

## Translation Vogue

# Documentary, exhibition and parade celebrate Penny Slinger, pioneering artist of British feminism

Icon of the late 1960s English Surrealism, the artist was responsible for opening up the dark side of the flower power decade with videos, collages, texts and sculptures that plunge into the sensual and spiritual psyche of women

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Aug 18, 2019 - 6:50 pm Updated Aug 19, 2019 - 3:12 pm



Penny Slinger. (Foto: Penny Slinger/ Adrian Dirand (divulgação)/ Ines Manai (divulgação) / Getty Images)

Fifty years after being named one of the pioneers of British feminism, artist Penelope "Penny" Slinger finally, at 72, feels at ease as a... feminist.

"At the time, I didn't fit in as such, because I didn't think we should be seen as equal to men, or act like them. Rather, we wanted our qualities to be valued with equal power, including the sexuality to which we are entitled and which could not be set aside to claim our role in society," Penny explains at the end of the latest couture show of the Dior, whose scenario was signed by her. "The concept of feminism today has matured and broadened to include everything I believe to be pertinent to women, so I'm fine with it."



The Larval Worm Collage (1969) (Photo: Penny Slinger / Adrian Dirand (publicity) / Ines Manai (publicity) / Getty Images)

Icon of the English surrealism of the late 60's, the artist was responsible for opening up the dark side of the flower power decade. Her videos, collages, texts and sculptures, often with strong erotic appeal, have forced a generation to plunge into the sensual and spiritual psyche of women. "I wouldn't say it was the dark side, but the 60's gray," she laughs.

"At that time, we were optimistic about the power to change the world. And I thought part of

that was claiming a woman's right to pleasure. It is part of our nature, and if there were no sex and eroticism, neither I nor you would be here. It is something that should be celebrated and not considered taboo or shame. Claiming pleasure is part of you, it is sacred. And men are part of it, I like them very much, who also need to break free. ”

To denounce female oppression, Penny's work included heartbreaking doll houses, masks, fire, mouths, wedding cakes and witches, the latter when she joined the Holocaust, a radical feminist theater group founded by Jane Arden and Sheila Allen, in the early 70's.

And then there was Arden's fateful experimental film, *The Other Side of the Underneath*, in which Penny, despite protests from her partner at the time, film director Peter Whitehead, was filmed having sex with another man. The consequences were dire for most participants; the cellist's husband Sally Minford, who signed the soundtrack, immolated herself when she saw the end result and died from the burns.



Penny-dress, signed by Penny for Dior's winter 2019 couture show (Photo: Penny Slinger / Adrian Dirand (publicity) / Ines Manai (publicity) / Getty Images)

I ask Penny if she regrets the movie. "I don't regret anything, what would be the point of that?" "I believe you have not had a healthy experience for many people involved. We thought we would embark on a transformative journey, but it turned out not to be redeeming."

After the movie, Penny released one of her most potent works, *An Exorcism*, a series of collages published in a book in 1977, in which a country house in England was transformed by fire, hawks and nudity. "It was my way out of that process and finding the light at the end of my tunnel," she recalls, which then disappeared from the public eye during the 15 years she lived on the Caribbean island of Anguilla. Today she lives in California.

It was because of *An Exorcism* that Maria Grazia Chiuri, the first woman to lead the Dior style and who has been making a revolution in the house by reinventing her historic femininity with collections of feminist themes, came to Penny. A week after the parade, the 30th Avenue Montaigne address would close its doors for a two-year retrofit, so they both had complete freedom to disfigure it.

All floors, ceilings, and walls were painted black with smoke, a gigantic dry gray tree crossed the stairs; Penny's disturbing tantric works were scattered throughout the halls where predominantly black clothes were paraded.

To complete, the artist signed the final look, a doll-house dress in the shape of the maison. "Doing this in this historic property, opened the same year I was born, was a wonderful experience, especially at the invitation of a woman who has contributed so much to the feminist cause," celebrates Penny. "I even collaborated and paraded for Thea Porter (English designer) in the 70's. I hope this work with Dior opens up new opportunities, because I love fashion."



The scene, set by Penny for Dior's winter 2019 couture show (Photo: Penny Slinger / Adrian Dirand (publicity) / Ines Manai (publicity) / Getty Images)

Until then, Penny enjoys the rediscovery of her work, with the newly released and excellent documentary about her career *Out of the Shadows* and an exhibition on display until the 24th at the Richard Saltoun Gallery in London about her tantric works of the 1970s, including unpublished photographs.

The artist, who made room for names like Cindy Sherman and Louise Bourgeois, today is dedicated to warning the world about the need to exorcise what she considers today's great demon: "The fact that humans do not respect the planet, canceling it by its civilizing process. We need to reintegrate into nature and stop putting ourselves in this position of dominance over nature. In this way we will be free indeed".