

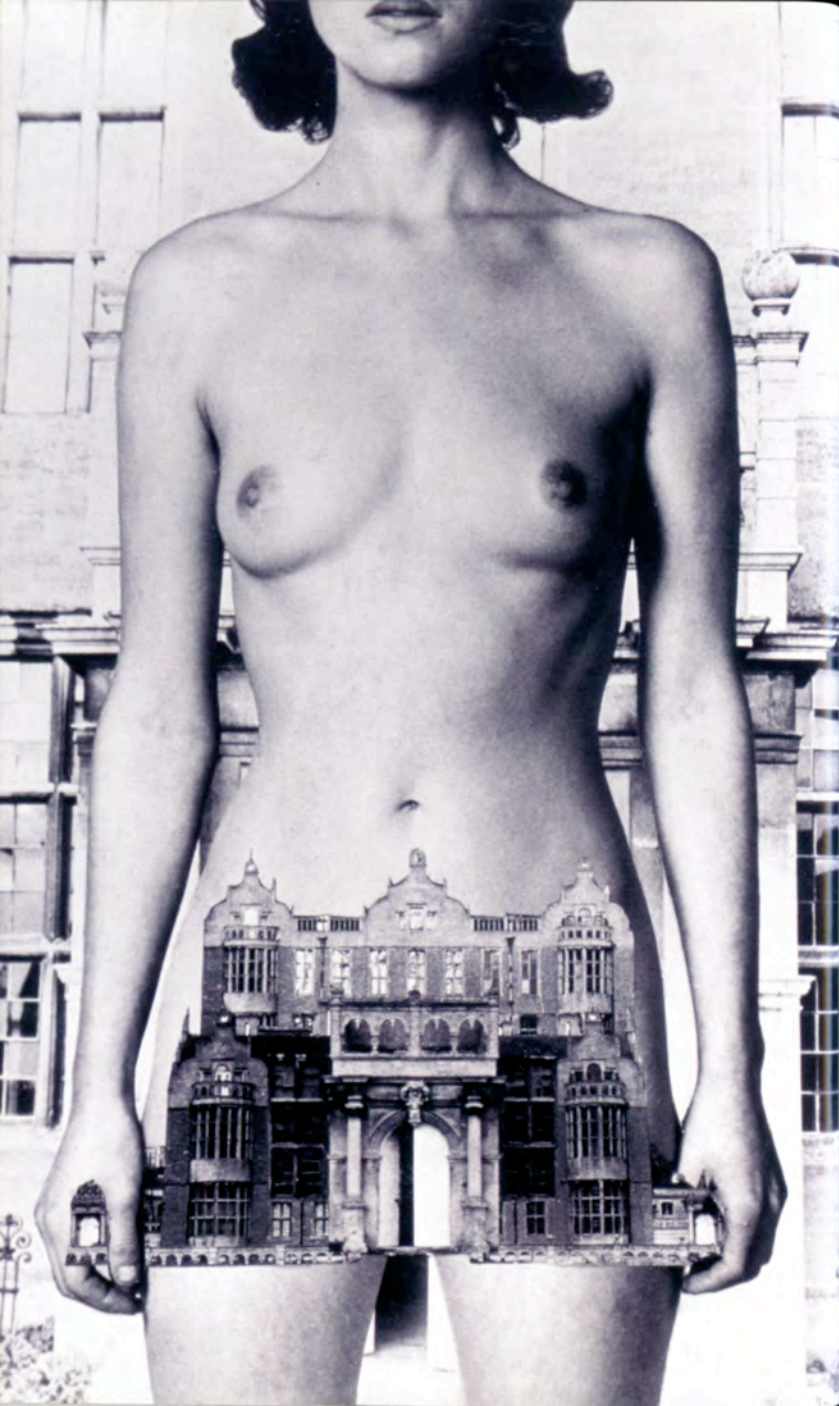
*Riflemaker*  
978-0-9563571-9-9

# PENELOPE SLINGER

## HEAR WHAT I SAY

FRONT COVER: *I HEAR WHAT YOU SAY*  
photographic collage. 35 x 47 cm, 1973. The Penrose Collection  
BACK COVER: *GIVING YOU LIP*  
photographic collage. 24 x 19 cm, 1973

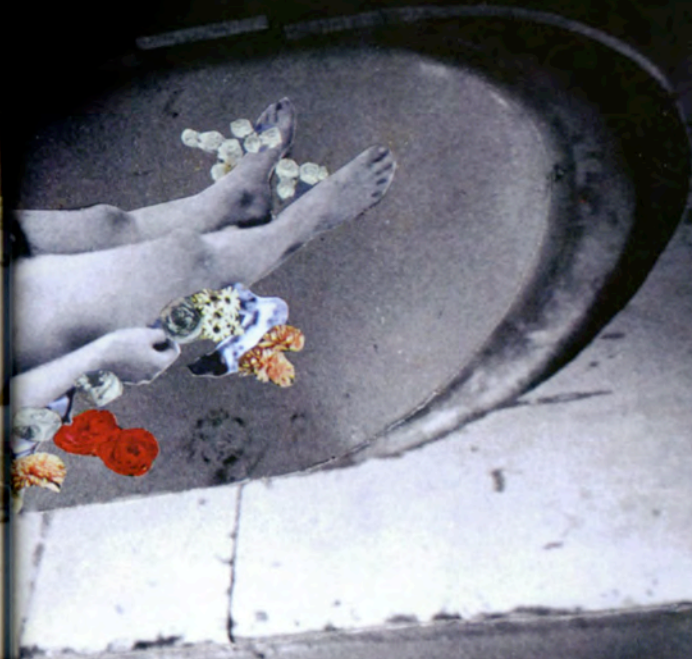




interestingly share the same physique – they are outstandingly beautiful, young, petite whose ideal bodies (de Saint Phalle and VALIE EXPORT were fashion models) became the contorted site/sight for a new embodied knowledge, despite or because of, the deeply rooted sexism inherent within the patriarchal art world. To frame these women within Feminist, or even proto-Feminist discourse is possible – but not entirely satisfactory. The quest to “forge a language”, as Slinger writes in the dedication to her famous girlfriend, upsets the perceived view of women artists in the 20th century. Slinger’s art is crystallic and unfolding<sup>1</sup>, a concentrated form which encompasses Surrealism, ancient mythology, Eastern philosophy and the theories of the French philosopher Georges Bataille. Slinger’s collages follow the Batailleian path of Surrealism that departed from Freudian psychoanalysis; her blooming, blossoming bodies are not Rorschach tests revealing the suppressed unconscious desires of the pathological artist, her flowers, vulvas, crystals, skins and veils are archetypal images, which enable the paradoxical combination of contradictory spaces: deep tunnels and receptive surfaces.

The exhibition *Hear What I Say* plays an important part in the recent re-discovery of this artist. It is thanks to the exhibitions *The Dark Monarch: Magic and Modernity in British Art* at Tate St Ives and *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism* at Manchester Art Gallery, both 2010, as well as the private collection of Roland Penrose, a long-term supporter of Slinger, that we are able to encounter the work of this







artist today. Is it sheer coincidence that Slinger's work re-emerges at a time of paradigmatic shifts from post-modernism into new 'alter-modern'<sup>2</sup> structures so deeply affected by digital communication and globalisation? What can Slinger's collages teach us today and how do they relate to Feminist art, which recently has been inscribed into the canon of mainstream art history?<sup>3</sup> The artist's use of fantastic animals and crystals, her interest in Bataille and his departure from popularist Freudian economy, are at stake again when questions concerning post-humanism, Deleuzian folds, topology, neuroscience and new developments in philosophy such as speculative realism have become central to cutting-edge theoretical discourse and artistic practice.<sup>4</sup>

Little has been written on Slinger's collages. The reason for the lack of critical analysis seems obvious: in the 1970s the artist left the UK via New York to work in the Caribbean, where she made paintings influenced by the ancient culture of the Arawaks. After leaving Britain she illustrated a series of important books on spirituality. These include *The Book of Matan*, which was published by her partner Nik Douglas in 1977 and contains extraordinary collages, which are rooted in but depart from her surrealist work. This was followed by a set of tantra cards entitled *The Secret Dakini Oracle* in 1977. In the important book *Sexual Secrets—The Alchemy of Ecstasy*, published in 1979, Slinger turns to illustration to demonstrate the transformative potential of erotic intimacy.<sup>5</sup> The

**Laura Mulvey  
looks into  
Penelope Slinger.**

Is there feminine fantasy? Penny Slinger's recent exhibition *Opening* at the Angela Flowers gallery provided graphic images of fantasy which only a woman could have produced. The whole question of fantasy is crucial for women: until women can confront their own unconscious phantasies, as long as they continue to be captivated by those of men, they will be out of touch with the content of their own minds and victims of the repression which allots them their place in society even to their own satisfaction. From a theoretical point of view, the argument for the existence of a separate and distinct realm of female fantasy is strong. Children are not born *sexed* with an innate psychological tendency to masculinity or femininity. The concept of the Oedipus complex, produced by Freud, explains how children acquire a sexual identity and from it derive the great, initial complex of phantasies through which, as a kind of second mutilated birth, a child takes its place in human society and succumbs to its pattern of repression. Yet, however strong this repression, fantasy persists in the traces of an unconscious desire and, as the

experience of the Oedipus complex varies essentially for male and female, so do the phantasies which accompany it. Very much in the tradition of the Surrealists, who first consciously attempted to fight

repression by making phantasy and dream into the discourse of art, Penny Slinger explores the workings of the mind, using sexuality not just to portray its conventional surface but to express the hidden desires and fears which warp and govern it. Her work is elliptical, and in circling round her subject she gradually encompasses it, so that all the objects in the exhibition were inter-related by means of puns, allusions and analogies. None of them could be looked at in isolation. In the Surrealist tradition, the exhibition should have been seen as an event with a discourse rather than a display of art objects. It is a continuation of their campaign to break down the barriers between unconscious and conscious. But whereas the Surrealists showed little interest in feminine phantasy, *Opening* showed us how powerfully a woman is able to transform Surrealism.

*Opening* was conceived around the theme of food and orality. It is arguable that orality (libidinal fixation on the mouth) has a particular significance for women. In the Freudian concept of phases of sexual development, the oral phase, which is the first, is dominated by the mother. It is the phase in which the child's main need is for food and its main pleasure is in receiving nourishment. Traditionally this

pleasure has been provided by the mother. For both sexes the mother is the first love-object. Freud, as he struggled unsatisfactorily with the female Oedipus complex, considered the change of affection for women to heterosexuality one of the main problems. A girl's first attachment is the homosexual attachment to her mother, which cannot be totally dissolved.

The exhibition included objects made up in the form of meal tables, three enormous dainty wedding cakes, as well as collages of mouths and a series of assemblages of mouths in boxes. The catalogue, written in the form of a menu, provides an ironic guide to the feast and its symbolism. One of the wedding cakes, titled *Happy Anniversary*, opens to reveal a doll's house, arranged in three tiers as kitchen, dining room and bathroom, an image of oral domesticity. Photographic collages use the same symbol, but differently. A woman is encased in a wedding cake, as though it was a bra and corset, from which a young groom is cutting a slice, wielding an enormous knife which later turns into an erect penis. The "well-known, worn out, emotionally loaded icon" of the cake is used in a variety of ways to explode the false repressive ritual of the wedding feast. The ▶

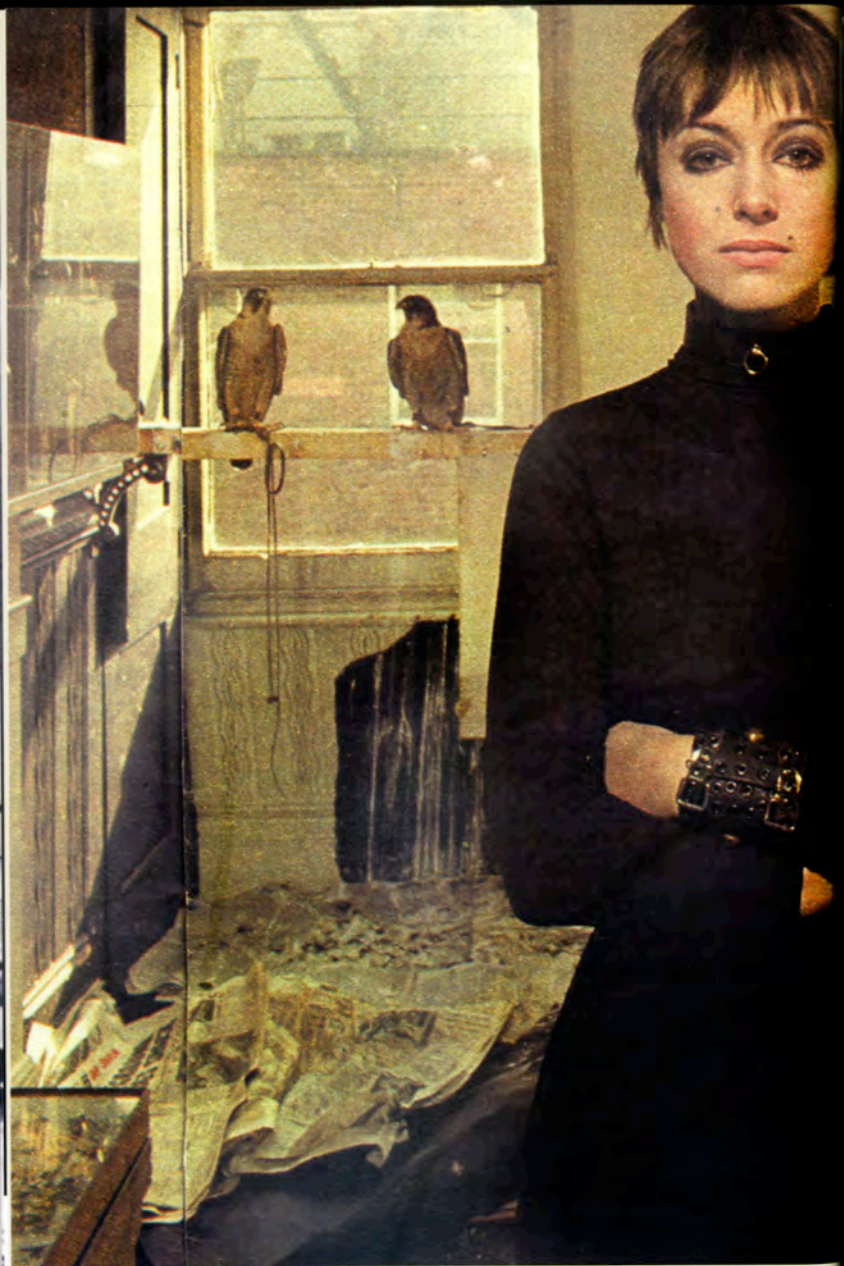
Women's magazine  
No. 17

# spare Rib



Happy Anniversary





ABOVE: Penelope Slinger at home in Dean Street, London with falcons  
*The Observer* colour supplement May 2, 1971





artist's physical, intellectual and spiritual departure from the European art 'world' into the 'new world' of embodied experience and Other cultures is symptomatic of her generation. The 1970s were a crossroad for the *soixante-huitards*, who either 'dropped into' the bourgeois life style of neo-liberal, post-industrial society, 'dropped out' into the underground of armed political struggle (Meins), radically changed their practice (Godard) or left their original countries for good (Slinger). Can the lack of art historical literature about Penelope Slinger's activities be explained by the simple fact that the artist made no attempt to sustain a career in the British art world but instead chose to venture into territories of difference? Or could one argue that her collages resist the narrative linearity of institutionalised art history; that they are in fact *outside* history?

A rigorous analysis of the art historical, formal and philosophical frame of the artist's practice is long overdue; but given the limits of this publication the following text will serve as a mere introduction to some of the key aspects of her early work. I will seek to weave a discursive web around Slinger's collages. The artistic work of Niki de Saint Phalle and the theoretical writings of Bataille shall be the yarn with which to knit a mesh thick enough to contain Slinger's art, yet thin enough to also let it slip through.

Slinger's first publication *50% The Visible Woman*, which was part of her Chelsea College graduation project, re-examined the tradition of









surrealism, in particular Max Ernst's collages, in relation to female desire and sexuality. Following the success of this publication a second collage series *An Exorcism*, 1970-1977, was published as a book in 1977.<sup>6</sup> In this work Slinger refuses to follow the traditional binary system of external/internal, real/fiction, human/animal and instead unfolds a complex dynamic relation between body/building and collage/unconsciousness. The architecture of an abandoned mansion becomes the host for her imaginary parasites. Modern images of psycho-architecture can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th century, when psychoanalysts sought to visualise the relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness through the camera obscura, the 'magic writing pad' (Sigmund Freud) and later the cinema (Christian Metz). In the 1960s the French

philosophers Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser defined systems of power and oppression as 'ideological state apparatus', or in French 'dispositif'. In recent years there has been a renewed interest in apparatus theory, possibly due to the new neo-liberal power structures, which Zygmunt Bauman described as 'liquid modernity'.<sup>7</sup>

In his short essay *What is an Apparatus?* the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben traces back the term 'apparatus' to the Greek term 'oikonomia' meaning the administration of the 'oikos' (home), or more generally 'management'. Oikonomia is central to early Christianity as it refers to the divine economy developed in the 2nd century: the oikonomia makes possible the administration of God's life, home, or the world – the Gnostics call Christ the man of economy. Agamben notes that "oikonomia became thereafter an apparatus through which the Trinitarian dogma and the idea of a divine providential governance of the world were introduced into the Christian faith." He continues "the term apparatus designates that in which and through which one realises a pure activity of governance devoid of any foundation in being."<sup>8</sup> Jan van Eyck's painting *Madonna in the Church*, ca. 1425, is a fitting example of the 'apparatic' (or 'economic') reading of the female body. In this work the larger-than-life body of the Virgin Mary represents the cathedral in which she is standing; the spirit (God) is materialised as flesh (Christ) in her 'oikos' (womb).

Penny, however, does not obey the traditional apparatus but subverts the definition of the female







body ('nature') as receiver of thought ('culture'). The artist does not manage her household well; the interior of her apparatus is rather un-domestic. Patriarchal oiconomia is rejected, the bride is locked, her sex has an economy of her own, the immaculate conception has been turned into 'maculate' contraception. There is, however, abundant growth in Slinger's 'oikos'. In *50% The Visible Woman* Slinger writes:

Transmutation  
Of the equatorial forest.  
Here everything grows.

Flowers mushroom wildly amidst the vast empty rooms, hallways, and courtyards. Rampant growth metamorphoses the human into the animal. Crystals defy the geometrics of Western oiconomia. No puritanical Oedipal economy, but Bataillean excess is what marks the interior/exterior of Slinger's world. For Bataille, excess is that which is left over after production, 'unproductive expenditure', a sort of spillage, superfluous abundance. The philosopher has received renewed interest in the 1990s and early 2000s – not (only) because of the problem of excessive over-production in the hyper-capitalist First World, but most importantly, because 'creative industries' aimed at the complete instrumentalisation of art, and as such, the total eradication of 'unproductive expenditure'.

How important the apparatic condition of the female body was for Slinger, as well as for de Saint Phalle, becomes clear when comparing the collage *A Difficult Position* and *Hon - en katedral* (She -



a Cathedral), a 23 metre long, 6 metre high, and 10 metre wide sculptural assemblage in the form of a giant and pregnant female figure, which was constructed by de Saint Phalle and her collaborators Jean Tinguely and Per-Olof Ultvedt in 1966. Referring directly to the Christian representation of the womb/oikos as exemplified in the Van Eyck painting, de Saint Phalle's 'nana' becomes a key work for Slinger, whose own version presents a much darker and troubled sexuality.

I have been wondering: why Slinger's images are not joyful celebrations of female liberation? Was the 'pill', or the 'cap', the independence of women from patriarchy leading to economic, intellectual and political self-determination, not reason enough for the production of more victorious symbols? Slinger's collages resist an all-too-easy process of 'liberation', a term fashionable in the counter-









ABOVE: ENCHANTED FOREST  
photographic collage on card. 50 x 35 cm, 1977

PENELOPE SLINGER  
HEAR WHAT I SAY



Been almost two years now since film-maker Peter Whitehead published Penelope Slinger's book **50% The Visible Woman**. The book, brilliant as it is, met with little if any critical acclaim and was destined to a lonely existence on the backshelves of Turret Bookshop. A sad fate indeed, for this book will become as important on your bookshelf as **Sgt. Pepper** is on your record rack. Slinger and Whitehead have produced a work which has yet to be compared to. It is one of those very rare books in a class by itself, being a visual-verbal series of closely defined optic images presented in the classic sense of the surrealist collage. Fluid verbal images have been painstakingly and strategically superimposed upon the collages by the use of a movable transparent fore page. The originality and uniqueness are intensified by the images being classified into a formalised series of fourteen chapters. A concept that has yet to be reproduced. Although the book sells for £3.50, it is a small price to pay when you see what is inside. And "see" is the word too, for **50% The Visible Woman** is a personification of everyone's introspection, in a genre that until this time has been reserved for painting and film. Truly a landmark accomplishment in the blending of different art forms. As with many good things, it cannot be bought at your local bookshop. However, copies can be ordered by sending £3.50 to Narcis Publishing, 18 Carlisle Street, London W1.

cultural middle class of the '60s generation, but which in reality only hides repressive libertarian ideology, according to Philippe Sollers.<sup>9</sup> Penny's images could be described as acts of mourning. It

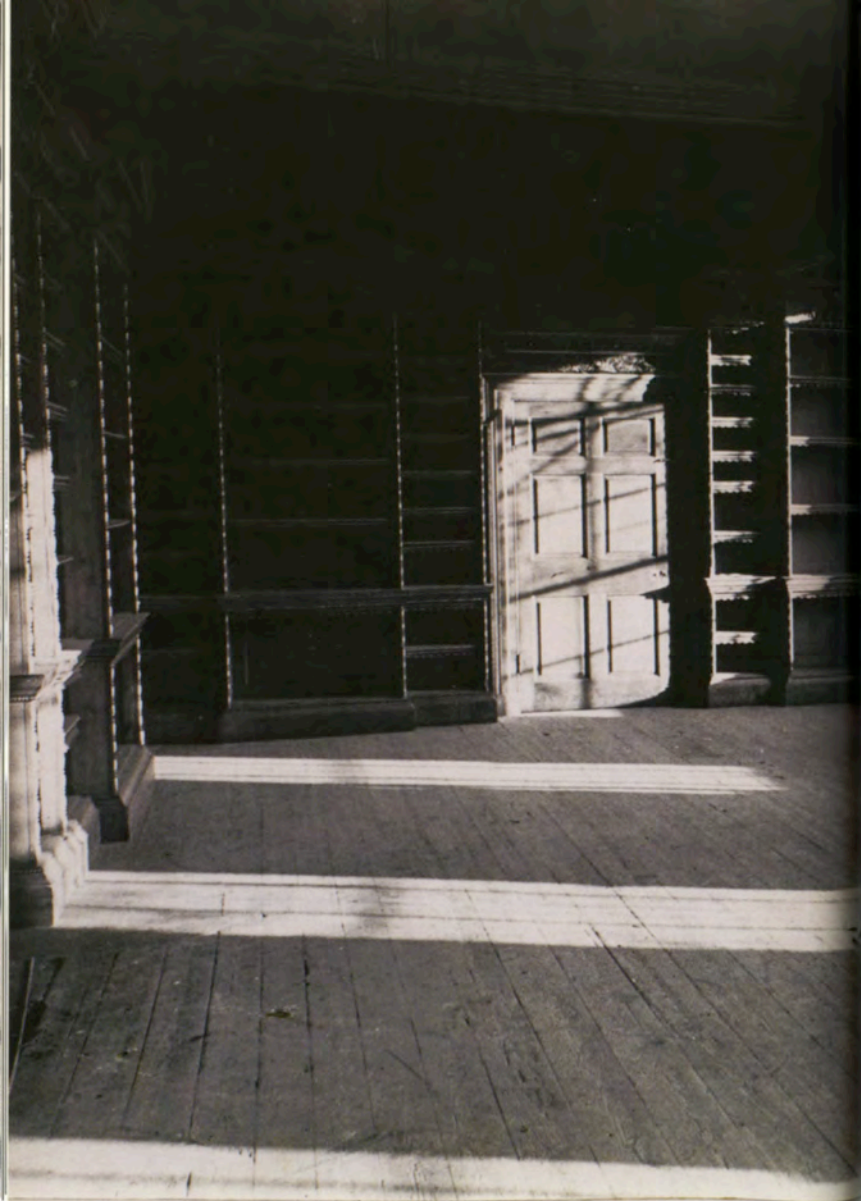
is as if the artist seeks to destruct and sacrifice (from Latin: to make holy) the space of domesticity traditionally assigned to the woman/womb. She writes:

Survival of the...  
...fitted with a cap  
she no longer conceived.  
The dirt clung to her thighs  
Like sticky jewels  
She adorned her head with faeces  
And became child again.  
She murdered the Christ-child.

The above poem is a 'crystal-clear' indication of Slinger's departure from the imposed biological determinism of the mother figure ("she no longer conceived") onto the Bataillean journey of abjection ("dirt" turns into 'jewels' and "faeces" become a crown) to the un-pure child, guilty of murder. Production, whether material or procreative, is sacrificed in the ancient halls of the Self. Wealth is not guarded but given up and given away – for Bataille the 'potlatch' ritual was the example *par excellence* of unproductive expenditure.

Slinger and de Saint Phalle did not only share artistic affinities but also both collaborated with the British filmmaker Peter Whitehead. Whitehead features strongly in *An Exorcism*; he would direct de Saint Phalle's film *Daddy* in 1973, which in content and form bares similarities to Slinger's collages. In de Saint Phalle's film a country mansion becomes the site for the 'exorcist' ritual of a daughter towards her abusive father









(which, as is widely known, is based on de Saint Phalle's own childhood). After directing the little known yet extremely significant film *The Fall* in 1969 Whitehead worked in Europe but then dropped out himself and spent many years as a falconer in Saudi Arabia. Whitehead's affinity to these birds of prey certainly explains the presence of the many feathered friends in the works under discussion. It is important to note Slinger's active inclusion of the male figure into her images. The eroticism represented in Whitehead's nude sexual body in *Endarkenment*, *Solar Return* and *The Judgement of Paris*, and Douglas' presence in *Sexual Secrets – The Alchemy of Ecstasy* place Slinger's artistic practice within a wider context of desire and pleasure. In recent years Feminist theories, which critiqued the male gaze, such as Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking 1975 text *Cinema and Visual Pleasure*, have been appropriated *nolens volens* by institutionalised academia and turned into a sometimes rather rigid, and arguably complacent and habitual academic jargon. Those works, which sought to examine the complexity of the relationship between male and female pleasure, such as Carolee Schneemann's film *Fuses*, from 1965, and Slinger's *An Exorcism*, do not fit reductive definitions of Feminist art. It could be argued that it is resistance to academic categorisations that makes Penny's work so relevant today.

In one of her strongest works, *Self-Image*, Slinger super-imposes her own face onto the façade of an old country house, while a headless, severed body stands forlorn in the pebbled courtyard. The head-



less body refers to Max Ernst's 1929 collage series *La Femme 100 Têtes* (a French pun as '100' sounds like 'sans' meaning 'without'), a key influence for Slinger. It also points to Bataille's 1936 publication *Acéphale* (from Greek 'akephalos', headless). Similarly to Slinger, the French thinker was in search of a transgressive esoteric anti-Christian religion. The *Acéphale*, a figure literally without a head, represents the limits of cognitive intellectual thought.<sup>10</sup> Slinger's surrealist collages, which already anticipate her life-long engagement with other experiences of knowledge production, escape the frame of traditionally head-centric Western philosophy. Here, Bataille's notion of the informe is fundamental; this influential philosophical concept described that which lies below the threshold of knowledge and that which cannot be contained by form. How important the informe is for the artist becomes apparent in her short poem from 50% *The Visible Woman*:

A collage exploits itself  
A corner  
Seeking identity  
In its absence of form

It is only from this corner, the corner of Penny's eyes, that we can view the world inside the outside. This exhibition will help us to fathom the breadth of her art, which manages to "forge a language" in the "absence of form".

Maxa Zoller is a curator and a lecturer in film  
working at Tate and no.w.here



<sup>1</sup> The terms 'crystalline' and 'unfolding' refer to the philosophical concepts by Gilles Deleuze. For the crystal-image see *Cinéma 2: L'Image-Temps*, 1985. See also *Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 1993, originally published in 1988

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Bourriaud: *Altermodern*, Tate Triennale Catalogue, Tate Publishing, London, 2008

<sup>3</sup> WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, MOCA, 2007 and Global Feminisms, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, 2007

<sup>4</sup> Laura U. Marks: *Enfoldment and Infinity: An Islamic Genealogy of New Media Art*, MIT, 2010; Thomas Metzinger: *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of Self*, Basic Books, New York, 2009; Graham Harman: *Towards Speculative Realism: Essays and Lectures*, Zero Books, London, 2010; Steven Shaviro: *The Cinematic Body (Theory Out Of Bounds)*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993

<sup>5</sup> Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger: *Sexual Secrets: The Alchemy of Ecstasy*, Hutchinson, London, 1979 and Nik Douglas: *The Book of Matan: Automatic Writing from the Brink of Eternity*, Sudbury, Spearman, 1977

<sup>6</sup> Penny Slinger: *An Exorcism*, Villiers Publications for Empty-Eye, London, 1977

<sup>7</sup> Zygmunt Bauman: *Liquid Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000

<sup>8</sup> Giorgio Agamben: *What is an Apparatus? And other essays*, Stanford University Press, 2009, p.10, 11

<sup>9</sup> Philippe Sollers: 'The Roof: Essay in Systematic Reading', in: Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (eds.): *Bataille: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 1998, p.74-102. Originally published 1968.

<sup>10</sup> Leslie Hill: *Bataille, Klossowski, Blanchot: Writing at the Limit*, Oxford University Press, 2011, p.47





## BIOGRAPHY

1969

Graduates from Chelsea College of Art, London, with First Class Honors Degree,  
Diploma in Art and Design. Her special interest is Surrealism  
Exhibits in *Young and Fantastic* ICA, London

1971

Set-design, acting and art direction with the all-woman theatre group, Holocaust  
Solo exhibition at Angela Flowers, London  
*50% - The Visible Woman*, collages and overlaid poetry - published

1971-3

Major performing role and art direction for *The Other Side Of The Underneath*  
(re-issued BFI 2011)

1973

Solo exhibition *Opening* at Angela Flowers, London  
Achievement in Art Grant, Cassandra Foundation, Illinois  
Exhibits Sao Paulo Biennial, Brazil

1974

Exhibits at Nicholas Treadwell, London  
Acts in video documentary *Vibration*

1977

Publication of *An Exorcism* - with introduction by Sir Roland Penrose  
The first colour book, *The Book of Matan* published  
Solo exhibition Inner Space, at Patrick Seale, London  
Exhibit *Secrets* at Mirandy, London

1978

Included Surrealism & Company *In This Decade* Camden Arts Centre,  
*Transformation* at Angela Flowers, London and London group exhibition  
*Metamorphosis*, University of Cambridge, England

1980

Moved to the West Indies where she lived until 1994

1992

Featured in *Addressing the Forbidden*, Edinburgh Festival

2009

Featured in *The Dark Monarch*, Tate St Ives, curated by Michael Bracewell,  
Martin Clark and Alun Rowlands

2009

Featured in *Angels of Anarchy* Manchester Art Gallery,  
curated by Dr. Patricia Allmer

2011

*A Photo-Romance* at Riflemaker, London

2012

*Hear What I Say* at Riflemaker, London







Exhibition curated by Tot Taylor  
Produced by Virginia Damtsa  
Book design by Julian Balme at Vegas Design  
Special thanks to Kristina Lindell and Dawn Fahy

#### OTHER RIFLEMAKER PUBLICATIONS

- JUAN FONTANIVE *See-Sounds*  
text by Gilda Williams & Robin Mann 2012
- ANALOG texts by Tot Taylor and Richard Nicholson 2011
- JAIME GILI *The Lakes* texts by Alan Powers, Hannia Gomez,  
Iain Carson, edited by Robin Mann, 2011
- JOSEPHINE KING *Life So Far* text by Adrian Dannatt,  
Josephine King, 2010
- LEAH GORDON *The Invisibles* text by Simryn Gill, 2010
- STUART PEARSON WRIGHT *I Remember You* text by Adam Foulds,  
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- ALICE ANDERSON'S *Time Reversal* text by Marina Warner,  
Maud Jacquin and Louise Gray, 2010
- ARTISTS ANONYMOUS *Lucifer over London* text by JJ Charlesworth, 2009
- ANJA NIEMI *Porcelain*, 2009
- JOSÉ-MARÍA CANO *La Tauromaquia* text by A. L. Kennedy, 2009
- VOODOO: *Hoochie-Coochie and the creative Spirit* edited by Tot Taylor  
with text by Marina Warner and Zina Saro-Wiwa, 2008
- LILIANE LIJN *Stardust*, 2008
- FRANCESCA LOWE & ALASDAIR GRAY *Terminus*  
unpublished short story by Alasdair Gray, text by Sarah Kent, 2007
- CHOSIL KIL *Living With Andis*  
co-published with Cornerhouse, Manchester, 2007
- JAMIE SHOVLIN *Lustfaust* text by Jamie Shovlin, 2006
- GAVIN TURK *Me As Him* text by Tot Taylor, 2007
- RIFLEMAKER BECOMES INDICA by Tot Taylor,  
with contributions from Barry Miles & John Dunbar, 2006
- WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS *The Unseen Art of William S. Burroughs*  
with text by Stephen Lowe and James Grauerholz, 2006
- JAMIE SHOVLIN *Fontana Modern Masters* text by Martin Holman, 2005
- CHRISTOPHER BUCKLOW *If This Be Not I* by Christopher Bucklow, 2004
- MARTA MARCÉ *Playroom* reproduction of the artist's sketchbook, 2004
- JAMIE SHOVLIN *Naomi V. Jelish*, 2004

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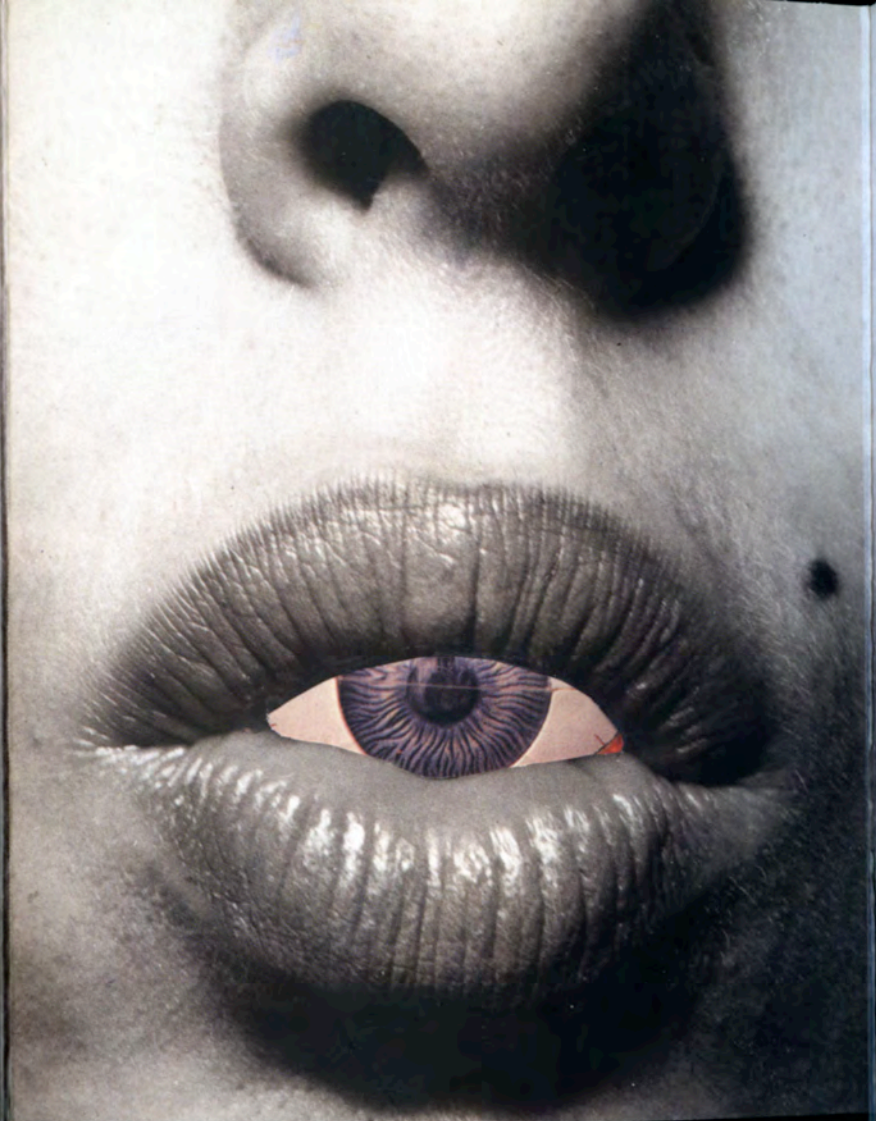
ABOVE: HERMETIC VESSEL  
photographic collage from 'An Exorcism'. 50 x 35 cm, 1977





BACK COVER: **EAT MY WORDS**  
*photographic collage. 24 x 19 cm, 1973*

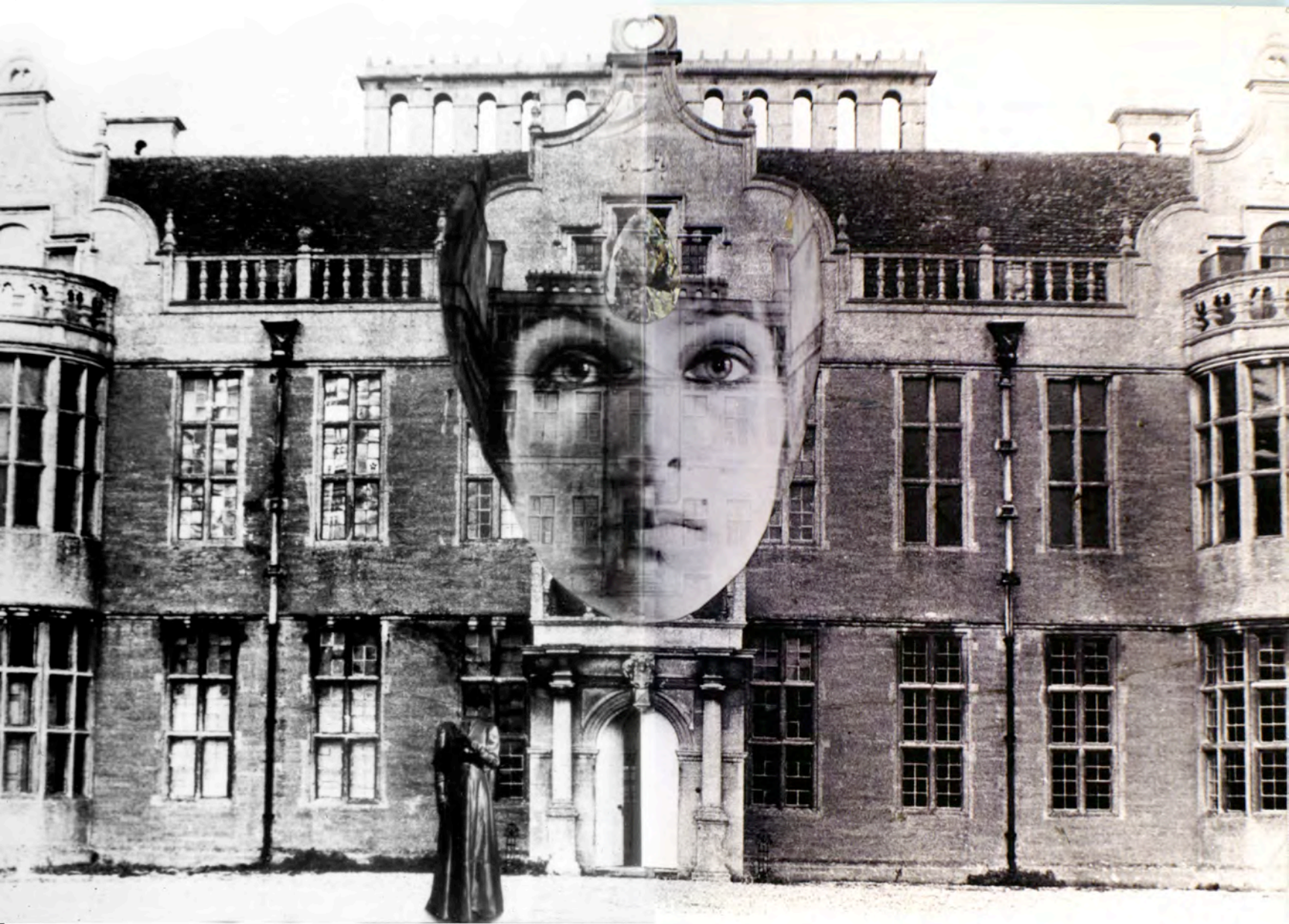
INSIDE BACK COVER: **I SPEAK WHAT I SEE**  
*Photographic collage. 24 x 19 cm, 1973*



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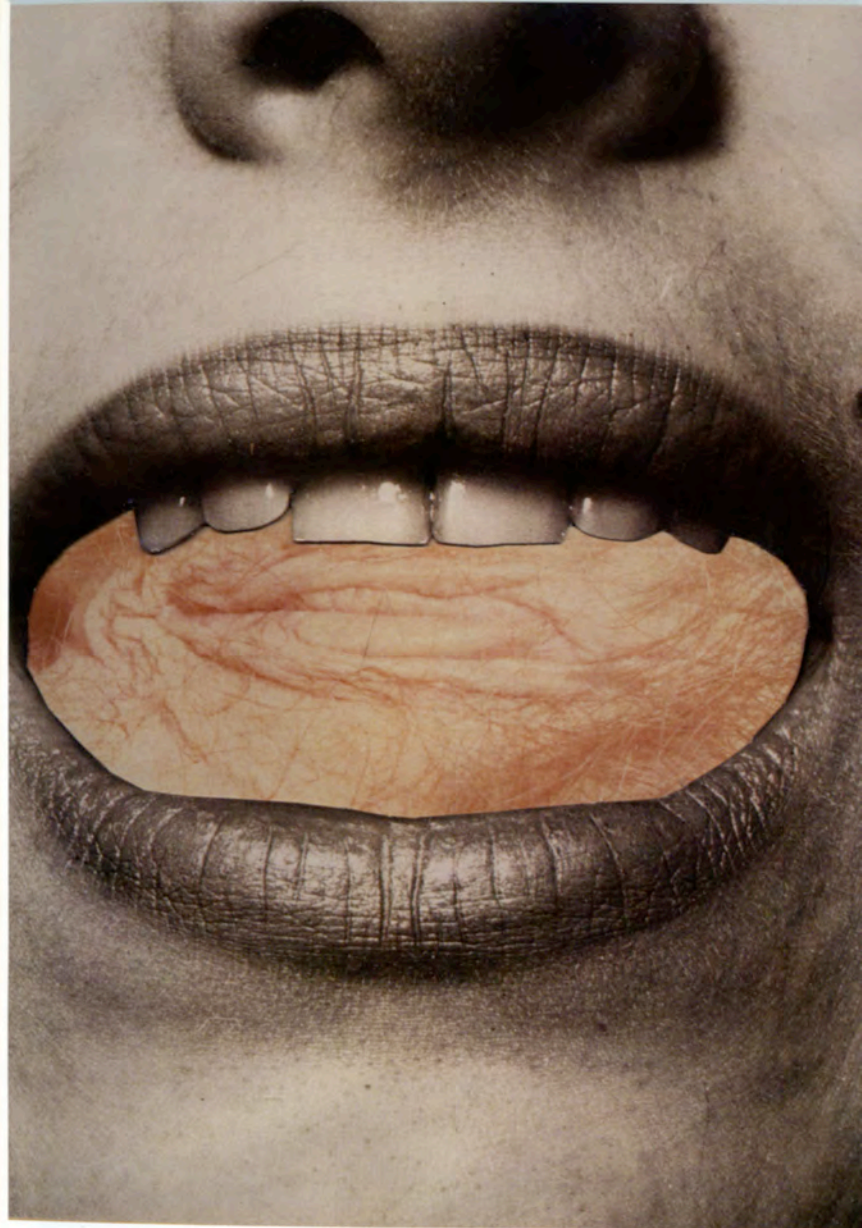
## PENELOPE SLINGER

### *Hear What I Say (1970-1977)*

The art and the life of Penelope Slinger (b.1947 London) are inextricably interwoven. *Hear What I Say* is the second of three exhibitions focussing on the artist's early output; photographic collages, 3D objects and sculptural works from the 1970s.

In these pieces, Slinger uses the tools provided by Surrealism to penetrate the female psyche, presenting herself as both subject and object in a group of collages and montages which sidestep the then current themes of 1960s and 70s art. Exhibited in London in 1977, the work's explicit depiction of 'feminine power' and its anarchic approach to life, challenged and outraged many of her peers as well as the critics. The artist left Britain in 1979, never to return; the Rifleman exhibition being the first time much of the work will have been shown publicly in almost forty years.

Initially published in book form under the title *An Exorcism*, the photo-collage series, seven years



ABOVE: *READ MY LIPS 2*  
photographic collage. 24 x 19 cm, 1973







in the making, was created in the tradition of the classical 'photo-romance', taking its cue from Max Ernst's *Une Semaine de Bonté* and *La Femme 100 Têtes*. In these works the artist explores the ultimate romance - the death and rebirth of Self. The action takes place in a deserted country mansion, the empty rooms of which represent the many chambers of a woman's being. Each image is a meditation on a particular state of consciousness. It represents a place where the lines between the world of dream and that of so-called 'reality' are undefined, as the sub-conscious is opened to the light of conscious scrutiny.

The series follows on from Slinger's first photo-book *50% The Visible Woman* (1971) and the showing of her 3D works at the ICA's *Young and Fantastic* exhibition in 1969, when the artist was aged twenty-one. The final collection of the period, *Mountain Ecstasy* (1978), achieved a unique combination of the erotic and the mystical.

The narrative has a mise-en-scène which can be attributed to the artist's work with the all-woman theatre troupe Holocaust (1971) and her appearance in and art direction of the feature film *The Other Side of the Underneath* (d.Jane Arden) now re-issued in a special edition by the BFI. In that year she also worked on the production and design for Picasso's play *The Four Little Girls* at the Open Space Theatre, London, at the same time developing an interest in Tantric Art which would guide her artistic and spiritual direction throughout the 1980s. She was named Woman of the Year in New York 1982, other recipients of the award



being film director and union organiser Ellen Burstyn and US Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick. Slinger describes her output as a "map of the journey of the Self". Surrealism allowed her to delve into the subconscious and emerge with archetypal glyphs. The next logical step for the artist was to include Tantric and Visionary influences which brought a further dimension to her artistic journey. She has, since then, woven her own mode of Surrealism together with a radical approach to spiritual energy forming a bridge from the subconscious to the super-conscious, the realm of unlimited potential.

Her many works include *The Secret Dakini Oracle* (1978), her illustrations for *Sexual Secrets: the Alchemy of Ecstasy* (1979 & 2000), & *The Path of the Mystic Lover* (1993).

In 2009, the photo-collages were exhibited at Tate St Ives as part of *The Dark Monarch: Magic and Modernity in Modern Art* and in *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists & Surrealism*, Manchester Art Gallery.





*"The primitive psyche has provided Penny Slinger with a brilliant means of expressing her drama. She unfolds the myth born from her own experience, the anatomy of her psyche, entwined with primordial images"* Roland Penrose

*"Penelope Slinger's exhibition showed us how powerfully a woman is able to transform Surrealism."* Laura Mulvey, *Spare Rib*

*"Penny Slinger's latest photo-book is the ultimate expose. A cascade of photo-collage imagery which has all the emergent trepidation of Hesse's 'Steppenwolf'."*  
Sheldon Williams, *Art & Artists*

Penelope Slinger was born in London in 1947, she took a pre-diploma at the Farnham School of Art and a degree in Art & Design at Chelsea College (1966-69). She exhibited in *Young & Fantastic* at the ICA on leaving college. Her work explores the human journey through life and time. She moved to America in the 1990s where she continues to work as an artist.



IN ABSENCE OF FORM:  
*Penelope Slinger's collage art*

Maxa Zoller

*A collage exploits itself*

*A corner*

*Seeking identity*

*In its absence of form*

*50% The Visible Woman*, Penny Slinger  
(Narcis Publishing, London, 1971)

I returned to my desk at the British Library and opened my eagerly awaited copy of Penelope Slinger's 1971 publication *50% The Visible Woman*. On the first left-hand page I read the following hand written dedication:

*"For Niki with all hopes for the future -  
into continuity, to forge a language,  
my love Penny."*

Someone, possibly a researcher or librarian, had added "(de St Phalle)" after 'Niki'.

Penelope Slinger's art forms part of those unique artistic practices, which first explored female desire in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Her œuvre relates to the work of pioneering female artists such as Niki de Saint Phalle, VALIE EXPORT, Ana Mendieta and Carolee Schneemann. These women





REVERTING

photographic collage from 'An Exorcism' series, 49 x 87 cm, 1977

