

The Debutante

Issue 02



**Feminist-Surrealist
Odysseys**

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'A MERMAID'S TALE'

by Penny Slinger

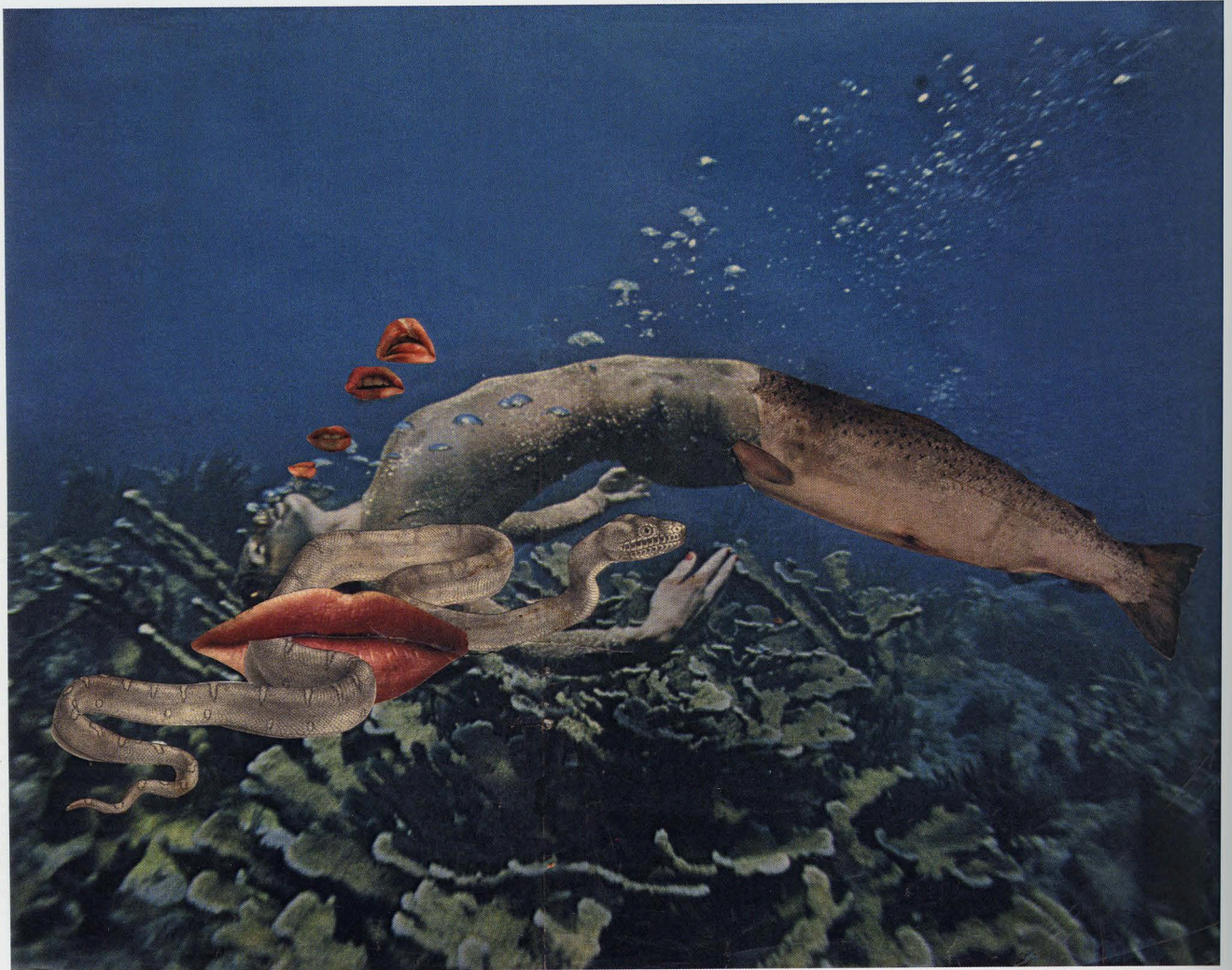


Photo Collage; (1973-1974). Courtesy Blum and Poe.

'My Body in a Box' by

Penny Slinger

When the first wave of isolation hit, I was not able to manifest anything for the beginning few weeks. This was unusual for me as I am generally full of inspiration most of the time and the only thing that limits what I create is hours in the day and materials available.

But in this phase I just felt very introspective and it felt almost indecent to think about actually making art from the situation. I just needed time to assimilate all that was in the psychic atmosphere, both in how it affected me directly and in the way that so many millions of people were being affected.

Similar to the conundrum of a photo journalist who sees atrocities being committed. The moral dilemma of whether to rush in and capture the moment of film, or whether to try and take action to prevent the event from happening...So I sat still and meditated for quite a while, weeks in fact. People were dying. I could not capitalise on that. I may die. I could not feel making art was an appropriate reaction, I just needed to see what I could do to look after myself. I am a work of art after all...

As things percolated and osmosis occurred, I began to sense what I wanted to express. I cannot live too long without self expression. I feel I am here on the planet to channel my energies through art. I am happiest when I am in my milieu. I feel like I am falling off my path if I spend too long not creating. But it has to be authentic. It has to be deeply felt, deeply experienced, or it has no intrinsic and lasting value.

That's why I knew I was never just a documentarian, I was, I am, a creator of icons, of archetypes, a map maker laying a trail through the recesses of the psyche to guide seekers through any dark night of the soul.

There were some dark nights in this current situation. Nightmares came visiting in a way they had not done for many years. So I sought their origin. Was it my own psyche, or in the collective? For an artist/empath it is often hard to separate, for our sense of self is extended and wraps around many sentient beings...

My compassion for humans expanded in this rite of passage. I had been upset with humanity for quite a while, sending my heart waves to the rest of nature whose suffering called out to me, howling in the night. What have we humans done? Why are we causing so much trauma and devastation to all our relations? But now the pain of humans reached me and I felt for them too.

So I decided to use myself as the guinea pig, as I have traditionally chosen to do, and map the range of impressions and emotions that have flooded my being while sheltering in place. I decided to show the underbelly of the beast as well as the path of transcendence. For how can I claim the title of feminist surrealist if I do not reflect and express them both? Full spectrum. The shadow and the light. Give form to it all.

Although I love to travel, the greatest journeys lie within. There lie the wildest shores less traveled. Yet we all travel there, but few emerge with the tools to describe the landscape...

The Yearning: Ocean Bliss (2020)



I mine these inner depths, these remote terrains and bring back relics, like a castaway gathering driftwood.

Out of these shards I construct stories, the story of my life, the mythic weave, the signposts in the sand.

Once I found the form through which I would express, all fell naturally into place. To use my own body, for this is my interface, as a vehicle to channel all I feel. It is mine and I can do with it as I like. I am my own muse.

My Body in a Box is the container I chose. Perfect because it combines elements of the bodies of work I have been engaged in over the past few years, both 2 and 3 dimensional. It weaves them together in the now.

The Box represents the rooms we all find ourselves confined in during this period. My Body is your body, all our bodies.

So in this body, in this box all impressions come and seek to express themselves. I examine the dark night of the soul, the fears that dwell within this bodily temple. I look at the semaphore of body language, where we contract and where we expand, and how that affects, mitigates the interface with all we encounter. We can choose. To open up or to close down.

So after having my partner photograph me in the variety of poses, or I should say stances, that I had in mind, I photographed many items I had collected specifically during this time and used them as collage elements. With these I constructed my first pieces.

I feel sorry for those who do not have a means of creative expression. Without it now I would go stir crazy. But life is not so very different from normal for, as an artist, I spend most time in my studio manifesting on my own.

Everyone has been forced into a period of self-reflection and reflection about the constructs of the society we live in. This has opened up a crack through which the light of what could be possible is shining. In some of this series I wanted to focus that beam on what our choices are.

I decided to accompany the visual works with poetry. From my youth I have always written poetry and enjoyed the complimentary combination of words and image, as in my first book, *50% The Visible Woman*. I have returned to that formula. I usually just transcribe what comes flowing into my mind, rather than structure the writing that much. It is very spontaneous. I feel the association of the two art forms give breadth and depth, without 'explaining away' anything.

What will be the results of this global situation post pandemic, I do not know. All I can do is make my contribution into the alchemical vessel of transformation and hope that a little elixir will spill over into what is.



The Yearning: Dry Cocoon (2020)

The Yearning

I find myself
Longing
For bodies of water
To be submerged
Extended
Held and cradled
By mother ocean
A homesickness
For the sea
Overwhelms me
In waking and sleeping
Dreams
Azure waters beckon
Glinting
In mid day sun
Silken
At sunset
I want to lose myself
In their healing
Embrace
But I am still here
Stranded
On dry land
Like a beached whale
Out of her element
In a dry cocoon
Longing
For wet kisses
And the lapping waves
To rescue me
From this sensory
Deprivation.

Flotsam
And jetsam
Tangled up
In blue
I am awash
In a littered sea
Bombarded
By the folly of humans
Finding
No pure place
Swaddled by nature
As it is meant to be
Pristine natural state
Stolen by carelessness
Polluted by plastic
And now there is
Nowhere to go
To escape our folly
Nowhere to be
That is safe and free
Eden becomes
A minefield
Where we cannot avoid
Our destructive tendencies
And trip over ourselves
In a sea
Of our own waste
Oh how it devastates
The natural order
The laws of being
And completely
Overwhelms me

The Yearning



Littering (2020)



The Black Tide. Photocollage: (1974)

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In homage to Leonora Carrington, *The Debutante* explores the continued legacies and relevance of women surrealists. The journal strives to engender a new movement of feminist-surrealism.

Issue 02 explores the structural journeys feminist-surrealists take across borders, seas and inner psychological landscapes to explore their own *sur-reality*, alongside confronting ecological and transnational crises.

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