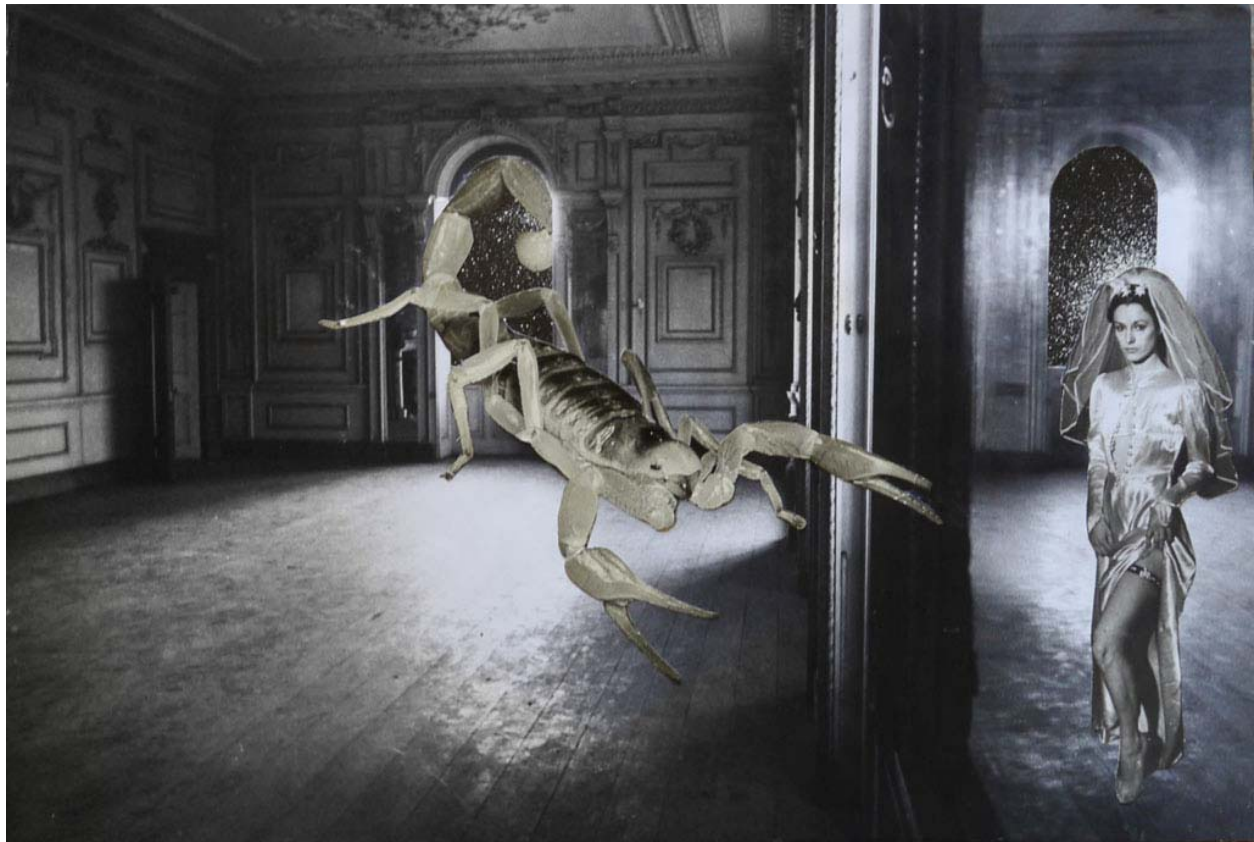




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ART CITIES:N.York-Penny Slinger



On the wave of feminism, Penny Slinger started producing highly radical works which embraced not only the spirit of the time, but rather made a connection with female history respectively spirituality. By presenting herself as both subject and object in a group of collages and montages, the artist dealt with both construction of her personal identity in relation with the archetypal image of a woman.

By Dimitris Lempesis
Photo: Fortnight Institute Archive

The exhibition **“Inside Out”** brings together film, photography, and collage from Penny Slinger’s four bodies of work from the late 1960s and 70s, related in their dedication to mapping and unveiling the feminine psyche, and dismantling repressive social dynamics of power, the **“50% the Visible Woman”** collage series of 1969, **“Bride’s Cake”**, uncut footage from **“Lilford Hall”**

and **“An Exorcism”** series. Penny Slinger graduated from Chelsea College of Art in 1969, formulating her thesis on Max Ernst and finding her artistic identity in Surrealism. Through her interest in Surrealism, Slinger became acquainted with the British painter, poet and biographer Sir Ronald Penrose, organizer of the International Surrealist Exhibition 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. Slinger began to translate Surrealism into a radical new language 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. Slinger’s interest was from the beginning clearly focused on a feminist reformulation 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. 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.”**, this work 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. **“Bride’s Cake”** came when she was working on the body of work on food and eroticism that was shown in her 1973 Opening exhibition at the Angela Flowers Gallery, Penny Slinger wanted to create herself as a wedding cake/bride as an art piece presented as a photographic series. She designed and made a construction/costume which could wear/sit in. It had a removable slice so Penny Slinger could mimic the ceremonial cutting of the cake. It was both parody of a wedding ritual, and recreation from a woman’s point of view. Penny Slinger posed alone and with a man friend of mine playing the part of the groom, and then my girlfriend acting the part, dressed in a suit. A knife and a life cast of a penis (dildo) were used interchangeably. From the series she created a **“Bride’s Book”** as a facsimile of the traditional wedding album, but much more radical and outrageous in its use of imagery. **Lilford Hall”** is the uncut footage of an unrealized film project meant to probe the metaphysics of the unconscious. A collaborative endeavor with Slinger and filmmaker Peter Whitehead, and featuring Slinger, Whitehead, and Suzanka Fraey, the scenes were shot in 1969 in an abandoned and derelict 500-year-old estate in Northamptonshire. Although the film project never came to fruition, the footage and stills generated there proved profoundly impactful for Slinger. In 1977 Slinger prominently continued this approach of an art project realized in book form, with the publication **“An Exorcism”**. 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 “Tonite 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 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.

Info: Fortnight Institute, 60 East 4th Street, New York, Duration: 8/2-17/3/19, Days & Hours: Wed 11:00-19:00, Thu-Sun 13:00-19:00, <https://fortnight.institute>



Penny

Slinger, Open Sesame, 1970-1977, Photo collage on card, 50.2 x 34.3 cm, © Penny Slinger,
Courtesy the artist Fortnight Institute and Blum & Poe-Los Angeles/New York