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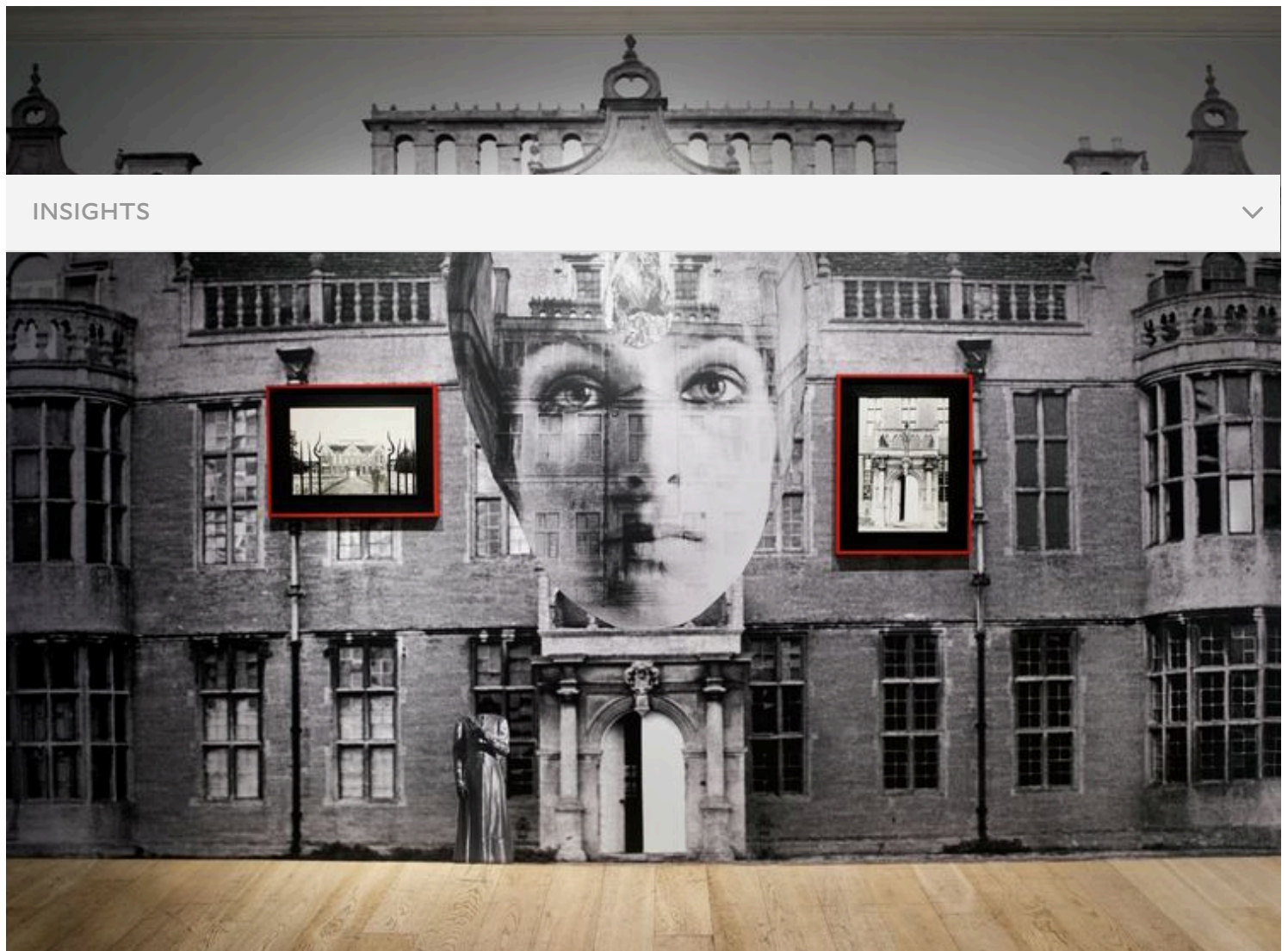
Penny Slinger's Haunting Surrealist Vision

By [Emily Steer](#)

London

7 August 2024

Which demons do we need to exorcise to find freedom? At Richard Saltoun in London, Penny Slinger's radical installation tracks the heroine's psychological journey.



Exhibition view: Penny Slinger, *Exorcism: Inside Out*, Richard Saltoun Gallery, London (3 July–7 September 2024). Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery.

Known for her revolutionary approach to the female body and sexuality, London-born artist Penny Slinger is adept at grabbing viewers' attention. Since the 1960s she has been creating provocative, richly psychological collages, prints, and videos; in 1971, critic Peter Fuller described Slinger as 'one of the one of the most active and socially relevant artists around'¹. In 2019, Dior invited Slinger to create extravagant scenography for its haute couture show in Paris, which explored the powerful alchemy that exists between the elements. This saw the artist's intense monochrome projections applied to the walls and floor as models walked the catwalk.

Building on this is Slinger's current show at Richard Saltoun: an immersive experience that draws on the artist's autofictional imagery from her series 'An Exorcism' (1977–2024), which spills from the gallery's walls. Slinger has also created

a film, with all the images playing on loop overlaid by her own hypnotic voice, responding to the series with poetic rhythm. It is a haunting spectacle that, in documenting the female experience, challenges the traditional, patriarchal hero's journey.

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Exhibition view: Penny Slinger, *Exorcism: Inside Out*, Richard Saltoun Gallery, London (3 July–7 September 2024). Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery.

The series, which was first created in the 1970s, comprises a selection of black-and-white erotic collages alongside images of Lilford Hall, a then-abandoned Jacobean mansion in Northamptonshire, U.K. The setting draws upon horror-movie aesthetics, with the show's title, *Exorcism: Inside Out*, calling to mind one of the genre's most iconic films. Within the gallery space, the viewer is enveloped by a chilling, all-encompassing theatrical set, with blackened walls and monochrome imagery flooding onto the floor. The work has a decidedly surrealist feel, reflecting Slinger's interest in the collages of Max Ernst, on whom she wrote her thesis in 1969, shortly before beginning this body of work.

The eerie interiors also connect to the role of the psyche in Slinger's work; empty houses have long been used throughout psychoanalytic theory and gothic literature as emblematic of different parts of the mind. Here, we could be walking through the recesses of the heroine's subconscious as she moves to self-actualisation. The

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Slinger's characteristically numorous fashion, a cock's head protruding from one corner.



Penny Slinger, *Under Lock and Key* (1970–77). Photo collage on card. 32.4 x 48.3 cm; 48.5 x 64 cm (framed). Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery.

The artist finds herself nude and penned in by an all-male jury before discovering a form of freedom, alluded to by the giant roses that bloom between her thighs. Throughout all these images, the line between self-expression and fetishisation is

carefully trodden, inviting the viewer to question what sexual freedom really looks like in the hands of women.

The book Slinger produced to accompany the original series was withheld from U.K.

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British customs authorities in 1978. Yet, despite now being proudly on show in central London, near to high-end boutiques and luxury hotels, this immersive installation could be seen as a chilling vision of contemporary reality.



Exhibition view: Penny Slinger, *Exorcism: Inside Out*, Richard Saltoun Gallery, London (3 July–7 September 2024). Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery.

We still live in a world that ruthlessly judges and polices women's bodies; a world in which a man found liable for having sexually abused a woman can run for U.S. president while his nominee for vice president can rant against the rights of a woman to have control over her own body, and the Supreme Court can overturn case law intended to recognise that right. That religion is still used as an excuse for this

behaviour is wound up with the title of this show: which demons do we really need to exorcise to find freedom?

Slinger presents a world that heavily references history, from the flailing female

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storytelling. Having visited her liberated heroine for a while, however, you might wonder how far we have really come. —[O]

Penny Slinger: Exorcism: Inside Out is on view at Richard Saltoun Gallery in London until 7 September 2024.

¹ Peter Fuller, "In the Galleries: Penny Slinger," *The Connoisseur*, May 1971.



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