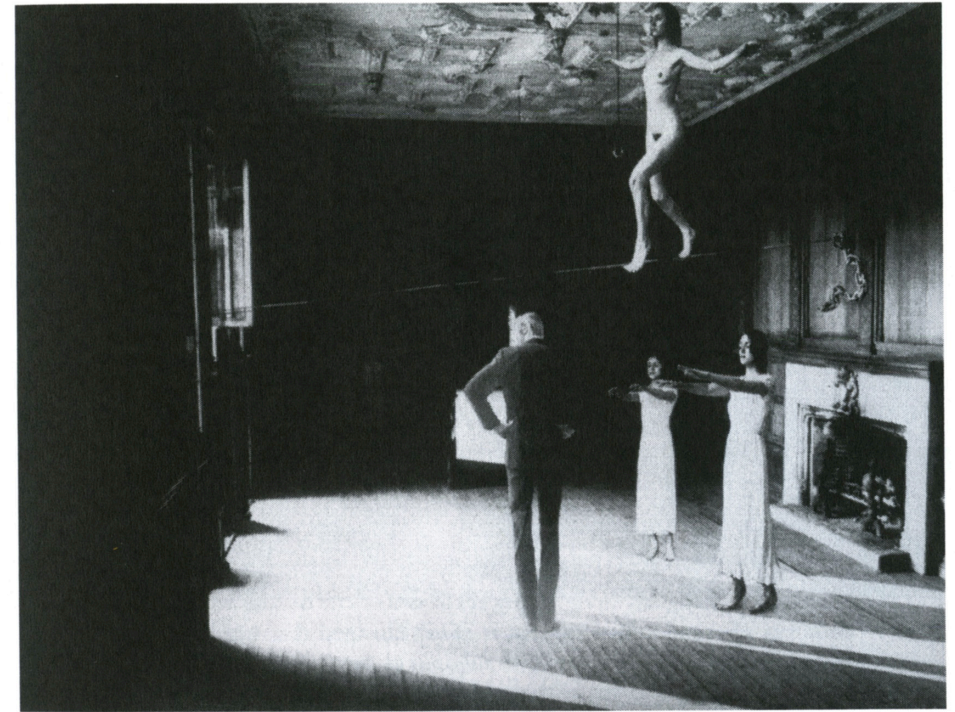
P Well, you know, I had never liked to label myself a feminist because of the flavor that feminism had at that time. Of late I've been much more willing to take on that mantle because feminism is now a lot more inclusive - for instance of sexuality, sensuality and spirituality.

In England in the sixties, women hardly owned their sexuality at all. In those nascent years it didn't feel like it was a very full body experience, let's put it like that. It seemed to be much more like, we want the power that men have had and we're gonna get in that world and fight for it. I didn't resonate with the feminist scene because I felt that female qualities needed to be recognized and empowered in their own right too. I have a body and I want to own that body. I want women to be seen for all of ourselves, as full psycho-sensual emotional beings. Eventually I did become part of this all women's theater group, Holocaust. And that was because when I went to that first meeting and met Jane Arden, she talked about how she wanted to create artwork that was from a political and an embodied perspective.

With "*The Other Side of the Underneath*" we were trying to shake out all the sacred cows and really get in people's faces. We wanted to present the blood and guts of feminism, not just the intellectual and political and more heady kind of side of it.

ES What's your relationship to feminism now in your work?

P I got the opportunity to connect back into the fine art world in England with a couple of exhibitions - at The Tate with "*The Angels of Anarchy*" show and at Riflemaker Gallery. The recognition I've been getting has all been around the work that I was doing in the sixties and seventies and hasn't gone past my discovery of Tantra. That earlier body of work was sort of feminist surrealism. At this point it doesn't seem like the fine art world is ready yet for the divine feminine work which is where I've been all these last years since.



This year I worked for awhile on a project called "*Reclaiming Scarlet*" with a young woman who's very much part of this whole wave of feminism that's happening now with The Red Tent movement.

I haven't yet got an outlet for that even though it's in a more proto-feminist surrealist style. My gallery in London just wrote to me and said, "It's very strong and it's very real, but I don't know that there's a market for it." I want to do something that shows that I'm not just a historical figure. I want people to recognize that someone in their later years can be totally relevant and do something in society rather than being cast aside as no longer of use. One of the reasons I picked being an artist was because I thought that the work had longevity and you don't ever have to retire! You can keep going right to the end. I want to really try to manifest that. I would like to have some success and some recognition this time not only for the old work, but for what I'm doing now. I want to put a stake in the ground for all women of this age whose wisdom hasn't been percolated back into the world.

This is why we have such an immature, materialistic society, the wisdom of older women is not being put back into the energy cycles. People are going off into old people's homes filled with drugs to veg them out.

ES Are you still using your body as the main vehicle for your collages and life casts?

P Yes, I am using my body in my latest work. I'm 68 and my body has changed somewhat but it hasn't changed that much since I was 28. So I am wanting to use that as my vessel and to bring that forward to make this statement about it not being over. I'm still embodied!



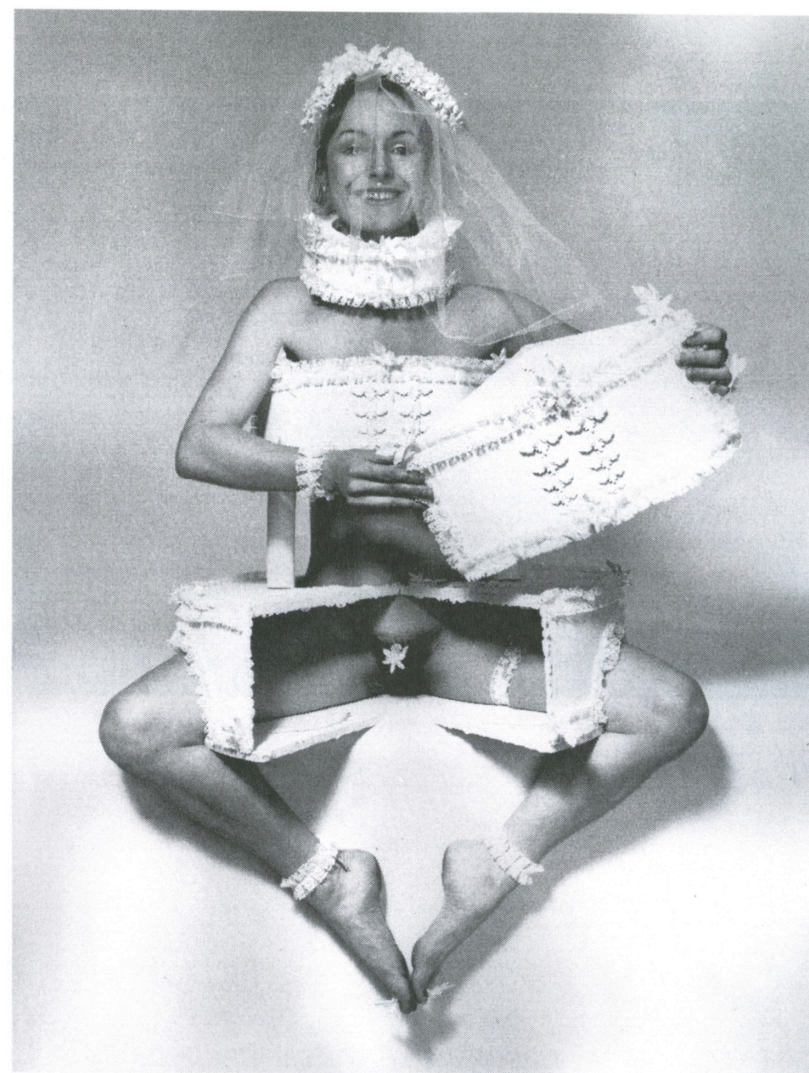
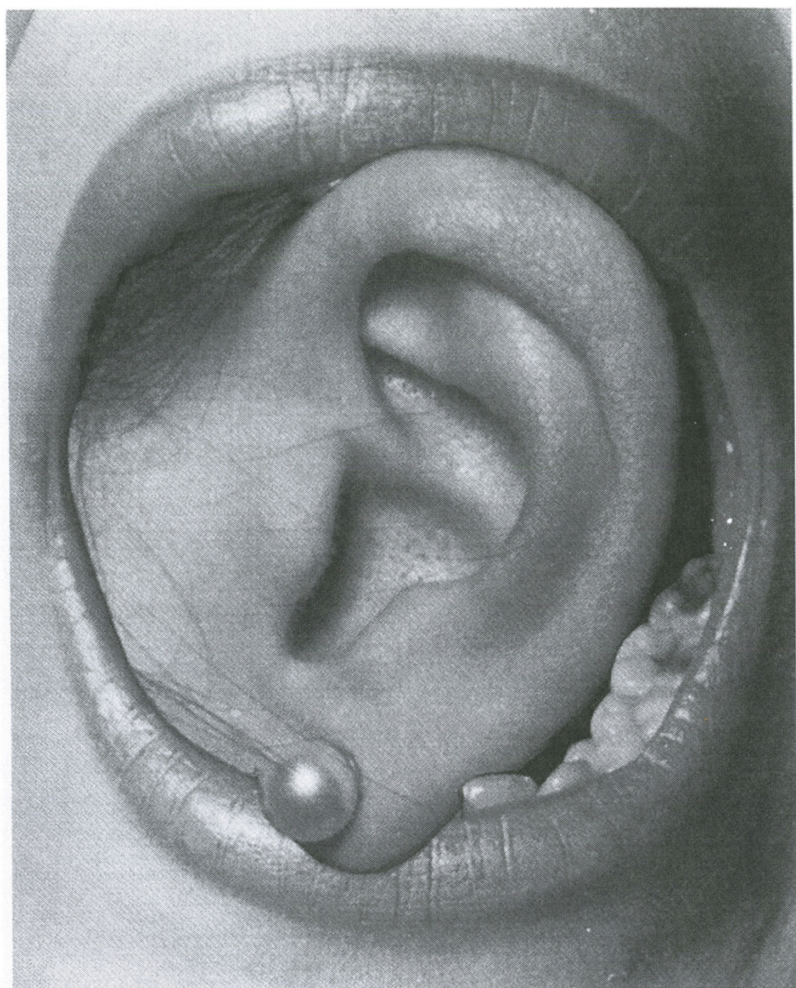




Image List

Cover: *Rose Colored Spectacle*, 1974, Xerox body print with collage

1. *The Web*, 1973-74, Photo Collage, courtesy Broadway 1602
2. *Cards from Secret Dakini Oracle*, 1977, Collage
3. *The Hermaphrodite*, 1969, Photo Collage
4. *The Uninvited Guest*, 1970-77, Collage, courtesy Blum & Poe
5. *A Difficult Position*, 1970-77, Photo collage on card
6. *Holocaust poster designed by Penny Slinger*, 1971
7. *Old Fashioned*, 1970 – 77, Collage, courtesy Broadway 1602
8. *No Return*, 1970 – 77, Collage, courtesy Broadway 1602
9. *Our Lady of the Owls*, 1970-77, Collage, courtesy Broadway 1602
10. *I Hear What You Say*, 1973, Collage, Roland Penrose collection
11. *Wedding Cake – The First Slice*, 1973, courtesy Broadway 1602
12. *Penny in her studio*, photo by Eliza Swann, 2016

Back Cover: *Penny in her studio*, photo by Eliza Swann, 2016