

HEYUGUYS

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Penny Slinger: Out of the Shadows Review

By

[Daniel Goodwin](#)

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For those unfamiliar with artist Penny Slinger, this documentary by writer/ director Richard Kovitch is an edifying low-glide over the controversial surrealist's work and life. Starting serenely with old short film footage of a twenty something Penny sauntering solemnly across the lawn of what looks like a stately home, Kovitch propels us into an anarchic bombardment of stills from Slinger's audacious work. This surreal salvo of images from paintings, films, sculptures and collages hits like a drug spiked slap or defective self-hypnosis video, but sets the tone perfectly for what's to follow.

Out of the Shadows parades Penny's art in movements and moments, parted by supers, until her disappearance from the scene at the end of the 1970s. The film first flits back to the late 1940s when Penny grew up in Streatham with a club foot and speech impediment. It also features interviews with her friends, peers and industry experts including: Michael Bracewell (Curator and Author), Tote Taylor (Curator), Jane and Louise Wilson (Curators) and Max Zoller (Lecturer).

Penny believed "art has to be a combination of intention and divine accident." Her work is described as a "dedicated to a vision of surrealism from a feminist perspective" with "hurt and wit" manifested through film, paintings, poetry and literature. Kovitch's film focuses both on Penny's art and the personality behind it, but the art reveals a distinctive, dark characteristic that is probably best conveyed this way than if mined via obdurate interviews. Penny has a fascination with death, the "ambience of the flesh", sexual politics and twists mythologies on male and female roles by becoming her own muse, instead of acting as somebody else's.

Her life and Kovitch's film both deviate at the point when Penny meets artist, political filmmaker Peter Whitehead, who had a strong interest in the mystical and occult. The couple moved to Hertfordshire (with an owl and a kestrel), where Penny took up taxidermy to incorporate into her work. Later, Peter embraced falconry and Penny joined a Women's Theatre Group, performing in a play called Holocaust. It was there that she met fellow artist Jane Arden. The film then follows Penny and Arden as the couple moved to Wales and produced a film of their play "The Other Side of the Underneath". Their film contained faux therapy sessions featuring actors on acid, a tranquilised sheep and fake crucifixion of a character/ actor (not the sheep). Penny found playing a catatonic schizophrenic to be liberating and cathartic, but after the production, one of the artists tragically burned himself alive in protest of its controversial content.

Out of the Shadows relays views on the 70s political feminist movement as a "conservative, political post-modern period" during which Penny felt symbiotic connections between politics and her own personal journey. In the latter half of the decade she visited Iran, which formed part of the basis of her photo-romance compendium "An Exorcism": a seven year journey of self-discovery, containing "broken intimacies, fears, fantasies and dreams". In the 70s, Penny experimented with food and eroticism, which ensnared her work with the porn industry. Due to its erotic nature, articles on Penny were published in magazines such as Knave and her paths crossed with industry misogynists, with whom she refused to work. After the publication of her third book, "Mountain Ecstasy" (1978), Penny vanished from the art scene and later moved to California where she worked for a tribal community.

It was not enough for Penny to simply just present her art to people. She also wanted to provide experiences. Like Penny's work, Kovitch's documentary is disquieting, provocative, radical, sexual, feminist, ahead of its time and has an air of claustrophobia. While drama from Penny's personal life could have bolstered OOTS with an emotional whack if extrapolated and utilised more efficiently, Kovitch blitzing images from her staggering portfolio feels in line with Penny's style. This also makes Out of the Shadows edifying, electrifying, overwhelming to the point of disorientating, but bombastic in a brilliantly fitting manner as it presents Penny with the "vagueness and precision of a dream".

For screenings and tickets: <http://www.anti-worldsreleasing.co.uk/films/penny-slinger-out-of-the-shadows>

REVIEW OVERVIEW

Penny Slinger: Out of the Shadows

SUMMARY

Kovitch's film slightly lacks the emotional whack which could have made it amazing, but it's still fun, frenetic and frequently sensational.

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OVERALL
SCORE



[Daniel Goodwin](#)

Daniel Goodwin is a prevalent film writer for multiple websites including HeyUGuys, Scream Horror Magazine, Little White Lies, i-D and Dazed. After studying Film, Media and Cultural Studies at university and Creative Writing at the London School of Journalism, Daniel went on to work in TV production for Hat Trick Productions, So Television and The London Studios. He has also worked at the Home Office, in the private office of Hilary Benn MP and the Coroner's and Burials Department, as well as on the Movies on Pay TV market investigation for the Competition Commission.