

women artists

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Slinger at Riflemakers gallery, London 'Hear What I say' is a photo romance. 7 years in the making, it attempts to decipher the ultimate love affair; the death and rebirth of the self. As exhibition number two in a three part series, it presents works made in the 1970s, during the artist's early career.

'Read my Lips', 'I

See': Penelope

Speak What I

In 1979, Penelope Slinger left Britain, and this series of exhibitions, all at the Riflemaker, mark the first occasion her work has been shown publicly in almost 40 years.

19 cm Riflemaker is an unmistakable, character filled gallery, it does not conform to a generic white cube aesthetic, and the works are displayed so as to punctuate the wooden panelling, flooring and ceiling. Features, which, with their density and weight, arguably might oppress the

artworks. Though, I feel it is not

coincidence that Slingers, photographic

collages, objects and sculptural works do

not succumb to the pressure of the space

blending into the surroundings and

The space, becomes inclusive, we are

tangents, down dark unlit stairways and

guided along a thought processes, lead on

punching out from them.

but bear the weight of the architecture, both

Lips 2 (1973) photographic collage 24 x

Penelope Slinger Read My

into a cellar, erotic and mystical. The architecture of the gallery space echoes the rooms featured in the collaged photo romance. Penelope Slinger O (1977) photographic collage on card 50 x 35 cm Heavy with wood, barren, yet laden with their own symbolism and history. A history

seemingly parallel to that of Penelope

Slinger, where dual realities, existing

simultaneously, show one world inside

another. Slinger's sheer presence, imbues

the notional spaces within the frame and

the actual ones around them. The gallery

space presents the chambers of a woman's being, in actuality, as successfully as the mis-en-scenes created within the mind of the artist. Slinger's work is often categorised a surrealist, a pigeonhole with which I cannot disagree. She sits perfectly, (I suggest), amid two artists, on one side, Hannah Hoch, and on the other Linder (two female artists of equal importance). Using surrealist tools to penetrate the female

opportunity for Slinger to present herself as

psyche, the artworks provide an

dually objectified and subjectified.

Imagery is layered and I find it almost

impossible to view any form of collage

without the overriding reminder of the

vaguely violent notion, of the incision. Or

perhaps it is an erotic notion, potentially

both. Either way, Slinger cuts and frames,

one image with another, folding something

up within the parameters of something

else, an eternal magician, body parts are

swallowed whole (or hole??) by other parts, frequently mouths. There have been suggestions that the tongue, with its potential to break hearts, is the strongest muscle in the body. Aspects of orality, mouths, lips and tongues, are the vehicles through which emotions and thoughts find expression. Physically, these organs concurrently convey affection, and have the distinct ability to inflict pain and pleasure, two aspects conveyed in Slinger's pieces veraciously.

Penelope Slinger My Lips are Sealed

Triptych (1973) 3-D sculpture from the

Interiority comes hand in hand with

intimacy. My obsession is with intimacy,

built between artwork and spectator are

and it is not entirely physical. Relationships

series 'Mouth Pieces'

potentially intimate, especially where the artist allows someone into their thoughts, to hold and caress their feelings. The artist herself is not unfamiliar with concepts of intimacy, as proved not only in her visual work but also in her important book work, Sexual Secrets – The Alchemy of Ecstacy, published in 1979, where she clearly demonstrates the transformative potential of erotic intimacy. I find myself an eternal logophile, a lover of words (and of course I am partial to images also!), and there is a particular word, described in the Guinness Book of World

Records as the most succinct word in

existence, that seems appropriate in

relation to Slinger's visual imagery:

Mamihlapinatapai. It refers directly to a look

shared by two people, each wishing the

desire, but which neither wants to begin.

statements, neither they nor their viewer

makes the first move, both circling the

In the preface to her book, Intercourse,

Andrea Dworkin describes how males

we lower our voices. Women whisper,

Women trivialize what we know. Women

Women apologize. Women shut up.

shrink. Women pull back." Perhaps

men maybe, and also women, but

Slinger's work reverses this notion, or

evidences it, illustrates it maybe? Either

way she asserts her feminine power, over

frequently react to women's words (and

visual imagery, might I add) as if they are

acts of violence; reacting with violence. "So

other in an endless tango.

other initiate something that they both

Slinger's images act as provocative

essentially over me, I'm under her spell. Penelope Slinger Pearl of Wisdom (1973) 3-D sculpture from the series 'Mouth Pieces' I speak of her as an enchantress as for me her work has the ability to command me as a viewer. It is not polite, it does not whisper, although much of it is muted. The work is sensory, not in the physical sense (!!?) but in the sense that it represents so many senses, each to infinity. She clearly represents women's orality, be it what they do speak, want to speak or find impossible to say. She represents aurality, what women hear, in actuality, or hypotheticality.

To return to the symbolism of the mouth,

just as Slinger returns to it as a metaphor,

Sigmund Freud considered the mouth to

symbolise the female vagina, and that it

issues, ones which may manifest in biting

For me the overriding (and overwhelming)

sensation, upon leaving the show, was that

intimate with her mind. A sensation, which

is surely longer lasting than any physical

exchange, and one I wont neglect in a

Slinger had given me permission to be

could represent unresolved childhood

and verbal aggression.

hurry.

More about the exhibition and the Riflemaker gallery can be found here on their website: http://www.riflemaker.org/s-index a beautiful book was published on the occasion of the exhibition and can be bought from the site (I highly recommend it!!)

Article written by Alison Humphrey:

(http://alisonhumphrey.tumblr.com)

#Penelope Slinger #Women Artists #fyeah

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20 notes