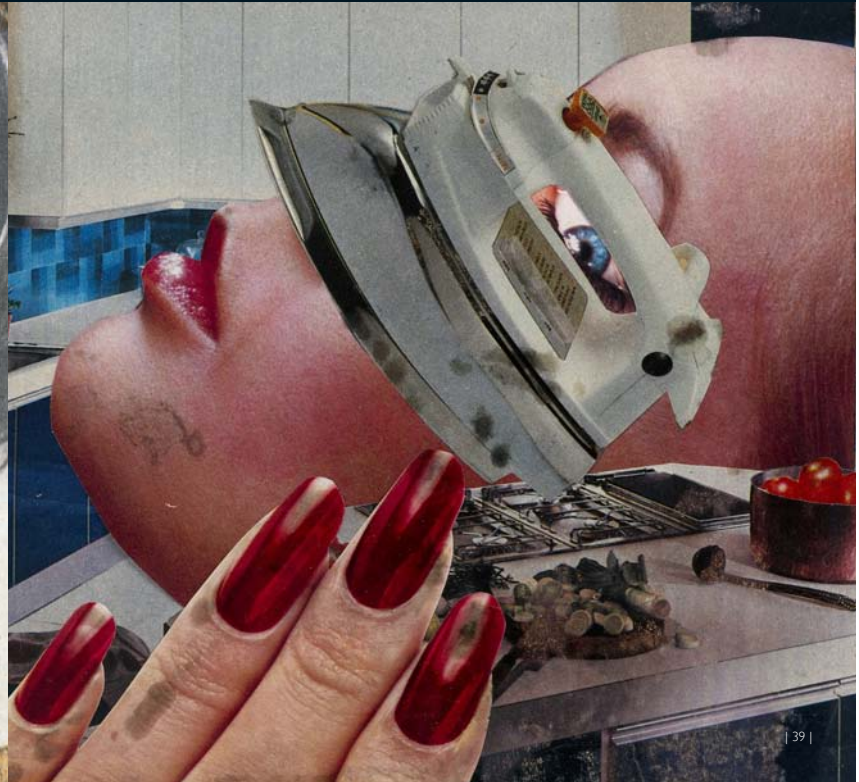
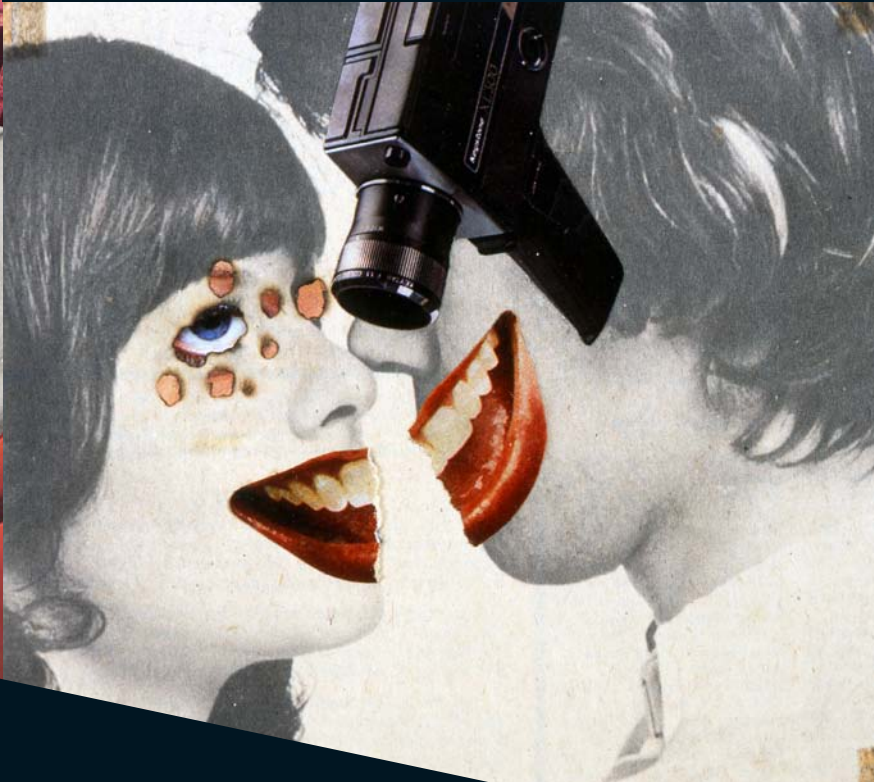




# ALTERED ASSEMBLAGE

Linder Sterling assembles modern art.

words: lori fredrickson



**"I'm as intrigued and excited by the gaps between sounds, images (and) characters as I am in the actual sounds, images and characters themselves." –Linder Sterling**

Of the Manchester post-punk artists only recently getting their due, Linder Sterling may be one of the most enduring. Her trademark collage work of photographs of nude models plastered with cut-outs of household appliances—most famously seen in fanzines and on Buzzcocks album singles—made an impact not just in the arts but in feminist and cultural studies. And if Sterling's name slipped slightly under the radar in the 1980s and '90s, retrospective and contemporary works have earned her critical acclaim over the last several years. As a result, her pieces have been featured in multiple group and solo shows, including the MCA Chicago, Institute of Public Arts in London and Cornerhouse in Manchester, among others.

As a visual and performance artist in the late '70s and founding member of the post-punk band Ludus, Sterling's feminist and anti-consumerist works were little less than confrontational: shocking audiences by whipping out a dildo onstage, or handing out packages of meat at concert tables. Though Ludus disbanded in 1983, Sterling's work as an artist continued to evolve. She now holds a monograph to her name, *Linder Works 1976-2006*, with contributions by friends Jon Savage and Morrissey. A 2007 P.S. 1 exhibit displayed

both her ongoing *Pretty Girl* series and more recent *Star* series, which replaces the appliances with flowers. Thirty years out of the Manchester scene, her performance pieces are being seen at the Tate Triennial. And it's given her a new sense of focus.

"In 1977, it felt as if we were holding up a mirror to the world that we saw around us," Sterling explains. "Then, knowledge and 'newness' were quite hard to find. We rarely even had phones in our home. But looking back, the irregularity of communication helped create gaps and spaces for meaning, where secrets survived—in contemporary life, there is so much of everything all the time. Now I'm as intrigued and excited by the gaps between sounds, images [and] characters as I am in the actual sounds, images and characters themselves."

Partly for this reason, she's turned to mythology and folklore for inspiration. A recent performance piece—held at Tate St. Ives for Halloween as part of the *Dark Monarch* exhibit—focuses on mysticism in British Art. And in April 2010, she'll be performing at the Glasgow International Festival. "This will be my most ambitious performance piece," Sterling asserts. In collaboration with long-

time friend and muse Stuart McCallum, with music that "sounds like a 16th century witch on acid," the piece is derived from satirist Ben Jonson's "The Masque of Queens Celebrated from the House of Fame," written for Queen Anne in 1609. "She scandalized her court by painting herself black for the starring role—similar to British culture through to 1978, when the BBC still showed 'The Black and White Minstrel Show,'" Sterling says.

More recently, she explains, she's been focused not just on what is portrayed in the media, but what isn't. "It feels odd that you rarely catch images of women of 50," Sterling says. "It's like looking in the media mirror and there's nothing there."

In the modern day—the "one-touch world" of cell phones and music-on-the-go—it's not about holding up mirrors. Mirrors are everywhere. Now, for Sterling, it's about finding a new focal point. "There are still discrete gaps in communication and culture that offer opportunities for true change. Still, we miss them all the time," Sterling says. "How to make the absent present? I'm still working on that one."

This page, clockwise from top: details of *Untitled 1979*, collage on paper; *Untitled 1977*, collage; *Untitled 1978*, photomontage; *Golden Jewel 2007*, collage on LP album cover; flower from *Super Star 2006*, collage. All images courtesy of Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London.