

Polly Borland & Penny Slinger: Playpen

Lyles & King (Catherine Str.) 📍 LOWER MANHATTAN | NEW YORK | USA

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Lyles and King is pleased to present PlayPen, a collaborative exhibition of photographic works by Los Angeles based artists Polly Borland (b. 1959, Melbourne, Australia) and Penny Slinger (b. 1947, London, England). This is their first presentation at the gallery.

PlayPen marks a collaborative role reversal in the processes of both artists. Borland's career as a photographer—one whose work has seen her push her subjects, their bodies, and their guises from behind her own camera—differs from much of Slinger's work where she has regularly offered herself and her own form for the audience's inspection. Here, Slinger chooses to place herself behind the lens and train it thus on Borland who serves as the series' model and performer. Or, as Slinger puts it, "putting herself on the line and putting her money where her mouth is." This statement gives clue to a defiant and jubilant spirit runs throughout the work on display, and marks a joyous and messy collaboration between two artists and friends.

The corpus of PlayPen is a selection of photographs featuring Borland's nude (and nearly nude) body, contorted and distorted, gazing directly at the camera's lens. Slinger says that while her own practice has aspired to "all kinds of representation of the feminine," PlayPen marked an opportunity to "throw away all prejudice and come into a new way of looking, a new feminine gaze." It's a gaze that Borland seems to accept willingly—posing and preening with proud defiance, seemingly spurred on by Slinger, her "conjuring magician who simply got me to play my way through the blobs and get glimpses of light and hope." By 'blobs,' Borland refers metaphorically to her own body, and also in a literal sense to the scrunched forms and fruit that hug her figure in several of the images, held securely in place by full body stockings and tights—a recurrent feature and prop used on others in Borland's solo practice.

Borland and Slinger's work clearly stands within the firmament of picture-based feminist art, but there's also a distinct dialogue within this work that speaks to art history on a much broader scale. Many of the images read less formally photographic, leaning gauzily instead towards the gestural and painterly. Crudely applied prosthetics and warped mylar reflections (recalling Weegee's pioneering vernacular trickphotographic techniques), render forms practically, creating a visual intrigue that pulses back towards a wider historic explorations of form. Borland's stocking stuffed body reminds of the surrealist specialized dolls of Hans Bellmer, Lucien Freud's fleshy paintings, and Sarah Lucas's nylon 'Nud' sculptures among others. Fresh fruits adhered to Borland's body reflect Arcimboldo's baroque vegetal portraits, and a crotch first image of mud-caked Borland clenching her breasts (with a crudely modeled Cyrano-like mud nose), suggests a psychic connection with the transgressive art of both the Viennese Actionists and Paul McCarthy.



Artists on show

Penny Slinger

Polly Borland