



PENNY SLINGER

How does one write about such an important and influential artist, author and feminist like Penny Slinger? A Way-sharer in the Arts and the Art of Transformation alike? A fearless and strong woman and artist whose confidence is effortless and natural, who paved paths where there were none before with her photographs, sculptures, and as an author since publishing her first book *50% The Visible Woman* in 1969. Countless have walked on the trail she left and they will without doubt continue to do so in future. Penny Slinger always refused to be defined and put into a neat box society still wants women to be in.

Space is her place which is infinite, thank goddess!

While researching I found a recent interview from September 2022 on The Last Bohemians Podcast* which I highly recommend. A few things she said in this conversation with the host journalist Kate Hutchinson stuck with me ever since. To me they embody the power and magic that defines Penny Slinger and her work.



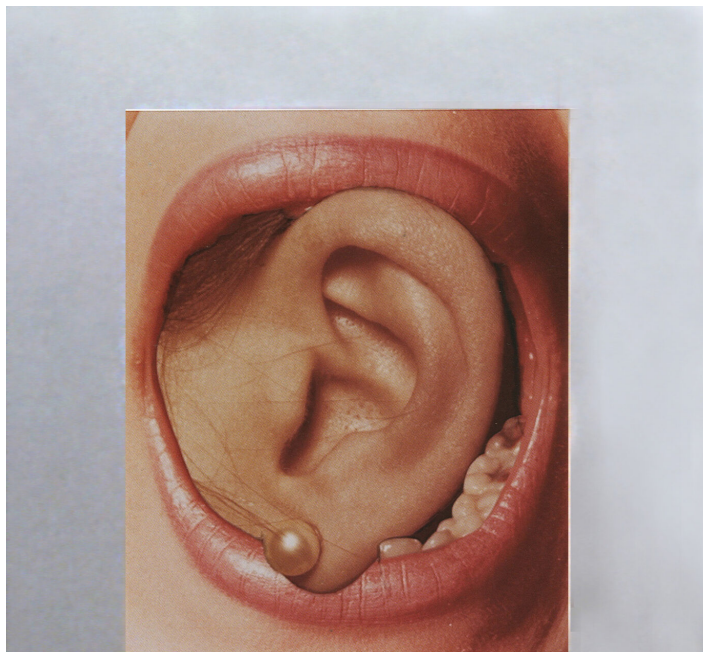
Penny Slinger, Larval Worm, Photo collage, 1969

First, that art is always at our fingertips, everywhere and all the time. The beauty and endless source of being her own muse, to be subject and object at the same time and finally to look at yourself as a piece of art instead of falling into the trap of perceiving yourself only through the lens of your ego. These three concepts bear immense wisdom as they hold truth and expansion. Every person on their sacred hero's journey will find echoes of these truths on their way back to and into themselves. The potential is limitless.

I first encountered Penny's name and work when I stumbled over The Tantric Dakini Oracle Deck she had published with her then partner, tantric scholar Nik Douglas. As you can imagine it is an incredibly intricate and deep Oracle deck. But it was the combination of her collages with the Tibetan Buddhism Dakini teachings and concept which really blew my mind. I practiced Tibetan Buddhism for

many years including Dakini practice. To see this merged through her raw collages into an oracle deck was to me unheard of. It challenged everything I knew, or thought was possible when it comes to art and spirituality. It was exciting and stimulating!

The second time was when I visited the Cut and Paste 400 years of Collage Exhibition in 2019 in Edinburgh. I remember the sensation of literally falling into her photomontage “I hear what you say” when entering the room. I recall the dimmed light, the sounds of my steps walking through the room on the wooden parquet floor and the soft noises that came from Carolee Schneemann’s 16 mm film “Body Collage”* that was also on display, playing on repeat. The sensation of disruption when I looked at Penny’s works of her Mouthpiece Series was like my higher self observing in amusement my 3D brain trying to form a coherent thought or response. The for me sparkly transmutive moment was releasing the need of trying to make sense of it, to react. Instead, I let its surreal and chaotic essence drip into my heart strings and enjoyed the clash and splash into my reality. The bliss of radical transformational Art is always inherent in Penny Slinger’s immense oeuvre, and I can’t wait for the long overdue Retrospective of the Kaleidoscopic plethora of works and offerings she birthed and shared with us in this “Cauldron of Life” as she puts it so beautifully!



Penny Slinger, I Hear What You Say, Photo collage, Roland Penrose collection 1973



Penny Slinger, Read My Lips Photo collage, Roland Penrose collection 1973

Which of the five elements would you choose in relation to your practice and yourself?

As an alchemist, I would have to say that I incorporate all the elements in the process of making my art.

Without each being in the retort/cauldron, there would be an imperfect practice!

In my astrological chart there is quite a good balance between the 4 elements of earth, water, fire and air, with a little extra air as I just squeezed into Libra.

As creativity arises in the Great Sea of Becoming which exists in the ethers, the place of all potential, then of course space always plays an active role in bringing vision and inspiration into immanence.

Then all four elements help to ground that vision of what could be into something that actually is.



Penny Slinger, Immortal, fom My Body In a Box, 2020/2021

Is there a particular situation that inspired or motivated you to become an artist?

The situation that first inspired me to become an artist was, as a child, finding myself often alone and needing something to counteract the loneliness and the boredom. Art filled that role, that empty space. Once I was engaged in creative pursuits I could always be entertained, always have something to do. It became my best friend in the world and one so less fickle than human beings!

As I always had a natural aptitude, it was a no brainer. I loved to express myself, be it visually, through words, through dressing up and through expressive dance. It made life meaningful.

Later, when, an art student at Chelsea College of Art, London, I had to prepare my thesis. I searched through the history of art to try and find my subject, my inspiration. It was then that I discovered the collage books of Surrealist artist Max Ernst (Une Semaine de Bonte and La Femme 100 Tetes). This was a revelation.

By example he showed me that collage could be used to create seamless magical realities which could describe dreamscapes and mythological beings in a visual language that disrupted mundane reality and spoke directly to the subconscious. I was in love!

Feeling that the greatest form of tribute was to use the inspiration felt to create something of one's own, I immediately put together my first book.

I wanted to use this new toolkit to delve into the psyche of the feminine, as I felt this to be a relatively unmined territory and I wanted to claim it as my own.

I have never wanted to be an 'also ran', I have always seen myself as a map maker and trail blazer. Instead of using old engravings as source material as Ernst did, I decided to use photographs and to this end took

photos, had photos taken of me and freely sourced anything that seemed relevant from whatever media I could put my hands on.

The resulting work was 50% The Visible Woman. I made the first version in 1969. It was published in 1971 and in 2021 republished to mark the 50 year anniversary.



Penny Slinger, Self Portrail



Penny Slinger, Self Portrail

Do you consider yourself spiritual and how does this feed into your work?

I have always had a contact with the unseen world, living a lot through my imagination and the riches that reside therein. I have also always been fascinated by various spiritual paths and practices through the history of civilization. A favorite book when younger was 'The Secret Teachings of All Ages' by Manly Hall.

Religion has generally proved problematic with its dogma and politics that often seek to control rather than liberate, but the spiritual path has always been close to my heart and soul.

As I have been rather eclectic in what has attracted me in this realm, when I discovered the path of Tantra, that spoke to me most strongly as it is a path of inclusion rather than exclusion, weaving together various

approaches in its mystic, transcendent web.

It allows for the integration of the material with the ethereal and sees the body itself as the sacred temple of all mysteries.



Penny Slinger, Self Portrail

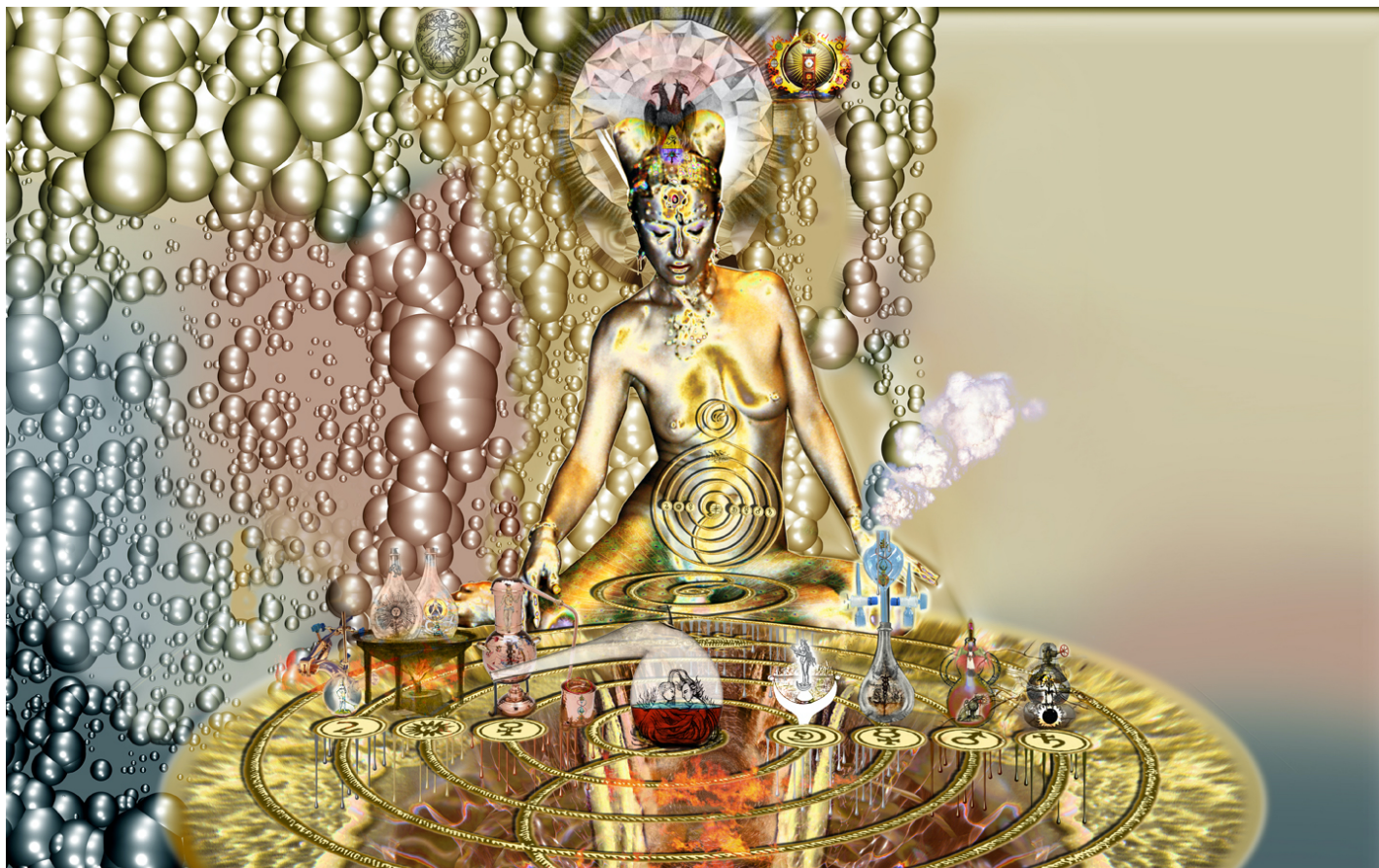


The sacred and the 'profane' dance together in this magical path and enlightened ecstasy is there for the embracing.

All inspiration I see as a gift from spirit.

How can one exclude the spiritual from one's work when it is that which informs it and gives it life?

I myself am a cloak of flesh wrapped around a breath of spirit, a whisper wafted by cosmic winds..



Penny Slinger, Alchemica, Dakini Oracle

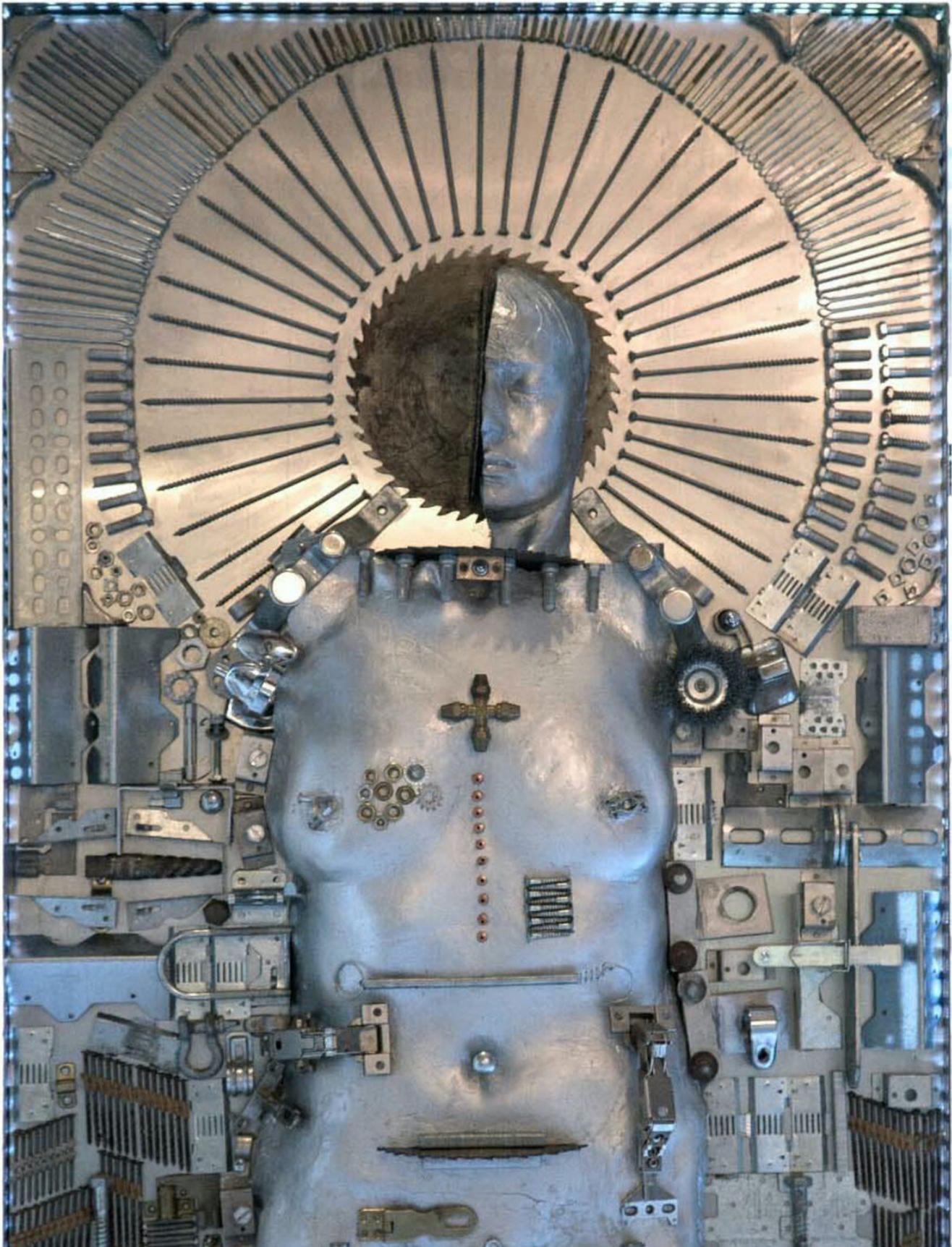
Is there a book or an author you are reading or in general that stimulates inspires you?

Oh goodness! I am probably like a magpie, poking around and finding treasures here and there to bring back to my nest...No one thing springs to mind, but there have been many points of connection through out my life.

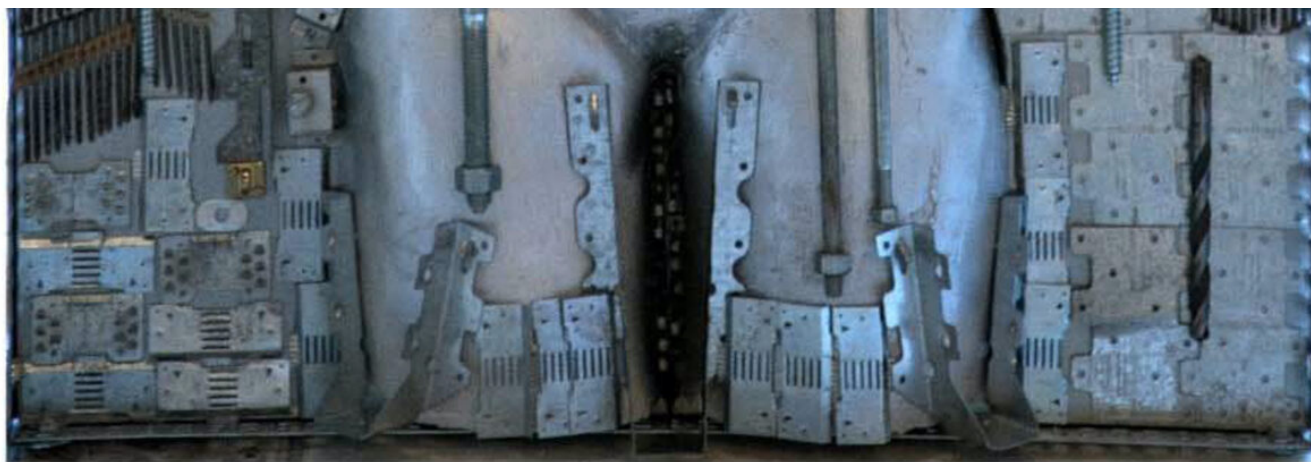
It's that moment of recognition, where one feels that you recognise what the other person is talking about and then it, by osmosis, becomes part of you.

That can be in the form of writing, of the visual arts, of performance, of film...when younger I would say films

often brought me the most inspiration as they were the most immersive.



Penny Slinger, Iron Maiden



Please tell us what you are looking forward to this year

I am looking forward to collating all my computer files in one place on a new mega storage system.

I am hoping to get the big project I have in mind off the ground, a virtual museum of my life's work.



Penny Slinger, Bride and Groom – Are You Sure You Can Handle All That?, 1973



Brick Wall 04, captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger



Where do you find inspiration, how can we imagine your process while creating work?

All inspiration originates in the mind sky. It can be triggered by events or other stimuli in mundane reality, but that is where it really takes shape.

After that it is a question of determining how this vision can be manifested, what tools of learned craft, what materials are required to bring it into reality.

As a multi media artist, I have developed quite a wide range of skillsets and modalities over my career spanning over five and a half decades. Of course I always feel inadequate, with all I have evolved, to fully express the grandeur of what I see in vision, but I try my best to do what I can with what I have to hand.

These days many of my projects require hours of work on the computer as I use digital photography a lot in the creation of my collages and the tools of the digital realm are most in tune with the times. I also work with 3 dimensional creations as well, so this brings me into contact with all kinds of materials as I construct works which include lifecasts of myself along with all kinds of 'found objects'.

Until I relocate my magic wand, I have to go through the trials and sometimes traumas of physical creation.



Penny Slinger, *In the Depths of the Nigredo*, Photo collage, 1969

Penny Slinger, *Deer*



Aesthetics and Process aside, which emotions you want to trigger with your work and why?

I seek a visceral reaction, something which touches people on a cellular level. We all need to open our hearts wider and dispell the spell of numbness which having to live in an often cruel world tends to induce. So there are a range of feelings i wish to engender, each particular to a specific work or body of work, but the main thing is to feel.

Often there has been a sense of unease that I want to evoke as I am trying to crack through the veneer of the mundane, the acceptable, the status quo, to get to the real juice that abides within. This can sometimes be a messy process.

But then once the shackles are broken, I seek to present new marriages, fresh combinations of elements into new realities which I show to be within reach once density opens itself up and throws away the rules which

governed it.



Penny Slinger, Twentieth Century Reconstruction, Photo collage, 1969



Penny Slinger, Celestial Tabernacle, photo collage on card 1970-77, from An Exorcism

If you could, what would you change in the art world?

I turned away from the art world for many years because I was not happy with the terms of engagement I found in it. I thought I could establish my own legacy outside its confines. But after trying it out for many years, I discovered that if you do not play the game, you are eliminated from the annals of the history of art.

I did not want that fate, so I am back in, but still somewhat with the standing of an 'outsider' artist.

The whole situation is too complex to tackle with a few trite words, but I would like to see artists of value being able to benefit from the value they contribute while they are alive, rather than having to wait to be recognized until after they are dead!



Penny Slinger, Prayer for Planet Earth

The future is .. ?

Shall I look into my crystal ball? Oh no! So scary....

We live in deeply uncertain times. We live on the brink of extinction of species, of collapse of eco systems and of karmic repercussion for all the human race has wrought. It is indeed a pretty grim picture.

As hope must spring eternal in order to move forward, we, as visionaries, must find ways to reflect back the dilemma and to show paths to salvation.

I am a practioner of the transformative arts. I feel any real artist must hold that as central to their practice. So in light of this, I say the future is what we make it. My prayers are that we can remake what we have unmade.

ABOUT IMPRESSUM DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG CONTACT

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May understanding dawn in all human beings that we are one connected ecosystem and that everything that is is worthy of respect and fully imbued with spirit. May all hearts crack wide open. Ah ho!

Follow Penny Slinger on her Instagram for updates and dive into her works on her website!

*The Last Bohemians is an award-winning, critically acclaimed, independent podcast series that meets maverick and radical women in arts and culture and takes listeners on a vivid, hallucinatory trip through their extraordinary lives. From subversive musicians and style icons to game-changing artists, these are women who have lived life on the edge and who still refuse to play by the rules.

The series was created in 2019 by host and journalist Kate Hutchinson and is produced by a team of rising women in audio, with portraits by Laura Kelly.

*By the mid-1960s Schneemann was a leading figure in New York performance art. *Body Collage* was shot on 20 December 1967. In the film, Schneemann covers herself in wallpaper paste and then sticks shredded printer's paper all over herself to become a living collage. *"My intention was not simply to collage my body (as an object), but to enact movement so that the collage image would be active, found, not predetermined or posed. When I had covered myself with glue I ran back and forth around the pile of papers until the momentum of the runs provoked a fall into it. Once there I rolled heavily to attach the papers to my body in a random shape and proportion. (Schneemann 1997)*

Conducted by Esther Harrison