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TRIBUTE: Penny Slinger-Exorcism Inside Out, Part II



The provocative practice of Penny Slinger spans photography, collage, film and sculpture. Active from the late 1960s, Slinger emerged into a maelstrom of political protest, social change and sexual freedom. She graduated from the Chelsea School of Art in 1969 having developed a visual language she described as ‘feminist surrealism’, influenced by her study of European Surrealism, her friendship with Roland Penrose and association with Max Ernst. Slinger quickly began exploring and investigating

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the notion of the feminine subconscious and psyche, using her own body to examine the relationship between sexuality, mysticism and femininity.

By Dimitris Lempesis

Photo: Richard Saltun Gallery Archive



Penny Slinger, Brick Wall Behind the Door, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery

Spanning original photo-collage, print and video work, the exhibition **“Exorcism: Inside Out”** coincides with the re-publication of Penny Slinger’s iconic book, *“An Exorcism: A Photo Romance”*. After the original *“An Exorcism”* was published in 1977, the artist created this extended version, which was nonetheless withheld from being published in the UK after her other collage book *“Mountain Ecstasy”* was seized and burned by British customs for being deemed pornographic. The series of collages *“An Exorcism”* was evolved over a period of more than seven years. In early 1969 Penny Slinger first visited The House, a near derelict

Stately Home in the Northamptonshire countryside. The artist was taken there by Peter Whitehead, a film-maker who had stayed in part of the building during his student years and with whom she was living. The place seemed to be the ideal location for a film-project probing the deep metaphysics of the unconscious. They were given permission to film there. Over the next weeks the project evolved into a psychodrama with both the artists as participants. The sequences actually filmed were, however, unsatisfactory; the psychic atmosphere of The House seemed to lead then away from reality. The project was shelved but a larger number of still photographs were taken of the empty rooms and

grounds before they left. Over the next month Penny Slinger printed the black and white photos in her darkroom. They had an evocative power, which compelled her to use them as the basis for a series of collages. Penny Slinger returned to London and became involved with a woman's theatre group. This two year commitment, in which time she acted out many of archetypes and aspects of female psychosis, culminated in the making of a film, "The Other Side of the Underneath", in which she played a major role. The participation demanded of her during that project resulted in the traumatic breakdown of her own relationship with my filmmaker/falconer partner. Pushing to the limits of psychic disintegration she began to put the pieces of my life together by working on the series of collages, which became "An Exorcism". Using herself as photographic subject, Penny Slinger acted the parts to the drama. She also organized photographic sessions with her partner and her girl-friend/co-star Suzanka Fraey. In 1977, "An Exorcism" was published as a limited edition book with a grant from Roland Penrose's Elephant Trust, featuring ninety-nine of the collages. After nearly 50 years, Slinger's "An Exorcism" can finally be revealed to audiences in the UK and beyond. In celebration of this extraordinary moment, inspired by the artist's project for Dior's haute couture fashion show in Paris in 2019, the exhibition is designed as an all-immersive audio-visual environment, with the entire gallery wrapped in images from the original "An Exorcism" series and presenting a spectacular evolution of the artist's vision. "An Exorcism" is often hailed as her magnum opus. It's composed of a collection of erotic collages set against the backdrop of the empty mansion. Described by Slinger as a "surreal romance in photo collage," this work represents the "deepest excavations" she has done as an artist, started in 1969 and completed over approximately 7 years. The narrative unfolds through biographical chapters, tracing a young woman's journey towards self-actualization; from oppressive spaces dominated by phallogocentric symbolism, evident in works such as "He Crows" with the oversized head of a cock poking out from the corner, and "Tribunal", in which a naked female figure stands exposed, surrounded by an all-dressed, all-male jury, to a reality where the protagonist finally comes into her feminine power, evoked in works like "A Rose By Any Other Name", with a bright red, gigantic rose spreading its petals between a woman's naked thighs, and Through the Glass, a

tender communion of entangled women. Through a blend of personal embodiment and imaginative transgression, Slinger integrates her own body into archetypal landscapes, engaging in a cultural exorcism that explores themes of fetishism and exploitation from a feminist perspective. This autofictional journey is staged within the Gothic ambiance of Lilford Hall, merging the evocative allure of British neo-Romantic painting with the ominousness of horror cinema. The exhibition presents a selection of Slinger's original collages from *An Exorcism* alongside her recent animated film "An Exorcism – The Works" (2019), which is shown for the very first time in the UK, and reflects Slinger's original, filmic approach to the project. The entire gallery has been transformed into an immersive environment, covered with images that mirror the surreal, decaying grandeur of the mansion, completely enveloping viewers within Slinger's multifaceted exploration of desire, identity, and the subconscious.

Photo: Penny Slinger, *Self-Image*, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery

Info: Richard Saltoun Gallery, 41 Dover Street, London, United Kingdom, Duration: 3/7-7/9/2024, Days & Hours: Tue-Fri 10:00-18:00, Sat 11:00-17:00, www.richardsaltoun.com/



Penny Slinger, *The Path*, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery



Penny Slinger, *Nursing Home*, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery



Penny Slinger, Enchanted-Forest, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery



Penny Slinger, Elevation, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery



Penny Slinger, Mortification, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery



Penny Slinger, Celestial Tabernacle, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery



Penny Slinger, Wed-lock, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery



Penny Slinger, On Her Mouth You Kiss Your Own, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery



Penny Slinger, Communion, Photo collage on card, 1969-77. © Penny Slinger. All Rights Reserved, DACS/Artimage 2022, Courtesy the artist and Richard Saltoun Gallery

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