

Meet Penny Slinger of Downtown

VoyageLA LOCAL STORIES

SHARE

TWEET

PIN



Today we'd like to introduce you to Penny Slinger

Alright, so thank you so much for sharing your story and insight with our readers. To kick things off, can you tell us a bit about how you got started?

I was born in England in 1947. From an early age I exhibited artistic talent and knew I wanted to be an artist. I studied at art college for 5 years, the last 3 being my Diploma course at Chelsea College of Art, London, where I graduated with a First Class Honors degree in 1969.

While a student I created my first book of collage and poetry entitled 50% The Visible Woman, published in 1971. At this time I decided to be my own muse and developed my style of Feminist Surrealism. I was fortunate enough to exhibit my work at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London, in 'Young and Fantastic' in the summer of 1969.

I went on to publish two more books of collage in the 1970s, and the book Sexual Secrets, the Alchemy of Ecstasy which introduced Tantra and the idea of sacred sexuality to a modern Western audience. Working on that book brought me to America, along with my partner and co-author, Nik Douglas.

From there we went to the Caribbean, where I resided for 15 years before coming to California in 1994. From then until 2018 I lived in the Santa Cruz Mountains, built my own audio and video studio and worked with the local communities on sacred ritual performance art.

I have been living and working in Los Angeles since 2018, with my creative partner Dhiren Dasu. A highlight of recent years is when I designed the transformation of 30 Avenue Montaigne in Paris in 2019 for Dior's last haute couture fashion show in the building I also designed a Miss Dior bag for them.

This year I designed an immersive exhibit around my 'An Exorcism' series at Richard Saltoun Gallery London to coincide with the new and expanded publication of my book by this name, first published in 1977.

Although my life has been 100% dedicated to the creation of art, in many forms and media, I have been in and out of the world of fine art. This has allowed me to expand and experiment beyond the range usual for an established artist. However, I feel that the whole spectrum of my art and life presents a highly relevant and significant cultural contribution. To this end, I am currently working on my archives so that I can leave an accessible and navigable legacy of my life as an artist, with all its flavors and nuances, relationships and locations as an integral part of the texture of this journey.

We all face challenges, but looking back would you describe it as a relatively smooth road?

When I was a teenager, I had an astrology reading done. The astrologer said, 'it's not an easy life, but it's an incredibly rich one'. I said, 'I'll take it', and that has really set the tone.

At my current age, 77, I thought things may get easier, but that does not appear to be the case! If you choose the path of the artist, you basically throw all security out the window with that choice. I have generally been fortunate enough to experience quality of life throughout, but it has been fraught with challenge, both in the field of personal relationships and in relation to my career. The struggles have been, and are, too copious to go into here, but suffice it to say, you have to believe in yourself 110% to get through, and you have to try and learn to treat success and failure, acceptance and rejection, as equal bedfellows. Not a mean task! Buddhism promotes non attachment as the key, but I have found that ardent attachment to the things that really matter to you is the only lifeboat in a sea of constant change.

In terms of specifics, I can offer a couple of examples. One instance was in 1982 when I had my first solo exhibition in New York at the Visionary Gallery. It was a mini retrospective and attracted the attention of three different powerful men, who were interested in purchasing a number of works (one even wanted to buy the whole collection). However, when it came down to it, none of them came through with a single purchase as they expected me to come with the work! When I was not willing to 'put out' and sleep with any of these men, they canceled their desire to collect the work.

So this is the kind of struggle that women artists can face. I bet there are a number of women artists who, I'm when they read this, can come up with comparable challenges on their lives.

Another instance was in 1977 when I was to show my work at the Patrick Seale Gallery in London. We had agreed on pricing and Patrick was out of town when we hung the exhibit. On his return, he walked around and said, 'we can't charge these kind of prices for this work. They are just bits of colored paper stuck together'. (He was commenting on my collages from the series Mountain Ecstasy, published as a book in 1978 by Dragon's Dream).

So in the above two instances we see both rampant sexism and an oppressively dismissive attitude towards my choice of media by a professional in the field.

Life is full of struggle anyway. These kinds of attitudes are prevalent, if often unspoken, and add unnecessary bumps in the road for the committed artist to navigate.

Appreciate you sharing that. What else should we know about what you do?

From the time I was a student, I discovered the path I wanted to take. In this era, the blending of various media and practices was not something artists were pursuing, but it felt totally relevant to me to do so. I studied painting and sculpture, but I also working with printmaking, photography, film, performance art and the written word. I wanted to establish a platform with my work that wove, blended and integrated these different creative approaches.

Combined with the means of creative expression, I also found my calling in terms of content. I saw that the female form was a key and central element in artworks, across time and culture, but generally as seen through the lens of a male artist. I decided to become my own muse so that I could portray not just the surfaces, but the inner workings of the feminine psyche. This has been the leading light that has illuminated all my work, the liberation of the feminine.

I adopted a style of presentation derived from the surrealists. After studying the collage books of Max Ernst for my thesis, I felt that the toolkit established by the surrealists to probe and lay bare the subconscious was perfect to portray the inner workings of the feminine.

I am well known for the series of collages I produced in the 1970s, collectively entitled 'An Exorcism' and published as a book in 1977, with an extended version, with text, published in 2024. The series represents the journey I took, delving into the deep recesses of my being, to discover 'Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?' I wanted to understand what about me was inherited from my upbringing and cultural context, what was projected onto me in my relationships, and who I really was in essence. It was in the form of a heroine's journey as I wanted to create maps for this kind of self investigation and to offer others signposts and landmarks to lead them through their own dark nights of the soul.

After this series was completed, I moved on to study Tantra and the next phase of my creative output is tantra-centric. The term means 'to weave' and 'to expand', to be understood as providing the Philosophical framework to weave together all facets of one's being, the physical with the spiritual, the male with the female, and to expand into the full potential of one's multi-dimensional self. It is far beyond the 'religion of sex' that is a common reductionist misconception.

When living in the Caribbean, I focused on the study of the indigenous people of the region, the Arawak Indians, and recreated them in a series of over 100 paintings and pastels.

The period when I lived in northern California was dedicated to the Divine Feminine and finding ways, through performance art, gatherings and ritual, to share Her energy with the creative community.

Currently I am seeking to break through the glass ceiling of ageism and break the spell of invisibility that threatens to engulf us when we become the wise women, no longer the desirable young women. I am using myself as my own muse now, at this age, often naked, as the platform to express my wisdom of experience, so that it may percolate back into society, rather than be lost to the annals of culture.

What I am most proud of is the fact that I am still here, I have hung in there and stayed the course, not buckled despite all the setbacks and discouraging events of my life and times. I am a warrior. Although I have always wanted to be a lover not a fighter, nevertheless, the need to constantly pick oneself up and keep on fighting seems to come with the territory.

I am also proud of the influence of the paths I have trailblazed, and that, by example, I have emboldened and given heart to many young women seeking to express themselves through their art.

What sets me apart from others is, I think, my bravery and transparency. Being prepared to show it all – the beauty and the wounds, the glory and the terror, the underbelly as well as the shiny veneer.

I also feel that my blend of the physical – the sensual and the sexual – with the spiritual is part of my unique brand.

We'd be interested to hear your thoughts on luck and what role, if any, you feel it's played for you?

I would say I have had my share of both, great good fortune and it's opposite. I have learnt never to count on anything. Welcome the positive and always keep space in your heart and mind for the most miraculous of outcomes. At the same time, not being attached to that result if things do not work out the way one would hope.

I like to keep in mind that we do not have access to the bigger picture and that things may not be as they appear. What may look like misfortune could well be an avoidance of a bigger disaster. Your spirit guides may well be looking after you and preventing you from going down a path strewn with fool's gold and ultimately leading to much deeper disappointment.

My policy is just to try to do my very best, under all circumstances. If you do your best, then you have played your part, and the rest is up to forces beyond your control to designate.

Rather than describe it as 'luck', I would prefer to talk about synchronicities and con-incidences. When things are flowing well, these events seem to automatically occur, strengthening one's faith and helping confirm that magic does truly exist..

Pricing:

- '50% The Visible Woman', photo collage and poetry, republished from 1969/1971 versions in 2021 by Blum, LA, \$50.
- 'An Exorcism A Photo Romance', book of photo collage and writing, published by Fulgur Publishing, UK, 2024, \$64.
- 'Self Image', 1970/2020 edition: Archival inkjet print, 13 3/4 x 20 inches (54.9 x 50.8 centimeters). Limited edition of 10 signed and numbered archival print \$5,000.
- One of my practices is in the area of portraiture. I take photographs of my subject that can express the inner being will help them see themselves in a light that is transformational. Contact me to find out more. Prices on request.

Contact Info:

- Website: <https://www.pennyslinger.com>
- Instagram: Pennyslinger
- Facebook: Pennyslinger

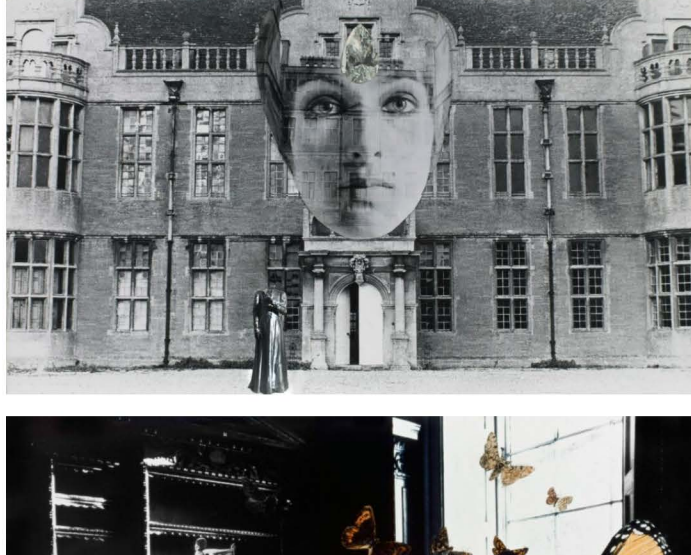
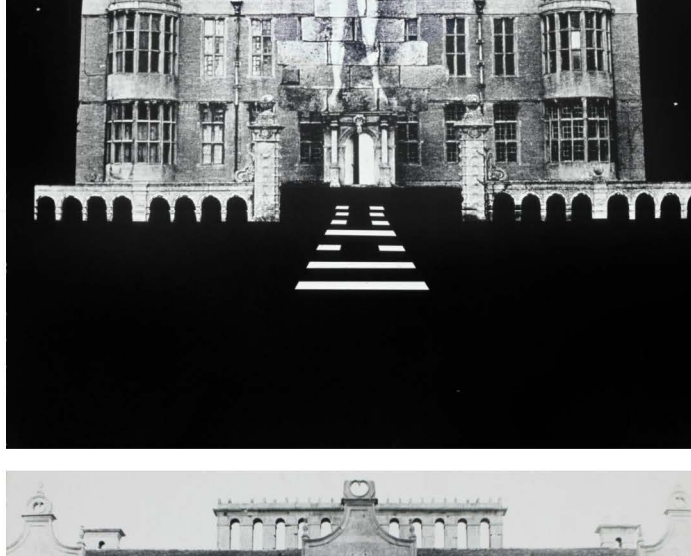
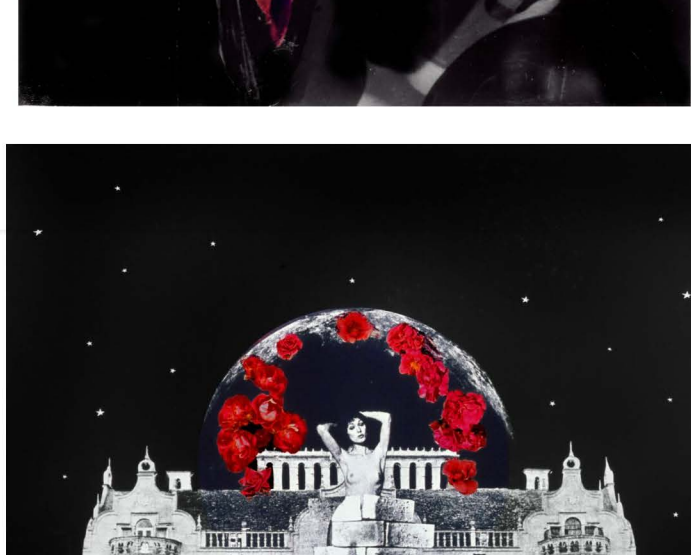


Image Credit:
Main Photo and Last Photo: Nick Berardi

Suggest a Story: VoyageLA is built on recommendations from the community; it's how we uncover hidden gems, so if you or someone you know deserves recognition please let us know [here](#).

RELATED ITEMS

LEAVE A REPLY

POPULAR

PORTRAITS OF THE VALLEY

PORTRAITS OF HOLLYWOOD

LA'S MOST INSPIRING STORIES

VOYAGELA GIFT GUIDE: SERVICES SPOTLIGHTS

VOYAGELA GIFT GUIDE: EXPERIENCES TO CONSIDER

VOYAGELA GIFT GUIDE: PRODUCTS FROM THE COMMUNITY