

**My best shot** Photography

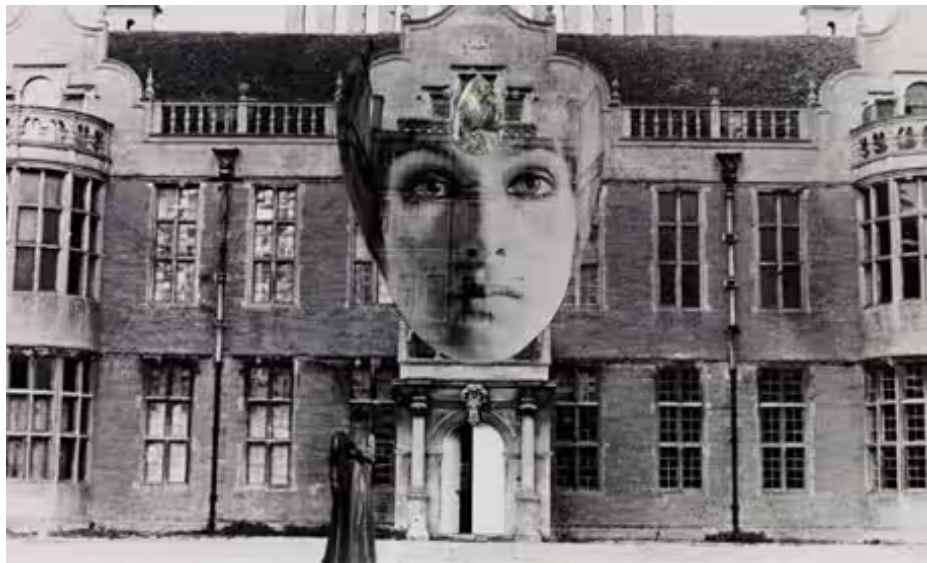
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**Interview**

## Penelope Slinger's best photograph: Lilford Hall montage

Interview by Sarah Phillips

'My face is like the figurehead of a grand ship - while the gowned, headless body is my ghost'



📷 'The haunted atmosphere was the ideal setting' ... Lilford Hall montage, by Penelope Slinger.



Wed 12 Sep 2012 16.01 EDT

**M**y boyfriend at the time had stayed at a mansion called [Lilford Hall in Northamptonshire](#) when he was a student, so in 1970, we went off on a magical mystery tour to rediscover it. The property had been owned by [Baron Lilford](#), who kept bears and falcons, and ended up killing himself by jumping from a turret. The place had since been abandoned.

We got permission to shoot there and spent a few days working, not staying over but going to and fro. My idea was to create a kind of detective story. The haunted atmosphere provided the ideal setting, going through all the rooms and opening up cupboards to find the skeletons within. I wanted to be both subject and object, so [Peter, who is a film-maker](#), took the pictures of me, with my direction. All my life I've used myself as a model; for me, it's not an issue to have someone else do the shooting.

This image shows the approach to the house, with my face montaged on the facade, like the figurehead of some grand ship. Positioned at [the third eye](#), the jewel suggests enlightenment - the guiding life of the self. My gowned and headless body, standing to the side of the portal like a sentinel, represents the ghost of myself. A female friend came, too, and became the other protagonist in the story.

I printed all the photographs in the darkroom and created montages, blending two negatives during the printing process. They were published seven years later, in a book called [An Exorcism](#). Surrealism is a wonderful tool to probe the subconscious layers of the feminine psyche, which had not been fully explored at that time. I felt that I went deep enough into my own

psychology to unearth archetypal truths. Back then, women in art were generally seen through the lens of a man's eyes. This was about a woman looking at women.

## CV

**Born:** 1947, London.

**Studied:** Farnham College of Art; Chelsea College of Art

**Influences:** "Surrealism, especially [Max Ernst](#)."

**High point:** "As a graduate, having my work discovered by [Roland Penrose](#) and being included in an exhibition at the ICA"

**Low point:** "When the owner of a gallery showing my collages said: 'You can't charge serious money for these. They're just bits of paper stuck together!'"

**Top tip:** "Believe in your vision, but don't forget to contextualise yourself in relation to what else is going on in art."

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**LittleRichardjohn** 16 Sep 2012 7:58

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which had not been fully explored at that time.

Women were invented in 1970? Who knew?