

POLLY PENROSE
Chased by Swans

22 OCTOBER - 20 NOVEMBER 2022
Press preview: Friday 21 October, 5 pm.
Private View: 6:30pm Register interest [here](#)

Messums Wiltshire
Place Farm, Court St, Tisbury,
Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP3 6LW



Polly Penrose, Edenbridge Road banisters, May 2018 © Polly Penrose

On the occasion of the inaugural Art, Print & Book Festival at Messums Wiltshire, we are delighted to present an exhibition of new works by British photographer Polly Penrose.

Penrose is her own subject, bending and contorting her naked body into a series of anonymous abstractions. Working alone with a ten-second timer, she seeks out challenging backdrops such as abandoned houses or large-scale agricultural farmland in which to place herself in poses that appear effortless and completely belie the painful and often dangerous process that making the picture involves. The title of the exhibition reflects the precarious situations that she has found herself in:

'I've been chased by swans, picked glass splinters from the soles of my feet, been locked on a balcony naked, fallen through a table and sliced my leg open with a rusty carpet nail. In one house there was a fox in the bathtub.'

The resulting pictures have a performative beauty and strange narrative quality. Penrose's face is never visible and so the viewer can never be certain who is in the picture and how they are feeling. Are we looking at a staged performance or perhaps a still from a film?

She writes:

'Fitting in, hanging on, taking up space, working with what you've got. The comedy and tragedy of the uncomfortable shapes we assume whilst feigning a sense of normality and control. Sometimes it's effortless, sometimes it hurts.'

In a world now filled with images of the digitally perfected self, Penrose presents her body with ruthless candour, and we are invited to see her 'warts and all' as her body ages before our eyes. Celebrating the body as a creative tool, her pictures jostle the opposed notions of vulnerability and empowerment, spontaneity and control, truth and fiction.

BIOGRAPHY

Polly Penrose studied Graphic Design at Camberwell College of Arts in London. She went on to work in Fashion Styling and after that worked for the photographer Tim Walker. She has always taken photographs but started to take the practice seriously when she entered and won a competition held by the London Photographic Association in 2008.

Penrose has been taking self-portraits on a ten-second timer and more recently a remote for nearly 20 years. Her work is unpremeditated and spontaneous and records her responding to her environment. She explores identity and the opposed notions of vulnerability and empowerment, comedy and tragedy. Her pictures focus less on sexuality and female allure, but retain the awkward, often beguiling force of the body as an object, pushed into a space, forced into a position whilst feigning a sense of normality and control.

She held her first solo show, *A Body of Work*, at the Downstairs at Mother Gallery, London, in May 2014, and her second solo show *10 Seconds* at the Hoxton Gallery, London, in May 2016. The same year, she exhibited in the group shows *Self Reflection* at the Untitled Space, New York, and *All Inclusive* at the HVW8 Gallery, Berlin. In 2018, she showed work in Spring Break Art Show in New York, and at Messum's Wiltshire as part of the group show *Image*. Her third solo show, *Self Obscured*, was at the Benrubi Gallery, New York in 2019, and the same year in *Gossamer*, curated by Zoe Bedeaux at the Carl Freedman Gallery, Margate. In September 2020, she exhibited in *Emerging Contemporaries* at the Michael Hoppen Gallery and *A Picture of Health*, Woman Photographers from the Hyman Collection, at the Arnolfini Gallery Bristol.

Penrose's work has been featured widely in publications including *The Guardian*, *Dazed Digital*, *The British Journal of Photography*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Artnet*.

PRESS

For press images, please contact: press@messumswiltshire.com

For further information about Polly Penrose's photographs, please contact Mary George at photography@messumswiltshire.com

Launched in May 2021 with a programme of talks and exhibitions featuring international, renowned and emerging artists and photographers working in various parts of the world, **Messums Photography** favours dialogue between contemporary imagery and archives, reflecting on the evolution of photography as a storytelling genre.

MESSUMS WILTSHIRE is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre set inside a restored thirteenth-century tithe barn and surrounding buildings with exhibition space, sculpture garden and restaurant.

MESSUMS LONDON is a 2,000 sq ft exhibition space on Cork Street behind the Royal Academy. It hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions for our contemporary artists and is home to our photography department.