

# MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE



**JAN 28 PENNY SLINGER: MY BODY IN A BOX**

FEATURE



Hoarding, captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger

*First Things First*

*Like a squirrel*

*Ardently gathering nuts*

*In the last days*

*Of summer*

*Storing them away*

*For winter's bleak*

*Foraging*

*Taking care*

*Of bodily needs*

*For who knows*

*When the sun*

*Will bless the earth once more?*

*I will not starve! she says*

*Though frost covers the land*

*And snow conceals*

*The verdant trees*

*Now skeletons*

*In a grey landscape*

*She stores their present bounty*

*Against a future famine*

*Knowing*

*That all things pass*

And she

Like the maiden

Will gather rosebuds

While she may...

In a series created in response to the confines of the COVID-19 pandemic, London-born, L.A.-based artist Penny Slinger has produced a collection of nude self-portraits entitled "My Body in a Box," marrying photography and collage to reflect her own psychological entrapment during the period.

For more than five decades, Slinger has worked across a variety of mediums, including film, photography, collage, and sculpture, using primarily self-portraiture to investigate the connections between eroticism, feminism, subjugation, and rebirth. Her infamously controversial and sometimes discomfiting work has been described as a confluence of feminist surrealism and punk, her use of herself as her primary subject inspiring comparisons to Cindy Sherman and Sarah Lucas, among others.



Dreams and Nightmares, captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger

*DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES*

*I toss and turn*

*Willy-nilly*

*Restless sleep*

*Trying to sweep*

*The cobwebs from my soul*

*That clutch and cling*

*Like old dead unwanted tendrils*

*That will not give up*

*The ghost*

*Are these unquiet dreams*

*All mine?*

*Or do they belong*

*To a collective psyche*

*That I*

*Artist and empath*

*Have drawn into my lair?*

*Oh self*

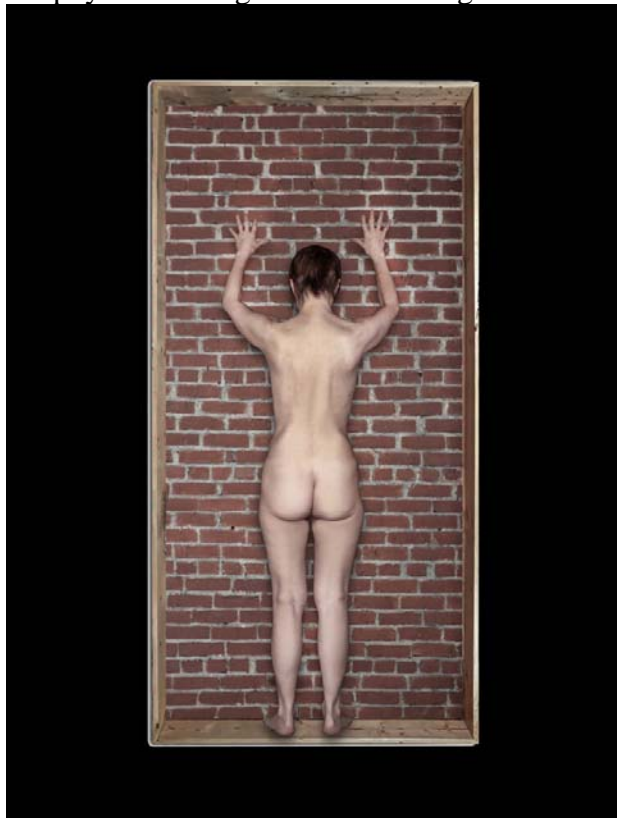
*Where do you*

*Begin and end*

*In this collective*

*quagmire?*

In this evolving series, she again uses her own nude form to reflect the struggles accompanying the isolation of the pandemic lockdowns, creating images that portray the external impacts with her typically raw, surrealist thumbprint. The series captures Slinger in her naked form, framed in a “box” in a variety of poses, ranging from the stoic to fetal, overlaid with collaged elements. While notorious for her emphasis on the erotic, her decision to remain nude in her portraits has more to do with stripping down to uncover “what’s underneath,” she says. This is not a series on sexualization as much as it is a means of dissecting the psychological entrapment that accompanies the physical during social distancing.



Brick Wall 01 , captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger



Back Wall 02, captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger



Brick Wall 03, captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger Brick Wall 04, captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger

*BRICK WALL*

*Within my palace*

*Of self-construction*

*A brick wall*

*Seals the way*

*No way in*

*No way out*

*and no way through*

*Trapped*



*In solidity*

*Frozen*

*In time*

*Petrified*

*In a state*

*Of rigidity*

*In a place*

*Without potential*

*Without ability*

*To effect change*

*Solid state...*

Brick Wall 04, captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger

*There is but one way*

*To dissolve the wall*

*To peel away*

*The wallpaper...*

*I will claim the heroine's path*

*Dissolve the wall*

*For I am not a slave*

*To matter*

*But a humble servant*

*Of imagination's power*

*Believing in*

*Self-transcendence*

*As the only tool*

*That takes a psychic sledgehammer*

*To the wall that kills dreams*

*To the confining principle*

*That places matter*

*Over mind*

*Mind does matter*

*But the substance of dreams*

*Is big as the sky*

*The pathways of consciousness*

*Have no limitations*

The tranquility and stillness implied in the term “shelter in place” feel almost mockingly antithetical to the quotidian havoc and destruction issued on a global scale at this time, a sentiment Slinger expresses in each of her images. While, in her nudity, she is immediately exposed and vulnerable, the emotions portrayed are not all negative. In one, she captures a sense of abundance and fortitude, as she stands upright with arms outstretched amid a plentiful collage of groceries. In another, she has her back turned to the camera, and though pressing her hands against a brick wall, she splices through the barrier with a strip of blue sky, applying a sense of optimism to an otherwise claustrophobic image.

In the majority of her photographs, however, Slinger’s expression and position evoke a sense of fear, loneliness, and disillusionment. A talented author of over 10 books, she has created a collection of poems to accompany her series, which serve to further examine the multitudes of feeling she has encountered in 2020. The florid and frightening imagery conjured by her words enhances the effect of those same surrealist applications in her photomontages, which include cobwebs, moths and medical tools.





Limits, captured by Dhiren Dasu ©Penny Slinger

*LIMITS*

*Taking the measure*

*Of the situation*

*Staking out*

*My limitations*

*Feeling the shape*

*Of the box I am in*

*The height*

*The width*

*The breadth*

*The depth*

*So I may ascertain*

*The ideal box*

*To reconstruct*

*Once I have*

*Broken*

*This frame*

Her intention with this series seems not to be to draw some palliative conclusion or optimistic outlook on the current state of affairs, but more to reflect the highly variable and deeply personal psychological impact that this period's physical restriction has had on her. It is an extraordinary narrative of a natural renegade's introspective journey—the portrayal of an outsider, looking inward.

Penny Slinger's "My Body in a Box" is an ongoing series on display at Blum & Poe Broadcasts, here.

Penny Slinger, Lara Southern