

Penny Slinger on Her Latest Series, Created in Response to the Pandemic



Hoarding, from My Body in a Box Artwork by Penny Slinger, Photographs of Penny Slinger by Dhiren Dasu, Courtesy of Blum & Poe

Slinger's new series of photomontages – a direct response to the Covid-19 pandemic, created from her home in Los Angeles during lockdown – has launched online this week

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Text [Jack Moss](#)

This article is published as part of our [#CultureIsNotCancelled](#) campaign:

In 1977, the British artist **Penny Slinger** announced her departure from the art world: “This exhibition is the last public showing of her work in this country,” she wrote in the invite to Slinger’s *Secrets*, on show that year at London’s Mirandy Gallery, [announced](#). It contained the original images from *An Exorcism*, a collection of photo-collages which depict the psychic disintegration of a woman amid the grounds of a derelict British country home. The visceral series, first begun in 1969, would become definitive of Slinger’s oeuvre: utilising the tools of surrealism to delve into the female psyche, *An Exorcism* is a potent exploration of the gruelling psychological repressions of being a woman in a patriarchal society, played out on Slinger’s own body. “I thought it was about time to be my own muse,” [she said](#).

In the decades that follow Slinger continued to create work outside of the boundaries of the art world, before finding renewed prominence in the 2010s – culminating in a flurry of activity in 2019 which saw her [exhibit at Richard Saltoun Gallery in London](#), collaborate with Maria Grazia Chiuri [for the sceneography of Dior’s Autumn/Winter 2019 Haute Couture show](#), and be the subject of a documentary, *Penny Slinger – Out of the Shadows*, which charts the artist’s formative years. Despite this growing renown, the septuagenarian’s vital work – which continues to focus on collage, now undertaken digitally – retains a radical, outsider spirit.







[12My Body in a Box by Penny Slinger](#)

“I have tended to be an ‘outsider’ artist most of my life,” Slinger tells AnOther on the occasion of a new work, [*My Body In A Box*](#). “I spent many years totally outside the systems of the fine art world, by choice and circumstance ... being non-traditional is part of who I am.” Created during lockdown in Los Angeles, where Slinger now lives, the work is a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and is being [displayed online by her LA gallery, Blum & Poe](#) (it is part of Blum & Poe Broadcasts, “musings by artists from their homes to yours”).

The series consists of photomontages which directly reference our current moment, “seeking to explore the psychological entrapment and fears that accompany the experience” of lockdown. In one collage, she is surrounded by hoarded foodstuffs; in another, medical masks, gloves and medicine. Other images see her nude form pushing against brick walls and boxes. Interspersed with Slinger’s poetry, they explore how the pandemic has created new modes of being – and perhaps the possibility for personal transcendence. “Believing in / Self-transcendence / As the only tool / That takes a psychic sledgehammer / To the wall that kills dreams,” one poem reads.

As part of our #CultureIsNotCancelled campaign, Slinger tells us why she felt compelled to create *My Body in a Box*, how she is getting through lockdown and why the world must change post-pandemic.



Limits, from My Body in a Box Artwork by Penny Slinger, Photographs of Penny Slinger by Dhiren Dasu, Courtesy of Blum & Poe

“The project came about because, as an artist, I need to express and manifest in order to feel I am doing what I am here on the planet to do. I have never been a documentarian in my art; I seek to explore the psychic landscape and give form to the ineffable rather than to offer a representation of the material. In this instance, this is a major global event, the like of which I have never seen in my lifetime, so I felt commentary on what it provokes on the inner planes to be essential and relevant. Also, this event has forced whole populations into self-reflection, so I wanted to mirror that, through my own being, my own lens, so as to amplify that process for anyone viewing the work.

“For the first few weeks of the isolation I did not feel motivated to any kind of creation. I was processing. As I tend to be empathic, there was a whole lot of intense and challenging energy coming in to deal with. My psychic and physical being felt challenged too, so I was just hunkering down and in self-preservation mode. After this initial period, what I wanted to express came bubbling to the surface. This series is very related to the work I have been doing over the last few years, but with its own particular flavour, which is a direct response to the pandemic. My normal mode of being is to spend much time alone working on my art, so isolation did not present much of a shift in my status quo. But, as I say, it’s what’s in the air for everyone that impacted me.

“I have experienced a wide gamut of emotions and reactions during this time and I wanted to try and express the full spectrum. Some people react negatively, some positively. I felt to be truly authentic, I needed to show the shadow and the light, the anguish and the transcendence. They are all part of us as human beings, beings with bodies and minds that have their own ways of dealing with what comes in. Some years ago I had a realisation about body language, about how we open up or close down with our physical postures dictates the impact life has upon us. I wanted to express this as a kind of visual semaphore of my body in this series.



Protection, from My Body in a Box Artwork by Penny Slinger, Photographs of Penny Slinger by Dhiren Dasu, Courtesy of Blum & Poe

“I am [spending lockdown] in my loft space in downtown LA. Fortunately this building has a beautiful communal outside terrace where I can spend time each day. It is full of flowers, fruits and herbs, hummingbirds and doves frequent it and it is truly a saving grace for me. Not only can I have the joy of being in nature and, thanks to the fabulous LA weather, soak in the healing rays of the sun, I can also connect with fellow artists here in the building in an appropriately socially distanced way.

“[After the pandemic] I do not want to see us return to what was considered ‘normal’ before. I do hope this opportunity to stop and smell the roses has helped open up hearts and minds to what could be, rather than what is. I have been deeply concerned for the plight of the planet for many years now. So many lessons could be taken and applied from this ‘time out’, but perhaps that is the subject for a whole other article. Suffice it to say for now that we could start to think of everything more locally: locally and seasonally sourced foods, people working from home where possible, a revolution of industries like that of fashion where creative events could be virtual, rentals of clothing take over from mass consumerism ... The promotion of cottage industries all round ... Travel in general could be much more circumspect, much as I love to travel ... In general, some personal sacrifices from everyone in terms of rampant consumerism, but with an eye to the health of the planet and the good of all. Kindness becoming king and factory farming petering out.”

My Body in a Box is on show at [Blum & Poe’s website](#). An ongoing project, further works will be added as Slinger continues to shelter in place.

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