

Animae

The invisible sources
of the artwork: talks
with today's artists

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I would like to start talking about some pieces that really caught my attention from the series *An Exorcism. Nursing Home*, for me, calls to mind *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, with dark features similar to *Neco z Alenky*, the movie directed by Jan Švankmajer, in 1988.

The doll's extended eyes remind me of the doll from the movie.

How did your connection with dolls develop in the course of time?

I was never that much into dolls when I was a child. I think it was because I found them "girlie" and as my father had wanted a boy, I was less inclined towards more archetypically feminine pursuits. I had teddy bears more than dolls, also because they were more cuddly. Dolls also seemed to have that insidious element of training wheels for girls to know what their role in life is to be... I recall the main doll moment I had as a child was when I got my mother to make a coronation gown and crown for my doll. It was around the time of the Queen's coronation, so I had my own Queen in my room, dressed in a long red velvet gown and train trimmed with ermine and with a crown on her head.

My interest in dolls evolved later (I was a late bloomer!) as an adult activity with ironic twists. In the image you refer to, I used an antique doll from the collection of my girlfriend (who portrays my female alter ego in the series). The image is one in the chapter *Empty Cupboards* which seeks to evoke those empty, lonely hours of childhood which can only be remedied by entering into the world of imagination, so then the empty cupboard becomes a portal into a magical world. As, yes, I always loved those kinds of stories...

The doll is a good glyph to represent the "invisible friend" we have before the veils of reality close off these channels. It also represents, as I mentioned above, the way little girls are initiated into their roles as females in this world. I also used dolls and dolls' houses extensively in my 3 dimensional work, particularly in the 1970s. I made a series of adult *Dolls' Houses*, each with a different theme, where the rooms were inhabited by transformed dolls and other elements presented in surreal juxtapositions and tableaux. In these 3 dimensional works, I thought to shake out the image of the house and remove it from its more mundane and bourgeois associations and make it a canvas for the upheaval of the psyche, pulling out the carpet of comfort and replacing it with erotic imminence.

I also created a series of figurines based on dolls. They were mainly headless and I cast them in different materials and gave them bird heads, wings and many other transmutations. They made a good device to liberate the body image from convention and blend it with all sorts of elements from our world, organic and inorganic. At the same time the headless aspect suggesting how body image is disconnected from consciousness.

What is the story behind *Letting-go*? Maybe there's no relevance at all, but it made me think of the movie *Girl on the Bridge*, by Patrice Leconte. Quoting Adele, from the movie: "Have you ever felt great fear and pleasure, both at once?"

Letting Go is my image to represent that moment when you just have to let go of everything you held onto and free fall, naked, into the unknown. It is the release of the psyche from all its baggage. The facing of fears and therefore the release from them. It's that moment when you just can't go on anymore holding on and you just have to let it all go. With that loss is also that freedom. Freedom from fear is the greatest freedom. Nothing to lose. It was also evoking my fear of heights. It's a strange "fear" because when I am in a high and precarious place, my legs turn to jelly. It is not that I am afraid of falling, it is because I am afraid of my own desire to throw myself off! So my body starts to shake because it knows that is not good for its survival... But I just long to know what it would feel like to fling myself off and be falling through space. What a rush! I guess something in our DNA remembers what it is like to fly...

From a Tantric perspective, they say that in moments of great fear or great pleasure/ecstasy the body's energy moves into the central channel and shivers those powerful trembling waves through us... It is those intense moments that trigger out potential to be all that we can be. I once understood that the actual sensation of pain comes in our resistance to it. If we stop resisting, it passes right through us and all that is left is the bliss.

***Enchanted Forest...* It recalls so many connections to my mind! The first is the movie *The Secret Garden*, directed by Agnieszka Holland (from the novel by Frances Hodgson Burnett). Indeed, the forest in your work is close to a garden's image and made me think of the short essay *Hortus conclusus* by the writer Laura Tussi, a fascinating analysis of the garden as a symbolic and fantastic place that brings us back in time to the Sacred Grove and the archaic myths of the mother goddess Potnia, which, protected by a fenced space, could maintain themselves for ages. Even when the *hortus conclusus* gave way to much wider spaces, there appeared new kinds of secret gardens or the grand Baroque parks, which still preserved that microcosmic**

atmosphere, a sort of island of intimacy, protection and secrecy and magic. Also linked to the myth of the Garden of the Hesperidis, where there were eternal youth and golden apples that gave immortality, and most of all to that of Eden, the terrestrial paradise where we were born and cast out, the garden is pure nostalgia: nostalgia of an “imaginary place” and time of perfection. Childhood is our lost golden age, and the garden, with its colourful beauties and peaceful pleasures, evokes it nostalgically when we get old. “So the myth returns in the individual history in the form of the garden of imagination, desire and memory”, which is also at once the *hortus conclusus* (closed) and the *locus amoenus* (*a-moenus*, without wall). “This marvellous paradox [...] is essentially the symbolic image of one of the most profound aspiration of man: to be able to reconcile something that is closed and concluded with the system of freedom, with something that is open. [...] The garden is a chaos where man brings order.”¹

But what your wood-garden specifically tells us? Which ones, among the gardens and woods you have visited, seemed more “magical” in your perception, and why?

Ah, the secret garden, the walled garden, a magical place existing in its own dimension, apart from the laws that govern the material plane. A place where time stands still and the fragrance of roses ever lingers in the air. A private and personal place. A place of refuge, a dream world made manifest... Like you I am deeply smitten by the romance of the garden and the sacred grove. I feel particularly resonant with the quest of the secret, walled garden. Anyone who has ever felt different, ever felt like they didn't fit in and like a stranger in a strange land, will know the lure of this world of imagination. It is our “safe space”. In the *Exorcism* series, I explore this world in the chapter about childhood, *Empty Cupboards* and in *The Rose Garden* which covers the burgeoning of womanhood and that private place of exploration, both sensual and mystic. Entering through that forbidden door...

Yes I was inspired by the classic *The Secret Garden*, and by Tom's *Midnight Garden* which has a similar concept. Mainly the idea of not being limited by constructed social reality, but having a whole world of experience open to you which is magical and transforming. An image in the first chapter of *An Exorcism* shows me opening a door which is blocked up with a brick wall. This heralds the commencement of my search for identity within the walls of this derelict stately home. I have to find out why my entry into the magical world, the world of imagination where all is possible, is blocked off. This is an image

¹ Laura Tussi, “Il giardino: storia. Leggende e miti”, http://www.didaweb.net/mediatori/articolo.php?id_vol=351

of horror to me. There is also nostalgia here, yes, you are right. Like a spiritual homesickness, longing for the innocence of the Garden of Eden before "the Fall". Also, that part of ourselves that gets lost as we grow older and are trained in the ways of society, that innocence and openness to magic and wonder... Alice through the Looking Glass. We artists just want to keep crossing over from one side to the other all our lives, recording our adventures in our work so that others may visit these realms with us, through the glass and through our eyes...

You ask what gardens and woods have seemed especially magical to me. Well, I have always found great solace in nature and it always feeds my soul. As a child, I would slip away and be with nature to overcome my sense of isolation. I feel Nature Herself and all Her creatures are naturally existing in a magical reality and it is only us, as humans, who have closed ourselves to the wonder of it all. Where this natural mystic state is recognized, the veils thin and nature reveals Her intrinsic beauty and mystery. I have been lucky enough to live in the midst of the California redwoods for the last 20 years, where my interaction with this world of wonder is my daily sustenance. I can walk in the groves and experience the unique frequencies of each one, embellished by the altars and shrines we have placed there to honor them.

And of course, I can always return to the secret Rose Garden that lives forever in the mind sky of the imagination and the hidden chambers of my heart...

Bird in a Gilded Cage. Why is your cage gilded? And whom or what bird does the title refer to?

I have always felt a strong affinity to birds. I actually have one sitting on my shoulder preening as I write this! We can refer to the soul as the bird in the gilded cage of the body. In this case, it is a lifecast of my head/face that is covered in feathers and transformed, along with photos of my face. So I am the bird. The cage has many meanings. Who has not felt trapped in their life? Show me. And the gilding also representing the aspect of the material world, the addiction to gold, to money, which is the biggest trap for the psyche and the soul... She/I holds the key to her cage on her/my lips. We all possess the key to our own liberation. Speak the word and it shall be. Yet her/my eyes are closed and she/I sees it not... The fact that the padlock on the door is in the shape of a heart is a clue... Her feathers are captured and held. As this angel fell, she dropped some feathers, and here they are, caught in the frozen, timeless moment of the fall.

This bird in a gilded cage is also a metaphor for how the artist presents her psyche to the world.

Are you more interested in the Buddhist religion or philosophy? Could you illustrate the aspects that caught your attention in particular?

I discovered Tantric Art in the 1970s. It had a huge impact on me as I felt a deep sense of recognition. I immersed myself for many years in understanding Tantra and how it manifested in the culture of Hinduism and Buddhism. A Neo Tantric movement has emerged but mainly focused on the sexual aspect of Tantra which is, of course, just one facet of the multifaceted jewel of Tantric spirituality. Tantra is actually an amazing path. Non-sectarian and non-dogmatic, it offers a way to integrate all aspects of material and spiritual life into one dynamic relationship with our multi-dimensional selves. It is a spiritual path, not a religion. Religion has become too much of a dirty word these days because of all the intolerances associated with its dissemination.

I am particularly interested in esoteric Tantric Buddhism. I like direct experience, and this is what the Tantric path has offered me. Testing all truths in the reality of one's own experience and validated by the wisdom of the heart. I received a direct transmission from the 16th Karmapa Lama when he performed his Black Hat ceremony for the first time in New York. At that time (the early 1970s) I knew little about the subject. I believe he "seeded" in me then what was to become the *64 Dakini Oracle*, a project that I have worked on for many years (www.64dakinioracle.org). The *Dakini Oracle* presents 64 forms of the Divine Feminine as agents of personal transformation and evolution for our times. They are based on the Dakinis of esoteric Buddhism. I chose them as their mission statement is "To awaken and liberate all sentient beings", as well as being sky fliers and shapeshifters. So to answer your question, I would say that Dakinis, in particular, caught my attention as they inspired a whole project! I am drawn to the world of Thankas (Tibetan paintings) and sculpture that render manifest the vision space of meditation. And then, of course, the basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy like "No hurt", karma and the concept of personal liberation or Buddhahood.

The spider web. Among many populations, the spider web symbolizes various things: creation, bridge, fate and also destruction, sometimes with a cathartic function. For instance, according to Hopi prophecy the appearance of an immense spider web crisscrossing the Planet is one of the nine signs of the forthcoming end of the world: close to Purification Day, there will be spider webs all across the sky. On the other hand, due to its perfect architecture, the spider web takes on more earthly meanings, as in association with dialectics, words being able to trap the interlocutor like

the spider does with its prey... Ultimately, the spider came to be both a positive and a negative symbol. But what does it mean to you?

I have worked with *Spider* energy in different ways. Back in 1973 as part of my "Opening" exhibition of erotic tabletops, I made a piece called *Spider*. It was very dark. At that point in my artistic career, I was very interested in "shocking people into recognition". This work was a prime example. The "table" was in the shape of a coffin. Inside were lifecasts of parts of my body in wax, spiderwebs, and the legs of a real preserved tarantula emerging from the vagina. I sought to make a glyph of the "Devouring Mother", to make deepest fears manifest. Lots of people are scared of spiders, of being caught in the web...

Here is the poem that went with the image:

*She calls you from beyond the grave
 She who is eaten death returning
 You buried her before she had time
 To die
 So she haunts you from her bed of earth
 You call her the spider
 Her cobwebs want to cover you
 It's so cold beneath the ground
 She feels so hungry
 She eats her heart away
 They forgot to fill her orifices
 And they gape open wide
 Are you frightened to touch her?
 Do you think you might lose an arm?
 It's so dark in there
 She'll devour anything*

By contrast, my more recent engagement with the spider and her web looks at the more positive sides of her transformative nature. *Spiderwoman* is one of my 64 *Dakinis*. She is here seen as the Mistress of the web, the web of life. A creator goddess, "Thinker Woman", one with the power to manifest her thoughts into being, laying her web of life on the earth as a reflection of the cosmic net. She

transmits extreme sensitivity to vibrations, industriousness and patience and that we are all connected by subtle invisible threads of consciousness.

So about this web. You either see it as something to avoid getting caught by, or you see it as the beautiful connective tissue that unites all things.

Time: going back to Dalí, in 1931 he paints three clocks that are melting in *The Persistence of Memory*. The artist hints to a vision of time not stuck to the present, but that, instead, goes back to the past and joins the internal time to nature's primordial time. How do you perceive the flow of time? Which are your life's most meaningful memories? Did they change in the course of time? There is a contemporary artist who has produced an interesting work on the theme of time: Christian Marclay with the video installation *The Clock*...

What big questions! I actually did a recording a couple of years back on the nature of time called *Timepiece* (<http://pennyslinger.com/Works/timepiece>). It was a stream of consciousness. So how do I perceive the flow of time? Hmm... When this subject arises, I always hear T.S. Eliot's opening of *Burnt Norton* from the *Four Quartets*:

*Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future
 And time future contained in time past.
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable.
 What might have been is an abstraction
 Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation.
 What might have been and what has been
 Point to one end, which is always present.
 Footfalls echo in the memory
 Down the passage which we did not take
 Towards the door we never opened
 Into the rose-garden. My words echo
 Thus, in your mind.*

But to what purpose

Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves

I do not know.

Back to the *Rose Garden*, disturbing that dust... Memories, Dreams, Reflections...

Hard to talk about time except in the poetic mode... I looked at the perception of time in *An Exorcism*. One of the collages, *Continuum*, shows me surrounded by many clocks and within a clock's face. It follows *Waiting Room* where I am seated in a nostalgic pose in a completely empty room. Both seek to embody that state of being in suspended animation when one is waiting, waiting, unable to "be here now", listening to every tick tock of the clock as each second labors its way by... Currently, time seems to go by more quickly all the time. I ponder whether that is a result of my getting older or if things, in general, are speeding up. I believe it is a mixture of the two. I feel that the role of the artist is to try and freeze a moment in the flow, so it becomes timeless. Time is the clothing the spirit wears with its body. If we want to look at time in a bigger sense, then I concede to Goddess Kali who is Great Time Herself. You ask me for my life's most meaningful memories, but I don't think we have room here! I intend to write/record my memoirs as soon as I can carve out a place to do that in my "to do" list... Then I can string the memories on the thread of my life and make the meaningful connections. How can I sum up?

The main themes would be love, art and spiritual awakenings. There have of course been some of the "heavy lesson" variety, but in general, the meaningful memories have acted as touchstones in my life to guide me through denser times...

The fact that you ask me if my memories changed in the course of time leads me to think you may have been pondering, in a similar way to myself, areas of memory and recollection. I feel we are very selective in what we recall. The big internal editor who weaves our personal myth selects the relevant memories that form the points of light along our mythic journey. Those that do not contribute tend to be discarded. I have also found that our minds can reshape our memories to fit the template even better than so called "reality" as it happened. I found proof of this in my own experience when seeing a film again after many years that held key significance for me. I found that the actual content of that film varied from my memory of it, leading me to come to the conclusion that my consciousness took something from this life event, in the form of a movie, that was significant to it and reworked it over time to make it even more relevant because it formed an important meaningful memory in personal mythology.

I have also observed that different people remember different things about the same event. This conforms to my theory outlined above, but also leads me to believe we can only get an “accurate” reconstruction of an event when we put together the views, the memories of that event from several different witnesses or perspectives. All this questioning the nature of “objective” reality...

***Ophelia.* What do you think of suicide? And regarding suicide for love? Are there some recognizable specific characteristics of true love?**

More big questions, all rolled together in this love and death sushi roll! Suicide is not exactly something to think about and have an opinion about. It has a much more visceral reaction. I certainly do not subscribe to the schools of thought that classify it as “sin”. On the other hand, I do have a strong sense of the sanctity of life, the precious gift it is...

I think suicidal feelings are generally understandable. The way society is set up; the sensitive individual has a hard time surviving and fulfilling their potential. No wonder we can end up feeling, “Stop the world, I want to get off.” I am sure most people have felt that way at one time or another in their lives. I do not think this is necessarily something negative. I believe that it gives people when they are going through it the feeling that there is ultimately a way out, there is an escape, even if they do not act on it. The hardest times for me in my life are when I have felt the walls closing in on me, that there were no options open to me. Conversely, I have felt that happiness can be defined by feeling there are lots of doors opening... So one can understand how the doorway to death could feel like the only viable proposition when doors in life feel closed against you... Certainly someone with a painful and terminal illness may justifiably wish to end their suffering. I am not a big fan of suffering, but it does seem to go with the territory of being alive (one of Buddha’s “Noble Truths” was this recognition). It is also worth noting that all suffering is transitory, only the arc of duration varies.

There is a leap between contemplating suicide and actually going through with it. It is hard to take life. One of the reasons that having firearms around is not that desirable is it makes it easier to take oneself, or someone else, out. Acts that are committed in the heat of passion more often than not leave cause for regret. And after all, life is sacred and represents an incredible opportunity in the eternal continuum of the soul, no matter how things may appear.

The kind of love that is so intense that one feels one cannot live without the other is often a trigger for suicide when it is lost... When we are in love in that kind of way, we invest so much of ourselves in our beloved that it feels as if we are being ripped in two if they leave... But as most of us have probably

experienced in life, it is through our loves and losses that, despite feelings to the contrary at the time, one lives to love again.

Ophelia is the name of one of the images from the Chapter in *An Exorcism* called *The Death Trip*, which examines my own suicidal feelings on the loss of a relationship.

The Ophelia image has always felt so powerful and attractive to me. The beauty of death and the death of beauty... It is so devastatingly beautiful that it rises above morbidity. It seems to depict complete surrender as she lays back in her bed of water, surrounded by open flowers... It feels symbolic of the "little death" of orgasm.

As for love itself. It is funny that the English language has one word to describe a whole spectrum of sentiments. I think culture is going through a time of redefining the nature of our understanding of what love is. Romantic love, sexual love, still has, and probably always will have, a central allure. It is the way we are designed to propagate the species. But the politics of gender roles have created all sorts of sub dynamics which complicate the landscape of love and partnering. The institution of marriage is... floundering. Things are in a state of flux and all relationships feel it.

We know what it feels like to be "in love". There is a heightening of all the senses and we just feel generally alive, awake and turned on by life. Wouldn't it be wonderful to be in this state all the time? I feel this is the next phase in the evolution of the love frequency, to fall in love with all and everything. And when we can do that, we wouldn't hurt our planet, our fellow creatures or human beings because they would all feel like part of ourselves.

The characteristics of true love? Well, we have to ask what in terms of "true" is relative and absolute? Because love changes over time, does it mean it was never true? At the time it was and perhaps, as in all things in life, love has its seasons. We know that feeling when just even a thought of the other person brings undeniable and spontaneous joy bubbling up inside, coupled with an intense and sudden longing...

With true love you see the object of your affection as full of shining attributes, and never full of flaws. You see charm in their quirks and any shortcomings as "windows of opportunity". You can recognize true love because it puts the other first and wants the best for them, even to its own detriment. That is why the mutual exchange of love works best; then each has the other's back. And for love to be absolutely true, it exists beyond time, beyond life and death. This is where all the true love we have ever known resides eternally.

Of course, love exists! It is the glue that holds everything together. Love is a fractal phenomenon. It exists from the sub atomic right through to the interstellar. I exist because of it. We all do. Love exists independently and we

just attract it to us. When we see things as they really are, we realize everything is making love to everything else all the time.

What do you think of the cases of doll-like women who make passive and submissive objects of themselves?

Well it all depends on context. I myself have always been drawn to doll-like imagery, and of course women “dollify” themselves everyday when they apply their make-up and create a new face... I was fascinated by the visual landscape of the fetishistic dolls of Hans Bellmer, and I have used transformed dolls and Doll Houses extensively in my own work. I used the doll often as just a simple symbol of the female body (often without its head!), a glyph to represent the container we find ourselves in and then ring the changes on that to suggest our ultimate mutability. That is not really the same intention as being “a passive and submissive object”, and if it is a woman creating her own image of herself, then she is no longer just an object, she is subject and object. This is a different situation than having a man project doll-like submissiveness onto a woman.

Then we look at not only the intention of the creator of the work, but to how the work is perceived. If the contextualization is presented strongly enough, the commentary will be recognized. However, the artist cannot always control how their work is seen, and I have heard straight from the horse's mouth, that many of my more intensely wrought visual commentaries have served as masturbation fantasies!

What I am ultimately saying is that we are multi-dimensional beings and I believe we can be many things and not stuck in one view of ourselves, one role in life. If the doll persona is one we can take on, like putting on a different suit of clothes, then all well and good. It is fun to be submissive sometimes, too. We don't want to throw away the baby with the bathwater as we become empowered women!

It is true that the feminist movement, at least in the Western culture, has freed us women from heavy constraints, but do you think it might have also brought some negative results, somehow altering the traditional relationship between man and woman and bringing more insecurities to the former as well as high expectations to the latter?

So my last comment moves into your next question. As I was indicating above, a “liberated” woman wants it all! I have always felt that the aspect of the movement that focused on giving women the same power as men, the ability to do the same jobs, etc., may be ultimately short changing themselves.

We live in a society mainly set up to male standards, because these are the values that have been in charge for so long. I personally have never been too interested in getting to play as an equal in that arena. Most of them are systems set up in a masculine-centric fashion anyway. I would prefer to be valued for my own feminine qualities myself, and have those see pride of place. I will go into those in response to your later question, but here I would like to point out that we are all, in fact, androgynous beings, with male and female qualities. We get to be a specific gender from which of those qualities are stronger, but the gender stereotypes that dominated society are not really helpful when they end up boxing us in instead of giving us the opportunities to realize our full multi-faceted potential. It is a loss for male and female alike.

In one of the main relationships in my life, my partner said being with me was like having a whole harem, and he gave names to the different archetypes he saw come through me. That's where I rest my case. We want to play with all the parts of ourselves, not just what is permitted or sanctioned by the status quo.

Are women today truly emancipated or are there still serious obstacles to their personal fulfillment and their placement in a world market that is ever more competitive?

I have experienced obstacles to my personal fulfillment all my life, but it hasn't stopped me trying to go for it at every juncture. Still trying. Still frustrated a lot of the time, still feel like I am firing on only a couple of cylinders compared to the potential I have if I could get a bit of wind in my sails. And saying this as I am viewed as a woman who has stepped out and tried to live her dream.

So at this point, I don't think it's just about gender, it's about the values of a whole society and, yes, I do find these sorely lacking. We could live in a world of magic and wonder at all times, but then we would collectively need to lift the scales from our eyes and SEE.

At least in the Western World, the woman tends more and more to have total control on her own life. Let's imagine a world where women are in charge, which kind of outcome would you foresee, political field included?

Ah there's the rub! What a can of worms we would inherit! There would need to be a major shakedown of most of the systems we have in place and a reestablishment of everything coming from a wholistic viewpoint. One which sees all of creation as one connected, living entity, one which acknowledged and honors the spirit present in all things. The wholesale slaughter of all our relations, all the fellow creatures who co-inhabit this world with us, would

stop immediately. We would see them as part of ourselves, their pain, our pain. The elements of the earth itself would be seen as equally vibrant and the welfare of the earth, the water, the air be part of our daily prayer and daily practice. The nightmare of the cruel farming techniques that predominate would be ended at once and humans would have to rethink the way they interact with all of nature as a collaboration, not a domination. We would interact with each other and all around us from a heart-centric position, no other approach would be eligible in this Queendom of the Divine Feminine, and we would reclaim heaven on earth. We have been taught to close and harden our hearts. Our hearts need to be soft, open and pliable at all times and with us all listening to their wisdom.

Of course, this view is not just coming from being a woman, it is an enlightened, awakened perspective. Waken the Dreamer! Let's choose to live a different dream as this one is reaping the seeds sowed for so long and revealing the nightmare it really is... I am speaking on behalf of the Anima of the planet here.

What is the difference between sex and love?

Sex represents the mechanics chosen to propagate the species. Of course, it has to be super pleasurable, or why bother? Love is designed to walk hand in hand with sex. After the pleasure abates, the love takes over to ensure the nurturance of the offspring. Without love, again why would we bother? Love ensures the bond between parent and child, between partners. Love is actually the glue which holds the whole universe together. Once we open our eyes, as I was mentioning above, we see this to be true.

When the conception of children is not the by-product of sex, there are other fruits from this fertile womb, this erect member. Love is so big; it connects us deeply not only with each through this act, but with the Divine. That is ecstasy. I challenge anyone who has experienced this to say, "It's only sex"!

How can a woman achieve to be loved in old age as well? I know many couples that lived together, loving each other, 'til their last days. Don't you think that helping each other and being close in old age, 'til death comes, wipe solitude and uselessness away?

I can quote my late partner who said, "If you want to be loved, make yourself lovable". Simple but true. Especially in long term relationships, people tend to take each other for granted. To be lovable can take some work. We should never give up working on ourselves, seeking to evolve this little machine. That is the secret of staying forever young and vibrant. That we are ever open to new

possibilities in ourselves and refuse to accept the inevitable decline of old age as being a one way street. We can truly live our “wisdom years” as such.

And here again is where the nurturance of love comes in. Sexual desire tends to dim a little with ascending years, as this is the natural cycle of things. That vibrant Chi of youth is beginning to fade, preparing the being for the inevitable loss of the physical frame, preparing for the inevitable detachment. Then that deep love and friendship kicks in to hold the couple together through their golden years. I saw that with my own parents and it was beautiful to behold. We all need a reflection in life to affirm us and let us know we really are who we think we are, it's not just an illusion. That role can be filled by one significant other...

Also, I believe we are looking at an even deeper issue here than the bond between couples. We are looking at a society that does not honor their elders and care for them in appropriate ways. With the wide demise of the family unit, we are seeing so many of our elders feeling lonely, uncared for and useless. They have no vehicle to pass on their accumulated wisdom, the wisdom of experience, and this resource is abandoned and lost to the social fabric. We remain an immature cult of youth and our elders pass feeling lost and unloved, often drugged and sedated.

We need to re-establish something like a tribal template, where our elders have a place to be at the heart of the tribe and feel respected and listened to enough to pass on their well-honed and earned wisdom.

They say that only art has the prerogative of being universal and eternal, but who are we to think when the world as we know it will end?

This is something I meditate on often. What's the point in being famous in a society in decline? What's the point in upholding the values of a culture who is on track to self-sabotage and bring down all of creation with it? My heart cries, but my spirit strives to drop a little alchemical elixir into the bowl of consciousness, hoping that even the smallest drop can change the chemistry of the big mix, due to its truth and potency.

I'd like to quote a funny line of Woody Allen's: "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve immortality through not dying. I don't want to live on in the hearts of my countrymen; I want to live on in my apartment."

Ha, ha! But unless there was a way to retain radiance of health and being, what point to eke out a life? And seeing what most people do with their lives doesn't provide a great platform to petition for immortality from! Of course, I

would like my works to live on, they are the children I bore instead of human babies, procreating being the stab generally made at immortality, but more important than that is to refute the whole idea of death of the physical body terminating our immortality! Seeing death as but the doorway we pass through when we shed the human coil, and immortality being the clothing of the soul is a much more healthy approach. Then we have to be truly accountable for our actions, truly responsible, for we take it all with us when we go to ornament our soul, our everlasting spirit.

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She Turns Her Back, 13 x 19 inches, photomontage on card, *An Exorcism* series, 1969-77, © Penny Slinger.



Coming Up Roses/Petals Fall, # 13, 18 x 12 inches, Xerox Bodyprint, 1974, © Penny Slinger.



Letting Go, 20 x 12.7 inches, photocollage on card, *An Exorcism* series, 1969-77, © Penny Slinger.



Enchanted Forest, 19.2 x 12.6 inches, photomontage on card, *An Exorcism* series, 1969-77, Courtesy Riflemaker, London, © Penny Slinger.



Continuum, 19.4 x 13.5 inches, photomontage on card, *An Exorcism* series, 1969-77, © Penny Slinger.



Ophelia_2, 10 x 16 inches, original black and white photograph, model Liz Saville, 1974, © Penny Slinger.



The Web, 11.5 x 8.25 inches, photo collage, 1973-74, Courtesy Blum and Poe, Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo. © Penny Slinger.



Celestial Tabernacle, 50 x 35 cm, photomontage on card, *An Exorcism* series, 1969-77, Courtesy Penrose Collection, © Penny Slinger.