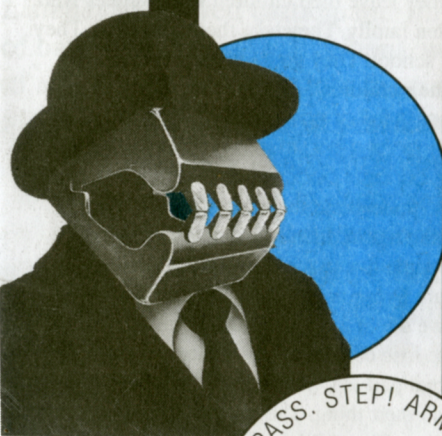


"MOVEMENTS THAT SING ARE THE MOVEMENTS THAT GET WHERE THEY NEED TO GO"
- BILL MCKIBBEN, P8

"PEOPLE CAN EMBED THEIR BRAIN WITH A PROGRAM THAT WILL HELP THEM RESIST THE ALGORITHMS"
- DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF, S2/3

"AS THE RISE OF THE FEMININE IS UPON US, THE WISE KNOW THAT THIS NEW ERA WILL BRING MUCH NEEDED TRANSFORMATION"
PENNY SLINGER, S2/4



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GO GET A LATE PASS. STEP! ARMAGEDDON HAS BEEN IN EFFECT.
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EVERYWHERE WE LOOKED WAS BURNING
EVEN IN KREUZBERG, I CAN SMELL THE BURNING REMNANTS OF BRITAIN
TO HAVE A VOICE, YOU MUST TRESPASS

"ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE THINGS ART CAN DO IS OFFER A CONCRETE EXPERIENCE OF CLIMATE CHANGE"
(OLAFUR ELIASSON, P4)

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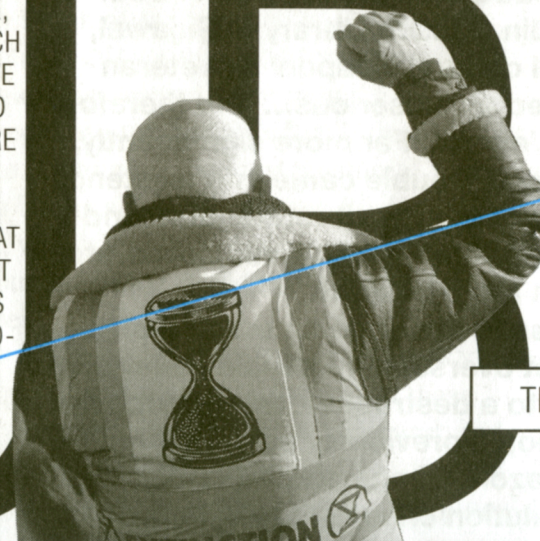


SPIRAL TRIBE:
IN THE AREA S2/16

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"IT IS ESSENTIAL TO ENJOY LIFE, CELEBRATE EACH OTHER, TO LOVE AND FUCK AND PLAY. THESE ARE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WHAT WE FIGHT AGAINST DOES NOT OVERSHADOW WHAT WE ARE FIGHTING FOR..."



THE CULTURE OF RESISTANCE

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SEX MILITANT
SEX AND SPECTACLE ON THE STREETS

PENNY SLINGER AND THE DIVINE FEMININE



RADICAL ENERGY:



A DISCUSSION WITH PENNY SLINGER

Rejected by second-wave feminists, radical artist Penelope Slinger turned to collage to remake her own reality. Tess Gruenberg talks to her about the transformational art of collage, the divine feminine and how to become your own muse

When sick as a child, Penelope Slinger would kill time by making collages. Learning young that a good remedy for boredom was creativity, she has now had a six-decade career of creating radical new realities out of old fragments.

Slinger first shocked the art world at the turn of the 70s with the publication of *50% The Visible Woman* – her first book of photographic collages, which subverted the tools of male surrealism by baring her own body as a detailed object of the feminine psyche. By objectifying herself, she haunted the silos of second-wave feminists and conservative cookie-cutters alike. Throughout the following decade, she continued to challenge the rigid paradigms of creativity, fearlessly playing both artist and muse while working in multiple media – film, theatre and sculpture – with the likes of experimental artists Jane Arden and her then-partner Peter Whitehead. Pushing the boundaries of eros was the name of the game.

In 1980, Slinger moved to the Caribbean and sought for many years to create without the pressures of an art world intent on commodifying all acts of resistance; it was only in 2009 that she was reintroduced into the art scene after her inclusion in the *Angels of Anarchy* exhibition at Manchester Art Museum.

Her mission as an artist remains strong: to uplift the divine feminine and equalise a spiritual balance long out of whack. Following Slinger's recent set design for Dior's FW19 house couture show and the release of

Richard Kovitch's *Penny Slinger – Out of the Shadows*, a documentary about her life and work, it is now obvious that her art is prophetic – a future feminism now present, where feminine and masculine transcend the biological, existing as divine energies in constant creative play.

What was your first encounter with collage as an art form?

When I was researching for my thesis at Chelsea College of Art, I realised I loved the human form, not in a purely representational sense, but in a mythic, iconic, transformed and symbolic form. I saw this occur in the history of art, but I wanted to find this nearer to my lifetime in the era of modern art. It was then that I came across the collage books of Max Ernst – *Une Semaine de Bonté* and *La Femme 100 Têtes*. It was a revelation. I had not realised before that collage could be used in this seamless way to create whole new worlds of illusion! Max Ernst had used old engravings and pasted them together where you could not see the joins. Humans and creatures merged in this fantastic world of myth and dreams. I was fascinated and not only wrote my thesis on Max Ernst's collage books, but created my own book of photographic collage, *50% The Visible Woman*, as a homage.

Surrealism was considered a man's game. How did your expression of the feminine psyche advance the surrealist movement?

OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Director Richard Kovitch on how he came to make a documentary about the pioneering radical artist Penelope Slinger

I wanted to turn the inside out of the woman before me, namely myself, and display the findings through the revolutionary tools of collage and its ability to remake reality. One can consider surrealism a movement in the history of art, or as an approach to reality – an artistic reinvention that is multi-faceted in its nature, untied to the rules of convention, and limited only by the extent of the imagination. I just took these tools and applied them to radical self-expression as a woman. What does it mean to be your own muse?

It means you don't ask anyone else to do anything you wouldn't do yourself. And to make things even more straightforward, you do it yourself. You develop the ability to be in two places at once, the viewer and the viewed. You are presenting yourself through your own lens, subject and object all at once. On a very simple level, if we don't find ourselves inspiring, that is a sorry state of affairs. There is endless inspiration in unravelling the mystery of the self and how it interacts with the world around it. It is fascinating to examine how we are seen and how we see ourselves.

You shocked the art world with visual statements about how female bodies are seen and objectified. Now we live in an image culture in which it is increasingly difficult to shock an audience, what is the role of shock in art now?

The shock of recognition is probably the best jolt an artwork can offer. That recognition may come from a deep and hidden place, but in that moment of encounter, it can stir something deep within the viewer. I think intensity of purpose can feel shockingly real. Art done just for shock value may only have a brief life, but – when done with intrinsic conviction – will resonate beyond its times, even while being appropriate to them. Making a spectacle of oneself. I have been doing that for a long time and (am) not stopping now, using my body at this age as my current muse. That is still a bit shocking.

What are some misconceptions about the divine feminine?

I would prefer rather to define her qualities. What do we mean by the divine feminine? The goddess. She has many forms. The aspect of divinity which embraces all embodiment as well as all spirit, that brings awareness of the sacredness of all living things. As the rise of the feminine is upon us, to balance out the male domination that has been prevalent for so long, the wise know that for this new era to bring much needed transformation, it is the higher qualities – of compassion, cooperation, empathy and heart wisdom – that we all need to cultivate. These are attributes of the divine feminine and her imminence is best expressed by bringing these values into play as the guiding lights of the new feminisation of Earth. In *An Exorcism* and your recent work with Dior, you play with the symbol of the house. What does that mean to you?

We all have to live somewhere, don't we? We live in our bodies, and those bodies for the most part live in clothes. Those clothed bodies live in houses. As with many other aspects of the mundane world, I like to take the elements of the house and shake them up and re-examine them. In my series of doll houses in the 70s, I transformed doll houses into harbingers of fantasies and dreams, abodes of the psyche and subconscious, not just material edifices. In *An Exorcism*, I took a large derelict mansion house and made it a container for the different aspects of my psyche, opening the door to each room to explore another aspect of my inner self. So I have used and continue to use the house as not just what it appears to be and its practical value, but as a symbol for, and exchangeable with, the body of a living being, haunted with the spirits that abide there.

What do you think needs radical rethinking in the art world?

It's not just the art world but the whole of culture and society that needs rethinking right now! Would we be on the brink of complete system failure of our whole ecosystem if we had been living by the right guiding principles? I think we are looking at a revolution occurring, where for the first time in history I know of, the art world is starting to take notice of women artists. I am particularly happy for this as I am a woman and I, along with other aspiring women artists, have been

marginalised throughout art history as we know it, hoping this is our time to step into the light. If the energy of the feminine can really permeate the world of art, it will automatically create an internal revolution and shifting of values. Let's hope this comes to pass, both for the world of art and the world in general. Is opting out of the art world a form of resistance?

The only career you affect by such resistance is your own! I did make choices that did not support my career as an artist. But life has woven me back into the art world, and for that I am very grateful, as – despite thinking that I could build my whole career outside of it – I found that I need to be in it to be visible. So I guess in life it's a question of resisting or embracing where appropriate. What does liberation look like to you, and how can resistance help us get there?

All that is born must die; that which outlasts these cycles is the only true liberation and that is the cultivation of the spirit which inhabits the flesh. While here on earth, I have been trying to free myself and by extension others from the things that bind them and stop them from reaching their true potential. High on that list has been the liberation of the feminine, as that energy had been stifled and suppressed for a very long time.

"As the rise of the feminine is upon us, to balance out the male domination that has been prevalent for so long, the wise know that for this new era to bring much needed transformation, it is the higher qualities – of compassion, cooperation, empathy and heart wisdom – that we all need to cultivate."

How that liberation looks to me is being free to express and embody the multi-dimensional beings that we truly are. Free to feel in our whole sentient bodies, with full sensitivity and awareness, capable of experiencing bliss. As for resistance, we do not want to become what we resist, but it is useful to put practices in place that help us resist negative trains of thought. We can replace un-useful patterns of thought with positive ones. In whatever situation

we find ourselves, the freedom of our consciousness is the only freedom we truly own and have control over.

The other resistance I can recommend is resisting following the patterns that are presented to us to live by. Just because there is common consensus in these matters does not mean it is the optimal choice. The holders of power seem to think they need to control people to ensure productivity, but this is mistaken. We are the most productive when we can do what we love. So resist the system in order to find out what you are passionate about, then embrace that with all you are.

Clockwise from left: Compromise to Form a Solution (1969), Primal (1969-77), The Surprised Tin Opener (1969), Don't Look (1969), Rosebud (1973), all by Penny Slinger

It's fitting that chance introduced me to the world of Penny Slinger.

In my film about her extraordinary life, *Penny Slinger: Out of the Shadows*, she observes: "Any great work of art has to be a combination of intention and divine accident." I'll leave others to decide whether greatness applies in this instance, but certainly the long and arduous process of making the film provided ample evidence of the intense role intention and divine accident play in the creative process. On seeing Penny's work for the first time at the Riflemaker Gallery in London in late 2012, I had no idea how all-consuming my journey would be – four years in total. But when you start unearthing a universe as expansive yet undocumented as Penny's, there is no alternative but to submerge yourself fully in the material. So into the shadows I delved.

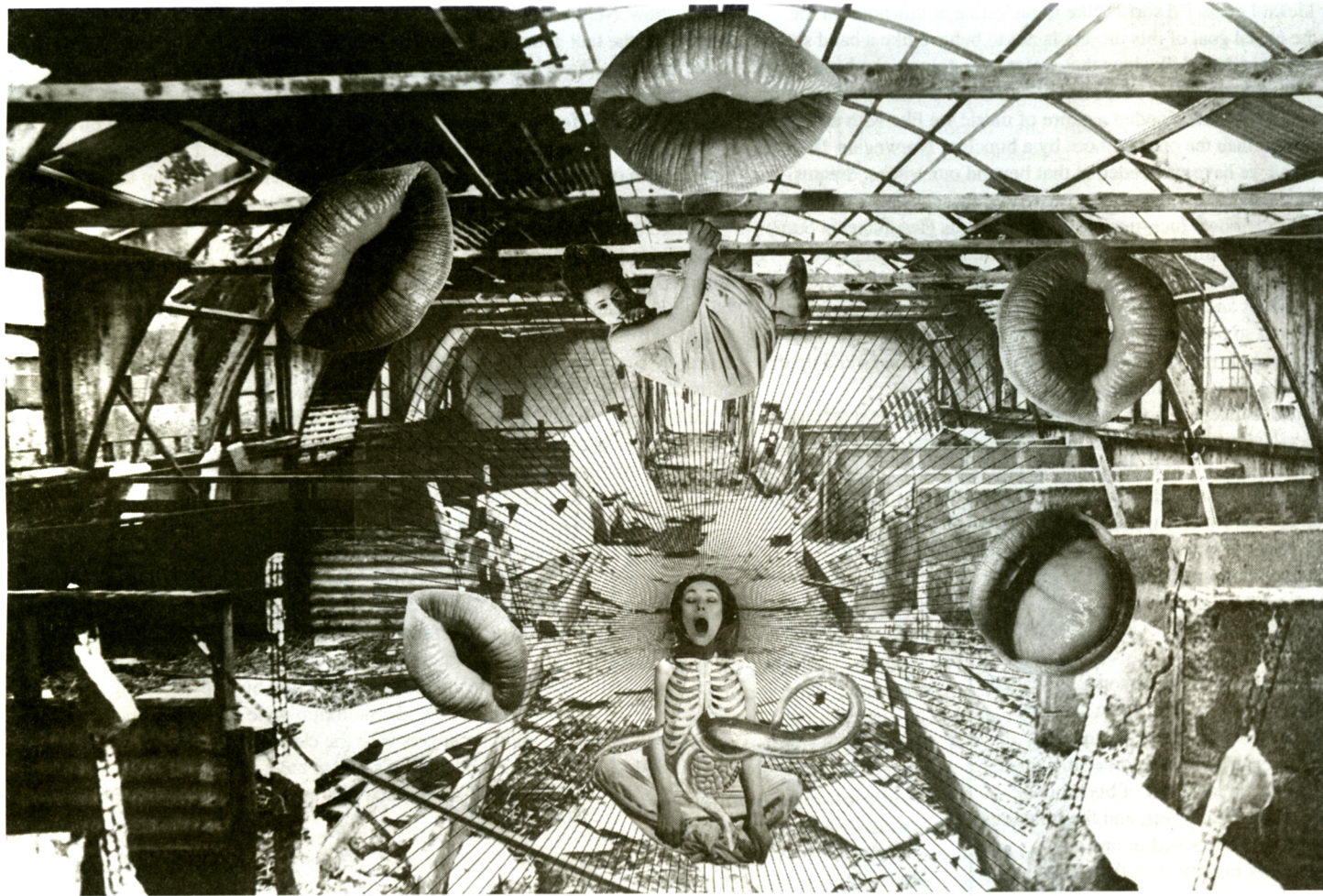
Making the film was never easy – for every lucky break, a new obstacle presented itself. Most difficult of all was persuading the filmmaker Peter Whitehead to become involved. As a key collaborator during Penny's formative years, he had many unique contributions to make. It took several years before he finally relented, eventually offering us exclusive excerpts of Lilford Hall, the hypnotic, previously unseen 16mm film he co-directed with Penny in 1969. But beyond these practical difficulties, it was the response to Penny's resuscitated career that cast a fascinating light on how the western world still feels even now about well-established taboos: beauty, the body, femininity, transgression, cultural appropriation. As the critic Maxa Zoller observes in the film: "The binaries are not working any more. The 'Me' and the 'Other' doesn't work any more. That's why Penny is interesting again, because she worked before the theorisation and categorisation of certain politics and certain poetics. And she hovers between the archaic and the modern, the inside and the out, the male and the female. She's not exclusive."

From one perspective, the current era feels right for Penny's re-entry into the culture. The internet has accelerated exposure to alternative viewpoints. Art created by women is no longer presented as a footnote to art created by men. Ideas around sexuality and gender have proven great disrupters, securing new legal rights while undermining heteronormative hegemony.

Yet from another perspective, Penny and her work still sit outside the rigidities of the current status quo. Her use of beauty; the different cultures she embraces in her collages; her positive thoughts about masculinity, which are carefully balanced alongside her advocacy of the feminine; her resistance to puritanism in all its forms: she continues to push buttons. Her full-frontal collages are still not permitted on book covers in the US, and her work has antagonised Japanese customs officials. Indeed, we were all surprised when *Out of the Shadows* was given an '18' certificate (rated 'R') by the British Board of Film Classification due to "strong sexual images and nudity". Meanwhile, films that harbour graphic depictions of violence secure '15' certificates or less. Evidently there are many battles still to be won, not least against the neo-reactionism that continues to pollute political discourse on both sides of the Atlantic.

We can rely upon Penny to fight these battles. Both her classic pieces and her new work map our deepest anxieties and desires, embracing a combination of intention and divine accident so we might see ourselves anew – not as we wish to be seen, but as we really are. Such revelations are the achievement of all great artists. It has been an honour for me to help shine a light on a master practitioner in this arena, especially now, when her visions and ideas have never felt so urgent.

Go to pennyslingerfilm.com for more about Penny Slinger – *Out of the Shadows*



“MAKING A SPECTACLE OF ONESELF – I HAVE BEEN DOING THAT FOR A LONG TIME AND AM NOT STOPPING NOW, USING MY BODY AT THIS AGE AS MY CURRENT MUSE. THAT IS STILL A BIT SHOCKING”