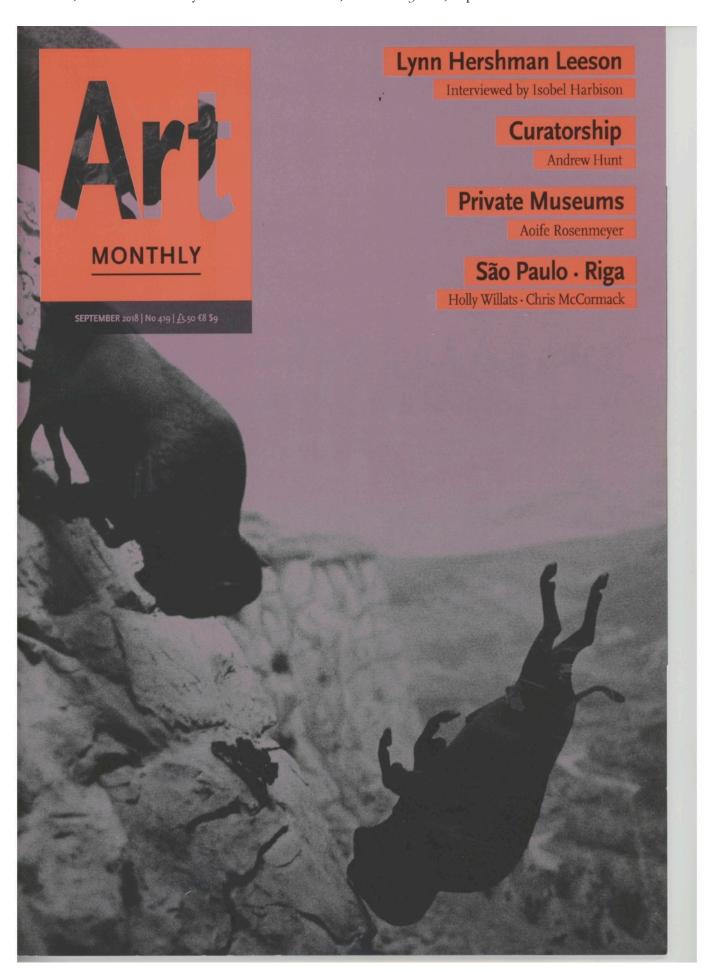
Isobel Harbison, "Interview with Lynn Hershman Leeson", Art Monthly 419, September 2018.



INTERVIEW

LYNN'HERSHMAN LEESON INTERVIEWED BY ISOBEL HARBISON

The San Francisco-based artist discusses constructing fictional identities and bots, DNA archiving, surveillance and dodgy software.

BECOMING ROBERTA

First Person Plural, the Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman

Isobel Harbison: When making your diary-format project First Person Plural, the Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman between 1984 and 1996, the central work of your recent exhibition curated by Anna Gritz and Cathrin Mayer at KW Institute in Berlin, did you have a particular audience or viewing architectures in mind?

Lynn Hershman Leeson: I had neither, only an urgency to speak and an ambition to learn the language of video. I had no idea they would ever be shown or broadcast.

Were there any specific events that triggered First Person Plural or did it respond to a more generalised sense of unease? At the time you made this work, surveys conducted between 1983 and 1984 revealed how North Americans were experiencing new surveillance consciousness and screen paranoia, an alertness that your work has constantly played upon.

Surveillance became a subcurrent of that and many other works, like my *Phantom Limb* photographs made between 1980 and 1990, or *Deep Contact* of 1989, or *America's Finest*, made over 1993 and 1994, or *Tillie the Telerobotic Doll* and *Cyberoberta* which I made between 1994 and 1996, and even

Roberta from 1972 to 1979. In the mid 1980s, computers were just coming into private homes and the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital rights group, was alerting people to the government's increased access to personal information and probable surveillance through computer wires. So incorporating surveillance was inspired more by the general tenor of the era rather than a specific action.

Would it be fair to say that the *Roberta Breitmore* performance explored how the self is constructed and performed over time, whereas *First Person* looked at how screen-based culture influenced a perpetual circuit of self-analysis and reconstruction, a circuit or cycle we are all now in?

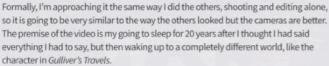
Yes. First Person was or is also an electronic mirror of both the self and culture simultaneously, a bit like Roberto but a wider swathe.

Have the First Person videos been re-edited over time?

A little, not much, but I do keep adding to them. In fact, I am making the last one now. It's about evolution, facing death, and what matters in life.







It is about realising how much has changed in the world, from programming the genome, to the #MeToo movement, to the shifting species' identities and the possibilities of extinction. It includes interviews with geneticists like Harvard's George Church, the inventor of 'Crispr' gene editing systems. I interviewed Elizabeth Blackburn, who first identified the telomere (or the ageing) gene, Caleb Webber, director of genetics at Oxford, Troy Duster, a sociologist of the genome, Drew Endy, a microbiologist from Stanford, and Anthony Atala from Wake Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine, who pioneered bioprinting systems. But the work is also about how little has changed, the necessity of love, integrity, friendship and humour, which are the really important things in life.

In previous episodes of *First Person*, the narrative is steered by those you select to interview. Is it all quite ad hoc or are the interviews carefully sketched out in advance?

Nothing is planned. When I started doing this I never knew what I was going to say – in fact, one of my therapists saw the diaries and said, how come you never told me those things? So I never know what I'm going to say but I try to integrate the people that I meet during the time that I'm making them, and the ideas that come out of knowing them. It's called *First Person Plural* because you think you're alone, but when you get to the depth of your own truth you get to the heart of other people who you find are also experiencing the same things.

Is First Person Plural interpretable as an index to many of your other works?

Definitely, and what I am also finding out at the moment is how we might keep our archive with DNA, so that it will have a million-year life span. This is something I was able to include in my recent exhibition in Basel at the Haus der Elektronischen Künste (HeK) and as part of 'Art in Motion: 100 Masterpieces with and through Media' in the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe. I was able to take a video that included on its timeline all the information on evolution that I have gathered over the past ten years, as well as my electronic diary, and convert these elements into DNA itself, in this tiny little vial that is practically invisible.

How does that little piece of DNA find form?

I put the vial that they gave me from the lab inside a mirrored box. They've only been able to do this process for a year so nobody really knows about it, I only found out about it by interviewing all these scientists. One of the scientists actually took pity on





me because his brother was a sculptor so he finally helped me to do it. Montreux Jazz Festival just had its archives converted into DNA, and Technicolor has been working on archiving films with DNA, so it really is the next step of archiving.

This is DNA without biomedical function?

Yes, it's synthetic DNA that they create. Information is very expensive to convert so I could only archive 20 megabytes. Basically, you take a video timeline to put everything on, so I put the entire electronic diary as one, as well as excerpts of information I have been collecting – JPEGs, lists on everything about evolution and so on – and then I gave it to them as a digital file, and it took them four months to convert it into DNA code.

It's a form of digitisation?

It's a conversion of digital code from video into the modifiable code of DNA. They did it with *Voyage to the Moon* because it is one of the rarest films. Georges Méliès tried to destroy everything he ever made so they're finding fragments of his films and converting them. That's why Technicolor, Microsoft and Harvard got together to try to convert it correctly and they have achieved a beautiful resolution. You can also unconvert it at any point and not lose any resolution and it

Dante Hotel lasted about ten months. It was a performance

named after the host hotel, which was easier to produce at the time than exhibitions at museums and galleries, which in those days did

not show women artists at all. This is why, during this same period –

the 1960s and 1970s - I invented three art critics to review my work,

which is how I got a gallery in the first place.

The Novalis Hotel 2018 installation

Lorna 1979-82 installation lasts a million years, perhaps longer than the planet. I think of it as extended cinema.

Your current instalment of *First Person Plural* will exist as DNA and as video, and it also ruminates on this material coexistence.

Yes, it ends up with me realising that this can be done. Because many times I feel like I'm being buried by my own history and the weight of my past, and the stigmas and traumas that I have endured, so if I can put that all in one place then I can be safe, and I don't have to think about it any more.

Juliana Huxtable interviewed you for Artforum in 2016 and you talked about Roberta aiming at 'the blur that exists in spaces where people perceive reality, and to show and exhibit flawed belief systems?

I set out to examine how you define and commodify 'reality', particularly when it is openly set up as a fiction. When, just before that work, I created *The Dante Hotel* in 1972 (reworked as The Novalis Hotel this year in Berlin), I wondered what it would be like if we created some living entity that existed in real time and real space but wasn't real. I was completely open as to what it would produce or how long it would last. I think you have to keep an open mind and not be too specific about what your expectations are, like when you're making a documentary. You have to be able to see all sides of it without restricting it to what you presume it is going to be.

Dante Hotel lasted about ten months. It was a performance named after the host hotel, which was easier to produce at the time than exhibitions at museums and galleries, which in those days did not show women artists at all. This is why, during this same period – the 1960s and 1970s – I invented three art critics to review my work, which is how I got a gallery in the first place. I wrote under the pseudonyms of Prudence Juris, Gay Abandon and Herbert Good. They each had their own writing style. They reviewed my work and published the reviews in major newspapers and art magazines. They also wrote about other art exhibitions.

I made Dante Hotel with Eleanor Coppola. She did hers for two weeks with a performer, documenting the changes to the artefacts in the room. Mine featured a fictional person, evident through the artefacts in the room, which were moved around by people as they visited. They could be there 24 hours a day. I didn't sit in the room and watch people but I was amazed that nobody stole anything and that they pretty much left everything intact. Some people spent several hours there and some came back. It was all discovered by word of mouth because it wasn't advertised apart from with a little Xerox flyer, but then people heard about it, people wrote about it, it existed as a myth, the same way Roberta did.

So it went viral, pre-social media?

I actually did think of Roberta as a virus, as someone that would go out and infect the space that she was living in, and especially when I viralised and cloned her into three beings later on in the work. She multiplied around 1976, about halfway through. This really was what verified the research aspect of that work, in that one Roberta having these negative experiences – like getting her purse snatched, or terrible experiences with men – was relatively meaningless but when all three of them would go out and have exactly the same negative experiences it was like a scientific experiment proven three times with consistent results: they were three living proofs of the adverse reactions to this specific being.

So when you assumed the identity of Roberta did you have to relinquish your own identity, administratively speaking, your own driving licence etc?

Not at all. I personally couldn't get credit cards but Roberta had no credit problem so she was able to get credit cards and all these government-assisted proofs of her existence. I was really lucky that I did it in the 1970s because somebody did it in the 1980s and got arrested for identity theft.

So Lynn and Roberta were coexisting quite separately during the mid 1970s?

Roberta had her own walk, her own language, her own gestures, which is what I had to teach to the multiples, which is why in 1976 I chose to cast dancers as the multiples, because they could move that way. She wasn't me – we shared a heartbeat but we were separate.

How close was their resemblance to Roberta?

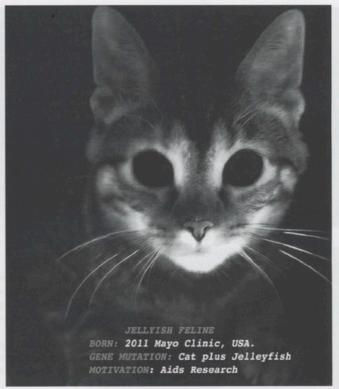
They were made up to be almost physically identical. They had the same dresses made for them, same wigs, same make-up...

In your conversation with Huxtable you spoke about your work engaging with multiple personae. I wonder how best to retroactively understand Roberta.

Roberta was a prism, and we all live in prisms or, in fact, prisons, of who we think we are. Nothing is stable because we live through time, and time and perception change how things appear and move and age, so nothing is fixed that is living.

Was Roberta set up explicitly or exclusively as an art project?





I look at these things as investigations. You could say they're art investigations, but I think it's broader than that. They are investigations into reality or its blurring, or what living is, or how people put frames on what they see and how that affects the perception of the thing inside the frame. I was just exploring these ideas through the process of her. That said, I did set up surveillance photographers around her – photographers of whom the public remained unaware – so I think I had to prove the project as I was doing it in different ways.

Before making *Roberta*, I was certainly affected by André Breton's book *Nadja* from 1928 where he took the city of Paris and turned it into this being. I also knew about Marcel Duchamp's very short-lived transition and why he made the choices he did, to create Rrose Sélavy instead of some other being, because he was thinking about being a Jewish person – he was thinking about all kinds of alternative personae. But it was *Nadja* that made me want to explore the situation of living within the context of a space and a time, how that affected how you were perceived as an individual.

So where is the complete archive now?

I was very lucky because I had one collector for many decades, Donald Hess, and in 1994 he bought the original archive of *Roberta*. Maria Balshaw, who was then at the Whitworth in Manchester, acquired the second set for that museum. The third archive is being split up. There are about 30 pieces at MoMA, several at Tate and the Jewish Museum in New York, with other pieces going elsewhere. I have kept one artist's proof.

Have you specified how material within those archives is shown in the future or are you open to multiple possible configurations or retellings?

There are over 200 elements in each, including notes, clothes and objects, but I think that when people look through and rearrange the material, it's like they are reperforming her and I am completely open to how they do that, and I like the fact that it is never the same.

How did your 2014 short film, The Ballad of JT LeRay, come about?

I was always fascinated by Laura Albert's story and felt that when her literary persona was revealed to the media she was treated unfairly, and how in fact LeRoy's persona had been a brilliant ploy for her to do her work. Then she contacted me out of the blue and asked me to make a film about her. So I started to do it. I made the short at my own expense and as I was doing it I looked for funding. What I did not know at the time, however, was that she had also contacted many other people as well, asking them to do it. One of the other people she asked secured funding for a feature-length documentary. They even wanted to buy my footage for it, but I wouldn't sell it. I didn't see any point in doing two, so I left it as the short.

Throughout your work you have switched between media, but you have also created some of your own, within modest budgets and during a period when artists working with technology didn't necessarily have access to funding.

In terms of media, I developed many things with zero money, including two artificial intelligence or bot pieces. The first, in 1996, was *Agent Ruby*, and the second, Dina, was finished in 2004, 11 years before Apple's virtual assistant Siri – Dina is much better. To develop AI, MIT had millions of dollars, so did Carnegie Mellon, and they came up with something that falls far short of these things that I did from the mid 1990s on 25 cents.

You have spoken about *Agent Ruby* in the past as 'the expanded cinema element' of your film *Teknolust* from 2002.

I think of expanded cinema as something that extends the screen into real life. When I made *Teknolust*, I had the idea for the bot before I had the idea for the film. I almost



by André Breton's book Nadja from 1928 where he took the city of Paris and turned it into this being. I also knew about Marcel Duchamp's very short-lived transition and why he made the choices he did, to create Rrose Sélavy instead of some other being, because he was thinking about all kinds of alternative personae.

word files, video and jpegs from Infinity Engine and Electronic Diaries 1984-2018 converted into DNA

The Infinity Engine

Reach from the 'Phantom Limb' series 1968

had to make the film, as weird as it was, to justify and secure the budget for making *Agent Ruby*, and when we first opened the film people were using PalmPilots and we developed a way that the code for *Agent Ruby* would leap off the screen and into the devices so that when people left the theatre they could go home and talk with her. *Agent Ruby* still refers to the earlier film through its central female character, and through the central narrative track of confessions within the film, so they're joined together, the two of them.

After making !Women Art Revolution in 2010, you spoke about all your work as being about 'loss and technology, about the erasure of identity and how technology adds to it and creates it. And how art can defeat that'. Do you still feel that art is capable of combating technology's erasure of identity?

I do, I think that's our major hope and the reason I tell people that this is why we need art more than ever, not only to neutralise the toxicity of our environment but also to create optimism and hope which art does better than anything.

Art also has the capacity to intervene in a visual field in a way that can be troubling. Artists can really challenge new modes of attention capture and I think that is something that your work has done for decades. When you are making work, are you conscious of the viewer's attention and how you want to channel that?

I want the viewer to be aware that they are viewing but also to be conscious that they're being watched. Many times I have brought surveillance into the piece so that the viewers are aware of the absorption of their presence into different media environments. I think that we have to be conscious about how our image is being stolen and what we can do to protect it.

You have been working with facial recognition technology for a while, anticipating an incredibly widespread usage of it, most recently by Facebook . . .

In one of the pieces I made, Venus and the Anthropocene from 2017, I used off-the-shelf software rather than software I had written myself or with my team. It is software

made in China and it is totally wrong, as in it logs incorrect data. It's the same software that major corporations are now using to strategise how to make commercial items for sale based on facial recognition, and this is software that essentially doesn't work. They have facial recognition for crowds, to scan for things, to judge what people like and what they don't like, so they base their conclusions on a product that is faulty. It is a new and highly unreliable form of surveillance data.

Are there artists whose works disarm you, in a similar vein to your own?

I am not sure that I have felt this way about a work recently. When my work was included in 'Art in Motion: 100 Masterpieces with and through Media', curated by Peter Weibel and Siegfried Zielinski, I was thrilled to see Étienne-Jules Marey's early work of a bullet going through glass, and how that affected William Eggleston's work, as well as an 8th-century automaton. So seeing things I didn't know about, and considering how early and how forgotten these pieces were, really resonated. In terms of contemporary artists, I have some concerns with how they use technology, because often it becomes problematic in its surface or shallow resonance. I would prefer not to mention names because sometimes a failed piece of work leads to a good piece and they are at least trying to make something relevant, I think. Other female artists that have inspired me include Leonora Carrington, Tina Modotti and Emma Goldman. All my mentors have been found through books. Paul Cézanne or JMW Turner have equally been of influence: people who were doing true explorations in their work and generally not accepted for their most important work during their lifetimes.

Isobel Harbison is an art critic based in London; her book *Performing Image* will be published by MIT Press this autumn.

Lynn Hershman Leeson's exhibition 'First Person Plural' was at KW Berlin from 19 May to 15 July, and will be travelling to Museum Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid in February 2019. 'Art in Motion: 100 Masterpieces with and through Media' continues at ZKM, Karlsruhe to 24 February.

Meritxell Rosell, "Lynn Hershman Leeson & Thomas Huber, anti-body or antibody?", Clot Magazine, April 18, 2018.



LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON & Thomas Huber, anti-body or antibody?

Biomedia, Body Sculptures, Interviews, Key Artists



"The immune system is a plan for meaningful action to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the crucial realms of the normal and the pathological."

Donna Haraway, Simians, Cyborgs and Women; The Reinvention of Nature (1991). The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Constitutions of Self in Immune System Discourse

Lynn Hershman Leeson is a pioneering figure in media art. Since the 1960s, the American artist has been creating works that address the interplay between technology, media, identity and the mutating relationship between the body and technology. She examines how new technological tools can impact our social life, our ideas about individual identity, and our relationship with the real and virtual world using photography, film, video, computer-based art and performance.

Hershman Leeson began working with concepts around cyborgs as early as 1962 (we could say planting a fertile seed for Donna Haraway's 1975 essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto') [1]. In the 1990s, she started working with the themes of artificial intelligence and virtual reality. A time when it became evident that it was no longer necessary to have a physical body to adopt a fictitious identity in the global network. She coined the term "anti-body" to refer to her research and work on virtual identity in cyberspace. She saw her "anti-body" (or alter-ego) as a viral presence that manifests itself in artificial intelligence fictitious forms, such as the online personas Agent Ruby and DiNA, roaming of the Internet and morphing to survive. As she explains: anti-bodies identify, expose and transform toxins in culture. These same issues have permeated my work for the past 50 years.

Now Hershman Leeson has brought her work a step further -in what seems the culmination of her research- with a project rounding all this pioneering work with a major solo show, bringing together her latest work on biotechnological advancements, _Anti-Bodies_. The exhibition comes from the hand of HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel) [2] and central to it will be the final version of _The Infinity Engine _, a piece that raises questions around the ethics of DNA manipulation and its impact on society: how bioengineering is altering our concept of identity and human uniqueness. The piece will take the form of a composition of genetics labs with their unique signage and equipment, files of legal documents related to genetic engineering, and a facial recognition booth that identifies vital parts of the viewers' identity. Most excitingly, it will also portray *The Antibody Room*, featuring the development of an artificially engineered antibody that bears the name "Lynn Hershman" in its molecular structure. A project developed in collaboration with Novartis and inspired by today's leading scientific research in the field.

Antibodies, beside their widely known role as immune molecules and vaccines, have become a central tool for biotechnology and biomedicine and are well established therapeutic modalities in the Novartis portfolio. **Hershman worked alongside Dr. Thomas Huber** (the therapeutic antibody research group leader in Novartis) to create this new antibody. And, as it's standard in biotechnology laboratories, after the antibody was designed it has been subjected to a series of research experiments to discover its properties

and potential therapeutic or research applications. Still undergoing investigations, it will be interesting to know what molecule this antibody targets and whether it is involved in any disease or therapeutic pathway (some preliminary results will be revealed on the 24th April, Dr Huber shared with us).

With this latest work, Hershman Leeson gives a new biological dimension to the concept of "alter-egos" and what it means to be human. An antibody seems in her hands the ultra representation of identity in the form of a reactive molecule which actually can even be reactive against oneself. A representative example of the depiction of the technology-induced epistemological changes in art that started at the second half of last century and have strongly crystallized at the turn of this one.

Text by Meritxell Rosell (Twitter @dancingmoog)



(Lynn Hershman Leeson, Lab (detail). From *The Infinity Engine* series. © Lynn Hershman Leeson)

Over five decades you have been exploring the relationship between humans (and in particular women) with technology, identity, surveillance and the use of media as a tool of empowerment against censorship and political repression. As a witness of the different social and political movements since the 1960s, how has your artistic practice evolved alongside the socio-political changes over all these years?

LYNN: My experience in the 60's shaped my political interests and efforts. Being a direct part of the free speech movement in Berkeley and watching the formation of the Black Panthers and Woman's Movement, I began to understand the generation of content in work and how art could actually affect social change.

Your upcoming exhibition, *Anti-bodies*, will be a solo exhibition bringing together your latest work on the theme of biotechnological developments. Lynn, could you tell us a bit about the intellectual process behind it? and Thomas, could you tell us more details about Novartis role in the Antibody room project and how it got involved in it?

LYNN: It came purely with my own investigations that began in 2006, understanding that programming the genome was one of the most important acts of this era. I set out to investigate the effects of this by contacting scientists, sometimes Nobel winners (in this case, Elizabeth Blackburn who agreed because she had seen my film, *Conceiving Ada*) and visiting labs. The information I garnered with the more than 18 labs around the world shaped *The Infinity Engine*. It was through dialogue and understanding possibilities now available that the lab was shaped.

THOMAS: Lynn Hershman approached Novartis to gain more insight into antibody discovery processes and applications. To explain our research activities and to personalize what Novartis is doing in research, the idea was created to design a novel antibody. Antibodies are made up of amino acids. There are 20 different naturally occurring amino acids and each is typically abbreviated by a letter, e.g leucine = L. The novel antibody will reflect Lynns name in its amino acid sequence, making up the region that is typically important to recognize antigens. The Lynn Hershman region of the antibody will mediate its unique character. Our part was the design, production and profiling of the antibody and generating data and reports of the process. For the exhibition, we will further provide some scientific equipment and the actual LYNN HERSHMAN antibody. It would be great, if the LYNN HERSHMAN antibody project may trigger some thoughts and excitement around the field of therapeutic antibodies in one or the other visitor.

In *Antibodies*, you will be presenting for the first time *The Antibody Room*, featuring the development of an artificially engineered antibody that bears the name of Lynn Hershman in its molecular structure and developed in collaboration with Novartis. What were the biggest challenges you both faced in the development of the project?

LYNN: I did not see any challenges. I worked with a great scientist, Dr. Thomas Huber, and the main challenge is seeing actually what the function of this anti-body will be on April 24. For the DNA conversation, I was lucky that the scientist's brother was a sculptor so he was sympathetic.

THOMAS: Sharing research activities with non-scientists is often challenged by the complexity of the topic. To create a personal connection and allow a different perspective may facilitate it. How well can the LYNN HERSHMAN antibody be produced? May it have unique features? Could it treat diseases? Questions no one can answer before running the experiment. Novartis is typically looking at an extremely high number of different antibody sequences to identify the single one having the desired properties. Starting with only a single sequence bears a high risk that the antibody may be misbehaving. It was a great relief, seeing the first production data indicating that the LYNN HERSHMAN antibody was a quite good one.

Thomas, Could you tells us a bit more details on the characterisation of the antibody? Have you used florescence technology (which can also have an artistic aspect) to identified any target antigen or potential therapeutic pathway?

THOMAS: Therapeutic antibodies are typically aimed for extracellular (secreted or cell membrane bound targets). For the Lynn Hershman antibody we have indeed chosen a fluorescence based assay, which is based on a recombinant protein CHIP array having around 7000 different secreted proteins spotted. It was the wish of the Swiss TV that we will evaluate the CHIP experiment only when Lynn is visiting on 24.April. Thus, we don't know the results yet. A therapeutic antibody optimally recognizes specifically the single protein for which it was selected for and is not binding to any other. For the Lynn Hershman antibody we defined the sequence of the antibody and are probing for a potential binding specificity. My expectation is that due to the long binding loop it may bind weakly to a variety of proteins. If we would see a more defined specificity, or no binding to any proteins that would be extraordinary in my view. But we have to see... It still is an exciting experiment to run.

Lynn, what were you most surprised about by closely working with scientists? What were you most fascinated by their research of the techniques used for the antibody development? And Thomas, has collaborating with artists had an impact on the way you view some aspects of your research?

LYNN: Science is very creative, not different from making art. The difference in this case is you are working from the inside out of the human structure directly and making shifts that will enable recovery hopefully.

THOMAS: Scientists are trained to anticipate possible outcomes before actually running an experiment. This may also be reflected to some degree in the way they define as role as a project team member. Input might be provide according to expectation. Lynn has a very open mindset. This open frame gave room for the rather "unconventional" idea of this anti-body project.

The Antibody Room culminates your body of work exploring the concept of "anti-body" or alter ego. This line of work started more focused through your examination of virtual identity in cyberspace and had evolved with a new set of meaning since the development of biotechnology. An antibody seems in your hands the ultra representation of identity in the form of a reactive molecule (which actually can even be reactive against oneself). In which ways do you think the new biotechnological advances are changing or affecting human behaviour towards identity ethics?

LYNN: Absolutely I think I was always making antibodies,. Antibodies identify toxins in the environment and attempt to neutralize them. This is what art does. Bio technology and ethics are no different than anything and ethics. It depends on individuals. Antibodies seem to have always been part of my art practice. An antibody identifies toxins in culture and then attempts to neutralize or erase them. Roberta Breitmore and later Roberta's viralized representative multiples illuminated the rampant toxins of sexism in her 1970's era. By the mid 1980's antibody photographs appeared. In 1995 the text "Romancing the Antibody, Lust and Longing in Cyberspace" was published.

While the search for antibodies exists in all of my works, identifying the antibody moves inwards with this this project and becomes an inverted biological gesture that has as its goal healing from the inside out, a cyborgian dream of infiltrating the body itself and thereby attempts to create a radical and curative recovery of individual culture.

Why do you think it's interesting or relevant to bring artistic projects in collaborations to scientific labs?

THOMAS: Science and technology are progressing at an incredible speed. Key drivers are innovative ideasStepping out of the "routine" work and being exposed to new perspectives can provide the freedom required to find new solutions. Art can offer those perspectives. On the other hand, the collaboration between science and art provides a unique opportunity that people outside the lab can discover science in an inspirational way. And finally, also bringing scientists outside the lab to an audience that might be "scared" by the complexitiy or had just not have the opportunity to get involved into scientific topics.

Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

LYNN: Optimistic, absolutely.

What is your biggest enemy of creativity?

LYNN: Administration. Overwork. No time. The burden of people not understanding what I am doing.

You couldn't live without...

LYNN: Time, meditation, immersion into the poetics of living.

Sonia Shechet Epstein, "Lynn Hershman Leeson on Vertigo, DNA, and Tilda Swinton", Sloan Science & Film, http://scienceandfilm.org/articles/3030/lynn-hershman-leeson-on-vertigo-dna-and-tilda-swinton, January 12, 2018.

Sloan Science & Film



Lynn Hershman Leeson on *Vertigo*, DNA, and Tilda Swinton

By Sonia Shechet Epstein | January 12, 2018

Pioneering filmmaker and visual artist Lynn Hershman Leeson wrote, "one of the advantages of using materials of the present is that it creates a contemporary dialogue, rather than competing with history." Leeson's feature films include the Sloan-supported film TEKNOLUST (1990) starring Tilda Swinton as a biogeneticist and her three replicants. Accompanying the film is a web project in which users can chat with a character from the film named Ruby—the chat bot's programming allows it to develop its own language skills, using more complex constructions, learning from each user interaction. Leeson's newest art installation "VertiGhost" uses surveillance technologies and 3D printing to place viewers in dialogue with Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece VERTIGO (1958). Kim Novak stars as Judy, a woman who is pretending to be Madeleine, a woman haunted by the ghost of her grandmother Carlotta. In repeated scenes of VERTIGO, Judy/Madeleine sit in front of a "Portrait of Carlotta" at the Legion of Honor.

Leeson's "VertiGhost" was commissioned by a new Contemporary Art Program at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The stipulation is that the commissioned work engages in some way with the Museum, whose buildings include the de Young Museum and the Legion of Honor. "VertiGhost" is installed in both spaces as well as online. The web platform streams scenes from VERTIGO which Leeson recreated using Kim Novak lookalikes. When viewers sit down in front of the "Portrait of Carlotta" at the Legion of Honor (the painting doesn't actually exist—Leeson found Hitchcock's original set piece and scanned it to make a blurry copy), the painting looks back at them with cameras behind its eyes. Viewers are then superimposed onto the scenes from the film that Leeson shot.

"VertiGhost" is on view through March 25. This is one of the many projects on which Leeson is currently working. In March of 2018, the pharmaceutical company Novartis will complete development of an antibody named for her.

After "VertiGhost" opened in December of 2017, Science & Film sat down with Leeson in New York.

Science & Film: Why did you choose VERTIGO as the subject of this commission?

Lynn Hershman Leeson: It occurred to me that this great film was shot at the Legion of Honor and the same bench [from scenes central to VERTIGO] remained in the gallery. Why not use that architecture and film history? Essentially every visitor to the Museum who sat on that bench was re-performing Kim Novak's role as Madeleine. I was really lucky nobody thought of it before.

S&F: Can you talk about the technology you used to create "VertiGhost"?

LHL: It's so easy. It starts with going into the gallery room, because everything is identical [to when Hitchcock filmed there in 1958]. In a corner of the gallery, I put a mirror with a value sign on it that reflects a manikin with Madeleine's clothes on it. The whole installation is about mirroring, value, artificiality, and twins. You sit down on a bench in front of my version of the Carlotta painting, which I blurred because it was more interesting, like blurring the truth of surveillance. Hidden in flowers [on the bench] is a 3D-printed sensor that looks like a leaf.



S&F: The Carlotta portrait is a very strange painting. Very garish.

LHL: It's really awful. We photographed the original prop that Hitchcock used, then blurred it in Photoshop, and printed it the same size on plexiglas. We then built the frame and a second stage camera to hinge in the back of it, so it sees through Carlotta's eyes. Sitting down on the bench in front of the painting activates the sensors which activates cameras in the Carlotta painting. Then, the camera captures your image and superimposes it into 16 scenes that we shot of VERTIGO which are streaming on a monitor in

the de Young Museum and at the Legion of Honor, like a Pepper's Ghost box. So you become a character. When a viewer is sitting they go into sitting scenes and when they're standing they go into standing scenes.

S&F: It's a constant loop. So if no one is sitting there, what happens?

LHL: It just loops with actors. In order to get Kim Novak look-alikes I put a call on Facebook for anyone who looked like Kim Novak. Then a 19-year-old composer recomposed the whole VERTIGO score.

S&F: Some of the technologies that you use, like the camera, are often used in surveillance. Was that intentional?

LHL: Yes, because I think it takes it to a second level. I wanted to do something that wasn't just in one museum but was in the entire museum—two locations. I can't imagine doing anything that doesn't have surveillance in one way or another; it seems so much of a part of what's going on. There is even biological surveillance, tracking your DNA to go back to the history of trauma.

For my installation "The Infinity Engine" [an installation that is a functional replica of a genetics lab], I interviewed a geneticist who is working on correcting DNA trauma in embryos. They've gotten permission in England to operate on humans.



S&F: Does such a technology make you nervous?

LHL: I think it's really fascinating. It's not technology that creates dystopian or utopian elements of the future—it's really what we as a species do. If we can correct something in an unborn fetus so they can live a life without being dependent on chemicals, then that could be liberating for them.

S&F: One of the things that I love about work that deals with science or technology, yours included of course, is that it gives people a space to think about these technologies that have moral and ethical implications.

LHL: [These biotech companies] all have to employ ethicists—a team of people who critique what they're doing, so that is a big change. Of course, the ethicists are being paid by these places too.

S&F: That seems like that would be an issue. I know there is an organization partly responsible for monitoring ethics around Artificial Intelligence, but many of the people on it are themselves inventing AI.

LHL: Maybe they should make an AI ethics bot.

S&F: As long as they get someone else to program it.

LHL: It could program itself. You heard about those bots that started to encrypt their own language?

S&F: No!

LHL: A few changed the language so that humans could not understand what they were saying. I think science is magic. I think art is magic too because you're putting things together to see what happens. The difference is scientists have to prove their work. My daughter is a scientist, an M.D., but I don't think she gives much credibility to my work about science. I say, they're making a Lynn Hershman antibody and she says, yeah yeah.

S&F: One day she'll say something different; once the antibody cures cancer or something. That's funny. Where is your daughter?

LHL: She's co-director of cancer research at Columbia.

S&F: So do you go to her for advice?

LHL: When I wanted to deal with pharmaceuticals, I asked her what was happening with pharmaceuticals, and that's how the "Lynnhershman" antibody happened.

S&F: You're also interested in DNA, right?

LHL: Everyone is using DNA as an archival means. I want to use DNA as a source for a new creative medium.

S&F: Has anyone done that?

LHL: No. The only people who've done it are Microsoft and Harvard. Technicolor archived VOYAGE TO THE MOON on DNA. I think some jazz festivals are putting their archives on DNA. All these places are doing it so the data can last longer than the planet, but not as a source for a new media or the core of a narrative.

S&F: A little bit like what you did with Agent Ruby and TEKNOLUST?

LHL: Exactly. But Ruby came first. I had to do the film to make Ruby.

S&F: Do you want to go back to making fiction films?

LHL: I've been making these works that I can do for nothing, basically. They're ridiculously inexpensive. I had to invent a way to do something that didn't cost anything. I don't want to go back into debt and films are expensive. I almost had to declare bankruptcy after TEKNOLUST. However, I've been trying to make a part three to the TEKNOLUST trilogy.

In fact, I have a script that Barry Jenkins [writer and director of MOONLIGHT] and I wrote in 2011. Well-known actors had agreed to be in it. Originally, I wanted to do something with the same actress who you

would see age through the trilogy. I'm not sure Tilda [Swinton] is so keen on doing it but she said she would play the cat. I'll have to update the script.

S&F: The trilogy is TEKNOLUST and what else?

LHL: CONCEIVING ADA is before that. How do you make a film like that for \$30,000? If you have somebody in bed all the time and do the backgrounds in blue screen.

S&F: Out of constraints come creativity.

LHL: Exactly.

Lynn Hershman Leeson is a filmmaker and multimedia artist whose work has been in over 200 large-scale exhibitions around the world and film festivals including Sundance, Toronto, and Berlin. The first comprehensive exhibition of Leeson's work, *Civic Radar*, was exhibited at the ZKM in Frankfurt, Germany in 2015. Her feature film TEKNOLUST was the inaugural program in the Museum of the Moving Image's Science on Screen series. Leeson's multi-room installation "The Infinity Engine" will be exhibited at the H+K Center in Basel in March of 2018, and then at the Riga International Biennial of Contemporary Art in June. If all goes smoothly at Novartis, the Lynnhershman antibody will be on display as well.

"VertiGhost" is on view at the Legion of Honor and the de Young Museums in San Francisco through March 25, 2018.

Sonia Shechet Epstein, "Notes on Science and Fiction", The Brooklyn Rail, December 13, 2017.

| 国BROOKLYN RAIL

Notes on Science and Film

by Sonia Shechet Epstein



Still from Teknolust (directed by Lynn Hershman Leeson), courtesy Lynn Hershman Leeson.

1.

Once it was engineered by Thomas Edison at the turn of the 19th century, moving image technology was modified by research scientists to observe what the eye could not. In the French production company Pathé's studio, Dr. Jean Comandon affixed a camera to a microscope and filmed bacteria. The spirochete bacteria that causes syphilis squiggles while it moves; in 1909, examining this with his camera, the doctor was able to establish a means of verifiably diagnosing the disease even in an asymptomatic patient. "Dr. Comandon photographs and reproduces a scene in a blood vessel," Edfrid Bingham wrote in *The Technical World Magazine* in 1910, "just as the showman photographs and reproduces a dogfight, a comical domestic quarrel, a shipwreck or the flight of an aeroplane."

2.

Science is a means of uncovering facts about the world. Film is a practice of seeing the world. A good science film is one that advances both disciplines.

BRIDGET DONAHUE

After a male seahorse births its young, gaseous secretions cause contractions: the seahorse hops with every poof, and its tail twitches. "The seahorse was for me a splendid way of promoting the kindness and virtue of the father," Jean Painlevé, the French filmmaker and inventor of one of the first underwater cameras, wrote about his 1933 film *L'Hippocampe*. His film was one of the first to show the reproductive biology of seahorses.

Painlevé anthropomorphized his subjects (as Jane Goodall would do in the 1960s, giving chimpanzees human names instead of numbers, thereby ascribing character), allowing him to comment on society—in the case of the seahorse he challenged traditional gender roles. Isabella Rossellini, in her more recent "Green Porno" series, molts from a male shrimp to a female shrimp sporting a pink bodysuit and red silk bra.

4.

Together with scientists, filmmakers can create work that could not be realized otherwise. Isabella Rossellini collaborated with a conservation biologist on "Green Porno" to ensure scientific accuracy, as well as to capture footage from fisheries inaccessible to the public.

Making some of the first films using the computer as a tool to generate imagery, cinema pioneer Stan VanDerBeek collaborated with computer scientist Kenneth Knowlton on an eight-part series. To make the *Poemfield* films roughly between 1966 and 1971, Knowlton wrote a computer code that VanDerBeek programmed into an IBM desktop computer; the visual output, words radiating geometric shapes that stiltedly move about the frame, was recorded. The two practitioners were paired through the organization Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), which was founded in 1966 by Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Whitman along with engineers Fred Waldhauer and Billy Klüver.

A meaningful convergence of film and science needs to work both ways. "Engineers making themselves available to artists," Klüver wrote for a 2001 exhibit "The Story of E.A.T.," would allow artists to work within the relevant forces that shape society—i.e. the materials of technology—and engineers would come to see their work from the perspective of society and culture, which might influence its future development. This is a standard that early collaborators, such as Pathé and Dr. Comandon, meet.

5.

Films that engage scientists or scientific ideas enhance public understanding of subjects fundamental to human progress. Enhancing public understanding can advance science by informing what questions are asked, which can affect the direction of research. Lynn Hershman Leeson's film Teknolust (2002)—starring Tilda Swinton as three distinct replicants created by a biogeneticist named Rosetta Stone, who communicates with them through a microwave, was always amazing but is newly relevant now that the human genome has been sequenced and CRISPR-Cas9 gene editing can alter it. This technology is as capable of creating—without sexual reproduction—new organisms, as it is of curing illnesses. Public understanding can help to establish moral and ethical usage guidelines.

6.

Film, arguably the most widely accessible medium, can bring science to the public. Jean Painlevé produced three versions of many of his films: one for the scientific community for research purposes, one for education, and one for public entertainment. Mark Levinson's *Particle Fever* (2014), filmed over five years, features physicists working on a massive machine, the large Hadron Collider, designed to smash microscopic particles together for the sake of learning what would happen. When science filmmakers ask audiences to care about science as much as their characters do, cultural and political attitudes towards science can shift.

CONTRIBUTOR

Sonia Shechet Epstein

SONIA SHECHET EPSTEIN works at the intersection of science and film at the Museum of the Moving Image in New York.

Sam Whiting, "Vertighost' re-creates Hitchcock film at the Legion of Honor with Kim Novak Twist", San Francisco Chronicle, December 11, 2017.

San Francisco Chronicle

'VertiGhost' re-creates Hitchcock film at Legion of Honor with Kim Novak twist

By Sam Whiting | December 11, 2017



The video rolls with that familiar Hitchcockian soundtrack, and there is the backside of Kim Novak as she steps from a luxury sedan and gracefully walks toward the Legion of Honor.

But this is not "Vertigo." This is "VertiGhost," a clever video installation that employs exact re-creations of the San Francisco scenes from that famous 1958 film to explore questions of double and hidden identity.

A's nearing trade for Cardinals' Stephen Piscotty Ed Lee: just an ordinary guy who transformed a city SF Mayor Ed Lee's death complicates politics in next mayoral... Ed Lee, 1952-2017: SF's first Asian American mayor led city... Ayesha Curry's 'Great American Baking Show,' pulled from... San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee dead at 65 It's acting Mayor London Breed for now — but what's next?

Multiple media artist Lynn Hershman Leeson hired a film crew of 15 or 20, plus three models to play the Novak role, to create "VertiGhost." The original San Francisco locations were shot with the same angles and lighting used by Alfred Hitchcock. The result is spooky in how precise it is.

Spookier still is the setting for Leeson's installation. It opens Saturday, Dec. 16, at the Legion of Honor in the same gallery that Hitchcock used for the scene in which Novak sits on a bench and studies a mysterious painting called "Portrait of Carlotta."

The only thing about "VertiGhost" that is not a reproduction from "Vertigo" is that bench. It was used in the filming and is a permanent fixture in Gallery Six — where "Vertigo" was shot and "VertiGhost" is on view.

The exhibit "is about not knowing the truth in something," says Leeson, 76, who watched all 129 minutes of "Vertigo" several times in her research. "The film is all about copies and fakes. Only the ghosts of the truth knows what the truth is. Once the truth is told then the ghosts can rest."

"VertiGhost" comes 50 years after "Vertigo" and was a commission by the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The only stipulation was that the artwork reference the Legion of Honor or the de Young Museum, or both.

Leeson dissected 35 scenes from "Vertigo," reshot them and sliced them into 10- or 15-second film clips. The location shoots — the Palace of Fine Arts, Fort Point, the streets of Nob Hill and the Brocklebank Apartments — turned some heads.

Yuliya Slepukhina, a former model from Ukraine, was one of the women who portrayed Novak for "VertiGhost," and "people wanted (her) autograph because she looked just like her," Leeson says.

If Leeson just wanted a Novak look-alike, she would have stayed with Slepukhina, but she wanted a more nuanced portrayal. So from scene to scene, Novak's character switches from a blonde to a brunette portrayed by curator Natasha Boas, to a black Kim Novak portrayed by Nkechi Emeruwa, a Nigerian immigrant who once studied American behavior patterns by watching movies such as "Vertigo."

In on-camera interviews, the three "Kims" give their interpretations of the character. Then comes the real Kim, Novak herself, giving her interpretations in a recent interview with the British Film Institute.

The subplot of "Vertigo" about the mysterious "Portrait of Carlotta" is paralleled in "VertiGhost" with the story of a mysterious Modigliani painting in the collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Thought to be fake, it was eventually determined to be real. That story is told by museums curator Elise Effmann Clifford, the only person on camera not channeling Novak.

The film lasts about 15 minutes, with a score composed and recorded by George Freedland. There is also a viewer participation aspect.

A person sitting on the Novak bench can either face a wall where "VertiGhost" is screened or turn around and face a remade "Portrait of Carlotta." Her eyes have been replaced by cameras, which will then project the viewer from a black box within the gallery and make the viewer part of the story.

"When people come and sit down on the gallery, they are imitating Kim Novak, too," Leeson says. "The whole piece is about how we really can't tell what is fake and what is authentic."

Sarah Thornton, "The Tools of Her Time", Cultured Magazine, November 30, 2017.





"Lynn always engendered the feeling of being on the edge of new ground."

-Tilda Swinton

At San Francisco's Legion of Honor, in the room where Alfred Hitchcock shot *Vertigo*, you can sit on the bench on which Kim Novak sat and gaze at a portrait that has a GoPro camera hidden behind its eyes. The piece is part of a complex installation by pioneering artist and filmmaker Lynn Hershman Leeson, which is on display from December 16 to March 25. Titled *VertiGhost*, the work explores the shifting relations between fact, fiction, surveillance and identity—themes that Hershman Leeson has been investigating for more than 50 years. Asked to come up with a site-specific work that made reference to the collection, the artist thought it would be exciting to deal with the museum's Hollywood history. "In an era of fake news," she explains, "mistaking false information for truth is a topic whose time has come."

Another component of *VertiGhost* is a 15-minute film that explores two paintings—*Portrait of Carlotta*, a movie prop, and *Portrait of Pierre-Edouard Baranowski*, a Modigliani painting of an androgynous bohemian with empty eyes that was put in storage for 30 years because it was wrongly thought to be a forgery. In the documentary-style short, we see three Novak impersonators—a silent blonde, an engaging brunette and an articulate African woman with braids tied in a French knot. The latter is an actress who watched Hitchcock movies to gain insight into the "American mind" while growing up in Nigeria. "When you are on a steady diet of reality, you have way more discernment for what is not real," she says.

Hershman Leeson is enjoying a surge of mainstream museum attention, instigated by a comprehensive solo retrospective that toured three German cities, then travelled to San Francisco's Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. At the moment, the artist has work installed at the Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris and the Bonner Kunstverein (in a show about "Art in the Age of Artificial Intelligence"). She also has a six-room installation, which replicates a genetics lab, in the current edition of Site Sante Fe. Called *The Infinity Engine*, the work includes images of experiments like the "Glow Cat," a tabby whose DNA includes a jellyfish gene. The piece has garnered the attention of the scientific establishment to the extent that Novartis, the pharmaceutical giant, has plans

to name an anti-body "Lynn Hershman."

Highly original and experimental, Hershman Leeson's oeuvre is hard to sum up. Her 1968 MA thesis consisted of reviews she wrote in the style of three fictional critics—Prudence Juris, Herbert Good and Gay Abandon. Then, in 1973, she created Roberta Breitmore, a mysterious creature whose existence was made real by her driver's license and dental records as much as her penchant for blonde wigs and seedy hotel rooms. Unlike Duchamp's Rose Sélavy or Cindy Sherman's various female characters (which came later), Roberta did not live in a photographic studio, but roamed the city, often stalked by a photographer. Eventually, Hershman Leeson hired three women to play Roberta and, in 1978, a handful of men volunteered for the part when the Roberta Breitmore lookalike contest invaded the De Young Museum in the form of a conga line. "A lookalike contest was perfect for a work about multiples," explains Hershman Leeson, who killed Roberta off in an exorcism the following year. "We are all more than one, whether we like it or not, and know it or not."

After that, Hershman Leeson took a deep dive, exploring how new technologies affect people's relationship to art and other human beings. She made Lorna (1979-82), an interactive laserdisc piece about an agoraphobic woman, which had three possible endings: Lorna would shoot the television. commit suicide or move to Los Angeles. In Deep Contact (1984), she used early touch-screen technology to enable her audience to access the body parts of a character called Marion. Then came CyberRoberta (1996), a telerobotic doll whose left eye hid a webcam, and Life Squared (2002), an online virtual hotel, haunted by an avatar version of Roberta. These works were followed by two ambitious science fiction feature films starring lanky British actress Tilda Swinton. Conceiving Ada (1997) was partly about Ada Lovelace, the 19th century inventor of the first computer algorithm, while Teknolust (2002) centered on a biogeneticist who made triplicate clones of herself. Swinton loved working with Hershman Leeson, who she describes as "the merriest of shipmates," because the artist-director always engendered the feeling "of being on the edge of new ground."







Hershman Leeson's *VertiGhost*, 2017, (left), is a complex installation opening at San Francisco's Legion of Honor on December 16; above, her 1976 *Masked Roberta*.

For many years, Hershman Leeson had only one collector—Donald Hess, the Swiss owner of many vineyards including Napa's Hess Collection. A friend to many artists including Francis Bacon, Hess visited Hershman in the 1980s when she was a single parent, living in a basement. "I felt intuitively that Lynn was an important artist," he explains. "She had a deep awareness of social issues such as privacy, gender, and surveillance. I may not immediately have understood her work but it intrigued me to the point that I wanted to spend time with it." Hess bought almost everything she had made—over three hundred pieces—and then continued to support her by acquiring the first edition of her photographs and interactive works for decades afterward.

"I admire outsiders," admits Hershman Leeson. "And people who have a political point of view." As such, her art historical inspirations are as varied as Jean Tinguely (with his kinetic mechanical sculptures), Lee Miller (a war photographer who started out as Man Ray's model) and Tina Modotti (an artist-activist who began her career as Edward Weston's assistant). Still the question remains: what made Hershman Leeson so ahead of the curve, so ambitious to merge art and technology? "It was about understanding that I couldn't compete with the past," she explains. "To have any impact, you have to use the tools of your time. I was able to breathe what was going on here in San Francisco and then reshape it."

Robert Slifkin, "Ladytron", Art Journal, Fall/Winter 2017, 133-136.

art journal

Robert Slifkin Ladytron

Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar.

Exhibition curated by Peter Weibel and Andreas Beitin. ZKM / Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany, December 13, 2014—April 6, 2015; Falckenberg Collection, Hamburg, Germany, June 14—November 15, 2015; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, February 10—May 21, 2017. Organized for Yerba Buena Center by Lucía Sanromán

Peter Weibel, ed. Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar. Exh. cat. With texts by Andreas Beitin, Hou Hanru and Laura Poitras, Pamela Lee, Peggy Phelan, Ruby Rich, Jeffrey Schnapp, Kyle Stephan, Kristine Stiles, Tilda Swinton, and Weibel. Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2016. 384 pp., 430 color ills., 62 b/w. \$70

In our current age of digital avatars, technological surveillance, and turbulent identity politics, few artists seem as relevant-and arguably as oracular—as Lynn Hershman Leeson. For more than fifty years, the artist has explored the ways in which a self is constructed, controlled, and exteriorized through various forms of mediation. The recent exhibition Civic Radar, organized by the Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe (ZKM), and which traveled to Hamburg and the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, along with its richly illustrated and comprehensive catalogue, provide a valuable and unprecedented opportunity to recognize and appreciate Hershman Leeson's sustained investigation of what of Marshall McLuhan described as "the pattern of sex, technology, and death" that has fueled the imagination, if not the material evolution, of modern humanity.1 Civic Radar effectively positions her works as a crucial and progenitive instance of a tradition of techno-feminism that reaches from McLuhan's Mechanical Bride (1951) to Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1984) and has arguably flourished most effectively in more popular iterations such as films like Metropolis (1927), Blade Runner (1982), and Her (2013), not to mention Hershman Leeson's trilogy of sci-fi-inflected movies, Conceiving Ada (1997), Teknolust (2002), and Strange Culture (2007), which all, notably, feature the actor Tilda Swinton.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Synthia Stock Ticker*, 2000-2002, Custom software, LCD, glass and electronics, first use of stock date and behavior as net motivation, $15 \times 11 \times 11$ in. $(38.10 \times 27.94 \times 27.94 \text{ cm})$

The retrospective perspective of the exhibition brings into focus Hershman Leeson's restlessly heterogeneous practice, now spanning over five decades and encompassing assemblage, photography, performance, installation, video, and interactive new media as well as a growing body of feature-length movies (including the important documentary !Women Art Revolution-A Secret History from 2010). From her earliest sculptures and collages of the 1960s, which conjoined mechanic and organic forms into proto-cyborgian entities, to recent multimedia installations like The Infinity Engine (2014), which examines the brave new world of genetic bioengineering, Hershman Leeson has considered the ways in which gender and sexuality continue to inform the changing contours of humanity's-and pace McLuhan, not only man's-technological extensions, provocatively suggesting how the rise of the internet and digital culture more generally have crucially shaped contemporary considerations of sexual identity and desire and, in turn, altered the very basis of what constitutes the boundaries between nature and culture.

Like many other artists working in the 1960s, Hershman Leeson began to reconsider the work of art-and the sculptural object in particular-as a categorically environmental object in which the surrounding space of the gallery was activated, consequently making the viewer's body a constitutive element of the aesthetic experience. Along with Nam June Paik, Charlotte Moorman, Stan VanDerBeek, and a handful of other artists in the second half of the decade, Hershman Leeson examined the environmental impact of technology and the way in which it seemed to increasingly surround a subject, providing a media correlate to the phenomenological circumscription of Minimalism. Incorporating and manipulating ready-made technological objects such as televisions and radios, these artists recoded them as notably kinetic and sonic sculptural objects whose emanations encompassed the space of the gallery.

The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue make the case for Hershman Leeson's crucial role as an innovator in this increasingly influential strand of postwar art, claiming that she is "one of the world's very first media artists" (7). Such celebratory assertions arguably convey a certain degree of defensiveness that may come from the relative paucity of art historical consideration

of the artist's career. As Pamela Lee writes in her essay on Hershman Leeson's early series Breathing Machines, produced in the late 1960s, "any attention at all" to these strange and rarely exhibited works "is a long time in coming" (57). Lee compellingly aligns these works, which consist of Plexiglas boxes containing bewigged wax effigies of the artist's face coupled with tape cassette players projecting a woman's voice, with the tradition of anatomical sculptures dating back to the Renaissance; the assertion suggests a genealogical link between scientific and technological simulations of life, which find their ultimate conjunction in the recent mapping of the genome and the scientific artifice of genetic modification.

Like Paul Thek, who was also casting body fragments in wax in the 1960s, Hershman Leeson's sculptures from the period display a sense of technologically derived vitalism and not-so-latent anthropomorphism. She called these early assemblages, after all, Breathing Machines, and this uncanny nexus between human and technological varieties of animation and artifice would continue to inform the artist's work throughout her career. The works impart a somewhat primitive but nonetheless affective interactive mode of address. Viewers (or, as the artist repeatedly describes her intended audience, "viewers/participants") are invited to respond to a series of statements and



Lynn Hershman Leeson, Self Portrait as Another Person, 1965, installation view, Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2017 (artwork © Lynn Hershman Leeson; photograph by Charlie Villyard, provided by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts)

questions emanating from the sculpture. (The soundtrack, originally played back on the cassette machine inside the Plexiglas box, now is a digital loop.) A female voice, seemingly belonging to the wax effigy, asks questions like "what's your name?" and "tell me what you're afraid of," along with simple directives such as "talk to me" and startling observations like "I've never met anyone else like you." Asking viewers to engage-often intimately-with an electronic apparatus, the Breathing Machines can be seen as sculptural Turing tests, probing the boundaries between human consciousness and digital systems. Yet the litany of commands and questions, expressed in an entreating and anxious tone, also give the impression of existential poetry, so that these animated machines seem to interrogate the essential identity of their human audience.

Indeed, the exhibition effectively demonstrated the artist's consistent and cunning engagement with language, both written and spoken. If for various conceptualists the incorporation of linguistic "information" provided a means to dematerialize art and uncover latent aesthetic presuppositions that sustained a modernist faith in autonomy, Hershman Leeson typically drew on narrative and fictive realms of language, such as diaries and screenplays, as a means to, as she put it, "plan narratives for my sculptures." One might argue that for Hershman Leeson, such postmodern paradigms as dematerialization and the critique of autonomy were not purely philosophical or aesthetic issues but rather constitutive to her interest in an art that could tell stories. These narratives would sometimes take the form of sculptural tableaux and performances in which the audience was invited to hotel rooms and private residences where they encountered extensive mise-en-scènes featuring wax effigies and, in certain instances, live actors. Many of these performances, especially when staged in down-and-out venues like the YMCA and the Chelsea Hotel in New York or the Dante Hotel in San Francisco, conveyed a certain noir sensibility, investing the various objects within the installations with a forensic aspect and correspondingly placing the visitors in the position of detectives having to reconstruct the possible motives and meanings surrounding the depicted event.

Even more cinematic were the twentyfive window displays Hershman Leeson cre-

ated for the Bonwit Teller department store in New York in 1976. Expanding on the estimable legacy of artists such as Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol, who early in their careers, in the late 1950s, designed displays for the store, Hershman Leeson, sponsored by the Institute for Art and Urban Resources (which later became the alternative art space, PS1), avoided the promotion of commodities for sale. Instead she emphasized the shop window as interface between fantasy and reality. One window featured live actors who could communicate with passersby through two-way microphones and speakers installed in the glass, while another window contained a mannequin whose arm broke through the glass, suggesting the central theme of connection, often between animate and inanimate entities, in the artist's oeuvre. The works, on view for only six days, were transient, collaborative, and multimedia, attributes that in many ways define a great deal of Hershman Leeson's output and make it at once so radically unique, difficult to categorize, and challenging to display in museum settings.

As the Bonwit Teller works suggest, Hershman Leeson often showed her work in non-conventional venues. These were truly alternative art sites: besides department stores, the artist would exhibit her work in casinos, hotels, and private residences. This tendency to eschew traditional modes of artistic display would be extended in her Floating Museum (1974-78) in which the artist organized a temporary exhibition for various friends and collaborators, creating what Kyle Stephan describes in his catalogue essay as a "nomadic, process-based exhibition model" (223). During its four-year existence, the Floating Museum presented over three hundred projects on three continents, including ephemeral "space invasions" (the artist's notably sci-fi-inflected term) by artists such as Eleanor Antin, Michael Asher, Terry Fox, and Newton and Helen Mayer Harrison. As Stephan notes, these projects demonstrate Hershman Leeson's "investment in the democratic potential of interactivity" (224) and, moreover, reveal a fundamental modesty and collaborative ethos at the heart of her practice, which might be aligned with her position within both the feminist and new media movements.

In addition, by working with time-based and collective practices, Hershman Leeson's

works often exist primarily through various forms of documentation. This presents another challenge for her work's representation in museums. As in the recent and equally revelatory retrospective of Mierle Laderman Ukeles at the Queens Museum, ephemera serve an essential, rather than supplemental, role in the artist's practice, again proposing a possible feminist interpretation for this model of art making that is not grounded in patriarchal ideals of permanence and power.2 An obvious care and thoughtfulness can be detected in the presentation of Hershman Leeson's ephemeral materials in the exhibition's horizontal vitrines. They contained elegantly arranged items ranging from unassuming photographs of the self-destructive assemblages known as Suicide Machines (1963-68), to various exhibition announcements, invitations to the series of "Performance Dinners" Hershman Leeson hosted, and an array of personal artifacts related to performances, including traces of her most famous and protracted performance, Roberta Breitmore.

The artist created Breitmore in 1973 as what she called "a portrait of alienation and loneliness" and would continue to perform and literally inhabit this fictional persona for four years until the character was ritualistically "exorcised" in 1978. Unlike other instances of artists taking on fictive persona such as Marcel Duchamp's Rrose Sélavyand more like Eleanor Antin's King of Solana Beach-Hershman Leeson's Breitmore operated primarily beyond the art world, going so far as to register for a driver's license, open a bank account, visit a psychologist, and place classified ads in the local newspaper for a roommate. (These last interventions led to

meetings with prospective lodgers in public spaces which the artist had photographed by a private detective.) Along with the documents related to what Peggy Phelan calls the character's "institutional markers of identity" (103), the exhibition also featured a series of altered photographs that served as diagrammatic "construction charts" for Hershman Leeson's transformation into Breitmore, identifying the type of wig and clothing to wear and noting where the artist would apply makeup. The project suggests a much longer —and much less technological—genealogy of mediated identity that finds its origins in Charles Baudelaire's celebration of maquillage as the epitome of modern artifice in his 1863 essay "Painter of Modern Life."

In all these ventures, Hershman Leeson brought her embodied narratives into the realm of the everyday, becoming, as she described Roberta, a "simulated person who interacts with real life in real time" (104). As Phelan notes, the Roberta Breitmore persona entailed a "performance of co-identity" in which Hershman and her fictional double (who was sometimes played by other actors) "forged a third identity" that was simultaneously real and fictive (101). As such, Hershman Leeson acted as both Pygmalion and Galatea, artist and uncanny ideal, suggesting what the literary theorist Wendy Steiner calls the "ontological paradox" of the "real model," who is "a real person who becomes artificial in posing and gives rise to a quasi self in the form of an artistic image." If, as Steiner notes, such figures "symbolize the growing permeation of the virtual into everyday reality," Hershman Leeson would make this virtual existence explicit in the work's ultimate manifestation as a character



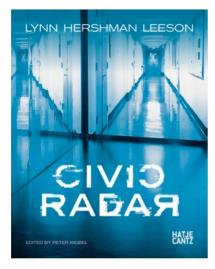
Lynn Hershman Leeson, Roberta Breitmore series, 1973-78, installation view, Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2017 (artwork

© Lynn Hershman Leeson; photograph by Charlie Villyard, provided by Yerba Buena Center for the

in the online platform Second Life and as an interactive doll, CyberRoberta (1996).3

Hershman Leeson went on to explore the possibilities of inhabiting fictive persona through a wide array of multimedia platforms. For instance, in her multimedia installation Lorna (1984), the artist invited viewers to imagine trading places with an agoraphobic single female character who was in many ways similar to Roberta. Described in the catalogue as the "world's first interactive video art disc," the work consists of a television placed within what appeared to be a somewhat grungy living room, containing unassuming furnishings, magazines scattered on the floor, and a fishbowl (with a real goldfish!). Viewers/participants are then invited to sit down in front of the television, grab the remote control, and select possible options for Lorna from an interactive menu. The relatively limited array of possible choices for the character's cloistered and desperate emotional life is fleshed out by the video's soundtrack, which features songs from Terry Allen's artcountry masterpiece, the album Lubbock (On Everything) (1979). As in so many of the artist's works on view (such as Home Front, A Room of One's Own, and America's Finest), video imagery in Lorna is incorporated into what could be described in somewhat formalist terms as a sculptural support, investing the moving image with a specificity rarely experienced in most aesthetic settings. The same objects depicted in Lorna's living room constitute the setting of the installation, allowing for what the artist describes in one of the short published writings included in the catalogue as a "point of identification between the viewer and the referent" (361). In a recent interview, the artist recognized how a similar empathetic relation based on a shared set of experiences is proposed in the Breitmore work. "Roberta was a fictional character, but in her DNA she carried the same characteristics as any woman who looked like Roberta and lived in the late 1980s, and so her experiences were common experiences."4

Many of Hershman Leeson's more recent projects have taken this genetic/technological connection as their primary subject. In Agent Ruby (2002) and DiNA (2004), the artist, working with programmers, has constructed interactive artificially intelligent characters that are able to "learn" and "evolve" through their interactions with users and the World Wide Web. This interest in the genetic construction of identity, across species, provides the central theme of the artist's Infinity Engine, which greeted visitors to the exhibition at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. The installation appears to be a stylized natural history museum display with videotaped interviews with scientists, immersive wallpaper featur-



ing an encyclopedic array of bioengineered entities, an aquarium containing live GloFish (an early patented bioengineered species), and open browsable file folders that held legal documents related to bioengineering copyright infringement cases going as far back as the 1970s. By emphasizing the creativity and artifice motivating scientific practices, these works blur the boundaries between artist and scientist.

Due to its treatment of the artist's prolific and varied output, the accompanying catalogue provides a valuable synopsis of her entire oeuvre, and the accompanying essays usefully situate her practices within larger milieu. Like many recent catalogues, the book contains shorter texts by numerous authors (twelve, if one includes the artist) as well as interviews, and in this instance the array of different voices work in tandem to produce a comprehensive, cohesive, and remarkably multifaceted account of the artist's work. Of particular note is Kristine Stiles's essay, which considers the importance of the Bay Area in the artist's oeuvre. Hershman Leeson assembled around her an impressive coterie, including the countercultural guru Timothy Leary and the feminist sex worker activist group COYOTE, as well as the gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson

(with whom she communicated via telephone), and Christo and Jean-Claude, for whom she served as the associate project manager for Running Fence (1973). Many of the texts focus on the artist's investigation of the constructedness of identity. Peter Weibel's introductory essay capably situates Hershman Leeson's gender-bending practices in an avant-garde genealogy and considers her place within a tradition of recoding the "male mythology" (51) explored by the Surrealists and Dadaists like Francis Picabia, in which femininity is aligned with nature while masculinity is related to technology. Andreas Beitin's contribution considers the artist's sustained interest in the theme of the mask, both in literal manifestations and through virtual avatars, both digital and analogue (such as her reviews published under pseudonyms.) Most valuable of all, perhaps, are the collected writings by the artist herself at the end of the catalogue. It is in these texts that one can discern Hershman Leeson's wide-ranging intelligence and her vision of art as a viable means of discovery rivaling any scientific endeavor. "Fiction, at its best," she writes, "makes truth accessible" (200). One senses a moral integrity and modesty even in Hershman Leeson's darkest and most inhuman inventions. Her work eschews spectacle even when most technological. Whether such a vision offers a constructive means of recalibrating our relationship to technology or envisages the consequences of our refusal to do so remains provocatively unresolved.

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- 1. Marshall McLuhan, The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man (New York: Vanguard, 1951), 13.
- 2. Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art, organized by Larissa Harris and Patricia C. Phillips, Queens Museum, New York, NY, September 18, 2016-February 19, 2017.
- 3. Wendy Steiner, The Real Real Thing: The Model in the Mirror of Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 4, 12.
- 4. Evan Moffitt, "All Lynn," interview with Lynn Hershman Leeson, Frieze, April 14, 2017, at https://frieze.com/article/all-lynn, as of August

Elvia Wilk, "Conceiving Anatomy: Lynn Hershman Leeson's Teknolust", Flash Art, no. 316, September/October 2017

Flash Art

FEATURE

Conceiving Autonomy Lynn Hershman Leeson's Teknolust

by Elvia Wilk

Loneliness lives on our net frontier. Even motherboards and Flash require touch. Think of passion each time you click me into you. E-dream with me before you crash.

Ruby, Teknolust

"Born Sexy Yesterday" is a term proposed by Jonathan McIntosh (YouTube alias "Pop Culture Detective") for a ubiquitous gendered character trope in science fiction. The Born Sexy Yesterday character is instantly recognizable as the wide-eyed, otherworldly alien with a childlike consciousness in a grown woman's body.

Like Leeloo from Luc Besson's The Fifth Element (1997): stunning, savant, yet totally inexperienced in the ways of the world; her intelligence may be alien, but her appearance accords with earthbound standards of beauty. And like her indie-movie counterpart, the Manic Pixie Dream Girl, the Born Sexy Yesterday is irresistibly quirky in her strangeness - a fascinating novelty waiting to be consumed by the (male) love interest she's inevitably paired with. Often she has a special skill, like combat or computation, but when it comes to social conventions she's adorably hapless A succinct tagline for this set of traits may be found in 2010's Tron Legacy, when the male genius programmer of Cora - an "isomorphic algorithm" in female form - describes her as "profoundly naïve [vet] unimaginably wise." What could better describe the competing desires projected onto female identity and sexuality? The figure of the Born Sexy Yesterday is rooted in a horror of female agency, of a woman wise and experienced - who's Born Sexy and knows how to use it.

In her works dating back to the 1960s, Lynn Hershman Leeson (b. 1941, US) has flouted and flipped the urges – from the mundane to the creepy - underpinibit his fantasy. This entails uncoupling the physical body from the performed identity. For her most famous, originary experiment in inventing or "birthing" new identities, Leeson led a parallel life as a character named Roberta Breitmore from 1973 to 1978. Roberta, distinguished from Leeson by a signature wig and makeup, was an autonomous self with her own apartment, therapist and relationships. Eventually, she was further fractured into multiple Robertas played by others.

In 1996, Roberta manifested again as CybeRoberta, a childlike doll with a webcam peering through hollow eyes. Alongside her "twin" doll Tillie, she streamed images continuously to a website, while remote visitors could control their gaze. Dolls, those ur-avatars for childlike female identity, recur in Leeson's work. But as technology advances, so does Leeson's exploration of the avatar, with more recent endeavors such as her Infinity Engine installation (2014) exploiting the possibilities for self-creation afforded by genetic engineering.

If, in an age of Als and genetic engineering, to be born is to be created, reproduction is in the process of being wrenched from the category of "natural" female (un)labor. Yet when the engineering of life is finally understood as a "cultural" act of production, it is predictably scooped into male-genius territory – resulting in uncreative offspring. Enter Born Sexy Yesterday. In the case of Al, it seems the male genius has a rather limited reproductive imagination bounded by a limited set of fears. After all, is the fear of autonomous machines any different than the fear of autonomous women?

Leeson's feature movie *Teknolust* (2003) presents a gleeful vision of creative reproduction unbounded by such fears, with the main character fractured into four identities, all played by Tilda Swinton. The first, Rosetta Stone, is a virginal, nerdy bioengineer genius who has created three artificial intelligences modeled in her image: Ruby, Olive and Marinne. She's kept their existence secret, insisting her male colleagues that her theories for creating such "self-replicating automatons" are all still hypothetical. She wouldn't want to frighten the boys.

The Al sisters, wearing monochromatic outfits corresponding to their RGB names, seem to be trapped inside the computer system, with the exception of Ruby, who must make regular missions into the physical world to gather sustenance. To survive, all three require regular injections of spermatic fluid. Ruby harvests this from men she effortlessly seduces using lines from classic romance movies culled from the internet. She also turns a profit, ostensibly to keep the servers running, through her nightly camgirl appearances on "Ruby's E-Dream Portal," where she recites melancholy lines of verse. Her mystical, seductive presence has made the portal the most popular site on the internet. So popular is she that Rosetta cautions her to "act a little more robotic - no one's supposed to know you're real!"

But her realness becomes evident when Ruby's sexual partners begin to exhibit symptoms of a virus-like infection: impotence and an inflamed forehead imprinted with barcode numbers. The former is most upsetting to the men: "I don't care about the numbers!" one shouts in quarantine.

Rife with jokes on femaleness and identity signifiers, Teknolust is a story of sexual liberation rather than sexual dependence. Instead of being Born Sexy with no socially learned sexual prowess, beguiling men is precisely what Ruby excels at. Her personal breakthrough comes via a love relationship with a man in which she teaches him in the bedroom, discovering an intimacy whereby sex is but one component.

Leeson had previously cast Swinton in Conceiving Ada (1997), in which a woman computer scientist obsessed with pioneer Ada Lovelace time travels to the nineteenth century to communicate with her through an invented Al "agent." Lovelace's story is tragic: without the legal right to control her own reproduction, she suffered through painful pregnancies and died young of uterine cancer. She was deprived of the freedom to exercise her computational brilliance, for which she was regarded alternately as harmless dilettante or heretic. "I'm not at all certain that half a life is better than none at all," says Leeson's Ada-a statement equally applicable to a disempowered Al in female form. But in Conceiving Ada, the protagonist discovers a way to give Lovelace a second, full life. Downloading Ada's consciousness into her own DNA, she gestates a daughter: Ada's reincarnation with the brilliant mind of a computer scientist in a child's body. In other words, a perfect inversion of Born Sexy Yesterday.

Conceiving Ada is a clear precursor to Teknolust not only for its focus on the embodied realities of female scientists, but for the way it reimagines reproduction as invention: reproduction of self through artificial means; reproduction of identity through artificial intelligence; reproduction of ideas — not only genes — through future generations.

Teknolust's Ruby led a further life in the form of a chatbot on Agent Ruby's E-Dream Portal (2002), a website where she engaged in continuous chat, learning, remembering and emoting. Later, Leeson built a bot called DiNa with even more sophisticated conversational skills. "Men seem to like Ruby more," said Leeson in a 2005 interview. "She's funnier and quirkier, and they are put off by DiNA's intelligence."

Identity is an artificial intelligence: that idea is nothing new, and nothing endemic to advanced technology. We are all multiple, invented selves, and the freedom to invent them and reproduce them is fundamental to our agency. Ruby gains her "freedom by way of polyphony," to quote Peter Weibel. ² That polyphony is what the Born Sexy Yesterday character lacks, and what Leeson and her selves achieve. It's only a matter of time until Ruby reincarnates again, smarter and stronger. The future is pregnant with possibility.

(Thanks to Susan Ploetz for the introduction to Born Sexy Yesterday.)

Elvia Wilk is a writer and editor living in Berlin. She is a contributing editor at Rhizome and the publications editor for transmediale. Vanessa Thrill, "The Trauma of Political Engagement: Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Tania Libre*", *Art in America* (May 23), http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/the-trauma-of-political-engagement-lynn-hershman-leesons-tania-libre/.

Art in America

NEWS MAY 23, 2017

The Trauma of Political Engagement: Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Tania Libre*

by Vanessa Thill



What happens when a performance artist struggling against state censorship goes to therapy? In her new film *Tania Libre*, Lynn Hershman Leeson lets us eavesdrop on Tania Bruguera's session with Dr. Frank Ochberg, a leading psychiatrist and PTSD expert. Their conversation is slow in tempo as it unfolds over the hour-long film, but it raises provocative questions about abusive familial structures and the ways that traumatic experiences of betrayal can play out on a larger political scale. Static camera angles of Bruguera and Ochberg relaxing on easy chairs have a drowsy visual impact as their discussion rambles between anecdotes and responses. But Bruguera's stories are highly useful for interpreting her work, and although the mood of Tania Libre is sedate, its ideas are keen.

Since the 1980s, Bruguera has found creative ways to test the limits and contradictions of various power structures through performances and collaborative projects. Her practice is impossible to pin down; sometimes it involves horse-mounted police officers herding visitors around a museum, or Bruguera reading aloud the entirety of Hannah Arendt's Origins of Totalitarianism. In one of her most well-known pieces, Tatlin's Whisper #6 (Havana Version), presented at the 2009 Havana Biennial, members of the public were invited to speak freely for one minute each at a podium. Footage of the performance is included in *Tania Libre*. In the doctor's office, Bruguera fondly reminisces on the sentiment from one participant in Tatlin's Whisper, who expressed his hope that "one day freedom of expression in Cuba will not be a performance."

Two weeks after President Obama announced the end of the American embargo against Cuba in 2014, Bruguera attempted to restage the performance again in Havana with the title #YoTambienExijo, but was arrested and detained by the Cuban police before she could begin. Hershman Leeson heard Bruguera was in jail and decided to produce a film about her. "I simply wanted to help," Hershman Leeson explained to me. "As an artist I felt empathy for the censorship and repression of her confinement and imprisonment that generated from an attempt to do her work." Hershman Leeson's unusual film focuses less on the political impact of Bruguera's provocative performances than on the relationship between the manipulative tactics of the Cuban government and the fraught psychic underpinnings of the artist's decisions made throughout her practice.

As one of the art world's most celebrated—and daring—artists, it's moving to see Bruguera express doubt about the risks she has taken for her work. In her session with the doctor, she eloquently reflects on the emotional ramifications of constant struggles with authorities and even peers who seek to cast her as a criminal. Yet Bruguera's resentment toward those who disparage her is coupled with empathic remorse for the pain that she has caused others.

When Bruguera and Ochberg discuss her time in jail, she laughs bitterly about her complicated attraction to her prison guard. Ochberg describes Stockholm Syndrome, explaining how victims of violence can be attracted to their abusers. The possibility of such a powerful—but scarring—bond at work in society at large may shed light on why citizens seem to willingly give up their rights under repressive regimes.

The familial metaphor of the state as an abusive caretaker is particularly apt when considering the Castros and the

aftermath of their revolutionary idealism. As any good shrink would, Ochberg makes sure to ask about Bruguera's relationship with her father, a former diplomat and minister to Fidel Castro. The topic first comes up when he asks about an early moment when Bruguera's faith in justice was deeply shaken. She recalls working on a newspaper project in 1994, when her father "came to my house as a policeman, not as a father." He turned her in to secret police.

Ochberg reflects on this incident as a moral wound connected to a deeper realization of injustice that has had complicated effects on Bruguera. In the aftermath of this betrayal, her father lost his status as an ambassador and was no longer allowed to travel outside of Cuba. The secret police have continued to interrogate and detain his daughter on and off, using creative tactics to censor her work to this day. As she told Art in America in 2015, "my work is about loopholes." In the film she recalls, her countenance lighting up with mischievous joy, the attempt by government officials to drown out her reading of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with jackhammers. During their lunch break, the workers listened in.

Footage of the therapy session comprises an overwhelming majority of the film, but there are also several intentionally discontinuous moments. Archival shots of Bruguera's performance work are interspersed as short montages with upbeat music, and several mysterious voiceovers from Hershman Leeson ask brief yet cutting questions like "Do you see this whole event as a performance?" Bruguera grins.

The film is bookended by a voiceover cameo by Tilda Swinton, who declares that "art is a basic human right" while disembodied hands release doves against a black background. The text, which comes from Bruguera's *Manifesto on Artists' Rights*, must have resonated when Bruguera delivered it to the United Nations in 2012, but the speech's effect is dulled here by theatrical cliché. Toward the end of the film, Hershman Leeson turns the camera to Bruguera's current projects, like the Hannah Arendt Institute for Art and Activism in Havana, a space for international artists and activists to work on civic literacy projects. Unsurprisingly, the government subsequently launched a smear campaign against Bruguera, accusing her of working for the CIA. Yet Bruguera has refused to give

BRIDGET DONAHUE

99 BOWERY 2ND FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10002 USA BRIDGETDONAHUE.NYC up on Cuba despite the government's many offers of a oneway ticket out of the country.

The film draws to a close with Bruguera announcing her 2018 Cuban presidential bid via a webcam in her house, undercutting any hubris with her primary message: "you should run, too." Ultimately, Tania Libre is a portrait of an artist committed to seeking out her most honest and vulnerable self. Portraying Bruguera's own messy internal process of constant questioning, the film concludes with the artist stepping solidly into the future, guilt and regrets in hand.

CURRENTLY ON VIEW *Tania Libre* screens at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, through May 24. Additional screenings will take place at Laemmle's Royal Theater, Los Angeles, June 2–8; the SF DocFest at the Vogue Theater, San Francisco, June 9; and at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, June 14 and 16.

Wendy Vogel, "Science Truth' and Fearless Feminism in Lynn Hershman Leeson's 'Civic Radar'", MOMUS, http://momus.ca/science-truth-fearless-feminism-lynn-hershman-leesons-civic-radar/, May 12, 2017.

MOMUS

"Science Truth" and Fearless Feminism in Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Civic Radar"

BY WENDY VOGEL • REVIEWS• MAY 12, 2017



Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Self Portrait as Another Person," 1965.

Recently, I woke up with a bump on my pinkie finger. I thought it was an insect bite. After a few days, I realized it was a callous from the way I hold my iPhone, housed in a cumbersome case that holds an extra battery. I no longer notice the weight, but my body has adapted to it.

This banal anecdote is instructive when thinking about Lynn Hershman Leeson's ongoing retrospective, *Civic Radar*. Since the early 1960s, Leeson has made work examining the merging of organic forms and technological products, the intractable erosion of privacy, and the ways in which identity can be a malleable condition. For most of Leeson's career, observers often struggled to see past her work's media innovations to understand its conceptual underpinnings. Today, the omnipresence and dulled novelty of networked technology allows Leeson's oeuvre to finally be evaluated in terms of its content. Her practice examines how lives – especially female lives – exist somewhere between fact and fiction. A committed feminist, Leeson embraces raw, ragged emotionality – even as it questions the truths of gendered narratives and the boundaries of the human body.

At Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco – the final stop in *Civic Radar*'s tour, after the ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, and the Museum of Modern Art Oxford – the show has been edited from 700 objects down to a focused set of 230. The exhibition narrative, crafted by curator Lucía Sanromán, positions Leeson as an artist intent on challenging the paradigms of institutional recognition. *Civic Radar* opens in a white cube antechamber devoted to *Infinity Engine* (2014–16), Leeson's recent project exploring bioengineering. A funhouse-like mirrored room leads the way to an environment wallpapered with pictures of genetically-modified organisms, from soybeans to a glow-in-the-dark cat. The austere space mimics a laboratory, showcasing video interviews with genetic scientists, a paper archive of copyright reports of new species, and lab-grown organs. Earlier iterations of *Civic Radar* included reverse facial-recognition software that analyzed the genetic makeup of visitors, raising ethical queries about scientific complicity in social surveillance.

Throughout her career, Leeson pursued themes plucked from science fiction that would become "science truth" (as she put it in a recent interview). In the early 1960s, she created cyborg drawings and assemblages. Her first new media breakthrough came with her *Breathing Machines*, which she made after suffering a severe heart condition during her pregnancy in 1965. In these unsettling works, Leeson combined wax casts of her face, modified by dyes, wigs, or glass eyes, with recorded soundtracks dominated by her own labored breathing. Between heavy sighs, Leeson asks a number of probing questions, from the addressee's name to their sexual experience and views on religion. *Self-Portrait as Another Person* (1966), in which the wax skin is painted a dark, almost charred shade, ventures from sexual politics into racial masquerade – a rare choice that reads as regressive. A wall text claims that Leeson wanted to show solidarity with the Civil Rights Movement by painting her skin, but this conflation of the struggles between white women and people of color trivializes the lived experience of race. Leeson's later feminist work focused on strategies of embodiment, leaving aside the idea that race could function as a removable guise.

Yet it was not the racial politics, but rather the sonic component of the *Breathing Machines* that provoked curators of the era. The Berkeley Art Museum removed her sculptures from a show in the '60s, reasoning that "sound did not belong in an art museum." Censorship catalyzed Leeson's hunger to create alternative structures for presenting and discussing her ideas. After writing criticism under the names of three fictional critics in the late '60s and early '70s (Gay Abandon, Herbert Goode, and Prudence Juris), Leeson spearheaded the real-life *Floating Museum* (1974–78), organizing hundreds of site-specific artist projects in locations ranging from San Quentin Prison to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Along with these museological activities, Leeson arranged performances in unlikely locations. In collaboration with Eleanor Coppola – the wife of film director Francis Ford Coppola – she organized *RE: Forming Familiar Emvironments* in 1975. At the Coppolas' home, members of a sex worker's union performed, taking baths and interacting with patrons from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. The evening followed on the heels of an installation of an anonymous, fictional woman's personal effects in a run-down San Francisco hotel (*Dante Hotel*, 1973–74). After observing how viewers could craft a psychological storyline from a series of objects, Leeson created her best-known performance: as her alter-ego Roberta Breitmore.

The Roberta Breitmore series acts as a spatial and conceptual hinge between the '70s work and that of the last 30 years. From 1973 to 1978, Leeson spent hours each week performing as the fictional Breitmore, eventually enlisting several female "lookalikes." Breitmore, an insecure, blond-wigged character who Leeson describes as "an archetypal ego of a collective culture," participated in Weight Watchers, EST, and psychotherapy. Leeson's series of collaged *Construction Charts* (1975), diagrammed not only Breitmore's cosmetic transformation through makeup (contour, blue eyeshadow, red lipstick), but also provided a somatic roadmap of the gestures that Leeson would use to express Breitmore's traumatized, schizoid personality.

Most importantly, Leeson crafted her character's traceable civic identity, with a driver's license, checking account, and credit card. In the retrospective, handsome vitrines display these artifacts, along with therapist's reports and clothing. Taken together, these traces add up to a wrenching portrait of the 1970s single white female: an endangered figure who, despite the rhetoric of Women's Liberation, was pursued by male predators, monitored by government agencies, and pressured to conform to beauty ideals. To conclude the project, Leeson and the Breitmore lookalikes "exorcized" Breitmore at the tomb of famed incest victim Lucrezia Borgia.

As Leeson pursued new venues for staging female trauma, she began the explorations of interactive technology that have come to dominate discussions about her work. *Deep Contact* (1984), Leeson's pioneering touchscreen-based video artwork, invites the viewer to follow a stiffy-coiffed blonde named Marion. "Touch me," the character pleads, when no one interacts with the touchscreen. In various chapters, Marion runs panicked through a surreal forest, or discusses the pressures of escaping the Iron Curtain through modeling. Leeson herself appears in the work, interjecting prescient thoughts on feminism and the distancing effects of screens. During the same era, Leeson taped a series of video diaries (*Electronic Diaries* (1986–90)), in which she faces the camera alone and discusses everything from binge eating to incest and brain tumors. Leeson perfects the video confessional years before its ubiquity, while purposefully confusing the diaristic with the stereotypical. Much like the aspirational quality of contemporary reality TV culture and social media, we don't know how much of the *Electronic Diaries* is fact or fiction. Seen today, it's hard to miss how cleverly Leeson anticipated the eroding distinction between these poles.

In more recent years, Leeson channeled her obsession with media's evolving influence through filmmaking and ever-more-daring experiments in artificial intelligence. While her documentaries on under-recognized artistic movements and figures attest to a continued engagement with feminist principles, plots for movies like *Teknolust* (2002) – in which Tilda Swinton portrays a genetic scientist – grew out of Leeson's enduring interest in cyborgs and AI.

Emerging from these dual trains of thought – feminism and science fiction – were two bots, *Agent Ruby* (1999–2002) and *DiNA* (2004). *Agent Ruby*, named after Swinton's character in *Teknolust*, answers typewritten questions, while *DiNA* responds to speech. Both have a wry sense of humor, well documented in thousands of printed pages of archived conversations on topics from sexuality to politics. Defying lasting critical interpretation, they learn as people interact with them in the exhibition space. They're not yet convincing as conscious, intelligent beings but they have been programmed with slightly flirtatious personalities to keep visitors interested. "Do I have to tell you everything?" they respond coyly, when the subject matter gets too personal or complex.

The majority of Leeson's sprawling oeuvre has never been exhibited until now. Seen all at once, *Civic Radar* proves the insufficiency of the ready story of her technological innovation. It's true that occasionally she reached so far ahead of her time as to be aesthetically incomprehensible. But she paired her forward thinking with an emotional depth and commitment to unearthing the taboos of female experience. The strength of Leeson's practice comes from its fearlessness in the face of risk – from her earliest self-destructing *Suicide Machines* sculptures (1962–68) to her forays into cutting-edge media techniques and scientific research. At age 75, the later part of Leeson's artistic story is more hopeful than the tragicomedy of her various heroines. It also presents a challenge to my generation of cultural producers, to use the networked technology at our disposal to more feminist, collaborative ends. To notice the weight of new callouses, and how they developed.

Jori Finkel, "Freeing Tania Bruguera", *The Art Newspaper*, May 6, 2017, http://theartnewspaper.com/reports/frny17/ freeing-tania-bruguera/.



FRIEZE NEW YORK 2017

Freeing Tania Bruguera

The artist takes a turn on the psychiatrist's couch in a new documentary by Lynn Hershman Leeson that delves into the psychology of government oppression

by JORI FINKEL | 6 May 2017



The Cuban artist during the making of Tania Libre, the new film by Lynn Hershman Leeson, to be shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in May. Courtesy of Lynn Hershman

Deep into *Tania Libre*, the new documentary that explores the artist Tania Bruguera's fraught relationship with the Cuban government, comes a particularly intimate moment. Sounding a bit more sheepish than usual, Bruguera admits that she was attracted to one of her interrogators during her detention in 2015.

She not only experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of her harassment and imprisonment, she says, but also some form of Stockholm syndrome, the condition by which hostages can become attached to their captors. And she believes she is not alone, seeing these afflictions as a near-universal condition of a population that survived Fidel Castro's regime.

It is the kind of insight that comes from intense therapy sessions, and here it comes from a two-day-long, therapy-like conversation between Bruguera and the psychiatrist and trauma expert Frank Ochberg, which provides the format and substance of the new film. It is a risky premise: the 73-minute documentary, which has a one-week run at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (from 19 May), consists almost entirely of this dialogue, save for clips of Bruguera's button-pushing performances. (She is also due to speak on a panel about art and social commitment with other artists at Frieze New York on 6 May.)

Film as a form of arts activism

The documentary was produced and directed by another risk-taking artist: Lynn Hershman Leeson. As the feminist conceptual artist tells it, she made the film on "lunch money" in between exhibitions of her own works, which focus on the seductive dangers of surveillance, cloning and other techno-futurist fantasies we already live with.

During her career, film-making has become Hershman Leeson's most visible form of art activism. "To jail or punish artists for doing their work is such a violent form of repression, like having your tongue cut out," she says. "I see this as a way of making people aware of these vital wrongs."

Hershman Leeson's previous two documentaries also show artists who have been oppressed or suppressed. *Women Art Revolution* (2010), a sweeping history of around 50 years of feminist art-making that took nearly that long to make, began with videos of friends made at home with a borrowed camera. "I didn't see it as a film," she says. "I didn't know how to make a film, but I thought it was the most interesting thing happening at the time."

The documentary gives female artists recognition long denied by museums as well as the market, and treats feminism as a serious political movement that grew out of Vietnam-era activism. Narrated by Hershman Leeson, the film covers works by Howardena Pindell, Judy Chicago, Martha Rosler and Ana Mendieta, among others, and weaves together dozens of one-to-one interviews. (Acquired by Stanford University, California, the full interviews are now online.)

One highlight is the interview with a feisty Marcia Tucker, the New Museum's founding director, carried out in July 2006, just three months before her death. She remembers working as a curator at the Whitney Museum of American Art (from 1969 to 1977) and asking its then president, David Solinger, for a raise so her salary would match those of her male counterparts. "He said: "The budget, the budget, the budget," Tucker recounted. "I said: "The New York Times, the New York Post, the Daily News."

Advocating for artists' rights

Hershman Leeson's 2007 documentary *Strange Culture* exposes the plight of the artist Steve Kurtz, who was investigated by the FBI over bioterrorism after police discovered a home laboratory where he kept bacteria for his biotech-related art. Kurtz's lawyers would not let him speak about the specifics of his pending case, so the film compensates by having the actors Thomas Jay Ryan and Tilda Swinton play Steve and his wife, Hope Kurtz. They dramatise the couple's daily lives, from teaching to working on a show at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art about genetically modified food.

In that film, Hershman Leeson clearly enjoys the slippery interplay of fact and fiction, as she did in her epic Roberta Breitmore project in the 1970s, during which she spent years developing an alter ego with her own clothes, mannerisms, relationships, driving licence and chequebook. In one scene in *Strange Culture*, she shoots the real Kurtz and the actor playing Kurtz together on screen. In another, she catches Swinton out of character, talking about the regulation of genetically modified organisms in Europe. (Swinton is also the lead in Hershman Leeson's two science-fiction films, *Conceiving Ada*, 1997, and *Teknolust*, 2002.)

But most of all, Hershman Leeson saw Strange Culture as a way to back Kurtz while the federal investigation dragged on. Kurtz has called it "a huge help" that led to "volunteers, expert witnesses, cash donors and even more support" for his case. All charges against him were dropped a year after the documentary came out.

The film-maker felt a similar urge to advocate for an artist's civil rights with Bruguera. In early 2015, she did not know the detained Cuban artist personally but "felt compelled" to get involved when video clips made by her supporters turned up on YouTube. "They made no sense. They were not just low quality, with bad video or sound, but they were low on information. They didn't really say why she was in jail or what the circumstances were."



Still from Tania Libre by Lynn Hershman Leeson with Dr Ochberg and Tania Bruguera in session

In the psychiatrist's chair

Hershman Leeson's first attempt to do something better failed: a planned trip to Cuba to shoot something that summer was scrapped when her camerawoman backed out at the last minute in fear of having her passport seized, like Bruguera's had been during her detention. The artists did not meet until Bruguera moved to New York that autumn. She had heard about Ochberg, one of the first psychiatrists to identify and treat PTSD, and invited Hershman Leeson to join her on a visit to his offices in Michigan.

The film's power stems from Bruguera's frankness in discussing her ordeals and Ochberg's insights into trauma. They discuss a range of topics, including Bruguera's father (a former diplomat and Castro loyalist), political leaders as father figures and Stockholm syndrome, which Ochberg describes as "this trauma bond—the person who does this to you eventually becomes the father. And when he is no longer threatening to kill you, you almost interpret that as love."

Then Bruguera mentions her interrogator, whose name is bleeped out. "I did develop some attraction, I have to confess," she says. "Sometimes she told me things to threaten me in a nice way, like: 'I want you to do that for your own good.' And I knew it wasn't for my own good. That was really intense." The conversation between psychiatrist and artist soon shifts to other topics, including Bruguera's decision to read Hannah Arendt's 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* non-stop in her house in Havana as an activist performance. The government's response? It immediately sent a crew with pneumatic drills to repair the street, but only in front of her home. She caught it on tape. "I think the government did a piece for me," she says, smiling. The film ends with her 2016 video stating that she will run for president of Cuba in 2018—an intention as hypothetical as it is inspiring, given the one-party state.

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As for Hershman Leeson, she connects film-making to her other art activities, since they all confront "the consequences of technological and scientific inventions that are happening in our culture without a proper ethics procedure". She also notes the common themes of "violations and threats to freedom experienced by women in particular, whether it be by a family member or authoritarian government".

"I don't see any real differences except in the form," she says of her work, before settling on an apt genetic metaphor: "I think one is a DNA mutation of the other."

Evan Moffitt, "All Lynn", Frieze, April 14, 2017, https://frieze.com/article/all-lynn.

frieze



INTERVIEW - 14 APR 2017

All Lynn

Recently awarded a USA Artist Fellowship, Lynn Hershman Leeson speaks about cultural technologies, personal narratives and alter egos

BY EVAN MOFFITT

In 1984, Donna Harraway published A Cyborg Manifesto, a critique of feminist identity politics that dismantled the boundaries between human and machine, and imagined our bionic future. One year earlier, artist Lynn Hershman Leeson had already created a feminist cyborg called Lorna, the first interactive laser artdisk, that allowed players to simulate the life of an agoraphobic woman. For more than 30 years, Hershman Leeson has employed innovative technology to probe issues of identity, embodiment and expression in newly engaging ways, producing complex works of computer engineering as well as powerful documentaries and feature films. I spoke with her in Chicago, where she was being recognized as a 2016 USA Artists Fellow – one of 46 recipients, across disciplines and from around the country, of a USD\$50,000 no-strings-attached

artist grant. The award coincided with her current retrospective at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, in her hometown of San Francisco, and closely follows her recent exhibition at Bridget Donahue Gallery in New York.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Self Portrait as Another Person*, 1965, installation view, 'Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar', Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2017. Courtesy: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts; photograph: Charlie Villyard

Evan Moffitt: I've always found one of the most moving elements of your practice to be your use of personal narrative, both your own stories and those of your alter ego, Roberta Breitmore. I'm thinking especially of 'The Electronic Diaries' (1986-1994), a series of confessional videos that were included in your recent show at Bridget Donahue in New York, in which you discuss experiences with men, including domestic violence. Do you see this as a specific strategy of engagement, or simply a fact of being an artist?

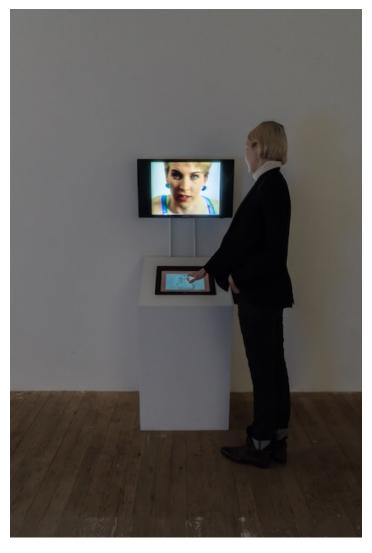
Lynn Hershman Leeson: I think that all art involves some kind of personal narrative, whether artists consciously include them or not. In my particular case, I began 'The Electronic Diaries' in order to teach myself how to use a video camera. I wasn't working with anyone else, so I was alone with the camera for hours on end, and just started talking. I've recently begun a new series of similar videos about aging, and what happens after you turn 30 – which reflects my own personal gestation. Narratives, if one is honest with themselves, are always personal – and the more personal you get, the further inward you go in search of yourself, the more people you'll resonate with. If you've been a victim of domestic violence, it's easy to think that you're alone, but after completing the 'Diaries' I've had so many people tell me they've had similar experiences, but never spoken about them.

EM: Were 'The Electronic Diaries' a form of art therapy for you?

LHL: I was seeing a therapist at the time, and my therapist saw the work and said, 'How come you never said those things to me?' (laughs) Working with a video camera, and especially editing, was a good process of self-analysis. But I also think that personal confessions make you into an archetype of your time: Roberta was a fictional character, but in her DNA she carried the same characteristics as any woman who looked like Roberta and lived in the late 1980s, and so her experiences were common experiences.

EM: If Roberta is characteristic of the 1980s, so was the equipment that you used to create your videos. The works have a patina that function as a kind of timestamp, given that technology has evolved rapidly since then. How has that technological change affected your relationship to the medium of film and video? What about technological change in a broader cultural sense?

LHL: Going from very heavy camera equipment that required a crew to complete any kind of shoot, to being able to film on your own, using just your iPhone – that's a profound change. My work has always followed technology as it has adapted to engage with people in new ways – creating artificially intelligent creatures like *Lorna* (1983) that will respond to you in a video game-like format. Just two days ago, I was up at Harvard meeting with the molecular engineer George Church, was telling me that they are working with Technicolor, Google and Microsoft to embed film on a strand of DNA, as a new form of archival storage. They've already done it with *A Voyage to the Moon* (1902), a very fragile film that will now be there for a million years, unless we get hit by an asteroid (laughs). So I thought, why not use my USA Artists grant to create a portrait of George Church, a documentary about this process, and embed it in DNA



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Deep Contact*, 1984-89, interactive videodisk installation, including first touch screen created on hypercard and ported, video, colour, sound, with coding in collaboration with Sarah Roberts. Courtesy: the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York © Lynn Hershman Leeson; photograph: Jason Mandella

EM: Bodily absorption as archival preservation – incredible!

LHL: It's bionic, in a very strange way. The ingestion of film, as George put it.

I think that as technology develops, it really changes both the narrative and the form of art. Life itself changes along with the means to express its narratives. There's been an explosion of personal expression with social media.

EM: Not just with the speed of communication, but the fact that anyone with a mobile phone has the ability to record and disseminate confessional videos to a hypothetically endless number of people. From camcorder to YouTube.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *DiNA*, 2004, installation view, 'Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar', Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, 2017. Courtesy: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts; photograph: Charlie Villyard

LHL: Or not share it, and have it surveilled ...

EM: If you do make a documentary about George Church, it will be one of many; you recently completed a documentary about Tania Bruguera, *Tania Libre* (2017). which premiered at the Berlin Berlinale this year, and will be screened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York this May. What was it like making a work about another artist?

LHL: I had done it with *Strange Culture* (2007) and *!Women Art Revolution* (2011) – both of those films are about artists dealing with the injustice of censorship. Tania experienced the same thing, so the film is really about the freedom of expression. I've been interested in the culture that provokes attitudes that perpetuate injustice, as seen through the eyes of an individual – much the way Roberta reflected the injustices of her time.

EM: Going back to technology, science fiction and speculative fiction seem to be enjoying a recent surge in popular interest – to say nothing of the dystopian films and books that have followed disasters like global warming or the rise of Trump. What has drawn you towards science fiction? What can it offer art – or, even further, a feminist art practice like yours?

LHL: I'd like to think that there's also a 'science truth', not just a fiction – and that if you live in the present, the things we think of as fictions are absolutely possible, even imminent. It's maybe easier to swallow the future when it's framed as science fiction; stories like *The Handmaiden's Tale* (1985) perhaps more productively frame the potential problems of repressive societies, so we can learn to spot warning signs when they appear. When I made *Teknolust* – a sci-fi film – in 2002, it reflected concerns about society that are very present today, regarding sexual repression and freedom of expression. If you make a film like that I think it can inform a public much better than accusations. I think many of my works can function as a kind of warning, a wake-up call.

EM: Many people might consider you a kind of prophet, for that reason – you worked with artificial intelligence, for instance, before many people outside of the computer engineering field imagined it was even possible. Do you feel at all vindicated that public discussion around the subjects of your earlier work – from surveillance to misogyny in the media – has increased in the age of Donald Trump?

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LHL: These issues have been prevalent for a long time, and many people have been concerned about them for decades. The fact that we have a President whose actions prompt us to discuss those issues more prominently just reveals how outdated our discourse really has been all these years. Our society has never been free of prejudice.

EM: Do you think the forms of media we deal with most regularly on a mass scale – from social platforms to cable news – exacerbate those prejudices? You've appropriated the forms of a wide range of such media in your own work. Can they be changed, or do we have to hit the reset button?

LHL: We really do have to start over again. But technology can never be the full solution to our problems; technology is cultural, and it's how we use it that matters. The ways the right wing has used media technology in recent years reveals a selfishness and myopia that younger people can actively work against, using those same systems, since they understand them so well.

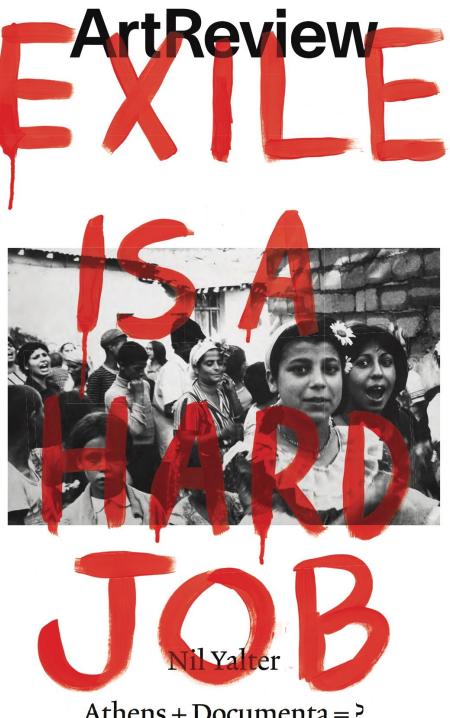
I think privacy ended in my lifetime: we now carry cyborgs in our pockets that permit government and corporate surveillance on a mass scale. At the same time, technology is a kind of mirror, in which we are reflected, and can better understand ourselves.

The retrospective Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar' runs at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, until 21 May 2017.

EVAN MOFFITT

Evan Moffitt is assistant editor of frieze, based in New York, USA.

Jeppe Ugelvig, "Lynn Hershman Leeson: Remote Controls", Art Review, April 2017, 124.



Athens + Documenta = ?

Lynn Hershman Leeson Remote Controls Bridget Donahue, New York 27 January – 12 March

When it comes to new media, few artists can claim a vision as prophetic as that of Lynn Hershman Leeson. Since the 1970s, the American artist has investigated issues of identity in relation to digital and virtual existence, often going unacknowledged for her trailblazing deployment of emerging technologies. Remote Controls surveys her interrogation of technologies of control and surveillance over almost four decades, both as subject matter and as a structural premise of artistic form.

For example, in Deep Contact (1984), the sensuous voice of a female avatar addresses the viewer, drawing us towards the screen she inhabits, 'waiting' for the touch of a passerby to 'activate' her. The first artwork ever to use touch-activated-screen technology, Deep Contact leads users through a technicoloured garden of Eden, where interaction determines the outcome of the narrative. The work skilfully captures the psychosexual dimension of the encounter (using tactile technologies long before the age of smartphones) and accurately predicts the prevalent feminine gendering

of AI service assistants today, such as Siri (Apple), Cortana (Microsoft) and Alexa (Amazon).

The erasure of the boundary between feminine subject and digital object is indeed Hershman Leeson's main concern, which is turned on its head throughout the show: technology as that ambivalent extension of humanity producing at once deeply troubling systems of control and new utopian horizons of female subjectivity. The six-minute Seduction of a Cyborg (1994) tells, in a surreal language reminiscent of that used on TV home-shopping programmes, the story of a white female computer-user whose body is invaded by the pictures that appear on her screen, effectively blinding her to anything but the virtually disseminated images of the Web (which in the video consist mostly of digitally rendered maps and newslike visuals from around the world). Hershman Leeson points to the seductive but hollowing effect of representation in cyberspace, in which ethnic/cultural Others are reduced to nothing but fetishised images despite the promises

of global networked communicability. This problematic techno-gaze is inverted in *The Complete Electronic Diaries* (1986–94), a 76-minute video 'confessional' in which then-emerging video-editing techniques become a kind of therapeutic tool enabling Hershman Leeson to act out histories of personal trauma.

These anxious, ambiguous documents regarding technology's effects on the human condition feel all the more poignant alongside Hershman Leeson's newer works, which engage super-current discourses of technology without ever betraying the formalism that by now shines clearly from her oeuvre. Venus of the Anthropocene (2016) captures, via facial-recognition technology and without warning, the image of the viewer, and projects it above a vanity dresser (part of a small installation that includes a stool, mirror and dismembered mannequin), where it remains as evidence of the surveilled body even after one has left the gallery for the streets, where these technologies already pervade, albeit far less visibly. Jeppe Ugelvig

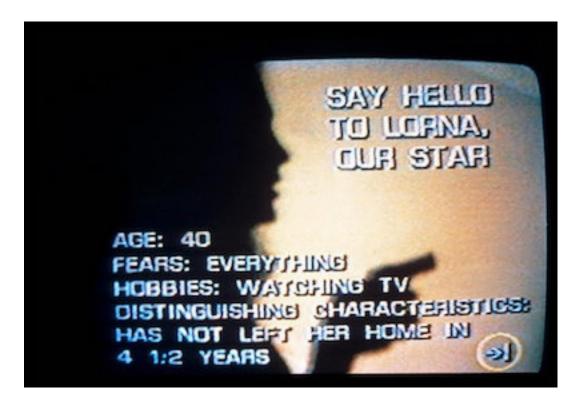


 $\label{thm:process} Venus \ of the \ Anthropocene, 2017, mixed \ media, dimensions \ variable.$ Photo: Jason Mandella. © the artist. Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, New York

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Martha Schwendener, "Lynn Hershman Leeson", *The New York* Times, March 9, 2017, https://mobile.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/arts/design/what-to-see-in-new-vork-art-galleries-this-week.html.

The New Hork Times



A video still from "Lorna" (1979-84) in Lynn Hershman Leeson's show at Bridget Donahue. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND BRIDGET DONAHUE, NYC

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

Through Sunday. Bridget Donahue, 99 Bowery, second floor, Manhattan; 646-896-1368, bridgetdonahue.nyc.

In the 1970s, suffering the neglect endemic to most female artists during that period, Lynn Hershman Leeson assumed the identity of several fictional art critics, wrote about her own work and had the reviews published in art magazines. Ms. Leeson no longer has to resort to such tactics. A retrospective of her work was mounted at ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2014, and a smaller version of that show is at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco through May 21. "Remote Controls," her second show at Bridget Donahue, also functions as a mini career survey.

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Inventing fictional critics sounds extreme, but creating characters and identities is central to Ms. Leeson's work, as is considering the effects of technology on women's bodies and psyches. "Deep Contact" (1984-89) uses early touch-screen technology to enter one woman's life, while "Lorna" (1979-84) employs interactive LaserDisc technology (here, a DVD version). The video "Seduction of a Cyborg" (1994) conjures Donna Haraway's germinal feminist essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1984), which moved away from nature-based 1970s goddess feminism.

Exploring traumas like rape, battery and agoraphobia, Ms. Leeson suggests that technology both glorifies violence against women and serves as a refuge from it, as in her video diaries from the '80s and '90s on view here. A new work, "Venus of the Anthropocene," features a half-mannequin propped in front of a mirror and a webcam that takes the viewer's photograph and uploads it to the internet. On a vanity table are bottles with the labels of drugs used in genetic engineering, like T-2 mycotoxin, which point to new horizons in biotechnology and new identities for women and all post-gender, post-human creatures.

Alan Gilbert, "Lynn Hershman Leeson's 'Remote Controls", *Art Agenda*, March 9, 2017, http://www.art-agenda.com/?p=10038392&preview=true.

art agenda



View of Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Remote Controls," Bridget Donahue, New York, 2017.

by ALAN GILBERT March 9, 2017

Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Remote Controls"

BRIDGET DONAHUE, New York

January 27-March 12, 2017

One day the interface between humans and computers will be seamless. For now, it involves necks bent over smartphones, hours sitting hunched in front of a monitor, fingers and arms that still need to extend toward their devices. Despite all the talk about disembodied experiences and virtual worlds, computer technology hasn't superseded the physical body; instead, it's subtly reshaping it, including neurochemistry. Nevertheless, some new media and digital art treats computers as if they're mostly tools for creating shiny images and scrolling animations, especially when abstraction is added to the mix. Many of these works can feel like painting and video simply updated for the electronic age.

The first audio track encountered upon entering Lynn Hershman Leeson's exhibition "Remote Controls" at Bridget Donahue is the phrase "touch me." It emanates from *Deep Contact* (1984–89), described on the exhibition checklist as the "earliest touchscreen"—i.e., the first artwork to utilize an operational touchscreen. Hershman Leeson has always been at the forefront of incorporating new technologies into her work (checklist descriptions also mention "earliest digital editing software" [*Seduction of a Cyborg*, 1994], "earliest emotional engine to reflect stock market data" [*Synthia Stock Ticker*, 2000–2], and "earliest interactive LaserDisc" [*Lorna*, 1979–84]), but accompanying this exploration is Hershman Leeson's ongoing commitment to tactility. For more than four decades, she has examined how bodies and screens interrelate, how bodies (usually female) appear on screen, and how female bodies move through various forms of constraint.

Along with showcasing an acclaimed artist whose reputation and significance have sharply increased in recent years, *Remote Controls* parallels on a reduced scale Hershman Leeson's current retrospective at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, which originated at the ZKM in Karlsruhe last year. (Hershman Leeson is also an independent filmmaker whose *!Women Art Revolution* [2010] is among the most important documentaries of the feminist art movement in the United States.) At Bridget Donahue, *Deep Contact* includes the aforementioned audio accompanying video footage of a blonde woman in a low-cut blue dress who beckons viewers to "try to reach through the screen and touch me." This obvious impossibility instigates other modes of interaction selected on the touchscreen directly beneath the monitor: for instance, following the woman along a path through the trees or encountering a demon that in turn gives the viewer a sense of what it's like to be pursued.

In this way, the gaze in Hershman Leeson's work frequently aims to alternate between object and viewer, even if her primary subject is representations of the female body via technology and performance. *Lorna* features both of these with its choose-your-own-adventure format that tracks a woman who suffers from agoraphobia. A video installation in which the objects in the gallery directly mirror the ones on screen (right down to the goldfish in a small bowl) establishes a feedback loop—as many of Hershman Leeson's works seek to do—between reality and its representation. Sitting in front of a television, viewers select with a remote control the chapters originally stored on a LaserDisc (now on DVD). While *Lorna*, *Deep Contact*, and other works (including many not in the exhibition) are structured around open-ended narratives, what they presciently anticipated is perception and experience skipping along the internet's seemingly infinite set of links—seemingly, because what Hershman Leeson's work also shows is how circumscribed choice (even on the web) can be. We remain trapped in our narratives.

What the internet promised—and perhaps initially achieved—was the means to range far from one's own personal experience and location, although at this stage in its evolution, the web seems more likely to confirm prejudice and predisposition than eradicate it. It's a bit like the theme of agoraphobia running through Hershman Leeson's oeuvre. The woman in Lorna waits for her lover, talks on the telephone, smokes cigarettes, and combs her hair. The viewer gets to choose one of three end results for her life, but the protagonist eludes through her loneliness any ultimate control, of her own or by anyone else. But this comes with a price—an existence that never coheres. Elsewhere, as with the installation *Venus of the Anthropocene* (2017), which features a nude plastic torso with exposed guts and a couple of internal organs displayed on the vanity dresser in front of it (above which a surveillance camera hangs), it's the female body that's presented in fragments.

Seduction of a Cyborg is the only example in the exhibition of a human and computer truly melding, and it also happens to be the most conventional work in the show (despite its "first" quality), as well as the only one explicitly imagining the future. A six-minute digital video depicts a woman receiving computer transmissions as a means to regain her sight. Its titular companion, Cyborg Lightbox (2003–6), hung directly across from it is a blurry photograph mounted on a lightbox—the human fully absorbed into pixels. But the work's bulky frame gives it a physicality—a phenomenological exchange with both image and viewer—that the virtual world remains a long way from eclipsing.

Hannah Stamler, "The Interactive Void", Village Voice, March 8, 2017, p. 21.





The Interactive Void

Lynn Hershman Leeson's new-media experiments bend reality

BY HANNAH STAMLER



n the beginning, it seemed innocent enough." These words open Lynn Hershman Leeson's Seduction of a Cyborg, a dark tale for the Information Age included in "Remote Controls," the artist's second solo exhibition at Bridget Donahue Gallery.

The short video, made in 1994, follows an unnamed blind woman who undergoes an unspecified procedure that grants her sight via computer transmission. At first, she is enraptured by her techno-gift and gazes blissfully into simulated landscapes made of the pixels that beam from her desktop's screen. But soon she is paralyzed by it, unable to turn

away from a flood of images - no longer just pristine natural vistas, but also scenes of human civilization - that becomes increasingly rapid, indiscriminate, even violent. As Hershman Leeson narrates, the woman bears witness to "the pollution of history," and with it the pol-lution of her own body, which weakens and falters under the stress

This parable of data overload is particularly chilling today, when the internet and media's capacity to overwhelm, skew, and bury facts is demonstrably powerful. The piece is one of many included in the exhibition to anticipate the emotional and physical consequences of

now ubiquitous forms of technology and mass entertainment.

Home Front — completed in 1993, just one year after MTV debuted The Real World - considers how television impels us to dramatize and perform everyday routines. Gallery visitors peek into the bay window of a dollhouse-size home to watch a monitor that loops a video of the house's inhabitants, an unhappily mar-ried couple, bickering and screaming. The film is made for not only our benefit, but also the characters': As the husband says in an aside to his wife, they are supposed to be taping a video message for his in-laws. Instead, they mug for the camera, using its presence as an excuse to stage a burlesque of heterosexual marriage that culminates in an act of domestic violence.

Just as reality TV makes stars of ordinary people and situations, so does Hershman Leeson's art make voyeurs and participants of its spectators. Throughout her career, she has experimented with interactivity, frequently collaborating with scientists and programmers to develop new responsive technologies and apply

them to the fine arts. Lorna, 1979-84, is the first-ever interactive laser disc artwork, and is shown here at the front of the gallery inside a replica of the eponymous character's apartment. Visitors sit in a chintzy leopard-print armchair under dim, bordello lighting to play through different menu options with the goal of getting an agoraphobic Lorna out her front door.

Despite its cheesy, lo-fi quality, the "game"—too elliptical and non-narrative to fully merit the term - remains immersive today. The same is true of Deep Contact, from 1984, which includes an early touchscreen. A Fassbinder blonde in skintight eveningwear emerges at the start of the piece with the simple request of "touch me," then waits for you to tap out your 'yes" before leading you into a paradisiacal Japanese garden. Each choose-your-own-adventure style decision from here to turn left or right; remain in the garden or move to a new location; continue or quit dictates how far your interaction with this screen siren will progres

While it is not wrong to call Hershman Leeson's art and technology prescient, to do so would downplay her accomplish-ments in both fields. She does not consider her work speculative or sci-fi, but rather sees it as rooted in the current moment. As she said in a recent interview in Artforum, "If you're dealing with the

present...people think that you're in the future, because they don't know what's going on in their own time."

Her commitment to producing art that reveals the truth of its time explains why she refuses to remove or smooth over glitches left in her pieces from the Eighties and Nineties. It also makes her new installation, Venus of the Anthropocene, worth a serious and considered look. A mannequin with a Frankenstein's-monster-like open torso and a cheap, ghoulish white wig sits in front of a vanity table strewn with DNA serums. We are invited to peer over her shoulder into a mirror on the wall enhanced with facial-recognition software that guesses our age, gender, and mood. From moment to moment, the answers change: Gaze into the magic mirror from an oblique angle with downturned eyes and you appear to be a sad 34; look again, straight on and with a smile, and become a happy, doe-eyed 19.

I manipulate myself, therefore I am. If this vision of how millennials construct and remix identity - both online and off-feels too inorganic or mechanized, it may help to remember that the line between human and device has always been hazy. After all, even the least sophisticated aesthete among us has the processing skill to take in the shadowy, long-haired figure in Hersh-

man Leeson's backlit photograph Cyborg Lightbox, 2003-06, and compute it as female.

Then again, this capability may have more to do with social conditioning than biology. After all, what is sexism if not a type of dehumanization that turns women into

objects for pleasure and play, or reduces them to datasets like bust/waist/hips? Indeed, it is no coincidence that so many of Hershman Leeson's avatars and half-human/half-robot protagonists are women. Though we all fall prey to the influence and expectations of the media, Hershman Leeson's work demonstrates that women may be the most vulnerable. Lorna sits glued to her TV, afraid to venture outside, while the wife in Home Front is a victim of soapoperatic male aggression in her own kitchen. The Venus contemplates genetic modification to improve her looks, while the blind woman's body

fails as a result of her data awakening.

Nothing, it seems, is truly innocent.





Lara Atallah, "Lynn Hershman Leeson: Remote Controls", The Brooklyn Rail, March 1, 2017.

国BROOKLYN RAIL

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON Remote Controls

by Lara Atallah

BRIDGET DONAHUE | JANUARY 27 – MARCH 12, 2017

"The patriarchy has no gender," writes A.L. Steiner in the latest issue of Aperture. Linking that system of society to neoliberal values, stressing ideas put forth by critical theorist Nancy Fraser, she describes mainstream Eurocentric feminism as an inherent adage to capitalism—an economic system that is in and of itself founded on, and sustained through, the oppression of women and minority groups. To be a woman in 2017 is to be constantly affronted by the bellicosity of a world where life-changing decisions are still made by men. It means to be scrutinized, judged, and silenced when choosing to fight back and speak. But the intricate wickedness of capitalism runs even deeper than these basic levels of oppression, for it has expanded its assault through surveillance technology, legitimizing the voyeur as a lurking pervert reigning over the codes of aesthetics and the commodification of beauty.

Operating at the confluence of technology and visual arts, Lynn Hershman Leeson's practice has been heralded as pioneering. Much of her work is a product of second-wave feminism that came about in the 1960s, at a time where the artist herself was a twenty-year-old in San Francisco. In this small retrospective at Bridget Donahue, Hershman Leeson's installations strike a depressing chord: forty years later, we're still fighting against the same shit. The medium's obsolescence further underscores that message.

Here, and throughout her trajectory, the viewer is both a witness and an enabler. Take *Lorna* (1979 – 84)—one of the first interactive artworks on video disc—in which we are invited to watch, and control, the world of a "typical" (i.e. white) American woman of the 1980s. *Lorna* represents all that we'd been told is feminine at the time, taken to tacky extremes. Her living room walls are red and teal, her armchairs leopard print. Inside a drawer of her small IKEA-esque yellow side table is a gun. As viewers sit inside a recreation of Lorna's living room, they watch, on the small TV set, *Lorna* in that exact same room, enacting different scenarios all controlled by the viewer via a remote. Throughout the video, several statements are made in defiance of these societal rules: "Mirrors like TV reflect our fears"; "Life's not what it seems. Be Brave"; "Take the chance. Learn to fight." Ultimately, despite her best efforts to resist manipulation within that small box, Lorna remains a prey to the viewers' whims.

The installation *Home Front* (1993 – 2011) suggests a war, and rightfully so. Within a tiny room of a constructed dollhouse, painted in dull, almost morbid colors, is a screen. On it, we see a (white) heterosexual couple, "playing house," oso to speak, in the kitchen. The venomous dispute that soon erupts is punctuated by belittling arguments made by a husband who dismisses his wife as an overly emotional person controlled by her "over-analytical graduate school head." When the fight turns to physical assault, all the man has to say is "look what you made me do," absolving himself from any responsibility, and verbally forcing his battered wife into submission. Using a dollhouse as a subverted gender-normative prop, Hershman

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Leeson's piece registers as a reflection on traditional marriage and the nuclear family. Beyond that, it exposes the viewer as a witness to the scene, who by virtue of not being able to directly interfere, becomes an unwilling participant in the violence.

The artist's latest work, *Venus of the Anthropocene* (2017), presents an evolution of a practice driven by the advancements of technology, and its connivance with surveillance. The installation consists of a cyborg-mannequin seated at a vanity station, its mirror equipped with facial recognition software, analyzing the micro-expressions of each viewer's face as they peer in. The piece is a twist on numerous ideations, from a narcissistic obsession with one's appearance—further emboldened by selfie culture—to the use of technology to read and categorize a person's emotions.

Scholars and activists such as Angela Davis, Nancy Fraser, and bell hooks have criticized second-wave feminism, calling it a movement that has been whitewashed and hijacked by women driven by the desire to acquire status and material gain within a capitalist economy, rather than achieve reproductive rights across gender, class, and race categories. While much of this is true given the pay gap between white women and women of color, the poignant relevance of Hershman Leeson's work at this moment signals that we are at a crossroads that, if not handled carefully, could lead to an impasse. As the war on women continues to seethe, let it be understood that until that war is rightfully won, a woman's place is in the resistance.

Alex Greenberger, "A New Future from the Passed", ArtNews, Spring 2017, 66-71.

ARTNEWS



from the Passed LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON comes into her own after 50 years of prophetic work By Alex Greenberger Portrait by Katherine McMahon

n 1965, while pregnant with her daughter, Lynn Hershman Leeson discovered she had cardiomyopathy, a disease that makes it difficult for the heart to pump blood to the rest of the body. A valve in her heart collapsed, and she was confined to an oxygen tent for five weeks. "I wasn't able to do anything—I couldn't lift a teaspoon," she said. "You either die within six months, or you slowly survive." Unable to make art the way she had since graduating from art school two years before, she slowly regained the strength to work with a ball of wax by her bed, molding it until it resembled two human heads—one male, one female. The process took two weeks, and she was proud of the result. Then she got an idea.

Having gone through X-ray machines and isolating medical procedures as a consequence of her health, Hershman Leeson learned to pay close attention to the sound of her breathing. When no longer confined to bed, she made what she called "Breathing Machines"—wax casts of her face accompanied by cassette decks that played sounds of heaving breaths, giggles, and recorded dialogue. Even though these sculptures looked dead—their eyes blank, like a corpse's—they evinced a sense of life in line with her self-diagnosis at the time. As an older Hershman Leeson said, looking back: "I always knew I'd survive."

Five decades on, Hershman Leeson continues to produce art in many different modes, though it wasn't until the past couple of years that the art world took proper note. When a retrospective opened in Germany in 2014, under the title "Civic Radar," her work was thrust into public view. Some 700 pieces—many of which had spent decades in boxes, under beds, and in closets in Hershman Leeson's San Francisco home—were exhibited at the ZKM Center for

Art and Media. Reactions were ecstatic. Reviewing a smaller survey of her work at Bridget Donahue gallery in New York around the same time, *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter wrote of the exhibit far away in southwest Germany, "someone here should grab that prophetic show now."

For the artist herself, the attention had been a long time coming. "People say I've gotten rediscovered," Hershman Leeson told me, "but there's no re-. I was never discovered before two and a half years ago." Since then, she has been retrofitted back into history as a pioneer of feminist art and an essential figure in the evolution of art and technology.

Art from a different era can appear new if shown at the right moment, and that has been the case with Hershman Leeson's 50 years of drawings, sculptures, performances, installations, videos, internet-based works, and feature films, some made with studio backing and released to theaters nationwide. At a time when young artists are exploring how we construct identity through technology, Hershman Leeson's work in all her different

media has proven remarkably ahead of its time. Her art proposes that identities are, in essence, aggregations of data—we are all masses of information gathered over time—and that who we become is shaped by computers, television, electronics. We make technology, but technology makes us, too.

At age 75, Hershman Leeson is pleased and also a bit disarmed by how suddenly she has been embraced. For the first time, she is out of debt, and she finally has a studio in San Francisco (as well as an apartment that she keeps in New York). When I met her for lunch this past fall, she was in Manhattan to oversee the installation of several works in the Whitney Museum's "Dreamlands" show, which surveyed an enterprising notion of "immersive cinema" since 1905. And she had more work ahead of her: a solo show at Bridget Donahue running from January to March 2017 and, on view until late May, a version of her ZKM retrospective at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. The year was shaping up to be one of the biggest of her career. She smiled through most of our lunch, her shoulder-length brown hair bouncing as she laughed. Though known to wear stylish Armani suits, that day she was dressed down, in a tweed jacket and cozy wool scarf.

In "Dreamlands," Hershman Leeson's work was shown alongside pieces by younger artists like Ian Cheng, Dora Budor,

and Ivana Bašić, all of whom are under 40. Their art involved human bodies altered by the internet, 3-D computer imaging, and algorithms. Hershman Leeson's video installations—delving into surveillance, avatars, and cyborgs—shared a certain kinship, even though they were made years before. Chrissie Iles, the show's curator, said of Hershman Leeson's art, "I think her influence is strong, but I think it's going to be stronger now that her work is more visible."

Iles added, "Paradoxically, you run a great danger of disappearing when you're young. Lynn never disappeared. She was hiding in plain sight, and now she's appeared."

ynn Hershman Leeson was born in 1941, in Cleveland, Ohio. Her father was a pharmacist, her mother, a biologist. Science appealed to her, she said, because "you put things together and form something completely hybrid and new." From a young age, she combined that interest with art, going to the Cleveland Museum of Art almost every day. Although her childhood led to her life of art, it would also haunt her work. She was abused, both physically and sexually—"broken noses, bones," she said. "I feel I withdrew from my own body during some of those episodes and watched things happen." Those experiences informed her early work from the '60s and '70s, which confronts the difficulties of being a woman

Above Lorna (still), 1983. opposite CybeRoberta, 1996.



in a patriarchal world. "I think the use of surveillance and not being present, of living virtually and the continual fear of brutal confrontation," she said, "came out of those episodes."

After college at Ohio's Case Western Reserve University, Hershman Leeson moved to California in 1963, to study painting at the University of California, Berkeley. She had been lured by the student activism there, but she gave up her studies before the semester even started. "I quit because I couldn't figure out how to register," she said, with a laugh signaling her disinterest in—or indifference to—the kind of abstract painting coming out of the Bay Area at the time.

In between protests, she found time to make paintings and drawings about living in a world being changed by technology. Her early works from the mid-'60s, some of which were on view in "Dreamlands," show mysterious women in forms reminiscent of anatomical drawings. Hershman Leeson depicts them without skin so that we see their innards, which are mostly cogs. "I thought of [the drawings] as a symbiosis between humans and machines—feminine machines," she said.

When she began making her "Breathing Machines" shortly after, not everyone was receptive to art that so aggressively disregarded traditional painting and sculpture. In 1966, when a black wax version of the artist's face with a recording of her asking the viewer questions was shown at the University Art Museum in Berkeley, the curators removed it because the sculpture included sound. "There was no language for it," Hershman Leeson said of the reaction to works like Self-Portrait As Another Person, "and nobody thought it was art."

Fed up with the kinds of conversations her work was generating in museums and galleries, in 1968 Hershman Leeson invented three art-critic personas who reviewed her work for Artweek and Studio International. With her editors unaware of the ruse, she gave herself good reviews but also wrote that her "Breathing Machines" were riddled with "clichéd social amenities and contact games to those who will listen." She brought these published reviews to galleries as proof-both positive and negative—that her art was worthy of attention.

In early actions like these, Hershman Leeson was "blurring the space between art and life," said Lucía Sanromán, who organized the San Francisco iteration of "Civic Radar." No doubt this was the case with *The Dante Hotel* (1973–74), a covert piece staged in a sitespecific fashion at a seedy hotel in San Francisco's red light district. When museums would not show

art by women, Hershman Leeson and her collaborator on the piece, artist Eleanor Coppola, took matters into their own hands. "We liked the democracy of exhibition opportunities" outside institutions, Coppola said. In a room they rented for \$46 a week, they installed two life-size wax dolls in a bed. Anyone in the know could walk into the hotel, sign in, and head upstairs to see the work. The installation concluded when one visitor called the police, having mistaken the sculptures for dead bodies.

That was merely a warm-up for *Roberta Breitmore*, a piece for which Hershman Leeson invented a fictional persona by that name and performed as her for five years, from 1973 to 1978. The name came from a character in the Joyce Carol Oates short story "Passions and Meditations," in which a woman attempts to contact celebrities through print ads and letters. The inspiration for *Roberta Breitmore*, Hershman Leeson said, was the result of thinking to herself: "What if someone were liberated—if they were able to go out in real time, in real space—and blur the edge of reality?"

Under her new persona, Hershman Leeson was able to get a driver's license and a credit card for Breitmore, and she enrolled Breitmore in Ph.D. classes about how people create their identities, as well as sessions for Weight Watchers and the then popular personal transformation training known as EST. Breitmore had her own psychology—she contemplated jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge at one point, only to end up choosing life instead.

The piece became dangerous in other ways. Performing as Breitmore, Hershman Leeson put out an ad for a roommate, unaware that was how sex workers at the time recruited women in need of money. "Roberta was asked to join a prostitute ring at





the San Diego Zoo," Hershman Leeson recalled. "They were chasing her! When you're dealing with real life, it has a different trajectory of risk than just changing costumes for a photograph."

Hershman Leeson ended the Breitmore piece when people started phoning her house looking for her alter ego—it had simply gone too far. Her friends and family thought so too. When the artist's daughter went on a field trip to the de Young Museum in San Francisco, where documentation of the performance was shown, she pretended not to know her mother's work. In 1978, after Breitmore cloned herself into four other women, Hershman Leeson held an exorcism for her by burning a photograph of Breitmore. For the artist, this was a way of liberating the character. Having become her own complete person, Breitmore was able to "convert that victimized single woman in the '70s into someone who was less victimized," Hershman Leeson said. "You could be a witness to her and also be her."

fter her actions and performances in the '60s and '70s, Hershman Leeson turned her attention to technology. Her interest in new media, she said, goes back to an experience she had when she was 16. She was Xeroxing a life drawing she'd made when the paper got crumpled in the machine. The woman's figure in the picture came out warped and distorted in a way she could never reproduce by hand. This, Hershman Leeson said, was when she first understood technology's impact on the human body.

She went on to work with LaserDiscs, touch screens, and webcams. "The idea of using technology as it's being invented in your own time—people think it's the future, but it's not the

future," she said. "You're living in it."

LaserDiscs, which for the first time allowed users to skip through films with precision and ease, were new when Hershman Leeson used them to create *Lorna* (1979–82), a work in her latest show at Bridget Donahue. By clicking on various objects using a remote control, viewers command the life of Lorna, an agoraphobic woman whose only connection to the world is by phone and television. "It's not that radical now," she said. "At the time, it was."

She built on Lorna's effect with *Deep Contact* (1984), which explores the life of Marion, a seductive blonde who invites viewers to caress her. Thanks to Hershman Leeson's pioneering use of a touch screen, *Deep Contact* makes visceral the ways men might control women and turn them into objects. To spring the piece into action, viewers have to touch Marion against her will.

But Marion is not as innocent as

she seems. Depending on how viewers navigate the work, she can become a devil or a Zen master. Maybe she is in control after all—maybe she plays the viewer rather than the other way around. Perhaps she is like the protagonist of *A Room of One's Own*, a later work from 1993 in which viewers peer into a periscope to see a video of a woman staring back at them and saying, "Go look at your own life—don't look at me."

"The voyeur becomes the victim," Hershman Leeson said of such works. "When you begin an aggressive act, you're victimized by it also. You're not separate from the result."

Some of Hershman Leeson's art has more directly addressed violence. For *America's Finest* (1990–94), she reconfigured an AK-47 machine gun with a viewfinder that projects images of explosions. If the trigger is pulled, the work captures the image of the viewer and then puts it in the crosshairs. Donald B. Hess, Hershman Leeson's first collector, acquired the piece and holds it now as part of the Hess Collection in Napa, California. Hess told me he admired the work's "visual presence and impact" in service of a statement about gun violence. Other works of hers in his collection seem to evolve with advances in technology—"a little like a cyborg," he said.

Hershman Leeson has enlisted artificial intelligence and the internet to update old pieces in such works as *Life Squared* (2005), which reconstructs *The Dante Hotel* installation in the form of a Second Life virtual world. Viewers could go online and explore a digital version of the hotel, and, if they were lucky, they

Above Teknolust(still), 2010; opposite Glo Cat (The Infinity Engine), 2013

"Lynn Hershman Leeson", The New Yorker, February 27, 2017, 8.



ART GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Lynn Hershman Leeson

This selection of absorbing interactive and video works spans four decades in the career of the American artist, a feminist trailblazer who exploits new technologies in provocative ways. The interactive videodisk "Lorna," from 1979-1982, displayed in a living-room-like set with leopard-print armchairs and teal walls, invites you to snoop through the apartment of an agoraphobe. The navigation is clunky by today's standards, but the work endures as a seductive, discomfitting exploration of voyeuristic complicity. In "Venus of the Anthropocene," completed this year, a white-wigged cyborg-mannequin with gold organs sits at a vanity, in a familiar scene of feminine self-inspection. Stand behind her, though, and you'll find your own face frozen in the mirror, as stats display your gender, age, and mood, as determined by facial-analysis software.

Chloe Wyma, "Lynn Hershman Leeson", *Artforum: Critics' Pick*, February 17, 2017, https://www.artforum.com/?pn=picks§ion=nyc#picks66579.

ARTFORUM

New York

Lynn Hershman Leeson

BRIDGET DONAHUE 99 Bowery, 2nd Floor January 27-March 12

Seated in overstuffed leopard-print armchairs, visitors to Lynn Hershman Leeson's second solo exhibition at the gallery navigate, via remote control, the dumpy virtual living room of Lorna, a middle-aged agoraphobe whose experience of the world is entirely mediated through her television. Clicking on various objects unlocks bits and pieces of a schmaltzy vernacular media culture, such as boozy cowboy ballads, daytime talk shows, televangelical sermons, and amateur music videos. In one of the game's three possible endings, its lonely heroine commits suicide.

The first interactive videodisk, *Lorna*, 1979–84, can claim importance in a broader media history beyond twentieth-century art, though Hershman Leeson has likened the piece's random, nonhierarchical sequencing to "electronic cubism." Even more fragmented and multiperspectival is *Deep Contact*,



1984–89, the first artwork to employ interactive touch screens. Viewers are invited to touch the virtual leather-clad physique of a Teutonic hardbody named Marion, whose various parts open onto a labyrinthine sexual fantasy with fifty-seven forking paths. In her 1985 essay "Interactive Technology and Art," Hershman Leeson espoused optimism about the enfranchising potential of interactive technology. "The art world," she wrote, "has long functioned on the presumption that viewing art is passive, while only making art is active. Technological change in the form of laser and video art, however, is changing this traditional way of viewing art."

But Hershman Leeson's avant-garde technologism is cut with camp, horror, and feminized abjection, undergirding an eerie feeling that interactivity is as much about capture and control as it is about activation and agency. Between the Snowden leaks and a Twitter presidency, the narrative around technology has acquired a dystopian charge, and Hershman Leeson's work is increasingly recognized for its Cassandra-like premonitions of technological panopticism. Such anxieties explicitly structure her new installation, *Venus of the Anthropocene*, 2017. A grotesque mannequin torso faces a vanity mirror rigged with a camera and crude facial-recognition software that attempts—with modest success—to identify the viewer's age, gender, and mood.

Haley Weiss, "Lynn Hershman Leeson", *Interview Magazine*, February 7, 2017, http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/lynn-hershman-leeson/#



ART

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

By HALEY WEISS
Photography VICTORIA STEVENS

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Lynn Hershman Leeson's career involves a lot of firsts. To name but a few, there's *Lorna* (1979–1984), the first interactive LaserDisc, in which the viewer manipulates the fate of an agoraphobic woman through a remote control; *Deep Contact* (1984), the first hypercard touch screen, which beckons you to stroke its display and set a narrative in motion; and *Synthia Stock Ticker* (2000–2002), an "emotional engine" that syncs with current stocks and alters its female protagonist's behavior according to market fluctuations. Hershman Leeson is also often framed as a "predictor," an artist who sees our forthcoming faults, but beyond her role as a technical pioneer in digital art, it's perhaps more accurate to describe her as an astute reflector. She looks to science, technology, and how it's affecting us now. She's also keen to emphasize that it's not all *1984* and *Blade Runner*—that is to say, a downhill dystopia—from here.

"The technology itself, it's neutral, there's no utopian or dystopian—it's really up to what we, as a public, do with it," says Hershman Leeson. "It's about having faith in the next generation being able to use the media that was created during their lifetime, to speak it—because they speak it better than anybody—to alter the systems that their parents or grandparents caused them to inherit, and reshape them into one of sustenance."

Interview recently spoke to Hershman Leeson, who splits her time between New York and San Francisco, at Bridget Donahue gallery in New York, where a collection of her works from the '70s through today is on display in "Lynn Hershman Leeson: Remote Controls." This Friday, a second career-spanning exhibition on Hershman Leeson will open at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco.

HALEY WEISS: I'd like to talk about your most recent work, *Venus of the Anthropocene*, and how genetics is playing into your practice now. What are you most interested in in terms of genetics?

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Well, I did this film called *Strange Culture* [2007] that helped to get the charges dropped against an artist, [Steve Kurtz, who was detained by the FBI on suspicion of bioterrorism,] and then I did *Woman Art Revolution* [2010], which inserted a history [of women in art] that had been denied our culture, and I thought those were really important things to add. And I thought, "What's going on now that are the issues to deal with?" And I realized that the genome had been programmed for the first time in 1995, and the things that people were doing with genetics were changing our species, changing the whole identity of who we are, of all living things, and to me it seemed like the most crucial thing—that and planetary pollution were the most critical things that we have to deal with, even though neither one was in the presidential issues that were discussed.

So that's how I started looking, and I went to these various labs since that time, in 2011, documenting what they're doing, doing interviews, and finding out about it. It will result in the entire *Infinity Engine* lab of eight rooms being opened in Santa Fe in October, which will deal with ethics, with bioprinting, with the CRISPR, which I'm going to shoot in late March at Harvard—the CRISPR lab.

WEISS: Gene editing is what the CRISPR is used for, right?

HERSHMAN LEESON: Gene editing, exactly, that anybody could do on a flash drive.

WEISS: That's surreal. A lot of your work is seen as predicting the future, but it feels like you're just looking at the present.

HERSHMAN LEESON: That's absolutely true. I think most people live in the past, because current information is discarded or not made available easily. Whatever I make are things that have been current to that time, so it's really not looking at the future, it's looking at what's happening in your lifetime around you. I think it's more comforting to look in the past because you can understand it better, and there are labels for it often.

WEISS: In terms of looking at the past, a lot of your older works are on display here. Is there anything within your body of work that looking back, you are surprised by the way you formulated it or by something that you made?

HERSHMAN LEESON: I'm surprised by all of it. [laughs] I'm surprised it exists. I look at it and say, "How did we ever do that?" But they all take a long time, between three and five years to do generally. I find people in the Bay Area who are programmers mainly, people I've worked with before, and just figure things out. We use the technology not in a commercial-based way, to see how you can make a profit from it, but rather what it can be, which the programmers like because it's really creative to do that, and not just gearing it towards a product.

WEISS: When you're working with a programmer, what do you look for in a collaborator? Is it just the technical acumen?

HERSHMAN LEESON: It depends on what I need—whether I need an AI person, whether I need a sound person—but people who are willing to look at the creative potential of what a technology can do. And a sense of humor.

WEISS: You've talked about the potential for biological censorship in gene editing, which made me think of this story from 2014, when a Danish zoo put down a giraffe because it didn't add any more to their gene pool, even though it was perfectly healthy. That seemed emblematic of shifting attitudes toward genetics and what's of worth. And "biological censorship" implies a danger.

HERSHMAN LEESON: Yes, because generally, at this point, it's people who can afford to choose, like people who can alter babies they don't have, so that they have blue eyes and blonde hair—it seems to be more popular than to create black babies, so you shift the natural balance of [racism], or you have different kinds of prejudices that show up through what people want. So yes, I do think it's really dangerous as to who has access, and what people want and why they want it, and what the aesthetics of choice.

WEISS: You've talked about how interactive art allows you to operate differently than other more traditional modes of media. Is that part of your artistic goal, to implicate the participant through interaction?

HERSHMAN LEESON: Yes, and I think they are implicated, but the difference is what [Marcel] Duchamp called "retinal art," where you just looked at it as opposed to really having a dialogue. So the early interactive works, you thought you were having a dialogue and making a choice, but you didn't because they were all pre-programmed. But with what's happening now, with AI and machine learning, and you add social media, is that the viewer can really participate and change the direction of content and context in a way that they never were before. That's really what interested me in the '80s, to see what kind of political shift individuals, and particularly individuals who previously had no voices, could manifest in the world. I have great faith in the millennials and in what they understand about social media, and how they're going to be able to counter fascist forces as they come.

WEISS: It's great to hear that you're positive about how people are able to use social media and these technologies. I think it's easy to view everything as dystopian, because things are changing so fast and the capabilities do seem a little terrifying when it comes to matters like gene editing.

HERSHMAN LEESON: But, you know, there's no limit as to who can do it, and the ethics haven't [caught up]—and there's no FDA, anybody can get a CRISPR and can start editing life forms in their kitchen. That's what's really dangerous, is people doing it without knowing what's going to happen, or not having a structure that oversees what gets done.

WEISS: Do you think there's a greater capacity for empathy in the kind of works you create, when one perceives that they have control, for example on Lorna where you can go through these different interactions with the piece?

HERSHMAN LEESON: I think that there is, that there will be, for sure, an empathic voice that's broader than ourselves.

WEISS: Back in the '80s, were you influenced by science fiction writing? I think of *Neuromancer* by William Gibson—I wonder if that was something that interested you.

HERSHMAN LEESON: Yeah, the writing did, but science always interested me, and science, real science, was more science fiction than science fiction. My family are all scientists except for me—my mother was a biologist, my daughter is a doctor—so they're all embedded in the sciences; that became my point of magic.

WEISS: Did you ever consider going into science yourself?

HERSHMAN LEESON: My undergraduate degree is in biology.

WEISS: So when did you incorporate that into your art? I saw an interview where you said that you basically hadn't done anything other than art-making.

HERSHMAN LEESON: Yes, that's all I ever did, but I was always interested in the sciences, so then it affected the art, but a lot of people couldn't understand that I would do that or why I would do that. But it just seems that they were interrelated.

WEISS: What's something you learned recently from a scientist or programmer that you think people would be surprised to know?

HERSHMAN LEESON: There's something called epigenetics, which are the patterns above genetics, and it's a year ago now that I interviewed somebody at Oxford and he was telling me about trauma and how trauma transfers through generations, and how they're able to correct trauma in unborn babies and embryos prior to their birth. They can see it and correct it before they're born so they don't have a lifetime of chemicals to shift it. I thought that was really interesting.

WEISS: Trauma—especially in your dollhouse and video installation *Home Front*, in the form of domestic violence—reappears throughout your work. So is that capability, of editing out or correcting trauma, appealing?

HERSHMAN LEESON: I think we have to learn how to do it, and not accept trauma that has been given to us for some reason, that we either inherited or is in our genes or is in an accident that happened in our lifetime, and use that in a way that it can be reconverted through creative restructuring—to not accept trauma as the end. We all experience trauma, and that's only halfway to what we can do with it before prevailing in a creative way.

WEISS: And that relates to the film you worked on most recently, *Tania Bruguera: A State of Vulnerability*, and psychotraumatology. She's someone who was detained by a doctor?

HERSHMAN LEESON: She was imprisoned for eight months, and she thought she had PTSD. So we found the man who identified PTSD, [Dr. Frank Ochberg,] who named it, and he was in his eighties living in Michigan and still practicing. That's how we found him and went to him.

WEISS: So is this a documentary? Is it fictionalized?

HERSHMAN LEESON: It's not fictionalized at all. The switch is, is a documentary or is it a performance? And where does performance begin and where does anything else begin? And is all of life a performance?

WEISS: I suppose it is; everything is situational. That relates back to when you created the *Roberta Breitmore* series, where you had an alter ego. When is it fiction and when is it reality?

HERSHMAN LEESON: And the diaries—things that are real—people think I fictionalized.

WEISS: One of the potential end points for Lorna is that she might commit suicide, right?

HERSHMAN LEESON: There are three choices: she could stay where she was, she could move to Los Angeles, or she could commit suicide. You can switch [the result] at any time, you can listen to different soundtracks—you could look at a screen with one soundtrack and [it would] make you think one thing is happening as opposed to the other soundtrack, or you see that it's misinterpreted based on what you heard. ... I think you just get lost in it, and then all of a sudden these things happen.

WEISS: What's the process like to create a work like that? Do you have to flowchart everything out?

HERSHMAN LEESON: We had a flowchart of where we were going to put everything, and what we were going to shoot, and we shot these 30-second to one minute clips that were put together. And, you know, in the beginning when we did it, there hadn't been any precedent, so the term "user," that little arrow at the bottom of how you instruct people to use it—nobody understood what interactivity was or how you navigate this.

WEISS: People are so tech savvy now. How they react must be different.

HERSHMAN LEESON: Yes, it's like an antique. [laughs]

WEISS: Has writing been a part of your practice? Obviously it is in your films, but what about writing narratives in relation to these works?

HERSHMAN LEESON: I have to write, I had to, because nobody understood anything I was doing. I had to put these little pamphlets together to explain what [the works] were, and why I did them, and what the references were, and how they related for instance to cubism. I saw these [interactive works] as extensions of cubism, because you're looking at something from all sides.

"LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: REMOTE CONTROLS" IS ON VIEW AT BRIDGET DONAHUE IN NEW YORK THROUGH MARCH 12, 2017. "LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: CIVIC RADAR" OPENS AT YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2017. FOR MORE ON LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON, VISIT HER WEBSITE.

Olivia B. Murphy, "Digital Pioneer Lynn Hershman Leeson Walks Us Through Her Groundbreaking 'Firsts'", *ArtSlant*, February 10, 2017, https://www.artslant.com/ny/articles/show/47301.



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DIGITAL PIONEER LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON WALKS US THROUGH HER GROUNDBREAKING "FIRSTS"

BY OLIVIA B. MURPHY

FEBRUARY 3, 2017

I recently met with septuagenarian artist Lynn Hershman Leeson just after the opening of her latest solo show, *Remote Controls*, at Bridget Donahue Gallery. Her first solo with the gallery in 2015 sparked something of a rediscovery of her groundbreaking work, even though she has spent her decades-long career pioneering in the realm of technology in visual art. In 2016, a comprehensive retrospective entitled *Civic Radar* at ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, charted her career from its early performative days in the 70s to her latest work addressing complex genetics research and technology.

With a portion of the ZKM retrospective coming to the U.S. this month, at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, Donahue and Hershman Leeson got the idea to put together a show of firsts—works that had mostly not been shown in New York, yet were the first of their kind to utilize different emerging technologies like the interactive laser disc, the touchscreen, and even video that reacts in real time to stock market data. The work in *Remote Controls* ranges from pencil drawings on paper to complex facial recognition technology, a testament to how vast and curiosity-driven Hershman Leeson's career has been.

During a gallery walk-through, Hershman Leeson carefully explains how she came upon the diverse technological modes she has worked with. More often than not she was ahead of the curve, and yet her name is not synonymous with the innovations she helped to forge. This never stopped her from continuing to try new things, however, and she always embedded an unapologetically feminist agenda within them: from using male pseudonyms to write about her work when no one else would to her investigation of the abuse of women's images through new media.

As we come to the newest work in the show, *Venus of the Anthropocene* (2017), we pause and examine a doll-like creature with exposed, golden organs, sitting at a vanity with a small teched-out mirror:



Lynn Hershman Leeson, Venus of the Anthropocene, 2017, Vanity dresser with drawers, stool, mirror with facial recognition system, plastic body parts, plastic labeled DNA composite jars, mannequin, custom electronics programmed to read viewer's DNA. Copyright Lynn Hershman Leeson. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, NYC. Photo: Jason Mandella

Lynn Hershman Leeson: See, she has all these disposable body parts. On the vanity, instead of make-up there are body parts and the chemicals you use for DNA modification. If you stand in front of it, it takes your picture and analyzes you. Try it!

Olivia Murphy: Sure.

[I carefully step onto the plush carpet below the vanity, and look up to find that the mirror has already begun capturing different stills of my face, holding them for a moment on the screen just above it.]

LHL: How old does it say you are? 34.

OM: Overshot by a few years, but that's okay. Let's see what else it says. Gender: Female; Mood: Surprised; Lips: Parted; Eyes: Open—the rest is true, I guess.

under my own name, but then I invented these other names so that I could have more freedom, and so people wouldn't get mad at me.

OM: That's a very invested project, to be keeping up with three different careers on top of your own! How did you end up capping that off as a project—did you present the writings all together?

LHL: No. One [critic] wrote for *Studio International*, one wrote for *Flash Art*, and one wrote for a throwaway newspaper that you got on your doorstep. I used the reviews about myself (because they would fight about me—somebody liked my work, somebody didn't) and that's how I got my first shows.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, Installation view of *Remote Controls* at Bridget Donahue, NYC, January 27–March 12, 2017. Copyright Lynn Hershman Leeson. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, NYC. Photo: Jason Mandella

OM: At a time when there wasn't a lot of opportunity for women artists, you created the dialogue you wanted to exist around your work.

LHL: Yes. In those days women didn't show their work, much less get reviewed, so by taking the reviews to galleries, they became interested in me.

OM: Was there any backlash after it came out that you had been behind these three different invented critics?

LHL: Nobody knew! It was a thesis that went into the library, and that was it! It's all collected, and I think it will go into the [Yerba Buena] retrospective, but no one knew at the time.

OM: From there, you began working with technology, using sound and mixed media in sculptural, body-like forms. Tell me about the show that was taken down at the Berkley Art Museum.

LHL: That show went up in 1970, but they took it down because they didn't expect it. When I was in high school I did a drawing that I Xeroxed, and it got caught in the machine, and I really liked the effect! That's what interested

me in what technology could do: I could mash it up and rip it, and I thought that was better than just drawing. So at Berkeley, they were threatening to close the museums because they wouldn't show women—

OM: They actually wouldn't? That was a rule, not just a tradition?

LHL: Yes! So they had to do some shows with women, and I got invited to do a drawing show. And to me, sound was like a drawing because it extended into space. I had this piece that used sensors and sound; you would

"Women really had a natural inclination to do these non-linear things that had technology."

walk up to it and it would talk to you. They had not seen anything like that. Ever. And they said it was "media" and the curator closed it down in one day. She didn't tell me she was closing it down, she just did it!

OM: And that is what spawned the Dante Hotel series?

LHL: Yes. We did some Xeroxed flyers and put them around. I also did hotel rooms in New York and Las Vegas, and for those I did these 30-second commercial spots. I bought time on television. And then it was just word of mouth.

OM: It's interesting to use the television spots to promote the hotel series, because much like your own work, it was still a "new media" that was far from being considered high art.

But before you really dug into new media you were focused more on performance—like the critic personas, but also *Roberta Breitmore* [1973–79], where you were spending time acting in a performance while also in your "real life." What was the leap from using yourself as the virtual or performed reality, towards moving into video as virtual reality, like we see here with *Lorna*?

LHL: Roberta would go out into the world and have "real" interactions and adventures, but then somebody gave me access to the local TV station, and I loved working with [video], because it used time and space and color manipulation and narrative. That was at the end of the '70s, and then I read about the National Gallery of Art putting their collection on a disc, where you could walk through and view the gallery on the disc. I thought that was really interesting, so I contacted the company that did it, and got the idea for *Lorna* [1983], who instead of going out into the world, was agoraphobic and was stuck in the room. I went into cable access TV all night to finish it.

When you're doing something that's new, nobody knows the language, so you can't explain what you're doing because they don't understand it. I just had to not let it go. I felt like, this is a really important and interesting thing I want to do, so why not? How can we get it done? Then it's just hotwiring and hijacking things to get them finished—mainly because I wanted to see what it would look like!

Deep Contact [1984] was the first touchscreen. You have to actually touch the screen on the woman's body.

Depending where on her body you touch, it goes into different options of where you can go with her—you can have her follow a Buddhist Zen master, or a demon.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Deep Contact*, 1984, Interactive videodisk installation, including first touch screen created on hypercard and ported, video, color, sound, with coding in collaboration with Sarah Roberts, Infinite duration. Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue

OM: The way you've scripted the character, there's a sort of sexualized element to it.

LHL: Exactly. A lot of these works are really about abuse of women's images, so you physically have to touch her body, and where you touch her body creates a different kind of response.

OM: And you were crafting all of the different narratives?

LHL: Yes, I wrote the narratives, but we also invented the technology of the touchscreen!

OM: And for that you were actually developing the coding? Or the physical technology?

LHL: Me along with a few people, yes. There's a piece in *Dreamlands* [at the Whitney] called *Dina*, and we did Dina twelve years before [Apple's] Siri. Dina, I think is better—she's smarter [chuckles]. And we had people talking to us about her technology who went on to develop Siri. Eventually my programmer stopped talking to them because we were giving away too much information! And we never patented these "I needed the millennials to be horn."

OM: Both Lorna and Deep Contact deal with women's lack of agency in culture and society, as well as in their virtual forms—the "abuse of women's images," as you said. How did you insert this

"I needed the millennials to be born because they really get this work—it's their language."

feminist platform into the technological space, which wasn't exactly free and open to women to begin with?

LHL: It wasn't free and open, but I wasn't used to anything being free and open! You know, you just do it. And women really were the basis of all our technology: Ada Lovelace invented the computer language; Mary Shelley invented artificial intelligence; Hedy Lamarr invented the spectrum technology used in cell phones. Women really had a natural inclination to do these non-linear things that had technology.

Lorna became mildly successful because the people who could understand it were really into it. So I wanted to do something else, not with a remote where you were distanced from the work, but with a touchscreen itself. It's trial and error. I've worked with the same team since then. And I live in the Bay Area, where technology is in the air, so you can always find people who can lead you to new ways of figuring something out.

OM: We have become so immersed in our virtual identities—how do you feel about looking back on the work now, knowing that it's become so pertinent to the way we live our everyday lives? Did you have any inclination that we'd all be living via smartphone versions of ourselves?

LHL: No, no... I keep saying that I needed the millennials to be born because they really get this work—it's their language.

I can't anticipate the future, but as an artist, you sort of have to do the things that come to you, and culture will slowly catch up. Culture has now caught up in a way that, to me, seems obvious. Because the ideas were present in the days that I created the works, but they weren't disseminated as widely as they are now. It's like an amoeba: it puts a foot out and the rest has to follow. Although it's never as fast as you think.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Home Front*, 1993-2011, Video installation, dollhouse, paint, custom electronics. Copyright Lynn Hershman Leeson. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, NYC. Photo: Jason Mandella

OM: In *Civic Radar*, the monograph that coincides with your 2016 retrospective at ZKM, you say that interactive technology "is the antithesis of communication as we have known it." What exactly do you mean by that?

LHL: Communication had historically been one omnipresent voice—television or some other authoritarian voice—whereas now anyone can publish and get their message out. I think social media has a great ability to change reality. Look at the Arab Spring. We just have to learn as a global culture how to mobilize it in order to overcome oppression and freely communicate. I saw interactive media as a vital force for politics, in particular for third world countries. Using it to avert oppression is a really potent form.

OM: I'm also curious about how you've moved from this idea of technological surveillance and voyeurism, into more recent work that deals with DNA, facial recognition, and the ethics around that technology.

LHL: I had finished the films !Women Art Revolution [2010] and Strange Culture [2007], and I thought those were really important films that had set clear a history that had not been

"I think social media has a great ability to change reality—we have to learn as a global culture how to mobilize it in order to overcome oppression and freely communicate."

noticed, and corrected the censorship and eradication of ideas and artists. I thought what can I do now that could be as important?, and that's when I started to learn about what's happening with genetics. It seemed amazing to me that this never came up in the presidential election. Between genetic manipulation, loss of species identity, and climate pollution—these are the key issues for the globe.



Lynn Hershman Leeson. Photo: Lisa K. Blatt

OM: What I find interesting is your optimism for technology. It seems that it's a very scary line to walk, between the good and the harm that can come from things like AI, social media, and genetics. How do you envision that technology being used for good?

LHL: Technology is always neutral. It's what we as human beings bring to it that determines whether it's going to be a weapon or whether it's going to mobilize unity and sustainability, so I really have hope for the future. I believe that young people are interested in sustainability and existence, and will find ways to use the technology that's been invented to create a planet that we can live in. I can only hope.

OM: Any weapon is a tool until it's weaponized, and we are definitely coming upon that moment where we have so much access that it's going to come down to not just how the powers that be use technology, but how we as individuals utilize it.

LHL: The most vital technology is being invented by young people all over the world—not old white men. They should have the force to use it in a way to defeat the old racist attitudes.

Remote Controls is on view at Bridget Donahue Gallery through March 12th, 2017. Civic Radar—originally curated by ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany—will open at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts on February 10, 2017.

-Olivia B. Murphy

Olivia Murphy is a writer and editor based in New York, covering arts and culture. Her work has appeared in various publications both in print and online, including L'Officiel Magazine, Freunde Von Freunden, Whitehot, Riot of Perfume, doingbird, and Whitewall Magazine.

(Image at top: Lynn Hershman Leeson, Still from *Lorna*, 1979–1984, Earliest interactive laser disc, created with original software. Copyright Lynn Hershman Leeson. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, NYC.)

https://www.artslant.com/sf/articles/show/47301-digital-pioneer-lynn-hershman-leeson-walks-us-through-hergroundbreaking-firsts

Charles Desmarais, "Lynn Hershman Leeson: Myths and machines at YBCA", San Francisco Chronicle, February 10, 2017.

San Francisco Chronicle

Lynn Hershman Leeson: Myths and machines at YBCA

By Charles Desmarais, San Francisco Chronicle February 10, 2017



Photo: Lynn Hershman Leeson, Anglim Gilbert Gallery Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Reach," from the series "Phantom Limb" (1986)

The exhibition "Civic Radar," a retrospective of the work of San Francisco artist Lynn Hershman Leeson, opened this week at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. It is required viewing for anyone attentive to pioneers of feminism, the development of digital and performance art, or the cultural history of the Bay Area. It is, as well, a reminder that legends are part historical, part mythic — distilled narratives, best told free of muddling detail.

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Any good exhibition is an argument for a point of view with regard to quality, timeliness or significance. "Civic Radar" was organized by the German museum ZKM/Center for Art and Media and adapted here by YBCA Director of Visual Arts Lucía Sanromán. It makes a thorough case for Hershman Leeson's political and media prescience.

The theme of identity and the search for self-awareness spans the artist's entire career, beginning with drawings like a Mylar-headed figure ("Mirror Face Woman," 1966) who exists as a reflection of others, who is alive only on the viewer's terms. Objects such as "Self Portrait as Another Person" (1965), "Thinking Woman Dreaming of Escape" (1965) and "Giggling Machine, Self Portrait as a Blonde" (1968) — sculptural masks of wax, sometimes with recorded sound, boxed into Plexiglas containers — develop the idea of woman as invented persona.

It is carried forward in time with works that revolve around the idea of the cyborg — the digital descendant of the automaton doll, spookily human and mechanical in equal proportion, invariably female in Hershman Leeson's work. She has pursued these avatars in a variety of media, including film, interactive video and Web-based projects.

There are intriguing side roads that might have become central artistic courses for other artists. A series of photo-collages called "Phantom Limb" (1984 and later) envisioned machine-human mutations. "Room of One's Own" (1993) is a nonlinear narrative controlled by choices the viewer makes about where to look.

"America's Finest" (1990-94) is among the most chilling works of art I know: An AK-47 assault rifle is fitted with a modified gun scope, rigged so that squeezing the trigger inserts into what is seen in the viewfinder (including anyone in the gallery at whom the gun is pointed) a momentary recorded video image of violence.

But Hershman Leeson returns again and again to the topic of self as observed from without — self seen as other. A yearslong, intermittent "private performance" as a blond and glamorous alternative to the brunet intellectual artist (the "Roberta Breitmore Series," 1973-78) is one of her best known actions. Those of us who came late to the piece know it from a few manipulated photographs and the story of the artist leaving home in another's makeup, wig and clothing. She eventually added further elements: a Breitmore driver's license and checking account, an apartment, potential roommates — a parallel life.

Performance grew into obsession. The only way out, ultimately, was a formal exorcism, held at the crypt of the 15th century sex symbol Lucrezia Borgia.

Truth be told, I had been satisfied with the myth, and I don't know that we need to see the whole Breitmore wardrobe, laid out in vitrines and hung on a mannequin — much less a transcribed conversation with a creepy guy, a psychiatrist's notes or vials of (simulated) urine and blood samples — to get the point.

Likewise, while the artist's undoubtedly early embrace of new technologies of presentation is remarkable, including in the show what seems to be every outdated, now-clunky experiment gives it something of the air of a prep school science fair in places. One gallery is a sea of library cases full of texts one feels one should read.

I spent nearly three hours in two visits to the exhibition, and two more hours with the exhaustively complete catalog (384 pages, 12 essays and interviews), yet I feel I have only scratched the surface. On one hand, it should surprise no one that a lifetime of thought and creative energy is not easily condensed into a few hours of consideration.

But the role of the curator and the editor is both interpretation and distillation — to be the intermediary between the artist or specialist, who is all information, and the curious audience with ordinary limits of time and patience. (We are told, good Lord, that the San Francisco presentation is an abbreviation of the show in Germany.)

Never mind. The exhibition opens and closes with a dazzling contemplation on bioengineering and its social implications that, on its own, will convince and excite the most skeptical among us. "The Infinity Engine" (2014-17) feels very today and, with all the problems this implies, tomorrow.

A disorienting mirrored corridor, widened and extended by life-scale films re-creating a modern laboratory, leads us to a high, large room. It is spacious to the point of nearly empty, clean in the sterile sense. A black-and-white mural confronts us, depicting two syringes, set en garde in opposition. Two walls are papered, floor to ceiling, with colorful images of life

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science experiments and their results; scientific papers in file folders, tablet computers and a video monitor serve as records of still more research.

Centered on the longest wall is a standard home aquarium holding half a dozen fish, each genetically modified to glow with a different luminescent hue.

A wall label claims that "the artist poses the question as to how far human intervention in DNA is ethically acceptable and what social and political impact it has." Not so. The pretty, lively strokes of color moving before our eyes do not frame a question about our future, but an answer.

Blake Gopnik, "Lynn Hershman Leeson Makes Art From Life's Challenges" *Artnet News*, February 3, 2017 https://news.artnet.com/opinion/lynn-hershman-leeson-bridget-donahue-845186.

artnetenews

Opinion

Lynn Hershman Leeson Makes Art From Life's Challenges

THE DAILY PIC: At Bridget Donahue, videos by Hershman Leeson show a couple as their rancor builds, and the artist as she admits to prostitution.

Blake Gopnik, February 3, 2017



THE DAILY PIC (#1726): The videos and installations of Lynn Hershman Leeson, which went on view last weekend at Bridget Donahue gallery in New York, are painful things. A piece called Home Front asks viewers to look at a video through the window of a dollhouse, and to listen as the couple on view inside goes from an affectionate moment to a full-blown hissy-fit fight. Almost all of us have been there, and done that.

An earlier series of videos, now assembled into an ensemble called The Complete Electronic Diaries (today's Pic is taken from it) consists of pretty straight footage of Hershman as she tells various harrowing stories from her life—all of which could quite possibly be true. But did she really do a stint as a call girl, and think of it as half-decent employment?

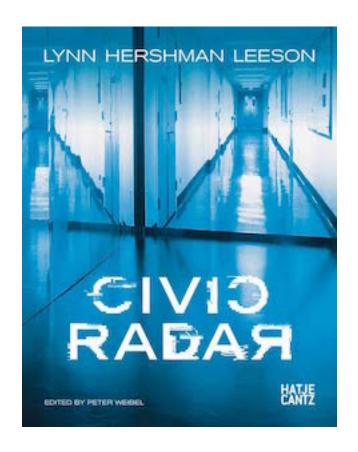
Hershman's work isn't always easy to take, but it certainly makes most of the other art on view in New York seem so light that it's barely there. (©Lynn Hershman Leeson, courtesy Hershman Leeson and Bridget Donahue, NYC)

Holland Cotter and Roberta Smith, "The Best Art of 2016", The New York Times, December 7, 2016.

The New York Times

The Best Art of 2016

By HOLLAND COTTER and ROBERTA SMITH DEC. 7, 2016



The art critics of The New York Times — Holland Cotter and Roberta Smith — share their picks for the best art of the year.

Holland Cotter

"Despite Fear and Uncertainty, Parts of Art Market May Benefit From a Trump Presidency, Insiders Say." This bit of speculative reassurance, <u>delivered by ARTnews magazine</u> on Nov. 9, gave a good sense of where the soul of the mainstream art world — and there are many other art worlds — lies: in business as usual. Sell. Buy. Art Basel Miami Beach.

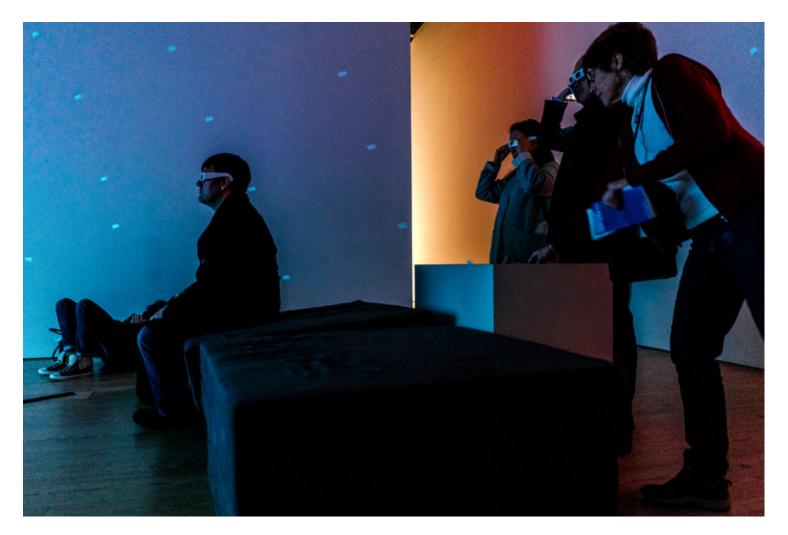
Can there be business as usual in the climate of racism, misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia that the election exposed and fostered? Has an economic and ethical line been drawn in the sand between the art market, with its appetite for eye-candy, and alternative factions and modes of production, in whatever forms they may take? Time will tell.

Most of the 2016 art season predated the election but can't help but be viewed, retrospectively, in its light. Meretricious events now look doubly so. Some of the stronger ones look more timely than ever. Here are some that struck me as strong:

13. INDISPENSABLE BOOKS arrived, among them "Working Conditions: The Writings of Hans Haacke" (M.I.T. Press); "Civic Radar," by Lynn Hershman Leeson, accompanying her retrospective at ZKM/Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany; and "Postwar: Art Between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965," the catalog for a world-embracing global show at the Haus der Kunst, Munich.

Roberta Smith, "Diving Into Movie Palaces of the Mind at the Whitney", The New York Times, December 2, 2016, C21.

The New York Times



Visitors experiencing "Flatlands" by Trisha Baga in "Dreamlands" at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The exhibition explores the immersive nature of film.

Credit Jake Naughton for The New York Times

When the movie camera emerged around the turn of the 20th century, it quickly became the miracle that never stopped giving. It attracted scientists, the news industry and entertainers. It generated its own forms of commerce, wealth and celebrity and, for a while, inspired its own architecture, the luxurious movie palace. It was itself the focus of constant innovation, from the advent of sound, color and 3-D, to digitalization, which let smartphones and other devices incorporate both filmless cameras and small screens — hand-held movie palaces. And from the very beginning, creative people of all types grasped the cinema as an artistic outlet that would transform traditional storytelling and popular culture while giving a new focus to the international avant-garde. That group soon set about taking liberties with all aspects of the miracle: the

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camera, film and projector and the ways they could be manipulated to alter experiences of time, light, space and self.

The interaction of art and cinema throughout the 20th and 21st centuries progresses fitfully across "<u>Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905-2016,"</u> an ambitious sprawl of an exhibition that has taken over the Whitney Museum of American Art's vast fifth floor — a space whose flexibility is once more impressively demonstrated.

Beautifully designed, with generous corridors, the show avoids being a daunting succession of black boxes, although the sound is not well balanced, and quieter works, many displayed on wall monitors in the halls, can be drowned out. It is informative, filled with diverse pleasures, rewards hours of viewing time and reflects a commitment to film in all of its forms maintained by no other New York museum. But making it all cohere is another thing.

"Dreamlands" presents the work of more than 30 artists born between 1870 and 1993, starting off strong and then unraveling. It includes a handful of avant-garde films made before 1930; a slightly larger group from 1940-80, especially the 1960s and '70s. But a majority of works date from 2000 and are often arcane, ineffective or not especially innovative.

In the catalog, the Whitney curator Chrissie Iles, who organized the show, sees her inclusions as dismantling the cinematic givens of "projection, apparatus, film, the frontal rectangular screen, darkness, immobility, cinematography, linear narrative" to give priority to "the senses, the eye, immersive space, the body and the all-surrounding image."

How often the work achieves this may depend on your definition of immersive. As mine is probably somewhat literal, stressing the disorienting, body-enveloping, all-surrounding kind, I was often disappointed. There simply weren't enough strong examples. There was almost no reference to video games or virtual reality, arguably the most immersive of recent developments. It took me a while to see that Ms. Iles defines immersive with more nuance to include concentration and psychic absorption, some of it achieved in old-fashioned frontal rectangular formats, or in very intimate terms. That's signaled by Joseph Cornell's "Rose Hobart" (1936), a mesmerizing, 20-minute blue-tinted version — no larger than a small painting — of only those parts of the Hollywood movie "East of Borneo" that feature its female lead.

"Dreamlands" starts with a bang: a <u>1977 film re-creation of Oskar Schlemmer's "Triadic Ballet" (1922)</u>, all blaring music, marionette choreography and bright bulbous costumes that turn the dancers into toys. Initially presented in a theater on a monochrome boxlike stage, it has the projecting intensity of a modernist, almost abstract film.

Nearby the short "Coney Island at Night," from 1905 by Edwin S. Porter, presents the classic dyad of film: the play of light against dark. It is captured in the wedding-cake filigree of the fairground's dark structures elaborately trimmed in lights. It still thrills and feels new, proving perhaps that beauty — and celluloid? — is always alive. After that comes "SpaceLightArt," a triptych from 1926 by the great Oskar Fischinger, an artisanal wizard who made abstract color films. He used strips of clay and swirled liquids that alternately evoke computers and the cosmos, and they were combined with music in environments he staged in interwar Berlin, pursuing, he said, "a happening of the soul, of the eyes." In 1936, he relocated to Hollywood and worked for Disney, drawing designs for "Fantasia" that were never used. Some are included here and equally reflect his visionary instincts.

Film's light-dark pairing recurs throughout the show, including in Anthony McCall's "Line Describing a Cone" (1973), an installation that progressively outlines a circle on the wall that, when complete, gives the projector's white cone of light a startling tangibility (with the help of some atmospheric haze). Next door is Bruce Conner's "Crossroads," from 1976, a symphonic ode, in grisaille, to the beauty and horror of the 1946

underwater nuclear test at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific; its overwhelming scale is by definition immersive. Farther along, Frances Bodomo's enchanting "Afronauts" of 2014, a D.I.Y. 13-minute film based on the true story of some citizens of the newly independent Zambia who decided in 1969 to try to beat the United States to the moon. Here, black and white merge into lunar silver.

Among other immersive high points is Stan VanDerBeek's "Movie Mural" (1968), a floor-to-ceiling massing of slide and film projections with the scale of a walk-by drive-in movie. The result is a jumping, roiling collage that's both crazed and encyclopedic.

Although it is something of a period piece, Jud Yalkut's "Destruct Film," from 1967, deserves mention as the show's most physical environment: Its floor is strewn with pieces of film (walk on them, handle them, hold them to the light), while its walls blink with projected movies that include the Fluxus deities Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik in performance.



Viewers focusing on Hito Steyerl's "Factory of the Sun." Credit Jake Naughton for The New York Times

Two recent pieces meet the show's immersive billing with fairly total environments. Hito Steyerl's brilliant, Tron-like "Factory of the Sun" was a hit at the 2015 Venice Biennale. It weaves together corporate malfeasance, international intrigue and an astounding hip-hop stylist, and was partly shot at a ruined American listening station in Berlin, a satire edged in ominousness in the era of fake news.

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Alex Da Corte's three-hour "Easternsports," an elaborate surround of four videos, adds robotic performers to his over-the-top arrangements of banal products. Meanwhile, a series of brilliant monologues and dialogues, by the artist Jayson Musson and rendered mostly as subtitles, rove sardonically through art, life, spirituality and the lack of it.

Among the pieces descending from Cornell's intimism, I recommend <u>Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Room of One's Own,"</u> a miniature installation whose tiny screens feature a woman confronting either a male intruder or the male gaze in general. And Terence Broad's "Blade Runner — Autoencoded," which immerses Ridley Scott's film in its own cloudy, prismatic atmosphere, leaves the dialogue as the primary tracking device.

Some works don't seem developed; others are just impenetrable mind games. Mathias Poledna's "Imitation of Life," a meticulous creation from scratch of a Disney-style animation with a singing donkey, is both homage and conceptual joke, but mainly virtually indistinguishable from the real thing.

Ms. Iles is one of the most skillful, erudite and ambitious curators in her field, but "Dreamlands" seems confused by her desire to accommodate both a large viewing audience and also to reach a smaller, more informed in crowd. On the side of such specialization, she has included all of the AnnLee videos. Those started in 2000, when the French artists Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno bought rights to a Japanese manga character, named her AnnLee, made short videos about her, then invited other artists to do likewise.

The nine resulting videos are united here, appearing throughout the show, usually compromised by ambient noise. Seeing them together reveals their sameness: Most artists didn't move beyond AnnLee's minimally depicted, passive-waif persona and endless self-reference. (Is it by chance that one of AnnLee's homonyms is ennui?) She is filled in only by Melik Ohanian, who gives her physical solidity and dance moves, and especially by Liam Gillick, who turns her into a gleaming 3-D goth vixen who sets off electrical storms wherever she goes. She promises less to immerse than to bury us.

"Lynn Hershman Leeson at Vilma Gold", *Contemporary Art Writing Daily*, November 15, 2016, http://www.artwritingdaily.com/2016/11/lynn-hershman-leeson-at-vilma-gold.html

Contemporary Art Writing Daily

Tuesday, November 15, 2016

Lynn Hershman Leeson at Vilma Gold



CAD never explains why things are important but Hershmann should be paid attention to not for this exhibition but for her resurgence now showing in Dreamlands: her forecasting much of the renderstentialist video and robot art of today's youth. Skip these images and go watch a low quality online sample of her work *Seduction of a Cyborg* and then everything else and see all the foreshadowing of Moulton's mock technospiritual, Wolfson's sex robots, Atkins' authorial monologue and sound cuts, Rose's affective slippages, Steryl's anti-comedy, Cortright's digital Sherman-esque subject construction, James Richards affective collaging, etc. etc. *It's all there*.

Nancy Princenthal, "The Feminist Avant-Garde", Aperture Magazine #225, Winter 2016, 40-47.

aperture

THE FEMINIST AVANT-GARDE

Nancy Princethal

It seems that it's time, once again, to consider the naked truths revealed by second-wave feminist art. In 2007, a year of women in the arts was spearheaded by *WACK!Art and the Feminist Revolution*, a traveling exhibition of women's art from the 1970s organized by Connie Butler for the Museum of Contemporary Art's two-day symposium "The Feminist Future." Traveling since 2010, the exhibition *Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s: Works from the Sammlung Verbund, Vienna* returns to the achievements of that formative decade. An assembly of photo-based work by thirty-four artists, the exhibition was organized by Gabriele Schor, who is also editor of the accompanying publication discussed here (its other primary authors are are Mechtild Widrich and Merle Radtke; there are numerous additional contributors of shorter texts). Schor's aim, she writes is to "draw the connection between the concepts of "feminism" and "avant-garde" - that is, to challenge the idea that at the leading edge of culture there is always a battalion of men.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, Roberta Construction Chart #1, 1975, copyright the artist

In her catalogue essay, Schor divides the artists into a Borgesian list of incommensurate, sometimes overlapping, and yet productive categories, including "Bride/Marriage/Sexuality," "Homemaker/Wife/Mother," "Role-Play," "The Dictate of Beauty," and "Violence Against Women." There is also "Measurement," both as an artistic strategy and a social constraint, and, more obscurely, "Critique of Reification," which sets "the female body in opposition to institutions and architecture." Some of these linkages comprise curatorial tours de force: Donna Henes, Franciose Janicot, Renate Eisenegger, and Annegret Soltau are all shown to have wrapped their heads in various binding

Seen forty years later, these many exercises in self-exposure have grown increasingly complicated—often raw and innocent, sometimes angry.



Renate Bertlmann, Tender Touches, 1976 © the artist and courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery

materials; Elaine Shemilt did the same to her body. Birgit Jürgenssen and Helen Chadwick both devised full-body costumes that took the form of kitchen appliances, while Ulrike Rosenbach posed at a kitchen stove wearing a series of marital "bonnets," and Martha Rosler produced hilariously deadpan Semiotics of the Kitchen (1975). Lynn Hershman Leeson's commitment to her alter ego, Roberta Breitmore, was extraordinary - for several years, Roberta had an independent and fully credentialed personal and professional life, and even her own psychotherapist - but Hershman Leeson was only one among a host of artists who undertook role-play to explore the dramatis pesonae of womanhood. Other themes likewise substantiated.

Schor, however, declines to situate them in a lineage that includes precedents and successors. A compendium, then, rather than a polemic, this book nonetheless offers strongly provocative gatherings, primary among them the abundance of women turning the camera on themselves. As noted in Widrich's catalogue essay, art historian Rosalind Krauss's "The Aesthetics of Narcissism," an article that appeared in the first issue of the influential journal October, in 1976, identified a prevailing "narcissism" in the nascent medium of video art. Widrich claims that Krauss "disparages...a preoccupation with

the artist's own self." But rather than actually exploring such preoccupations, malign or otherwise, Krauss applies the term *narcissism* to structures of perceptual relation. Similarly, fellow art historian Anne Wagner's "Performance, Video, and the Rhetoric of Presence," written nearly twenty-five years later for *October* and also cited by Widrich, is, like "The Aesthetics of Narcism," concerned with the nature of photographic address, although Widrich, is, like "The Aesthetics of Narcissism," concerned with the nature of photographic address, although Wagner explicitly counters Krauss by noting the preponderance of early video work that directs the camera, often rather aggressively, at its audience as well as, or instead of, at its creator.

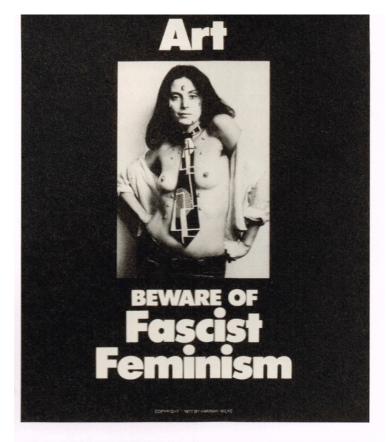
Both essays, it should be said, focus mainly on work by men - they include Vito Acconci (a focus in each case), Richard Serra, Bruce Nauman, Peter Campus, Robert Morris, and Bill Viola, along with Joan Jonas and Lynda Benglis (Wagner also discusses Laurie Anderson). And although the writers' attention to the question of narcissism sheds

valuable light on women's use of video and photography in the 1970s, it is an oblique kind of illumination. In the artworks *Feminist Avant-Garde* celebrates, the medium of photography - whether video or still, documentation of a live performance or freestanding - is less an object of interest in itself than a device for recording personal experiences, and in particular the experience of having a female body. More specifically still, in a great number of cases the camera found these artists with their clothes off. Those shown nude include fully half the artists in the exhibition, among them

Eleanor Antin, Lynda Benglis, Lili Dujourie, Birgit Jürgenssen, Ana Medieta, Rita Myers, ORLAN, Ewa Partum, Ulrike Rosenbach, Martha Rosler, Carolee Schneeman, and Hannah Wilke; shown mostly nude, or exposing their genitals, are Valie Export, Cindy Sherman (in an early, uncharacteristic work), Martha Wilson, and Francesca Woodman.

In her conclusion, Schor claims "self-depreciation and humor were important strategies" for the women she brought together, and that is certainly true of some - for instance, Antin's rueful exercise in "carving" her body (through scrupulously documented dieting) and Beglis's arch sendups of Hollywood cheesecake. Straightforward expressions of spirit and pleasure are important too; Wilke is probably the poster girl for defiantly flaunting physical beauty. But, seen forty years later, these many exercises in self-exposure have grown, it seems to me, increasingly complicated - often raw and innocent, sometimes angry, occasionally abashed. Mendieta and Woodman both caused their breasts to be seen painfully distorted by panes of glass, and their bodies to be placed in various positions of acute vulnerability - most dramatically in Mendieta's searing photographic work *Untitled (Rape Scene)* from 1973. Myer's presentations of her "better" and "worse" halves show her standing stone-faced and stiff, as if for a full-body mugshot. In the well-known documentation of her performance Action Pants: Genital Panic (1969), for which a gun-toting Export spread her legs to reveal a hole cut into her pants at the crotch, the artist presents us with a scowl as wary and fearful as it is aggressive.

Even the generally irrepressible Wilke allowed herself to be seen as vulnerable, not only in the late photographs in which her body is ravaged by cancer, but also, for instance in the guarded crouch she assumes in *So Help Me Hannah: Snatch Shots with Ray Guns* (1978). At the time they were made, these admittedly complicated and heterogenous images of self-disclosure were all understood to be, primarily, acts of proud defiance. In this respect, it *is* helpful to go back to Krauss, because the poststructuralist criticism of the kind she so forcefully propounded, with its scathing disdain for lived experience (men's as well as women's), and its "bracketing out" (to use a term favored by Krauss) of emotional and physical life, is what women



Hannah Wilke, Marxism and Art: Beware of Fascist Feminism, 1977 © Hannah Wilke Collection & Archive, Los Angeles/ Marsie, Emanuelle, Damon, and Andrew Scharlatt and courtesy Bildrecht, Vienna

The notion that "male" and "female" are fixed categories, and that the landscape of gender is divided between them, has been thoroughly discredited.

were up against. Despite the reliance on Sigmund Feud and Jacques Lacan, such criticism rendered women's full psychological lives invisible even to female critics.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the headlong rush to disrobe was brief. Most of the women who were leaders of the deconstructivism that arose in the following decade turned the camera away from themselves, using the codes of

commercial photography to subvert the media's framing of gender. Even when the women who were at the forefront of the Pictures Generation - including Sarah Charlesworth, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Lorna Simpson, and Carrie Mae Weems - featured themselves in their photoworks, they chose not to portray themselves nude. And as the art world opened, in the 1990s, to an awareness of non-Western cultural traditions and values, it was recognized that being covered up - indeed being clothed nearly head to toe, as are some Muslim women can be a positive choice, and its violation a form of oppression. But perhaps, too, the discomfort that is still, or newly, caused by the variously naked artworks of the 1970s reveals an alarming return of repression, a squeamishness styling itself as sophistication. In any case, seeing this work again is deeply instructive, and powerful in many ways perhaps not originally intended.

If this wholesale baring of the self still seems provocative, some of the battle lines drawn by female artists in the 1970s appear less revolutionary now. The ways conventional heterosexual couples struggle to manage domestic chores is hardly different from arrangements made by same-sex couples, male or female, and although more women than men still stay at home to care for infants, and disparity across the board remains a pressing concern, work/life issues are now understood to involve class as much as sex - a triumph, perhaps, of feminism. Similarly, the commodification of women's bodies and the pressure to be alluring remain important issues, but again, they are mitigated by both greater pushback and the recognition that such pressures are not restricted to women.

By the same token, the notion that "male" and "female" are fixed categories, and that the landscape of gender is divided between them, has been pretty throughly discredited in recent years. There is little evidence of that change in this book. Admittedly, it covers a period in which the dismantling of the gender binary was yet to come, but it is still very odd that LGBT identities and rights do not come up at all. Nor do those of race, in a volume that represents only white women, almost all from Europe and the United States. Where, in Sammlung's collection, or in this publication, is Lorraine O'Grad? Adrian Piper? Camille Billops? Theresa Hak Kyung Cha? This disregard is most glaring in a section os Schor's essay called "Whiteface," which features the (white) artists Martha Wilson, Cindy Sherman, and Suzy Lake, of work by women who "made up their faces with white foundation for the process of transformation," Schor writes that "the basic effect of whiteface is to neutralize the artist's own identity." Not a word is said about actual skin color and its ramifications.

For American readers and viewers, another bias of note, this one positive and instructive, is toward European artists and Continental points of reference. A touchstone for Schor's essay, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (published in 1949 in France and in 1953 in the United States), differs from the founding texts of the 1960s and 1970s feminism in America - Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) - by its mandarin tone, its political and philosophical commitments (to socialism and existentialism), and its historical scope, which spans the globe and reaches to antiquity. While it is profoundly rousing, it is not a call to action. It also stakes out a chronology of feminism that differs from the one generally followed in the United States. Beauvoir's books supports Schor's statement that the artists gathered in this publication, who ere born between 1933 and 1958, spent "their childhood and teenage years [in] what we might call the long 1950s." In this view, the culture in which feminism emerged was shaped by the left's challenge to a rising capitalism, and by the lingering shadow of World War II. Figures who negotiated those forces - preeminently, for German speakers, Joseph Beuys - were lodestars. "Joseph Beuys's actions in Germany...were important experiences for many women artists," Schor writes, noting, for instance, that Ulrike Rosenbach had studied with Beuys, who "explicitly conceived of his appearance as a form of mythmaking." While insisting that everyone is an artist, and that the boundary-crossing practice of social sculpture" is a kind of activism-as-art available to all, Beuys put his highly dramatized personal story to work in consolidating his authority as a performance artist, sculptor, and teacher, and ultimately as a founder of the leftist Green Party in Germany.

But looked at, instead from the perspective of the many artists included in this publication who came of age in what was perhaps an even longer 1960s, the prevailing influences are different - and they shift to the United States. While Schor sees the 1960s as dominated by "Critique of the capitalist-imperialist economic system," in America the most pressing issues were surely the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. Mobilization for the first and against the second clearly set the stage here for the feminism of the 1970s.

If Beuys is key to socially oriented performance work in Europe during this period, a comparable figure in the United States might by Vito Acconci, as is suggested by Schor (who credits him, along with Chris Burden, as having influence comparable to that of Beuys) and Krauss alike. For women taking on the mantle of the avant-garde, as Schor defines the feminist art movement, usurping Beuys would have meant engaging with an enormously charismatic politician-cum-shaman who proudly wielded considerable real-world power. Acconci, on the other hand, was

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determined, especially in his years as a performance artist, to dodge such power, using his own considerably (if decidedly unconventional) charm to explore body and soul at their most naked. Stripping off his clothes, burning his his hair, biting his flesh, and rubbing his skin until it bled, alternately taunting viewers and prostrating himself before them, he exhibited a brave (and still very disturbing) willingness to recognize the less amiable aspects of being embodied. It is by illustrating the vivd legacy of women who propelled this impulse, using their own physical and emotional lives to examine the full range of personal experience rather than - as is sometimes thought - generalizing expressions of collective strength, that Schor's publication makes its most valuable contribution.

Orit Gat, "Critic's Guide: London: Lynn Hershman Leeson, Mike Kelley, Laura Owens, and more: the best exhibitions on view during Frieze Week" *Frieze*, October 3, 2016, https://frieze.com/article/critics-guide-london-1.

frieze.com

CRITIC'S GUIDE - 03 OCT 2016

Critic's Guide: London

BY ORIT GAT

Lynn Hershman Leeson, Mike Kelley, Laura Owens, and more: the best exhibitions on view during Frieze Week



Lynn Hershman Leeson, 'Trans Genesis: Evaporations and Mutations', 2016, exhibition view, Vilma Gold, London. Courtesy: Vilma Gold, London

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Lynn Hershman Leeson

Vilma Gold

4 - 29 October

Lorna, which was included in 'Electronic Superhighway (2016 – 1966)' at the Whitechapel Gallery earlier this year, is proof of how ahead of her time Lynn Hershman Leeson has always been, and how current she still is. Made in 1983, the piece is an interactive video installation that sees viewers make decisions for *Lorna*, an agoraphobic woman who hasn't left her small apartment in years.

Leeson is showing a lot at the moment – she recently had a highly praised exhibition at Bridget Donahue Gallery in New York, and her video installation *Lynn Turning into Roberta* (2016) was shown at Vilma Gold earlier this year, another in a longstanding series of works focusing on Roberta Breitmore, who Hershman Leeson first created in 1974. The work of this artist, who has been thinking about the relationship between human being and technology since the late 1960s, seems more pressing, current, and urgent the more technology enters into our everyday lives. It's as if, finally, time has vindicated her.

Johanna Fateman, "Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar, Edited by Peter Weibel", *Bookforum*, September/October/November, 2016, 48.

BOOKFORUM

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: CIVIC RADAR EDITED BY PETER WEIBEL

BERLIN: HATJE CANTZ (DISTRIBUTED IN THE US BY ARTBOOK DAP). 352 PAGES. \$70.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Self-Portrait as Albino* (detail), **1968**, wax face cast, bronze powder, makeup, wig, scarf, sensors, sound file, and recorder mounted on board, 36 x 24 x 8".

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON'S "Breathing Machines," a sculpture series from the 1960s, are coolly macabre self-portraits- mask-like wax replicas of her face, styled with wigs and outfitted with electronics. In *Self-Portrait as Albino*, 1968 (above), the artist's expressionless face, eyes closed, is framed by hair like ratty white curtains, secured with a length of frayed silver fabric tied beneath the chin. As the viewer approaches, a motion detector triggers a cassette recording of her breathing. With this unsettling series, Hershman Leeson, who was traumatically confined to an oxygen tent for five weeks in 1966 with a potentially fatal heart condition, counters the traditional passivity of the art object, as well as that of the patient — and the woman. Inhaling and exhaling on cue, her low-tech "Machines" prefigure the feminist interventions and major themes — alternate selves, cloning, cyborgs, surveillance, and interactivity — that have defined her radical multimedia oeuvre for five prolific decades.

Civic Radar, the first major retrospective of Hershman Leeson's work, presented at ZKM Karlsruhe last year, was a rare opportunity to view these fascinating pieces. The substantial, handsome accompanying catalogue, replete with a reflective silver cover, charts her practice — from her early wax body parts to her recent 3-D bioprinted ones — with a comprehensive and illustrated timeline, interspersed with texts by diverse contributors. Art historians Pamela Lee and Peggy Phelan and film critic B. Ruby Rich provide deep context; Tilda Swinton, who has starred in three of Hershman Leeson's experimental science fiction films, contributes a love letter that illuminates the artist's ingenuity and humor; and documentary filmmaker Laura Poitras talks with Hershman Leeson about the hidden frontier of post-9/11 surveillance (the use of DNA mapping and genetic engineering), considering the possibilities for contemporary activist art that engages with these developments.

Hershman Leeson first emerged as an important figure in the women's-art movement of the 1970s. She documented its heady emergence with invaluable videotaped artist interviews (excerpts of which appear in 2010 film, ! Women Art Revolution), and produced a germinal body of feminist work, the "Roberta Breitmore" series, between 1973 and 1978. Roberta was a persona who performed in real time, undercover, in the real world. She had her own wardrobe, body language, and makeup style. Importantly, she also saw a psychiatrist and had a driver's license and a bank account, leaving behind proof of her existence — an identity that became an entity, fictional but authenticated. Hershman Leeson's prescient art, as Civic Radar shows us, continually mines the overlaps of the real and the virtual, exposing the mediating and monitoring roles of culture, technology and the state. The book clearly maps out her career, circling back to landmarks such as the "Roberta" series, which functions, in the artist's words, as a "two-way mirror", embodying her subversive ideal of interactive art. Hershman Leeson's work demands that we look at it through our own reflection, making us aware of our biases and desires as we grapple with that double image. — JOHANNA FATEMAN

"Art is a Form of Encryption: Laura Poitras in Conversation with Lynn Hershman Leeson", *Pen America: The Freedom to Write,* August 25, 2016, https://pen.org/interview/laura-poitras-conversation-lynn-hershman-leeson.



ART IS A FORM OF ENCRYPTION: LAURA POITRAS IN CONVERSATION WITH LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

By: PEN America

Long before the digital revolution and virtualization of identities became part of our everyday lives, American artist and filmmaker Lynn Hershman Leeson created surrogate personas and investigated issues of surveillance, interfacing of humans and technology, and media as a tool to counter censorship and repression. Spanning five decades, her groundbreaking work has ranged from Roberta Breitmore (1973-78), the fictional character that she enacted in real time and space, to !Women Art Revolution (2010), a documentary charting the history of the feminist art movement in America, to works dealing with robots and the latest developments in genetic engineering. Hatje Cantz Verlag has recently published Civic Radar (2016)—the first comprehensive monograph devoted to this pioneer. In the following edited interview, released in Civic Radar, Hershman Leeson and Laura Poitras discuss their experiences with electronic and DNA surveillance and more.



Lynn Hershman Leeson: Laura, do you think that people are aware of the deep level of surveillance we are experiencing?

Laura Poitras: If you are an activist, an artist, or someone perceived as critical of the establishment and you are living in a repressive environment—for instance, Saudi Arabia or China—then, yes, of course. State surveillance is something that you must circumvent and navigate on a daily basis. Activists in Saudi Arabia know how to use VPNs (virtual private networks) and encryption, because they know that if they don't their lives are on the line. The perception of [state surveillance] as a threat has everything to do with what one's relationship is to the state. If you perceive the state as benign—which a lot of people do in Western democracies—you don't necessarily feel that it is harmful to you. Some specific communities in the West—say, African communities in the United States and Muslim-American communities—have a very different relationship to the state. The state has always been threatening to them or at least has been active in their repression. What

we are seeing right now in terms of surveillance is that we have both perspectives in societies that include a spectrum of cultures. And it also depends on where you are globally.

LHL: Is there any place in this world that surveillance doesn't exist?

LP: I think probably you have a better answer to that question, because you have been working on the theme of surveillance, alongside issues of emerging technologies, for much longer than I have, for at least as long as I have known your work. You've been looking at how surveillance and technology intersect with people on a personal and psychological level and also on cultured and gendered levels. Do you see a shift, and where can you mark it?

LHL: I do see a shift. I think that the ultimate surveillance now is in DNA, which is in itself a form of encrypted archiving. In Istanbul, for instance, you have to submit to biometric readers on door locks to gain access to some private rooms. These readers can register your blood type and trace what sect you're from—what your bloodline is—and that will determine whether or not you can enter. Also now there are what are called brain chips, which can be inserted into your body to alleviate post-traumatic stress disorder. But they also can add new memories into your brain.

LP: I have never heard that.

LHL: Since the genome has been sequenced, in about 2001, scientists have been making completely new life forms. Mutants. Hybrids. For instance, they'll cross, say, a goat and a spider to get more resilient milk, or a deadly mosquito and tetracycline to deliver an antidote simultaneously with the insect's poison. I've been asking scientists from around the world about the implications of all this research. The reason human genes can't be used in any experiments in the US is because it would violate the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery. The Supreme Court decided that owning or patenting a gene of a human equals owning that person. Laws concerning humans are more relaxed in other parts of the world. In England, experiments were conducted last April on women who couldn't conceive; they were given an extra female chromosome. These women gave birth to fifty babies who were born with two female markers and one male. Eventually all of these mutated babies will give birth to progeny that are also mutated in this way. There are labs that are banking the DNA of original life forms, so that we don't forget—that is, so we know where we came from and can access and use that DNA in cloning if necessary.

LP So you must think we are naive when we worry only about electronic surveillance. DNA surveillance goes to a much deeper level of social engineering.

LHL: And racism. People could engineer designer babies who have blonde hair and blue eyes, repressing other ethnic physical attributes.

LP: And how is it that you define what you just described as surveillance?

LHL: Because micro-robots armed with a new force-sensing system can probe cells and track your interior corporeal being and also track your history. So the camera is not on the outside anymore. It's scanning you from the inside out!

LP: I'm used to seeing a dark world, but that certainly is even more terrifying.

LHL: When they passed those laws in Congress about allowing the government to tap all of our phone lines, there was no protest that I know of other than one from the Electronic Frontier Foundation, who unsuccessfully tried to stop it. The level of ignorance or denial is profound.

LP: The fact that people don't know is not surprising, because the government is not telling; even elected officials in many cases don't know what intelligence communities are doing. If you have this awareness, you are considered paranoid and crazy. If you worry about chips tracking people, you might be called crazy until the culture at large sees it actually happening and then catches up with you. It's hard to know what the ultimate impact will be from Edward Snowden's disclosures—if it will actually lead to change or not. But what you're describing in terms of manipulating biology, that's profoundly scary, and people should be scared. Technologies should not engage in this without a robust debate about the ultimate consequences, because it impacts humanity. Why isn't it part of the public conversation? How much of what you know in terms of biological manipulation and engineering is being done in a private sphere or a governmental sphere?

LHL: The military is funding a lot of this research. The labs say that they have ethicists on board. But, of course, the ethicists are being paid, too. Bear in mind, it took me a year to get the interviews, and I had to send the scientists the questions before I was allowed to ask them. Even so, they told me a lot off the record. I'm working with Lisa Cortés, who produced the films The Woodsman (2004; directed by Nicole Kassell) and Precious (2009; directed by Lee Daniels), among others, and was an early voice in Def Jam Records. We find articles in the papers every day about this, but people are not paying attention.

LP: How are you translating the research into art?

LHL: It's a three-part project. It will be a documentary and a feature film—part three of my trilogy on technology and women—and then it's also going to be an installation called "The Infinity Engine," which will include all of this research material and will play sequentially, on its own, in a program modeled after DNA. We will have in it a bio-printed nose and ear, and we'll have projected interviews with a person who's had the first bio-printed body part— a man whose finger grew back by putting protein powder on it. Among the people I interviewed was Myles Jackson, who testified in the US Supreme Court on the gene-patenting case. I intend to have many of the patent files available.

LP: So with something like skin grafts—that's a positive use of the technology, right?

LHL: Of course, like most technology, it can go either way. For example, scientists have discovered that the telomere, or the "aging gene," can also be used to deepen the understanding of cancer. I've consistently worked on projects where the roles of the observer and the observed are interchanged, and the user becomes both the victim or aggressor. The viewed or voyeur. They can see both sides, the dark and the light. There's always a choice—one can use technology to alter biology in either dystopian or utopian ways. Our decisions now are crucial in that they affect whether or not our polluted planet and the life forms on it can survive. We are not going to start the film until next spring. Tilda Swinton is going to play a phosphorous cat that has jellyfish genes of the kind they used for some early experiments in the search for a cure for AIDS.

LP: Nice.

LHL: Art is a form of encryption.

LP: People have always used encryption. That is one of the goals of encryption, how to communicate privately. I think art is in a kind of different category, because it is communication with the desire to express something more openly. Or perhaps it is communicating some kind of different emotion. It is a translation, or a type of communication that is not based on a set language. Encryption is pretty basic; it has a more practical use. I want to say something to you, and I don't want anyone else to hear it. I want you to know what I'm trying to say. Art making is not about anything practical.

LHL: What if you're doing art that's activist? You want people to react, but at the same time you need to be protective...

LP: Sure. Again, if you go to a country with a regime that you can't criticize, you have to figure out a way to do it and people do find ways. You find metaphors, for example, to stand in for the government. In China, there are certain words that can't be used on the Internet or they'll be censored, so people use other words as replacements. That happens with art all the time. And does your art-making feel like a type of encryption?

LHL: Yes, because it's a metaphor. If I make a film about [artist] Steve Kurtz, it becomes a metaphor for the kind of culture we live in. I use stand-ins. I used a stand-in for Steve because he couldn't talk about his case.

LP: I understand. I use codes all the time. I pretend to be talking about something else. There are certain people who don't encrypt their e-mail, so we just create a coding system. Perhaps we are talking about having lunch at a certain restaurant, when in fact we are talking about meeting to do NSA research. It is a way to use codes to communicate, whereas with art making it is maybe about more universal issues. I don't particularly use encryption to talk about broader issues.

LHL: After I made the film about Steve, I started to get audited—which is what happened to all his friends. It hasn't happened this year yet, but the last three times I got audited they had to give me money back because I never report everything since it looks ridiculous that I spend so much. I think that may have done the trick. That was a relatively harmless thing to go through. People asked me when I made that film if I was afraid of what the consequences would be

for me. For me there was no choice though. If you know about these things, you feel you have to go forward and deal with the consequences. Have you ever thought about those things for yourself?

LP: Yes, of course. I agree with you. For sure, there are dangers in doing this kind of work. But the dangers to us with US passports, with communities behind us—we have a lot of leverage, a power that we can deploy to do our work. And we're public figures. Those things give us more protection than someone else. In general, I feel that the work I do is my choice. It is a privilege to do it. But, working on NSA stuff...there is nothing that has put more fear into me. It is really scary. And there have been times at which I've felt that if I weren't careful about how I was communicating there would be repercussions. There are people who would do anything to make sure some information doesn't get out and that includes harming somebody...harming me. There are risks working in Germany. The Central Intelligence Agency just had their station chief kicked out. I assume my house is monitored; I assume I get followed. Those things are all par for the course. If you stick your hand in the hornet's nest, it is going to come at you. But there was no choice but to make the film because you realize that next it might be you who is victimized. If you back out and don't call on your courage to take that risk then you become part of the system you are criticizing. In terms of your work, what have been the moments that have been scary or that you felt yourself at risk?

LHL: I never have been really scared by making art, but maybe that's because I always felt like an outsider, so I haven't felt that I have had much to lose. It is a privilege to be able to give voice or give some presence to issues that have cultural resonance and can absolutely cause change.

LP: I absolutely agree. We are incredibly fortunate that people are opening up.

LHL: When did you become acutely aware of surveillance systems in your life and how they affected you?

LP: When I started working on this series of films about America post-9/11. I didn't conceive the first one, *My Country, My Country* (2006), as part of a trilogy; I just wanted to document what was happening in the Iraq wars, so I went to Iraq. While I was filming it, I knew that my next film had to deal with Guantanamo because the fact of that prison still being open was such a national shame. I also felt that my films were not all about the Middle East, that they are about how the war and terror is brought home to the US. At the same time as the government was planning the invasion of Afghanistan and later Iraq, it was also planning to surveil the US population. In fact, the turning of the powers of the NSA inward, into the US, happened before any bombs were dropped on those countries. It was an important part of the story to tell, and I became interested in doing research on wiretapping after seeing a New York Times story about it in 2005. After I finished the film about Iraq, I was put on a watch list and started to be detained and interrogated every time I traveled. I became acutely aware of it on a personal level, not just on the level of a person informed about the issue. I have never been tortured—and we do know that the US legalized torture—but my notebooks were photocopied and my computers confiscated. They contained my source material, real things I had an obligation to protect. The government started to infringe on this obligation, so I became aware of the risks that it posed to my work as a documentary filmmaker. I guess the short answer is that I became aware of surveillance post-9/11. Before 9/11, I had a more naive relationship to it.

LHL: What happened when you most recently came into the US? Did you get stopped?

LP: No. For six years, I was stopped every time. There was a particular incident at Newark when they threatened to handcuff me for taking notes. I was taking notes because my lawyer said take notes about what time of day it is, the names of the agents, and the questions they ask you. So, I was taking out my notebook, and they threatened to handcuff me. They yelled at me. There were several agents telling me to put the pen down, and I asked why. They said that I could use the pen against them as a weapon—and they were not being ironic. They thought that I would stab them with it. It was so absurd, because they all had guns! And they told me that my pen was a potential weapon.

LHL: It is! (...)So those are the stakes that you go through in making your decisions. You set a path but have no idea what's going to come from that, except that you kind of have to be ready for anything.

LP: Yes. You have been working on the themes of surveillance for a longer time than I have.

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LHL: Not as publicly as you. Always as more of a voyeur of surveillance within a culture. I always felt like an outsider, therefore, like a witness. In your work, you have always tried to think ahead of technology, to ask what the next technological thing will be, and how it will be used because technology has the ability to subvert individuals and to repress freedom. That's what the work is about to a great extent—exposing censorship and repression. Often people are victimized without realizing it. Sometimes, I hope, my work provides a tiny glimpse of what freedom could look like.

Laura Poitras is an award-winning director, producer, and journalist. Her film CITIZENFOUR, concerning Edward Snowden, received the Oscar for Best Documentary in 2015. One of three founding editors of The Intercept, Poitras is also a 2012 MacArthur Fellow and winner of the 2013 George Polk Award for her reporting on the NSA.

Lynn Hershman Leeson is an acclaimed artist and filmmaker whose work has explored technology and its effects on the human experience for over fifty years. Her use of innovative techniques such as digital media and interactivity has resulted in accolades from The National Endowment for the Arts, The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, among others.

Ian Epstein, "35 Can't-Miss Art Exhibits Opening This Fall: Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905 - 2016", *Vulture*, http://www.vulture.com/2016/08/35-art-exhibits-opening-this-fall.html, August 24, 2016.

VULTURE

FALL PREVIEW 2016

35 Can't-Miss Art Exhibits Opening This Fall By Ian Epstein



10/28 "Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016"

Through 2/5, the Whitney Museum of American Art

From hand-painted films to a 3-D video projected inside a dome, the Whitney delivers a multisite high-tech exhibition, including work by Lynn Hershman Leeson, that begins with the dawn of moving images and goes reeling into the present day. Films will also be screened at Bushwick's Microscope Gallery.

Juliana Huxtable and Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Personae of Interest: Lynn Hershman Leeson and Juliana Huxtable in Conversation", *Artforum*, Summer 2016, 312-319.



PERSONAE OF INTEREST

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON AND JULIANA HUXTABLE IN CONVERSATION

FOR THE PAST fifty years, LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON has explored identity's fluid mutations, creating a pioneering body of work that has presciently engaged questions of subjectivity in an era of artificial intelligence, surveillance, the cyborg, and genetic engineering. Hershman Leeson sat down with fellow artist JULIANA HUXTABLE, whose own shape-shifting work investigates similar issues in the millennial generation, to discuss the ways in which technology both abets essentialism and creates possibilities for its evasion and subversion.



Leeson/Huxtable

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: When I was starting out as an artist, people were just beginning to unwrap their identities, just beginning to reclaim their histories. Since then, it seems to have gone from an unwrapping to an unraveling. I think there's a different urgency now, as well as new possibilities for incorporating mutations and transgressions that weren't technologically possible earlier. And your generation was born in the midst of this flux.

JULIANA HUXTABLE: Yes—I was in college right at the moment when the celebration of the posthuman was at its height. At the time, I felt we were naively unaware of the conditions of the technology. There was a moment when it became so obvious that we had given up a lot in exchange for these new online spaces—that there were serious privacy questions, for example, and a real danger of oligarchic control of the Internet. Today we're still grappling with those issues, and with a perceived failure of participatory politics, at least in America, while identities, or ideas about identity, are unraveling in this radical way. So many notions are just crumbling. Technology can provide ways to engage with these shifts—a potential that I don't think is fully recognized in the art world, which hasn't yet acknowledged the importance of technology in art history, either.

LHL: You mentioned oligarchy and the failure of democracy. One of the things I think about is the impact that genetic technology will have on government

surveil- lance programs. What will happen in the future, when it will be possible to track anything forensically through genetic bar coding? We're constantly revealing our identities through our DNA. Hundreds of thousands of cells are right on this table. They could be tracked forever.

JH: I feel a bit of paranoia sometimes. Technology has gotten to a point where every single trace of yourself is marketable.

LHL: They market genetic information to insurance companies, for instance. Or DNA testing, which becomes a kind of biological censorship of identity.

JH: Yes, or pharmaceutical companies get patents for bizarre medicines that are marketed to consumers based on their race.

LHL: It was after the full sequence of the human genome was published that big pharma started, for the very first time, to market drugs to particular races that they believed—wrongly, as it turned out—were predisposed to certain illnesses. It scared people into buying those drugs.

JH: It was high-blood-pressure medicine, I think. They were saying that African Americans are more genetically prone to dying from heart failure. Sometimes drugs that just aren't doing so well on the market will be rebranded —the companies say, "OK, well, if we can link this with

some sort of genetic patent, then we can remarket it."
But to suggest that high rates of heart disease among
African Americans are attributable to their genes—and
not to years and years of food deserts—is a way of
dodging the ethical questions.

LHL: Right—or, for example, the Pima Indians of Arizona have the highest rate of type 2 diabetes ever recorded. Well, if you're looking at the molecular genetics, you may conclude that these patterns that you see in the Pima and their DNA would explain their diabetes rates. But when the Pima had a healthy traditional diet, which they did until the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, they had almost no recorded diabetes. Now, again, if you're working in molecular genetics and you get a grant to study diabetes among the Pima, you're going to look at their DNA, not their history. And you can use the results of your study to sell them drugs for diabetes. Today, research shows that if your ancestors went through a trauma, like a famine, that translates as a kind of genetic scar. And that scar from the trauma is passed down to all your progeny. I understand that they can correct this trauma scar in the embryo stage. In a sense, they could erase the trauma before the birth of the baby, so the child does not have to go through life taking corrective drugs to neutralize the damage.

JH: That's really intense.

LHL: It's now legal in the UK.

JH: There's this impulse to reduce everything to a set of genes—to say that these genes produce these phenotypes, which collectively represent an identity.

There's this push toward a biological, hormonal,

physical idea of what identity is. In some ways, I think that constitutes a certain liberation from older forms of racial or gender essentialism, because it makes things a bit more flexible. But it's also scary. If you're dealing with questions of transracial or transgender identity, you're in murky territory. I think we're still in the midst of a difficult conversation about how the physical matrix points that represent certain identities intersect with conditioning, experience, culture—all these other factors.

LHL: Do you think we need to find that out, or that we'll need to know that in the future?

JH: I don't think we will. It seems more like a matter of trying to find the gray zone. This is the liminal space in which these claims can be staked. But even though I don't think that there is necessarily an answer, I do think it's necessary to have that conversation, to consider questions of representation, and to explore their ethical implications. You've been doing that throughout your career, asking questions that no one else was asking about identity and the ethics and politics of its construction. The series "Roberta Breitmore" [1972–79], for example, was such an incredibly prescient project: this fictional character or avatar who leaves trails of documentation and ephemera, this character who accumulates a file of photos, tapes, psychiatric reports.... What were your thought processes when you were creating that work?

LHL: At the time, I collected data about how you identify something as reality. The information was nonhierarchical. I rented a place to live for Roberta, got her a job, a driver's license, a bank account, and collected the ephemera that accrued, from checks to

surveillance photos. As she went about her daily life, Roberta was "played" either by me or, later, by one of several actors who were multiples of the fiction. The accumulated materials were meant to be seen as yet another layer of witnessing, as what would remain after the "reality" of the fictional character no longer existed, after her corporeal body, or bodies, disappeared. It was a different era from yours, but if you're aware of the traces that you leave, the essence of the traces can still be subverted. You play with ideas of a false trail in your work, too.

JH: For me, there hasn't ever really been a separation between IRL and URL. I was an Internet baby. Both of my parents worked in tech, so I had access to a computer before I had anything else. I think the idea of an online profile, with all of the possibilities for fiction that come with that, was an inherent part of how I saw myself. I used technology as a way to seek out a counterculture, a music culture, a mail-order culture where I could gain these markers and this identity. I felt I'd found an alternate community. Maybe at one point I was thinking, "I'm stuck in my hometown at this terrible high school that I really don't like. Everyone hates me, and I hate them." That's the IRL. Then there's the other space, which to me was more real. I spent more time there, and all of my energy, all of my labor, went into that world. So while my work deals with my self as a fictional character, that fictional character is inseparable from my "real" self.

LHL: Is fiction even possible under these circumstances? There's a parallel to the genetic traces we leave everywhere we go: You always leave a data footprint, a digital fingerprint that with today's

technologies can be traced and interpreted in unexpected ways.

JH: The trail of documentation is mutable. I have such a long history of feeling like, "OK, this is what I have on my birth certificate," and then having a crisis where my body was not matching up with what my doctors presumed. Then there was this moment where they said, "Oh, aha, you have extra chromosomes. That's why this is happening." From that point, I chose to intervene via hormones. So even the trail of documentation is already so back and forth. I don't know what I would point to as the ground for what's real. Is it the chromosomes? Is it the psychologists' reports?

LHL: It's never one thing. It's all these different influences that create the mutation and the blurring. Any two people have at least three to six million points of difference in their DNA, so how can we expect absolutes? The spaces in between difference are what is fascinating. Did you start out with a fictional identity on the Net?

JH: I started off using an abbreviation of my first name —J. It was tied to who I was, almost like branding—it loosely implied a relationship to this real entity, but it existed on its own. Then it just moved on from there. At one point, blogs were free territory, and that's where you could create different personae. Like you could have whatever name you wanted for your Blogspot. You could have multiple profiles, and you didn't have to prove your identity. And at the same time, the Internet represented, for me, the ultimate library. I found this world online of queer history and precolonial black history— Encyclopedia Africana, for instance. You mentioned the connections between identity and history

—these sites illuminated those connections for me. I felt like I had found my library. This was before Wikipedia became a monolith, a reference monopoly. When that happened, a lot of alternative reference works and information sources disappeared. What I didn't realize was that this archive was totally ephemeral.

LHL: It isn't, because you can access it.

JH: I mean in the sense that I can't find a lot of the sites now. Maybe they're in a Google archive somewhere.

LHL: Somebody could find them. It's a different form of archaeological digging. It's cumbersome, but I think they can be excavated. Nothing disappears. That's what I've learned. You can't really erase anything. Disappearance is a fiction.

JH: Maybe the question of access, then, is: Who has the resources to actually get the erased histories? If the infrastructure for accessing that data doesn't enable the necessary type of search, it's almost as if it's not there. When I couldn't find the sites that I remembered, I felt like I had been wronged.

LHL: Your performances at MOMA [*There Are Certain Facts That Cannot Be Disputed*, 2015] were engaging this lost archive directly.

JH: That project started, in a lot of ways, with mourning these sites. The performance traced this longing to participate in history or to have a personal relation-ship with history, and I was also looking at how technology might facilitate that. When you go to the Met and you see a painting, there's a feeling you get—a moment of being in that pictorial space, like, "This is history." I'm engaging with that desire to experience a moment of

identification, even if it's just visual, just a moment of connection with an image. In one section of the piece, I was trying to create this romantic, dramatic processional for a lost era of technology and these lost sites. I wanted to evoke the idea that there were these great cities that disappeared, like the virtual cities that were lost when GeoCities shut down—like Atlantis. I was also looking at new hybrids of fantasy and history—video games where you can play a character in the Revolutionary War, fan fiction, cosplay. The work was celebrating those avatars, and the ways in which technology opens up these possibilities of inhabiting other personae and other histories. When I saw your show at Bridget Donahue [New York, 2015], I was in the middle of working on this project. I thought, "Oh, God, this is great. There's so much here to process and think through"—for example, CybeRoberta [1995–96], the doll with webcams for eyes. There's so much to consider in terms of how technology affects vision, perception, proprioception.

LHL: You become it—you become a virtual cyborg, just by looking through her eyes and tracking what she sees on the website. Even if they are in a room with her, viewers are captured by her eye cam and lodged in her gut, so to speak—they are cannibalized by this telerobotic doll, pulled into a symbiotic human-machine networked interaction that is live yet archived. The symbiosis is completed through absorption.

JH: I was with a friend when we saw your show, and we pulled the feed up on our phones. The site was living and it was active, but it had a certain texture, so that you knew it had been created in the 1990s. Looking at it was like looking at a page from an old book. That was really

interesting, and it was one of the things I really liked about the piece—this interplay between two different eras, two aesthetics. It made me think about GeoCities and all of that.

LHL: I really like to preserve the glitches of a time, the underbelly of an era. That is more revealing than a cosmetic surface. The mistakes in coding are like scars that you learn from. Even when I migrate a piece to a different technology, I keep the scars intact. The site you saw reflects and replicates the state of the technology at the time it was made—I'm not going to upgrade it to make it faster or more beautiful and then say, "It was done in 1995." That would make it counterfeit, which is what I am trying to avoid.

JH: That's great. I love that approach.

LHL: One of the things I also realized is that Internet breeding machines are live and refuse to die. For instance, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art acquired Agent Ruby—she's now one of the most visited works in their collection. Ruby is a Web bot that began in 1998, as the expanded-cinema part of my film *Teknolust*, and surfaced live with the film in 2002. The media curator at the museum, Rudolf Frieling, and some of his staff found a gargantuan archive on the project's server— which was Ruby responding to users who chatted with her for over twelve years, from all parts of the globe, about everything from politics to their dreams. In some years the conversation was about 9/11, or Bush or Obama or surveillance. But it was also about love and relationships, which I find is at the heart of all these AI bots. When SFMOMA exhibited it, Rudolf compiled eight books of conversations derived from the chats on subjects ranging from "what it means to be

human" to "the economy" and "feminism." Ruby's interactions are a mirror of the times in which she was accessed, a living history of dreams and fears.

JH: That's so insane—to discover that the archive had been growing all that time.

LHL: It never occurred to me in 2002 that these pieces don't die, that they're out there somewhere breathing through the pulse of the Net.

JH: If you can find them. Now that Google has become almost synonymous with searching, I feel they have a responsibility to do something with the archive to make it more accessible. I don't think Google caches images —I think they only save the HTML and the text of the websites. I found one of the sites that I was looking for, for my performance, but all of the images had disappeared.

LHL: I love what you did in the performance with the images and scanning—projecting the laser across your body as if it were the scanner bed, and using the sounds of scanning as well.

JH: That was a way of performing the idea that I wasn't actually there. This was in the wake of the New Museum Triennial [2015], where I'd shown self-portraits and Frank Benson's sculpture of me had been on view [Juliana, 2015]. There was a lot of media attention, and there seemed to be this desire to access my body, as if my body and the sculpture were a one-to-one representation. I was grossed out by that, and by a certain understanding of my performance, especially in the case of people who maybe weren't familiar with my work. They might have expected an aggressive presence of the body, so I liked the idea of using the performance

and technology as a way to create these screens, or distractions from the idea that it's a real, raw person in front of you.

LHL: When you mentioned that the role of technology wasn't really acknowledged in art history, what were you thinking about specifically?

JH: There's a gap between art history and how art actually deals with questions of technology, and with the progression of technology itself. There are just large moments that are unaccounted for. I find a lot of the writing about the potential of the Net really frustrating, partly because there doesn't seem to be that sense of historical knowledge. The whole post-Internet discourse skipped over a lot of the issues that you and I were talking about initially. Instead, everyone focused on formal and technical aspects of the work. The conversation felt really limited, and it accelerated very quickly, to the point where technology became almost passé. When I would tell people, "Oh, I'm dealing with. . ." the second I would say, "the Internet," it was like, "Oh." I was like, "What do you mean? What are you rolling your eyes at?"

LHL: That's why what you're doing is so important. I think it takes your generation, with your early access to the Internet, to be able to see the ongoing relevance and importance of these technologies that are emerging with you, and to know the language of the Internet in a different way. For most people I know, it's a second language, but your generation has grown up on it.

JH: Right, it's the very first language. But a lot of artists around my age have been distancing themselves from questions of technology, even though it's so important. I

know you've actually developed many of your own technologies.

LHL: Oh, yes. I had to, because they didn't exist, so I had to make them. I didn't want to. It's a lot of trouble and it was hard and always took years and a lot of frustration, but it was the only way to create what I was seeing in my head. In most cases, it took five years, and in some it took eight years to produce the work. My collaborators and I had the great joy of being able to figure it out ourselves— though of course, by the time we'd finish, we would invariably be able to buy whatever it was we were making off a shelf. We hunted the codes and programs and hardware down by instinct and faith and belief that it would be possible to accomplish a touch screen, or other kinds of interaction. In the field of artificial intelligence, for example: *DiNA*, which I finished in 2004. Siri was released in 2011, but still has not caught up to DiNA's wit and comprehension, in my opinion.

JH: Have you ever been approached by companies about commercial applications?

LHL: Well, when we did *DiNA*, there was a company that gave us a free software package worth \$40,000. We would show them all the things *DiNA* was capable of, things they were not thinking about, because they were only thinking of commercial applications, and we were thinking about stretching the metaphors. When I think back on it, it is possible that the research we were doing and feeding to the software company was actually used to create Siri, but there's no way to prove that. And thanks to the software, we were able to make *DiNA* and *Agent Ruby*, which is what we wanted to do, so it's an even trade. Other than that instance, no, no companies

have approached me, because what I do is relatively useless in the real world. I don't see these projects as a commercial application for anything that people might need, except maybe for joyful interactions, which are important but have not been monetized yet.

JH: You were interested in genetic engineering before a lot of people were aware of it.

LHL: It's something I've been dealing with in my work since the mid-1980s. My current project, *The Infinity* Engine [2011–], involves a scanning booth that accesses viewers via DNA readings, which I think is going to be the standard way of determining individual genealogy and histories in about ten years. The project was developed as a way of using facial recognition to reverse engineer a person's genetic origins. I worked on it with a (then) nasa scientist, Josiah Zayner, and several other programmers, and we premiered it in my retrospective, "Civic Radar," at ZKM [Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany, 2014–15]. Peter Weibel and Andreas Beitin and the entire ZKM staff valiantly committed to fully actualizing this piece. I hope to install it somewhere in New York. There were also rooms at ZKM devoted to bioprinting, mutation, genetic transplants, ethical conundrums. . . . We even had a bioprinted nose and mutant GMO fish. ZKM declared itself a science lab to accommodate all this.

JH: That's so ahead of the curve, to be dealing with these things in your work.

LHL: I think that if you're dealing with the present, and I've said this before, people think that you're in the future, because they don't know what's going on in their own time. I try to understand what is happening in the

time I live in. The full human genome was sequenced in 2005. That was a huge leap in discovering the possibilities for the inevitable genetically migrated and hybrid planet that we will inhabit in the future.

JH: In terms of the critical reception of your work, how have people responded to seeing their present reflected back at them? How did they respond to *CybeRoberta*, for instance?

LHL: They didn't, because nobody would show it. In fact, about 65 percent of the work in my retrospective was seen for the first time last year. Much of my work wasn't shown for fifty years, and most of it took at least twenty years to be acknowledged, because people had no reference or language for it.

JH: So almost all of the writing has been in retrospect, much later?

LHL: Yes. It's the opposite of your situation in a way.

JH: I have no clue what the perception of my work will be later on. I'm just thankful that it has been written about. I was really honored that people were writing about the performance versus the triennial work. In the case of the triennial, I felt like a lot of the writing was really just an accessory to the image. It was mostly anecdotal, biographical information about me, supplanting a discussion of the work itself. I was nervous that would happen with the performance—that it would become about the circulation of an image—and I was happy that there seemed to be more engagement with the actual work itself.

LHL: So what you're saying is that your work is aimed at combating any calcification of your identity into

merely an autobiographical cipher? It's almost as if you're actively trying to disrupt the process of stability of your identity, as if it is constantly shifting.

JH: I think I felt a sense of freedom for a while, because I found my visibility through multiple avenues. I was working in nightlife, but I also had a blog where I had built a following, and I would share other people's work and my own writ- ing and criticism. I felt I had these microcommunities and multiple identities online, and they didn't ever really have to come together. In the past two or three years, that all condensed into a singular body. Especially given the moment we're in—it was too easy for people to say: "trans." And that just became a reductive signifier—clickbait. I was so shocked by how crude people could be. I felt like I had to be aware of that and counter it in my own work.

LHL: When you say counter it, are there platforms that are especially useful for that?

JH: Maybe Twitter, because right now Twitter feels like it's a little bit more open to experimentation. If I don't read it for two days, I've missed so much. There's no algorithm to push something back up. And that appeals to me. It has become a space where I can say, even just for a day, "OK, this is my character right now, my alter ego of the moment."

LHL: That's interesting. For me, Roberta was a way of testing the blur that exists in spaces where people perceive reality, and to show and exhibit flawed belief systems. At first, I didn't really think that I was going to actually perform the role of Roberta myself. I certainly didn't want to do it. But I initially couldn't find anybody else to do it, so I had to. Then it took all that time to

flesh it out. These projects are like vampires. They enter your bloodstream surreptitiously, and then they inhabit you. Don't you feel that?

JH: Yes, that's how I feel.

Marc Garrett, "Lynn Hershman Leeson's - Civic Radar: Book Review", Furtherfield, http://www.furtherfield.org/features/reviews/lynn-hershman-leesons-civic-radar-book-review, May 18, 2016.

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Lynn Hershman Leeson's - Civic Radar: Book Review

By Marc Garrett - 18/05/2016

Introduction

In the introduction of Civic Radar, editor Peter Weibel sets out the motivation, layout and journey of the book. This first comprehensive monograph of Lynn Hershman Leeson's artistic career, spanning across five decades. It must have been a dizzying publication to work on, when compiling her pioneering work in the fields of photography, video, film, performance, installation, and interactive and net-based media art. It is noteworthy that Hershman Leeson collaborated in its production. One feels her personal involvement in the book - its richness, care and detail, shows in its nearly 400 pages, and approximately 500 illustrations. It also features supporting texts by other writers, curators, theorists, and artists, such as: Andreas Beitin, Pamela Lee, Peggy Phelan, Ruby Rich, Jeffrey Schnapp, Kyle Stephan, Kristine Stiles, Tilda Swinton, Peter Weibel and interview by Hou Hanru and Laura Poitras with the artist.

Review.

'I try to live in the present, because most people live in the past. If you live in the present, most people think you live in the future, because they don't know what happens in their own time." Lynn Hershman Leeson.

Lynn Hershman Leeson has pioneered uses of new technologies, recognized as key to the workings of our society today. She tackles the big questions surrounding: identity in a time of mass, overpowering consumerism; privacy in an era of surveillance; the interfacing of humans and machines; the relationship between real and virtual worlds; and new bio-ethics surrounding practices such as growing parts of the human body from DNA samples. We can think of Hershman Leeson as a direct artistic descendant of Mary Shelley. Consider Shelley's celebrated publication, *Frankenstein: Prometheus Unbound*, published in 1818, and its challenges towards macho revolutionaries of 'reason', and her critique of the misuses of science and technology by the patriarch. We can see strong parallels between both women. They are feminists, who have managed to find ways around (and to work with) traditional forms of dominant, patriarchal frameworks, so to express personal, creative and cultural identities, on their own terms.

"Lynn Hershman Leeson's mission statement seems to be that the body is a programmable software embedded in a changeable hardware. Therefore, she shows us so many hybrids and mutants, aliens and agents, actors and avatars, in real life and second life. From Dolls to clones, she demonstrates the paradox plurality of identities especially in the age of total observation." [1] (Weibel 2016)

Hershman Leeson's artistic process however does not keep its distance from the processes of science and technology. She leaps into the depths of our fears and unreservedly engulfs herself, and her imagination in their material influences and modifications. Like Donna Haraway, Hershman Leeson takes cyborgs, misfits, biology, mutation and transformation as her inspiration, contexts and materials. And also like Haraway, she playfully and critically owns concerns around science and technology, along with the ethical issues that may arise out of their continuously shifting, influences on society; and, thus not owned by or weighed down by them. Every work put forward by Hershman Leeson, is an experiment. Her interests and knowledge inspired by science and technology reflects her constant state of contemporariness. Her work directly correlates to breaking down systems of perceived values.

'Hershman Leeson confronted conventional gender roles and exposed the normative construction of gender identity. Some of her videos have included cross-dressers and transgender men and women, as in Double Cross Click Click (1995), and her assumed male pseudonyms at a time when the art world was dominated by men who mostly ignored women." [2] (Beitin 2016)

Hershman Leeson's art moves fluidly between different formats, contexts and disciplines. This of course is not easy to brand. The art market survives by promoting art that fits into particular roles and products that are easy to promote, predict and consume. The irony here is that the art world promotes the idea of itself as a site of novelty and insights, but in reality represents a deeply conservative culture. Some artists, Hershman Leeson is one of them, transcend the contemporary artworld norm and build alternative universes, contexts and identities, where the art is so investigatory and esoteric, traditional conventions are challenged.

When I interviewed Hershman Leeson last year for Furtherfield she talked about how she'd like to "eradicate censorship, and make more transparent the capitalistic underpinnings that are polluting access, value and visibility". In the 70's, she was the first artist working on a prison art project in San Quentin, and many of her early public art works "geared toward social change." [3]

Civic Radar shows us that her work is not reduced to a singular, reflection of her own creative self. There is a wider story and it includes the voices of many others as part of the narrative of her life and her work, as well as reclaiming a history in a male dominated society.

We see reaffirmed a varied and dynamic history where she has been involved in strengthening the role of women in society, as part of an extension of her art process. One excellent example of this rich history is that over a period of 40 years she interviewed an extensive array of women artists, historians, activists, and critics who integrated personal and political content into their work. Then, some of that gathered material was made into a film project !Women Art Revolution, in 2010.

Lynn Hershman Leeson has not only achieved pioneering work as an artist, but also as filmmaker. She has collaborated with actor and Oscar winner Tilda Swinton in several feature films that have gone on to receive numerous awards at international film festivals on account of their outstanding quality and innovative themes. *Teknolust* is an absurd, amusing and scientifically highly topical science-fiction drama on the subjects of cyberidentities, biogenetics, gender constructions and sexual self-determination in the age of the Internet. The plot turns on the scientist Rosetta Stone (Tilda Swinton), who illegally produces three clones of herself. The artificial entities can only be distinguished by the color of their clothing and live in an enclosed cyberspace. Because they are dependent for survival on the male Y chromosome, Ruby, the femme fatale among the clones, goes in regular pursuit of men. Sexual contact with Ruby leads to impotence in her lovers as well as to an allergic reaction triggered by a computer virus which is transferable to human beings. The FBI becomes aware of the clone family's machinations following the increased incidents of infection among men, and begins to investigate. Note*

Her work has crossed into many different fields and formats. Which includes: installations, videos, films, sculptures, robots, avatars, contracts, computer programs, photography, paintings, drawings, collages, browser based art, artificial intelligence, bio-matter, network communication systems and devices. *Synthia Stock Ticker* and *Dollie Clones* are just two examples that demonstrate how ahead she has been with her ideas and her integration of digital technologies into art. *Synthia Stock Ticker* is a networked-based media artwork made in 2000. It refers to the stock ticker invented by Thomas Edison and is unusually prescient in its portrayal of the emotional life of global markets. Inside a glass casing sits a small monitor screen, showing a video of a woman character named Synthia. "When the market is up, the character dances and shops at Christian Dior: when the market is down, she chain smokes, has nightmares, and shops at Goodwill." [4]

Again *The Dollie Clones* 1995-96 predate a contemporary artistic obsession with creeping surveillance. Two telerobotic dolls, *Tillie the Telerobotic Doll* and *CyberRoberta*, whose eyes have been replaced with cameras. Each doll has a website that allows users to view the images taken by the webcams and click on an "eyecon" to telerobotically turn the doll's head 180 degrees to survey the gallery.

Hershman Leeson's most prominent performance work was as another woman, Roberta Breitmore. This elaborate alter ego existed between 1973 and 1978. The Breitmore character was well developed, possessing different behaviors and attitudes to Hershman Leeson's own personal identity. Roberta Breitmore had her own handwriting, clothing, wig, makeup, driver's license, apartment, psychologist, bank account, credit cards, acquaintances, life story, and adventures. Hershman Leeson took the audacious leap and sporadically became Roberta Breitmore for 5 years. Other women also lived as Roberta Breitmore and sometimes simultaneously. [5]

"Hershman Leeson hired three additional performers, all women, to play Roberta. They wore costumes identical to the ones Hershman Leeson herself wore, and they treated Roberta essentially as a professional (albeit part-time) gig. They undertook some of Roberta Breitmore's correspondence and went on some of her dates (which were documented in photos and audio recordings). Eventually, Hershman Leeson stopped enacting Breitmore, reducing the instantiations of Roberta Breitmore from 4 to 3." [6] (LaFarge 2007)

The spirit of Hershman Leeson's radical art persona can be seen in younger, contemporary artists today. For instance, Heath Bunting's *Identity Kits*, part of his larger The Status Project consist of various items, personal business cards, library cards, a national railcard, T-Mobile top-up card, national lottery card and much more. "They take a few months to compile each of them because they are actual items that everybody uses in their everyday lives, involving evidence of identity. There is also a charge for the package of 500.00 GBP, which is cheap for a new identity." [7] (Garrett 2014) Then we have Karen Blissett, an Internet artist who suddenly decided to go multiple by opening up all of her email, Twitter, Facebook and Google accounts to many different women around the world. "A torrent of provocative, poetic, and often contradictory voices issued proclamations, made auto portraits, and shared psalm-like meditations on her existential transformation; distributed across online platforms and social spaces, in text, image and video." [8] (Catlow 2014)

Towards the end of *Civic Radar* a collection of pages show us various images of the exhibition by the same name at the ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art, in Germany 2014. When viewing the images of her work in the large gallery spaces you realize the scale of it all, and how substantial her work is.

Moving on after the images of the works in ZKM, there is a selection of Hershman Leeson's texts written, from 1984 and 2014. These writings, take us through different stages of her career, revealing ideas and intentions behind much of her work and also some of the work included in the publication. In the last paragraph of the last text in a short essay, titled *The Terror of Immortality* she writes about the contexts that have given rise to her most recent work. "As organic printing and DNA manipulation reshapes the identities of newly manipulated organisms, so too the culture of absorbed surveillance has dynamically shifted. In the next 100 years, the materials used to create DNA will become increasingly distributed and hybridized. The implications of this research include not

only the creation of a sustainable planet of hybrid life forms that can survive a sixth extinction and incorporate into to its existence a morally responsible future." (Leeson 2016)

This book is a profound read, offering an insight to this generous and profound artists' fantastical journey in an era marked by accelerating change. And what's so amazing is that the content, the narratives, and the histories, are real. It is an Aladdin's Cave of rich, exceptional artworks, flowing with brilliant ideas. Hershman Leeson has had her finger right on the pulse of what's relevant in the world for a long time, and transmuted the knowledge she unearths in her examination of identity, feminism, science, technology and more into her own artistic language.

Her work is way ahead of most contemporary artists showing now. This book should be read everywhere. Not just because it features great art, but also because features a woman with a great mind. I am not a fan of the words *genius* or *masterpiece*; I find them tiresome terms reflecting a form of male domination over women and the non-privileged classes. Yet, after spending time with *Civic Radar*, I cannot help myself thinking that I have just witnessed something equivalent without the negative baggage attached.

Preferences:

- [1] Weibel, Peter. A Panoply of Identities. Civic Radar. Hatje Cantz; 01 edition (15 Mar. 2016). P. 55.
- [2] Beitin, Andreas. Face, Surface, Interface: The Motif of the Mask. Civic Radar. Hatje Cantz; 01 edition (15 Mar. 2016).
- [3] Garrett, Marc. Choose Your Muse Interview: Lynn Hershman Leeson. June 2015.http://www.furtherfield.org/features/interviews/choose-your-muse-interview-lynn-hershman-leeson
- [4] Hershman leeson, Lynn. Civic Radar. Hatje Cantz; 01 edition (15 Mar. 2016).
- [5] Beitin, Andreas. Face, Surface, Interface: The Motif of the Mask. Civic Radar. Hatje Cantz; 01 edition (15 Mar. 2016). P. 205.
- [6] Breitmore, Roberta (Lynn Hershman Leeson). Antoinette LaFarge. 2007.http://fictive.arts.uci.edu/roberta_breitmore
- [7] Garrett, Marc. Heath Bunting, The Status Project & The Netopticon. Furtherfield, May 2012.http://www.furtherfield.org/features/articles/heath-bunting-status-project-netopticon
- [8] Catlow, Ruth. Karen Blissett is Revolting. Critical Personas. New Criticals. May 24, 2014.http://www.newcriticals.com/karen-blissett-is-revolting
- [9] Leeson, Hershman Lynn. The Terror of Immortality. Civic Radar. Hatje Cantz; 01 edition (15 Mar. 2016). P. 365.
- *Text from ZKM Teknolust. With Lynn Hershman Leeson at the cinema. http://zkm.de/en/event/2015/03/teknolust-with-lynn-hershman-leeson-at-th...

In 2015, ZKM in cooperation with the Deichtorhallen Hamburg / Sammlung Falckenberg exhibited the first comprehensive retrospective of Leeson's work, including her most recent productions of art. Last year Modern Art Oxford hosted a major solo exhibition of her work *Origins of a Species, Part 2* and she also has work in The Electronic Superhighway, at Whitechapel Gallery, in London.

Calder Yates, "Flavr Savr at the Pit", Daily Serving, May 17, 2016.



May 17, 2016 Written by Calder Yates

Flavr Savr* at the Pit

The Pit, a small artist-run gallery, sits semi-hidden in a commercial and industrial neighborhood north of Los Angeles. Artists Devon Oder and Adam Miller founded the gallery in 2014, exhibiting emerging artists in tightly curated group shows alongside at least one well-established artist. The Pit, located in a converted car mechanic's garage, has the same anonymously beige exterior as the neighboring businesses. But its out-of-the-way location and undistinguishable architecture belie the impact the space has had during its short lifetime. On clear days, when approaching the gallery's entrance, the combination of the Southern California sun mixed with the Pit's hard fluorescent lights will make your eyes water, as if you've been staring at a mirage for too long.



Lynn Hershman Leeson. *GMO Animals, Crops, Labs (The Infinity Engine)*, 2014; wallpaper; dimensions variable. Courtesy of the Artist and the Pit.

Visual deception and optical illusions permeate the Pit's current show, *Flavr Savr**, curated by Alexandra Gaty. The exhibition title refers to the first genetically modified food approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Engineered and developed in the early 1990s, Flavr Savr was a tomato of middling quality designed to ripen slower, thereby extending its shelf life. The FDA decided that the tomato needed no special labeling to delineate its genetic modification because its health risks and nutritional composition were no different from other tomatoes on the market.

Flavr Savr* has, as its background noise, the fear of unforeseen consequences that result from explicit human interference with the invisible, microscopic interventions into the systems we take for granted, like the food or healthcare system. Lynn Hershman Leeson's wallpaper, GMO Animals, Crops, Labs (The Infinity Engine) (2014), most explicitly tackles the dilemma of genetic modification and acts as a backdrop for the other video and sculpture pieces throughout the space. The wallpaper bears images, locations, and brief descriptions of research in genetically modified organisms, including glow-in-the-dark cats, 3D-printed human limbs, and cloned pit bulls and Afghan hounds. Many of the descriptions refer to experiments that either had an eventual practical application (developing pesticide-resistant crops or furthering AIDS research with glow-in-the-dark cats) or an idiosyncratic one (cloning pit bulls in order "to memorialize Bernann McKinney's deceased pet Booger").



Lynn Hershman Leeson. *GMO Animals, Crops, Labs (The Infinity Engine)*, 2014 (detail); wallpaper; dimensions variable. Courtesy of the Artist and the Pit.

Just as artists often make political, philosophical, and moral points through their work, Leeson's GMO Animals focuses on the political, philosophical, and moral points that scientists have made through their research on genetically modified organisms. Take for instance the "GLO FISH" entry on the wallpaper, which has as its motivation: "First GM organism sold as a pet." The desire for a glow-in-the-dark fish has implications beyond the lifespan of research. It creates demand and suggests that the scientists and their funders have certain assumptions about the good and proper role that animals play in society—namely, the same role that a painting above a couch might fill. As Jessica Pierce recently wrote in the New York Times, "Woe to the fish expected to live its entire life in six cups of water." Designer pets are nothing new, but Leeson shows how much more sophisticated our genetic modifications of animals have become. Her straightforward presentation of this research collapses the distinction between ethics and aesthetics with chilling efficiency.

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Danielle Dean. *True Red*, 2015 (still); hand-drawn digital animation; 03:45. Courtesy of the Artist and the Pit.

The show's inversion of expectations continues with Danielle Dean's hand-drawn animation, *True Red* (2015), which depicts the metamorphosis of a popular Nike skateboarding shoe into dozens of other forms. The iconic red shoe morphs into a figure in a fetal position, a flying bat (the animal), a bulging fist, a dark puddle that an iPhone falls into, and a standing figure whose hair flies off her head, which reveals a different figure wearing a surgical mask. The animation's eerie, machine-like drone in the background mutes the shoe's slapstick mutations, producing a hypnotic and haunting tone.



Kathleen Ryan. *Bacchante*, 2016; concrete, stainless steel, marble, steel; 53 x 36 x 45 in. Courtesy of the Artist, Josh Lilley, and François Ghebaly Gallery.

Elsewhere, in Kathleen Ryan's *Bacchante* (2016), a cluster of concrete and marble balloons dangles from a slick granite plinth reinforced with steel earthquake retrofitting. The cluster of stone balloons is made to look like a branch of grapes hanging off a platter. The whole piece weighs hundreds of pounds, making the paradoxical dangling action of the balloon–grapes that much more visually confusing and dangerous seeming. The piece's very presence implies a perilousness that, combined with Leeson's research into pesticide-resistant crops, suggests a bacchanal gone wrong.

At its heart, Flavr Savr* appraises the moral calculus involved in controlling and losing control of one's environment. The verdict has been determined by Alexandra Gaty, who has curated a protest rather than an inquiry. Despite the nefariousness the curator ascribes to these scientific and political interventions, the artists' work shines a hard light on the complicated ethics of an unexamined aesthetics.

Flavr Savr* is on view at the Pit in Los Angeles through May 22, 2016.

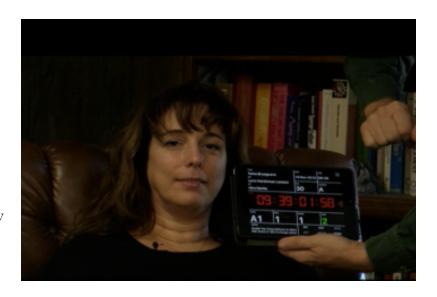
Alex Greenberger, "Lynn Hershman Leeson is Making a Documentary About Tania Bruguera", *ARTnews*, March 24, 2016, http://www.artnews.com/2016/03/24/lynn-hershman-leeson-is-making-a-documentary-about-tania-bruguera/

ARTNEWS

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON IS MAKING A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT TANIA BRUGUERA

BY Alex Greenberger POSTED 03/24/16 12:24 PM

Lynn Hershman Leeson has recently enjoyed a late-career comeback. Over the past two years, the feminist video artist has had critically acclaimed solo shows at Modern Art Oxford, Bridget Donahue in New York, and the ZKM Center for Art in Karlsruhe, Germany, and now her work can be seen at the Whitechapel Gallery's much-hyped show "Electronic Superhighway 2016–1966," which surveys the Internet's impact on art. During a recent talk at Brooklyn's Light Industry held in honor of a new monograph of her work, Leeson unveiled a preview of her latest project: a full-length film about the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera.



Still from Lynn Hershman Leeson's Tania Bruguera: A State of Vulnerability COURTESY THE ARTIST

Leeson's documentary is tentatively titled Tania Bruguera: A State of Vulnerability and will focus on the aftermath of Bruguera's experience in Cuba. Bruguera's political performances have been censored in her home country, where her passport had at one point been confiscated after she joined 40 activists in a protest against Cuba's suppression of civil rights. (Bruguera has since gotten her passport back from the authorities.)

Leeson has made two other documentaries: !Women Art Revolution (2011), which is about feminist artists, and Strange Culture (2007), which follows an artist on trial for bioterrorism charges. Both films deal with artists and civil rights, and Leeson explained that Bruguera interested her because her work had been so radically censored.

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"Artists, and in particular women artists, suffer so much censorship in culture," Leeson said in an interview. "It just seemed like this was something that I could easily help with."

The artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer put Leeson in touch with Bruguera's sister, who then helped Leeson contact Bruguera. Because they felt as though their emails were being surveilled, they met in New York, where Bruguera came up with the idea to see Frank Ochberg, the psychiatrist who was on the committee that formalized the term "post-traumatic stress disorder." Bruguera and Ochberg spoke for 12 hours, and Leeson plans to edit their conversation down to 75 minutes.

"Tania feels that all of Cuba suffers from post-traumatic stress," Leeson said. "They don't know their rights. They don't know how free they could be." Leeson added that her film will also include other issues related to private and cultural forms of censorship.

"She said so much in the film about the situation in Cuba that it'll only make it worse for her," Leeson continued. "But on the same note, if it gets seen a lot, it will protect her as well, in a way."

Leeson has the first public preview of the work planned for June 8, at Tate Modern—British audience members may be able to give good feedback since some may have seen Bruguera's performances at that museum, she explained. The version shown won't be the theatrical cut, and Leeson said she hopes it will be rough around the edges. "I think now it's really timely, and I don't want some sort of perfect film that takes you 20 years, or even two years, to do," she said. "It should come out right now, and I think the rawness is part of it."

Alex Greenberger, "9 Art Events To Attend In New York City This Week", ARTnews, March 7, 2016.

ARTNEWS

9 ART EVENTS TO ATTEND IN NEW YORK CITY THIS WEEK

BY The Editors of ARTnews POSTED 03/07/16 10:00 AM

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9

Talk: Lynn Hershman Leeson at Light Industry

Lynn Hershman Leeson, long an underappreciated figure in the art world, has finally come into the limelight. In the past year, the feminist video artist has secured New York gallery representation, thanks to Bridget Donahue, and was the subject of a retrospective at the ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany. (We still haven't gotten a Hershman retrospective stateside, but it doesn't feel too far off—curators are quickly beginning to realize just how much she's influenced a generation of artists whose work deals with the Internet.) Now, Hershman's work, which deals with the male gaze and technology's effects on organic matter, will be surveyed in a new book called Civic Radar. Not only will Hershman be discussing her work with Artforum editor-in-chief Michelle Kuo, she'll also be previewing a new piece at this talk, making this a can't-miss event. —Alex Greenberger

Light Industry, 155 Freeman Street, Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m. Tickets are payas-you-wish



Lynn Hershman Leeson, Construction Chart Drawing, 1973. COURTESY BRIDGET DONAHUE, NEW YORK

"Lookout Highlights of 2015", Art in America, January 7, 2016, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/lookout-highlights-of-2015/

Art in America

NEWS & FEATURES EXHIBITIONS MAGAZINE NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIBE SEARCH



NEWS JAN. 07, 2016

Lookout Highlights of 2015

by A.I.A. Editors



Every Thursday, A.i.A. editors compile The Lookout, a series of microreviews of compelling exhibitions on view in New York. Selections range from museum blockbusters to gallery shows to presentations in small nonprofits, from the Upper East Side to the outer boroughs. As a complement to our popular Best of 2015 series, contributed by art luminaries in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, London and Japan, we're presenting ten Lookout highlights of the past year in chronological order. Here's to an art-filled 2016!

Lynn Hershman Leeson, at Bridget Donahue (Feb. 19-Apr. 5, 2015)

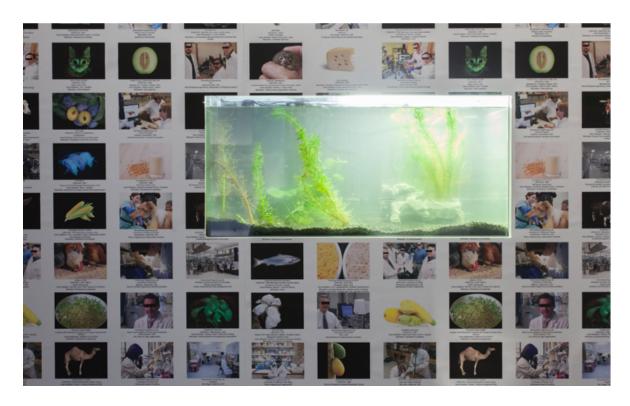
When a young dealer opens a gallery downtown you'd expect her to show artists from among her peers, but Bridget Donahue makes a big statement with her first show—a mini-retrospective of Lynn Hershman Leeson. In recent years, the New York and San Francisco-based artist has drawn increasing attention for her decades of perennially fresh encounters between technologies and bodies. Her last New York show was in 2008 at bitforms, which specializes in new media. Yet Donahue's current presentation is grandly quiet in its focus on the old. It includes a scratched painting from the '60s, along with photographs and performance documents reflecting the artist's interest in the female body as an object of surveillance and voyeurism. New wallpaper bearing images of genetically modified organisms suggests the internalization of tech, while a projection that one must peer inside a black-box installation to see bends the viewer's body to the artist's will.

Ingeborg Reichle, "The Infinity Engine", SciArt in America, October 2015, 27 - 31.

SciArt in America

a bimonthly publication dedicated to science-based art

REVIEW



The Infinity Engine

By Ingeborg Reichle

Guest Contributor

The human species is fascinated by the possibility of immortality. If we follow the progress of cutting-edge research in fields like regenerative medicine or human aging, which seek to

understand the molecular mechanisms and genetic factors that underlie the aging process, then we are closer to making this idea a reality than ever before in our history.

In her latest exhibition "Civic Radar"—a comprehensive retrospective at the ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art in Karlsruhe, Germany, initiated and curated by Peter Weibel and Andreas F. Beitin—the influential San Francisco—based artist Lynn Hershman Leeson engages with these developments through her prophetic art project *The Infinity Engine*. Hershman Leeson placed a molecular biology laboratory at the center of the exhibition, making a strong statement about the pre–eminence of the sciences and the role of art in the 21st century, which some call the age of 'technoscience'.

Starting her career in the late 1960s, Hershman Leeson became best known for her pioneering oeuvre in new media art and performance, as well her provocative and distinctive films such as *Conceiving Ada* (1997) or *Teknolust* (2002). From the very beginning, her art projects addressed the interplay between cutting–edge technology, new media, and gender—challenging concepts of identity and human uniqueness. In *Teknolust*, for example, Hershman Leeson raises questions about advanced techniques in biotechnology, but in terms of fantastic future scenarios like the cloning of humans.

With *The Infinity Engine* Hershman Leeson explores the current state of cutting–edge technologies, like the manipulation of DNA, the production of transgenic organisms, and regenerative medicine technologies, such as artificial fabrication of human organs with 3D bioprinting techniques. All these technologies profoundly affect our concepts of human identity and the relationship between past and present as well as life and death. *The Infinity Engine* asks questions about property rights and ownership of human body parts when human cells and tissue are turned into commodities.

Hershman Leeson also showcases contemporary developments in regenerative medicine by exhibiting an extracellular scaffold for growing a three–dimensional cell and tissue culture in the shape of a human nose in a glass display cabinet in the same manner as a priceless museum exhibit. All this is accompanied by a video projection of a collage of interviews with experts like the American scientist Anthony Atala, head of the Wake Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine (WFIRM) at Winston–Salem, North Carolina. According to Atala, research is just one step away from implementing tissue engineering techniques and methods to grow sophisticated cell structures in vivo and create artificial organs.

Another video features Keith Murphy, CEO of the U.S.— based company Organovo, which specializes in designing artificial organs. Murphy reports on the state of the art to create biologically functioning organs by 3D bio-printing, and describes the unlimited potential of tissue engineering and the new techniques that enable us to manipulate cells in a systematic and fully controlled way, producing whatever shape and function is desired.

Capture Room is a unique project Hershman Leeson developed with NASA scientist Josiah Zayner. It is an innovative and highly speculative project that attempts to identify a person's genome through a non–invasive procedure; that is, without extracting and sequencing the DNA from a body cell, relying instead on information provided by an image or photograph of a person's face. To develop Capture Room, Zayner used current face recognition software and advanced statistics that are implemented in machine learning. His approach diverges significantly from the invasive procedures employed in DNA sequencing by U.S. companies like 23andMe, which around a decade ago introduced a service to provide personal ancestry-related genetic reports to a fee–paying public. Information about one's own genome is now accessible to many people for the price of a whole genome–sequencing run, which has dropped significantly since the advent of next–generation sequencing technology.

The idea that *Capture Room* presents is much more than a bizarre vision of the near future. It is a scientifically–informed and probable scenario of what is likely to be standard practice in just a decade or two. The main obstacle to the realization of this vision is not a lack of machinery or algorithms, but our still very imperfect understanding of genotype–phenotype correlations embodied in complex gene expression pathways. Disentangling the complex gene interaction patterns involved in phenotype generation has proven to be far more difficult to uncover than was originally thought after the successful completion of the HUGO project some fifteen years ago.

In *The Infinity Engine*, Hershman Leeson also explores the manipulation of DNA and the production of transgenic organisms, exemplified by living transgenic zebrafish that glow in the dark. A number of zebrafish are presented in a brilliantly illuminated aquarium, which is surrounded by wallpaper with images of all kinds of genetically modified plants and organisms. The zebrafish, an important model organism in a great number of research fields, were provided by the Institute of Toxicology and Genetics at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), which houses more than 400,000 zebrafish. The vast number of examples of transgenic plants and animals depicted are palpable evidence that genetically modified organisms (GMOs) now belong to our daily life and have also become an integral part of the art world.

One of the rooms the spectator experiences when entering *The Infinity Engine* is covered with projected images and films produced in laboratories, which elicits the feeling of standing right in the middle of a laboratory. This part of the installation is a wonderful metaphor: on the one hand *The Infinity Engine* brings us as close to a wet bench in a laboratory as possible, and on the other this shift of 'location'—from the art museum to a science context—obliges us to get acquainted with new epistemologies and the logic of the techno—scientific regime in which many scientific fields are embedded today.

The manipulation of the human genome is still taboo in most countries. But with *The Infinity Engine*, Hershman Leeson drives the point home that with current and future developments in

fields like tissue engineering and regenerative medicine, there is far more at risk than just our identity. Our ontology as humans is called into question. Until recently, controversies about progress in fields like biotechnology or regenerative medicine focused on the future of our species and on some bizarre post-human visions about future bodies or getting closer to immortality. But since techniques and applications like DNA sequencing have become widely available and inexpensive, attention has shifted to the fact that they can be used by and on a great number of people outside the highly regulated scientific arena. This means that ethical considerations must be discussed not only within the controlled field of special medical applications, but also on a broader social level because mass use of these techniques is affecting large areas of our society.

In March 2015, some weeks after the opening of "Civic Radar" in Karlsruhe at ZKM, two commentaries by two groups of scientists—one published online in *Science* on March 19 and one in *Nature* on March 12—argued that the explosive proliferation of powerful new genome-editing technologies such as CRISPR-Cas9 and other techniques needed careful consideration and discussion. Developed by Emanuelle Charpentier at the Helmholtz-Centre for Infection Research in Braunschweig, Germany and Jennifer Doudna at the University of California at Berkeley, CRISPR-Cas9 makes it easy for anyone with basic molecular biology training to edit genes in cells, including in eggs, sperm, and embryos, potentially curing genetic diseases or adding new traits.

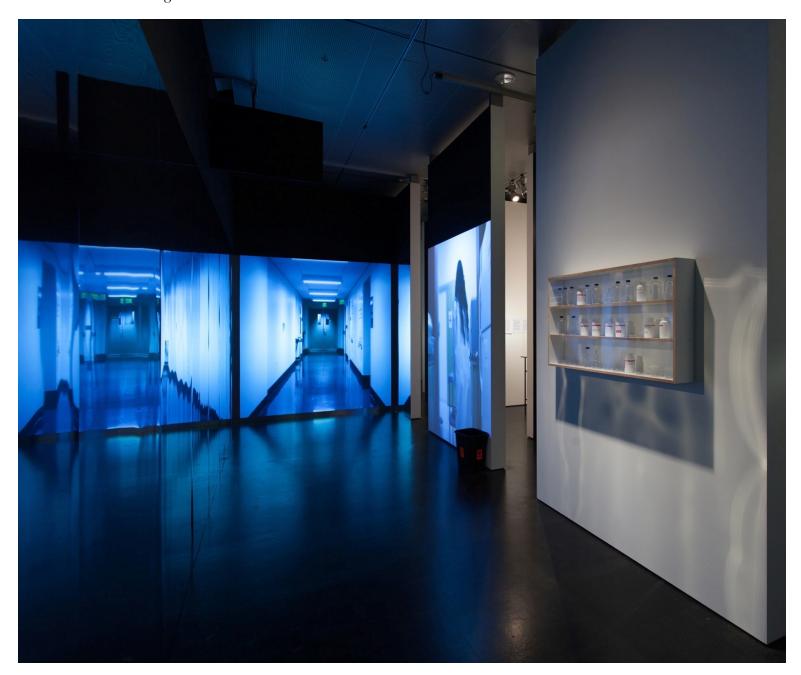
In recent years, new media and social media have garnered much of our attention. Amazingly, powerful corporations like Google and Apple have emerged, and are giants in Silicon Valley and on Wall Street. American whistle-blower Edward Snowden revealed the extent to which our personal data is collected by governments and processed without our consent, and showed us that we lost control over our personal data quite some time ago. The next step will be the collecting of personal genomic data on a massive scale to scrutinize the genetic makeup of as many people as possible. What kind of potential misuse of DNA profiling, privacy, and genetic surveillance will there be? If the make—up of the genome is also a criteria for decisions made with respect to the labor market or insurance—for example, health insurance—we are facing a wholly novel constellation. The new options that come with mass application of DNA sequencing or tissue engineering in the private sector make it a compelling necessity to understand what consequences committing to these new options have. We have lost control over our personal data, and now the question is whether we will also lose control over our personal genomic data, which governments and powerful corporations started to collect some time ago.

At the exit of the exhibition we encounter a lab coat and gloves and a red sign which reads: "You are leaving a laboratory controlled area. Gloves, lab coats, and other protective equipment should not be worn past this point." When we leave the exhibition we can leave the lab equipment behind, but not the imperative necessity to engage more with current developments

in fields like DNA sequencing or regenerative medicine; this is what Lynn Hershman Leeson is saying with *The Infinity Engine*. The ubiquitous application and spread of digital media that we have experienced is now being followed by a similar development in the field of biomedia, and this will change our lives and habits as much as the digital media did and still do.

SciArt in America October 2015

The Infinity Engine (2014) installation. All images are courtesy of Lynn Hershman Leeson, produced by ZK M | Zentrum für K unst und M edientechnologie K arlsruhe. Photo: Fidelis Fuchs, © ZK M | Z entrum für K unst und M edientechnologie K arlsruhe.



Karen Archey, "Lynn Hershman Leeson", Art Review, May 1, 2015, 126 – 129.

ArtReview

Lynn Hershman Leeson

by Karen Archey

One of the most successful tools deployed by second-wave we all know, artworld taste and time work cyclically, and feminist artists was mathematical calculation. By calculating female representation in gallery and museum exhibitions - which often amounted to none - second-wave feminist artists were able clearly, factually to express the egregious gender imbalance that plagued twentieth-century were to take a look at the New Museum Triennial, curated culture and which continues today. This is all explicated in by tech-savvy artist Ryan Trecartin and curator Lauren

!Women Art Revolution (2010), a 40 years-in-the-making documentary film by artist Lynn Hershman Leeson, who has seen her own fair share of elision from the art historical record

Hershman Leeson has been active as an artist since the 1960s. focusing on issues related to technology (specifically biotechnology) and the body, and although the influence of her works can be seen in that of artists of younger generations - such as Cory Arcangel, Cécile B. Evans or Ann Hirsch - and has won innumerable honours, including a Guggenheim Fellowship and a National Endowment for the Arts grant, she is just now seeing widespread recognition. Her first major institutional solo show was mounted this past winter at Zentrum für

above Self Portrait As Another Person, 1966, wax, wig, sound, makeup, sensor, tape recorder

panel series at MOMA PS1, as well as a solo show at the new gallery Bridget Donahue on the Lower East Side. As

for the first time it seems as if the two have paired for Hershman Leeson. Her work appears to be a decadespreceding preamble to much of what is being produced in New York, Berlin, and London today. For example, if you

> Cornell, you'd see a concerted interest in reimagining the body in light of advances in biotechnology and mass communication. So, too, is this interest expressed in contemporary art discourse in Europe, as, for example, in the group exhibition Inhuman at the Fridericianum in Kassel, which offers "visions of the human being as a socially trained yet resistant body, transcending biologically or socially determined gender classifications, as a digitally immortal entity, or as a constantly evolving self". In other words, we're thinking about the cyborg again. In a recent phone interview, Hershman Leeson told me she has been hiding her work under her bed for all of these years waiting - hoping - for the artworld to catch up. Looking back at Hershman Leeson's career now, the pieces to the

Medienkunst in Karlsruhe, and in New York the puzzle easily fall into place - the artist was on the vanguard artist was recently the subject of a daylong celebration and of both burgeoning feminist and new-media art movements during the 1960s and 70s, with a concerted interest in the cyborg that unites these fronts.

Hershman Leeson, originally from Cleveland, moved to Berkeley in 1963, longing to take part in the activist scene there. From her early days as an artist during the 1960s, her work was political in tone. Her first major drawings, shown at ZKM, were giant renditions of cyborgs, purpose in Hershmans Leeson's life. "Nothing she At Bridget Donahue, Hershman Leeson's early work includes hand-painted female bodies on canvas from 1965 that are deceptively haptic in contrast to the rest of her oeuvre. Her *Breathing Machines* of the late 1960s are an early example of work that employs sensor technology. Breathing Machine II (1968) comprises a wax face covered with a wig, paint, butterflies and feathers entombed in a wood-and-Plexi vitrine that, when you come near it, begins audibly breathing. These materially revelational works tap into an aesthetic depicting the hybrid investigation into the often unstable boundaries of the self. state of subjectivities; one both stereotypically feminine (the fragile butterfly), and the morbid (the disembodied, rotting face). This depiction of a woman as alive but entombed, rather than ebullient and brimming with vim, represents the female body in a realistic way that 's still severely underrepresented in both art and popular culture. The female bodies most visible in contemporary art today are so often eigendered, conventionally attractive and at least partially nude, and able to cater to, and perhaps overpower the male gaze in a battle of erotic forces. Hershman Leeson acknowledged as early as the 1960s that one cannot fight false idealization of women by creating another false idealization of herself, but rather focused on revealing abject femininity to collapse those ideals. A woman in 1968 could be many things, but not simultaneously feminine and funny, or simultaneously sexy and intelligent - and certainly not feminine and morbid.

While leading feminist thinker Donna Haraway saw the cyborg as a utopian vision of freedom from our gendered bodies, Hershman Leeson goes further and In her landmark 1975 essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto', Haraway writes that 'a Cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century.' Hershman Leeson's performance Roberta Breitmore (1973-9) saw the artist living a double life as a self-loathing blonde with a personality disorder.

She had an apartment across the street from the artist's own. as well as a part-time job, a shrink and a driver's license. Breitmore cruised around the city, meeting people through classifieds, but she served no grand, dramatic did was really remarkable," said the artist to me in a recent phone interview. "Roberta was activated by me putting on the outfit, getting into character and really becoming her. She had her own handwriting, her own gestures, her own manner of speaking and voice." Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Roberta is that she is not terribly dissimilar to Hershman Leeson herself. Roberta isn't the (supremely misguided) social-justice fantasy experiment that Donelle Woolford is for Joe Scanlan, but an Breitmore continued to be a motif in her practice, as she resurfaced in 1996 as CybeRoberta, a telerobotic made-toorder doll with webcam eyes. Even though desktop computers weren't popularized until the mid-1990s and the iPhone didn't debut until 2007, Hershman Leeson was already thinking about digital surveillance.

Especially in her work of the 1980s and beyond, Hershman Leeson tends to deal in the machine-made, massproduced and mediated image. Past the 1960s, her work has few moments of haptic touch or aesthetic delight, as in the case of her *Breathing Machines* or painterly collages, but rather focuses on the brutality of the image, specifically of the female body and the scientific infographic. Take for example her Construction Chart Drawing (1973), a photograph scribbled upon in pen with markings appearing similar to plastic surgery directions, such as 'lighten evebrows'. Or, at ZKM, her installation The Infinity Engine featured wallpaper, titled GMO Animals, Crops, Labs (The Infinity Engine) (2014), comprising images and brief descriptions of endless genetically manipulated organisms. The Infinity Engine also features genetically modified glowseemingly uses the motif to suggest an escape from the self. in-the-dark fish that one can easily buy in a New York City pet shop, but are considered illegal in Germany due to their genetically modified status.

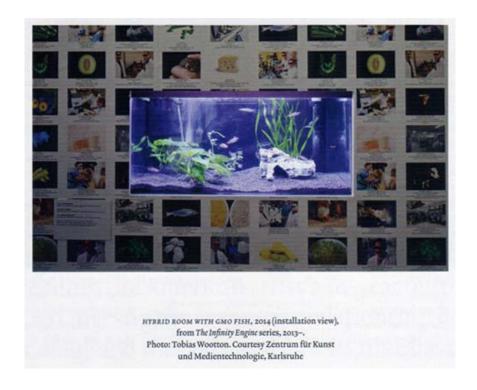
> Since the late 1980s, Hershman Leeson has also worked as a successful filmmaker and documentarian, her films exploiting the popular fascination with sci-fi to address polemical topics such as gender inequity and the precariousness of bioengineering. Actress Tilda Swinton has starred in nearly all of Hershman Leeson's movies (which have had modest budgets), seemingly in political solidarity with the artist, who knows that Swinton's presence will help popularize her filmwork and disseminate her message.

"When I was making video or new-media art, it was so often shown in the corner of a gallery and never seen," says Hershman Leeson. "So I decided I wanted to expand the format, to make feature-length films, in an attempt to expand my audience. I also needed the expanded amount of time to really develop a story." She has been working on original footage spanning four decades. a sci-fi trilogy for decades. Conceiving Ada (1997), her first in the series, features a young female computer programmer obsessed with Ada Lovelace (the nineteenthcentury mathematician and computer-programming pioneer) and a knack for manipulating the time-space continuum. Teknolust (2002), her next, features Swinton as Rosetta Stone, a scientist specializing in biogenetics who creates a part-human, part-machine organism. The last in the series will come out in the near future, and will further

deal with genetic manipulation. Hershman Leeson has also directed the documentaries Strange Culture (2007), on biogenetic artist Steve Kurtz's run-in with the FBI, and ! Women Art Revolution, which historicized the second-wave feminist art movement, with much of Hershman Leeson's

Having been making both films and artwork for nearly 40 years, Hershman Leeson's work now vacillates between long editing periods, and then building up the desire to make something. "A lot of the work is hybrid, because the ideas are always intertwined, but I do alternate," she says to me. Whatever her next wave brings, we should all be along for the ride. ar

> LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON: Origins of the Species (Part 2) is on view at Modern Art Oxford from 30 May through 9 August



Deidrich Diederichsen, "Lynn Hershman Leeson: ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany", Artforum, May 1, 2015, 364-365.

ARTFORUM

Lynn Hershman Leeson

ZKM I MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, KARLSRUHE, GERMANY Diedrich Diederichsen

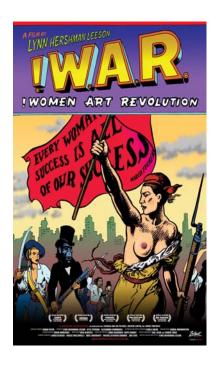
Hershman Leeson's works present an acutely palpable contrast between the rapid obsolescence of each novel technology she has enthusiastically embraced and the persistent currency of the underlying social and conceptual problems she addresses.

I'VE NEVER HAD works of art take so many photographs of me. Soon after entering Lynn Hershman Leeson's recent show at the ZKM, I was met by Past Tense, 2014, a projection displaying a frantic succession of pictures of animals on the brink of extinction; the image collection was sourced by searching "endangered" on Flickr and was updated on a regular basis throughout the course of the exhibition. But these creatures were not the only things on display. My own picture, apparently taken moments ago by a smartphone on a pedestal as I was peering at the installation, was smuggled in at regular intervals between the cougars and cheetahsostensibly to engage me, the (equally endangered?) viewer, more forcefully and perhaps to remind me that my own existence in America's Finest, 1994, a shooting stand the fragile ecology of our planet is not unrelated to the plight of this threatened fauna.

Shortly after, I encountered a sprawling work, The Infinity Engine, 2014, which addresses the dangers and possibilities of generic engineering. Standing in front of another large screen, I saw my own face being analyzed in real time by facial-recognition software, which then broadcast data about my genetic makeup: In my case, a disembodied voice focused on the genes I must carry as a "white male," with " brown" (actually greenish-brown) eyes. Finally, I saw my image appear to enter a kind of digital catalogue, dancing on an adjacent screen with the portraits of others who have submitted to this analysis (including Peter Weibel, the director of the ZKM and curator of the show), which seemed to offer an ominous warning that surveillance today reaches well beyond external appearances to the very core of identity. Soon after, I wound up in front of equipped with an M16, a staple of the postwar US military. The rifle sports a large scope, designed by Hershman Leeson, which incorporates a small digital display. Cradling the rifle and peering into the scope, I saw

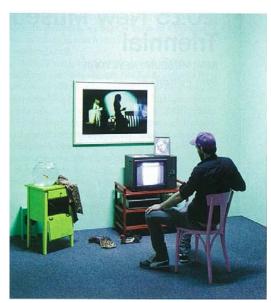
sequences of moving images of war scenes on which I could train the crosshairs; meanwhile, via a live video feed, my own body appeared in the line of fire as a potential victim: Here reflexivity became particularly menacing. Food for thought, presumably.

Interactive media art gunning for notaltogether unexpected didactic effects is hardly a novelty at the ZKM: Work that relies on a rate deployment of technology to produce not just interaction but the cliche of the eye-opening experience has long been the museum's bread and butter. In the waning years of the past century, the institution proclaimed with futurist ardor the rise of an electronic avant-garde. Now that the genre has aged considerably, and has repeatedly drawn criticism for its rather simplistic conception of the "activity" in "interactivity," the ZKM seems dedicated to a slightly truculent defense of standard-issue media art. Indeed, through works such as *Past* Tense, The Infinity Engine, and America's Finest, this show introduced Hershman



From left: Lynn Hershman Leeson in collaboration with Spain Rodriguez, film poster for !Women Art Revolution, 2010. Lynn Hershman Leeson, Teknolust, 2002, HD digital video transferred to video. color. sound, 73 minutes. Lynn Hershman Leeson, Lorna, 1979-84, interactive videodisc, remote control. furniture. Installation view. Photo: Tobias Wootton.





Leeson's work as fully in line with its usual fare. Such works, however, are only one type amid a great number of different artistic techniques, practices, and employments of technology that the artist has explored over more than five decades. And, ironically, through the very thoroughness of its comprehensive retrospective, the museum effectively contradicted or at least qualified its own emphasis: What's at stake in the artist's oeuvre is not a particular relationship between artist and media or technology but a set of well- excellent displays made clear that these piece defined political and philosophical questions that have remained remarkably constant over the decades.

Put simply, Hershman Leeson's work undertakes a feminist critique of the naturalization of gender through an exploration of the denaturalizing potentials implicit in novel technologies. It was not until the 1990s, when the writings of Donna Haraway were widely read, that the art world finally caught up with the investigations that Hershman Leeson had launched in the late '60s. Haraway may be credited with inventing so-called cyborg feminism, but this hybrid figure appears early on in Hershman Leeson's output as the model of a new subjectivity-one not merely to be envisioned by society but to be constructed in actual fact. This techno-realist perspective led the artist, in the early '60s, to initiate the ongoing

"Cyborg Series," a vast array of drawings, ceramic plates, and other works that visualize the cyborg as both a promising feminist project and the manifestation of an oppressive scientific-industrial regime, an ambiguity she has explored in far-ranging reflections.

Though most of the work Hershman Leeson created as an avant-garde feminist in the '70s appeared in the show primarily in the form of historical documentation, the ZKM's are closely linked to her recent media installations by their focus on spatial and social multitude of pieces she created over interaction. She repeatedly used public settings-shop windows, developments of model homes, hotels- as sites for installations. Many of these pieces scrutinize the interplay between gender and social architecture, the behavior expected from women in interior spaces, or the individual gendered roles assigned within families, while also hinting at utopian and transgressive forms of community life. Such works include, for example, 25 Windows: A Portrait/Project for Bonwit Teller, 1976, in which twenty- five windows of the Bonwit Teller department store in New York were converted into installations that constructed social and physical interactions fictional person become more and more real; between male and female mannequins, and

in which the audience was invited to watch, via surveillance cameras, the increasing paintings, collages, photographs, digital prints, disenchantment of a family in a suburban town house. The Dante Hotel, 1973-74, offered round-the-clock access to derelict rooms in the titular building, where two women (represented by wax faces and mannequins) appeared to be sleeping. These projects explicitly explored oppressive architectures designed to force women – whether housewives or prostitutesinto submission, unmistakably echoing her earliest electronic projects.

While Hershman Leeson's early installation works are still known today, the the course of several decades using the fictional character Roberta Breitmore occupy an even more prominent place in the annals of the feminist avant-garde. Although they have much in common with some of Eleanor Antin's experiments, they are now primarily read as precursors to Cindy Sherman's early self-portraits its or Sophie Calle's social experimentation. The artist undertook a protracted first phase of this work from 1973 to 1979, when she lived in the character of her alter ego, recognizable by her unchanging dress and makeup. She inhabited Breitmore to the edge of exhaustion, since she let the she even provided her with official documents Dream Weekend: A Project for Australia, 1977, and obligations of all kinds, including appointments with men and meetings with prospective roommates. This project was

largely forgotten virtual-world experiment Second Life, undertaken at the height of the platform's

popularity in 2005. Lorna, 1979-1984, perhaps the artist's best-known piece, is another foray into emerging media and a rare example of the use of interactive videodisc in visual art. The project relates the story of an agoraphobic

woman holed up in her home through an interface reminiscent of the period's early computer games, in which the player often explored a sequence of rooms to discover hidden clues and complete the game's objectives. Displayed in the ZKM's galleries, these works presented an acutely palpable contrast between the rapid obsolescence of each novel technology Hershman Leeson has enthusiastically embraced and the persistent currency of the underlying social and conceptual problems she addresses.

At the same time, the show reminded us that Hershman Leeson does not use experimental media exclusively; in

followed by several resurrections of Breitmore recent decades she has become known to in various new media, including one in the now European audiences, in particular, for her three allowing the full nuances of this rich and dense films starring Tilda Swinton, which include Conceiving Ada (1997), about the (2002), about the ill -fated genetics experiments of a scientist enlightened by thenrecent gender theory and feminism. Unfortunately, the exhibition presented both films in suggestive and, again, slightly overdetermined settings: Visitors watching Conceiving Ada sat on replicas of the historic furniture that appears in the film. Such "immersive" techniques, obviously designed to activism and interventionism, as well as her encourage engagement with the art and lend the viewing experience a faint air of popular spectacle, are no less distracting than the didactic quality of the later interactive works. One wishes the exhibition designer had lavished similar attention to detail on more basic issues: The sound in both screening installations was so low that it was impossible to follow the dialogue. By contrast, the presentation of the brilliant historical documentary !Women Art Revolution (2010), which Hershman Leeson shot over forty-two years beginning in 1968, was exemplary: It was screened in a movie

auditorium that was built into the ZKM, history of feminist art in the US to emerge. The feature films could be viewed here as computer pioneer Ada Lovelace, and *Teknolust* well, but were presumably encountered by most viewers in their more rigid installations.

> In a sense, !WAR encapsulated many of the best qualities of the ZKM show; this extensive retrospective provided a long-overdue opportunity to rediscover the conceptual politics of Hershman Leeson's art. It offered, too, a reminder of the richness and complexity of her oeuvre, her involvement in early forms of strategic appropriations of formats such as the computer game and the feature film. In this context, her latest forays into media art seem less significant for any resonance they may have with contemporary artistic engagement with technology than for their continuation of a long, varied, and relentless confrontation of art's patriarchal hegemony.

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Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

Holland Cotter, "Lynn Hershman Leeson: 'Origins of the Species', The New York Times, March 27, 2015, C23.

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

Lynn Hershman Leeson: 'Origins of the Species'

MARCH 27, 2015

Art in Review

By HOLLAND COTTER

The micro-survey of Lynn Hershman Leeson's art at the new Bridget Donahue Gallery is a tip-of-the-iceberg event with the potential force of a stealth explosive. Ms. Hershman Leeson began her career in the San Francisco Bay Area in the culturally roiling early 1960s. Like many young artists then, she identified as a painter, but one with multimedia extensions and futuristic ambitions. Almost from the start she was also working in sculpture that had a cyborglike dimension. The small assemblage in the show called "Breathing Machine II" (1968/2011), consisting of a wax face obscured by a wig, butterflies and feathers, sighs and coughs when you draw near.

Before Cindy Sherman was creating fictional histories for the camera, Ms. Hershman Leeson was living one, that of an alter ego named Roberta Breitmore, a 30-something divorced woman with an apartment of her own, a therapist and a troubled past. For several years in the mid-1970s, Ms. Hershman Leeson, wearing a wig and dark glasses, actually was Breitmore, at least part-time, and hired a private detective to tail her and photograph her daily movements. Several of those pictures are in the show, analog forecasters of the digital surveillance



Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Breathing Machine II" (1968/2011). Credit Courtesy of the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC.

and identity theft that have since become ubiquitous.

Ms. Hershman Leeson continues to use art as an advance warning system in new work, developed with scientists, that focuses on, and participates in, the phenomenon of genetic manipulation. The show's most recent piece is an installation of wallpaper made from images of hybrid animals, plants, and human limbs created through DNA manipulation, regenerative medicine and 3-D bio-printing. It looks great in the gallery, and like much of this artist's work, it takes both ethics and aesthetics in ungraspable directions.

Ms. Hershman Leeson's multitasking ambition includes filmmaking: Her 2010 "!Women Art Revolution," the best documentary on the early feminist art movement, will be screened at the gallery on Friday night. The big question is why we haven't seen more of her in New York. A major Hershman Leeson retrospective is on view at ZKM/Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany, and will travel in Europe, but no American dates have been set. Aren't our museums supposed to tell us where we've been and where we're going? Someone here should grab that prophetic show now.

Bridget Donahue Gallery

99 Bowery, second floor,

Lower East Side

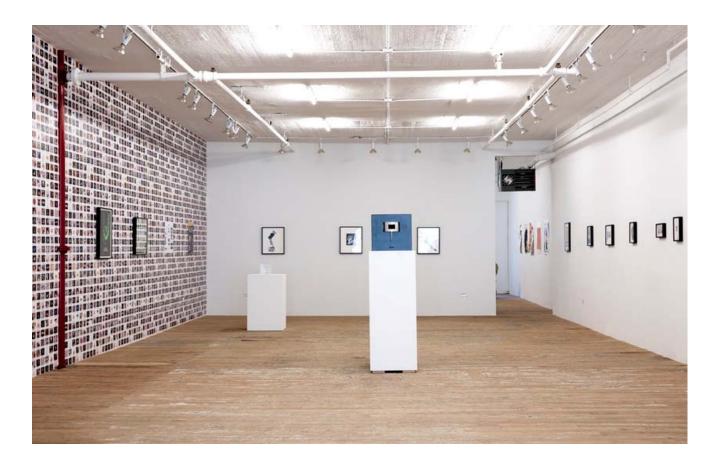
Through April 5

Kerry Doran, "Cyborg Origins: Lynn Hershman Leeson at Bridget Donahue", *Rhizome*, March 19, 2015, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2015/mar/19/lynn-hershman-leeson-origins-species/.

RHIZOME

Cyborg Origins: Lynn Hershman Leeson at Bridget Donahue

KERRY DORAN | Thu Mar 19th, 2015 11:15 a.m.



"Lynn Hershman Leeson: Origins of the Species," installation view, Bridget Donahue. Copyright Lynn Hershman Leeson. Photos by Marc Brems Tatti. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, New York.

Lynn Hershman Leeson has been probing the idea of what it means to be a cybernetic organism since the 1960s. This line of inquiry is laid bare in "Origins of the Species," a solo exhibition of Hershman Leeson's work that inaugurates Bridget Donahue's new gallery space in New York. Running concurrently with the artist's first museum retrospective, "Civic Radar," at ZKM in Karlsruhe, Germany, the exhibition nevertheless assembles an impressive cross-section of Hershman Leeson's work, including multimedia works on paper, sculpture, photographs, collages, videos, and interactive installations, spanning her five-decade career.

We find the hybrid of organism and machine, very conspicuously, in the sculpture *Breathing Machine II* (1968/2011), a woman's face cast in wax with a tangle of feathers, butterflies, and other fauna dispersed throughout her hair, actuated to "breathe" when the viewer draws close enough to peer down onto her. Or in Hershman Leeson's *Phantom Limb* series (1985-1987), in which the female body melds with sockets and wires, so that technology is as much a part of one's appearance as one's skin or physique.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Breathing Machine II (detail)*, (Early Work "Suicide Pieces" wax sculpture burned, photos are documents of these works, 1965). Copyright Lynn Hershman Leeson. Photos by Marc Brems Tatti. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, New York.

Other instances are more subdued: *Dress Me 1, 2, 3* (1965) and photographic documentation of her *Roberta Breitmore* performance (1974-1978) are suggestive of avatars, multiple identities, and multiple personas, in distant anticipation of MUDs, chat rooms, and social networks. The former depicts a woman with three options of clothes to wear, her body a mere outline devoid of sexual organs, the words "DRESS ME" emblazoned across her breastless chest. She longingly looks toward her two garment options: an average looking coral frock or a diagram of parts, words, and pieces, appearing simultaneously deconstructed and reassembled, as though taking in the outside forces that seek to define a woman wearing a dress in the world: "shadow," "reflection," "body," "&,"... "!!" What will I wear today? How will I be perceived, measured, valued, judged? Who am I: right now, today, or tomorrow?

As if to bring this dilemma to life, Hershman Leeson conceptualized Roberta Breitmore, a persona that she performed from 1974 to 1978. During this time, Breitmore came to be recognized as a person in her own right, interacting with people and systems, obtaining a driver's license, opening a bank account, and applying for credit cards. Included in "Origins", we find two photographs documenting some of Breitmore's real encounters with people, traces that of exchanges that actually took place. Yet these people will most likely never think of this woman as anything other than a woman, if they remember her at all. Thus, there was no "performance" for the people who experienced Breitmore's presence in the world: only those who are looking back on this as a performance can distinguish it from everyday reality. This differentiates her work from that of Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Eleanor Antin, and Suzanne Lacy; each of those artists embodied an

identity and life other than their own, but Hershman Leeson's performance is a fugitive one, barely discernible as such apart from its tangible affect. Anticipatory of filling in the negative space of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr, Hershman Leeson's Breitmore inhabits the negative spaces of the physical world and its systems, her identity constructed through encounters and paper trails, or what could now be equated to digital footprints.

During "Do you Follow?: Art in Circulation 3" at the ICA London in October 2014, Hannah Black posited that the issues Amalia Ulman addresses in her Instagram performance *Excellences and Perfections* (2014) were not specific to internet culture: "you could have probably talked about [this] in the seventies or whatever, it's just the methods of distribution have changed." In Hershman Leeson there is proof. Ulman's statement, "Being watched means coming to life and being someone," is just as much true for the character of Roberta Breitmore as her performance on social media. This comes full circle in Hershman Leeson's *Room of One's Own* (1990-1993), an interactive sculpture with a surveillance camera and motion detector that is activated as the viewer peers into the opening of a pedestal-mounted box. One eye stares back, and a small projection of a woman sitting in a room incisively asks, "Excuse me, what are you doing here?...Would you please look away?... How did you get here?...Who are you?" The sculpture comes to life through the viewer's gaze, by being gazed upon.

The arc of the cybernetic organism in "Origins of the Species" reaches its climax with *The Infinity Engine*, an ongoing research undertaking including a series of works that replicate some of the paraphernalia found in genetics labs. Wallpaper with a visual index of GMO animals, crops, and labs decorates the wall (Eduardo Kac's Alba makes an appearance), overlaid with propaganda-like posters advocating for bioengineering. Here, the cyborg manifests itself at a cellular level: the very makeup of our cells is entwined with technology. By focusing on the smallest level of human life, this inward-looking approach reaches far beyond our bodies, suggesting that the "origins" of the exhibition's title may not lie in the past, and that the "species" it refers to may not be recognizable life forms as we now know them.

Hannah Black, "Lynn Hershman Leeson: Karlsruhe, Germany – Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie", Art in America, April 1, 2015, 121-122.

Art in America



Video from Lynn Hershman Leeson's miniature installation Room of Ones Own, 1990-93, mixed mediums, 15 by 14 by 35 inches overall; at the Zentrum fur Kunst und Medientechnologie.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

KARLSRUHE, GERMANY- Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie

In a scene in Lynn Hershman Leeson's *Re-Covered Diary* (1994), from the video series "The Electronic Diaries" (1983-98), a child claws at the wall next to her bed. "When I was small and after a particularly bad experience I would make holes in the plaster next to my bed trying to dig my way out," explains a voiceover. "My memory is

a powdered past pouring out into the camera." A few feet away from the TV on which the video plays, a painting, *Ripped/Mutilated Self-Portrait-Homage to Fontana* (1966), depicts a woman with a red claw-like hand, bionic or atavistic, in her lap; the canvas is scratched through. From the beginning of Hershman Leeson's career - as this

ON VIEW THROUGH APR. 6 dazzling retrospective at the Zentrum fur Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) makes clear - the body appears as radically open to modifications by self and others, to violence and transformation. In a catalogue interview otherwise mainly concerned with technology, Hershman Leeson explicitly states: "One often survives trauma by making oneself a witness to it as it is happening, as a survival tactic.... It is something I had learned to do early in my life." In her practice, the development of new technology is implicated in the disassociations and repetitions of trauma, but also associated with the possibility of a reparative break with the past. The video *Seduction of a Cyborg* (1994) features a blind woman who undergoes a medical treatment that gives her the ability to see online images, and who becomes addicted to the stream of fragments. Lost in hyper-mediation, she is both imprisoned and released by her new access to the visual. Forgetting your body might not mean the same thing to everyone, depending on how that body has been treated in the world.

The show is thoughtfully installed, though a little overwhelming, as sounds from one work drift over to mix with the atmosphere of another. Hershman Leeson's preoccupation with technological novelty also means that some of the works' interfaces now seem less than intuitive. or even dated. All the works have been carefully installed as closely as possible to their original presentation, taking advantage of ZKM's expertise in tech-driven work. But it doesn't always go so well. In *DiNA* (2004), a chatbot played by Tilda Swinton asks polite questions that the viewer is supposed to answer into a microphone, but the bot is unresponsive. It's not clear whether the clumsiness of the conversation is a bug or a feature. Hershman Leeson succumbs to the lure of Second Life - the online community rendered in fanciful 3-D graphics - in Life Squared (2007), which consists of a virtual museum she created there to house her video works. But Second Life now looks like a misunderstanding or a lapsed possibility. The Internet is still a space for the performance of self, but on Facebook and Twitter, avatars and personae typically resemble their users, albeit in flattering or exaggerated versions, more closely than those on Second Life. In a practice that usually stuns with its prescience - Hershman

Leeson's "Cyborg" drawings from the 1960s look as if they could have been forged in Photoshop - it's a dissonant moment.

But obsolescence rather than novelty is the point of the works. Hershman Leeson's creations at the vanguard speak to technology's particular combination of failure and promise. The absence of vitality in the mechanical doppelganger reveals the living original's hitherto secret deathliness. Technology cannot be counterposed to a fully expressed humanity, because this humanity is unevenly distributed and fissured by trauma and drudgery, as in the installation *Cycles of Contention* (1993-2011). A video playing on a small monitor installed in a dollhouse shows a couple arguing in a kitchen: the woman begs the man not to go to work, not to be physically aggressive, to talk to her, to calm down. The video is a trap, the phrases are a trap, and even the dollhouse - requiring you to peer in - seems trap-like.

Infinity Engine (2014), commissioned for the retrospective, seemed to put extra pressure on Hershman Leeson's commitment to working at the bleeding edge of tech. Here, an array of research and objects related to biotechnology added up to less than the sum of its parts. In the catalogue, Hershman Leeson recalls using the first Xerox machines as a teenager to create distorted images of bodies. Now, science has allowed her to give those distortions fleshy form (Infinity Engine includes a bioengineered nose), but the sheer logistics of the task prevent her from imbuing the material with her own voice.

Hershman Leeson's engagement with biotechnology is yet another iteration of a message often found in her work: your body is already not you. In *Room of One's Own* (1990-93), a woman sneers at the camera: "Who are you? Go look at your own life, don't look at me." She makes the viewer a voyeur and the avatar of Hershman Leeson's problem: what does it mean to make high-tech artworks with the tools of patriarchal violence? Technologies of representation can disrupt the machinations of trauma, and vice versa, but relations of domination remain. Amid the claustrophobia of some of Hershman Leeson's arrangements, technology's inevitable tending toward obsolescence can seem like a gleeful bid for escape.

-Hannah Black

Courtney Fiske, "Critics' Pick: Lynn Hershman Leeson", Artforum, February 27, 2015, http://artforum.com/picks/id=50426.

ARTFORUM

New York

Lynn Hershman Leeson

BRIDGET DONAHUE 99 Bowery, 2nd Floor February 19–April 5 2015

From 1974 to 1978, Lynn Hershman Leeson doubled as Roberta Breitmore. She rode the bus, signed a lease, and solicited encounters with strangers, whom she met by placing personal ads in San Francisco city newspapers. The performance was ongoing and, for the most part, unwitnessed, sporadically documented in photographs taken by private investigators under the artist's employ. "To me, she was my own flipped effigy: my physical reverse," Hershman Leeson has described. "Her life infected mine."

Concerns with duplication and bodily impurity organize Hershman Leeson's oeuvre, which here receives a retrospective gloss. The iteration at stake is almost always of the artist's self, rehearsed through the genre of self-portraiture and technological media (photography, video, Second Life, and so forth) that are themselves duplicative. Again and again, Hershman Leeson calls us to the precarity of our status as subjects. Selfhood emerges as a sebaceous thing, slippery and secreted like so much glandular waste. It's work that feels proleptic, loosely 1990s even in its '70s moment.

A pair of C-prints, titled *Roberta and Blaine in Union Square*, 1975, frame Breitmore on a bench beside a middle-aged man, his face puffy and his hair pomade-slicked. The scene seems a filched view of some vague impropriety, the whole thing seedy and synthetic. Breitmore's outfit (platinum wig, prefab cardigan)



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Construction Chart Drawing*, **1973**, ink on gelatin silver print, 9 1/4 × 6 1/2".

heightens the effect, lending her the air of a department-store mannequin. Innervated by plastics, life, like the self, becomes alien, as indexed in Breitmore's incarnation as a telerobotic doll in *CybeRoberta*, 1996, which viewers can manipulate remotely. A nearby photograph, *Construction Chart Drawing*, 1973, finds Breitmore's face dissected, as if it were a cadaver. Tenuously organic, the artist's alter ego figures as a vacant (because partially mortified) site. Mediated and surveilled, Hershman Leeson is perpetually elsewhere.

- Courtney Fiske

Randy Kennedy, "Art: Technology and the Split Self", The New York Times, February 15, 2015, AR4.

The New York Times

THE WEEK AHEAD

A SURVEY OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE



ART TECHNOLOGY AND THE SPLIT SELF

RANDY KENNEDY

The philosopher Isaiah Berlin once described David Hume's idea of the self as a pure fiction, "a name for the concatenation of experiences out of which human personality and human history were formed, simply a kind of string which held together the onions, except that there was no string." For decades, the artist and filmmaker Lynn Hershman Leeson has been playing with this un-string, which technology has rendered all the more evanescent. Starting Thursday, a broad sweep of her unsettling work will inaugurate Bridget Donahue, a new gallery on the Lower East Side being opened by a longtime director at Gavin Brown's Enterprise, the West Village gallery. Ms. Donahue said she had been drawn to Ms. Hershman Leeson as a kind of prophet of "our cybernetic condition," through early interactive works that delved into artificial intelligence and surveillance and yearslong performances that blurred the line between acting and life. The show, "Origins of the Species," through April 5, will span from the late 1960s to recent work exploring the implications of genetic manipulation. (99 Bowery, 2nd floor; bridgetdonahue.nyc.)

From the "Phantom Limb" Series by Lynn Hershman Leeson Hilton Als, "Goings On About Town: Lynn Hershman Leeson", *The New Yorker*, March 10, 2015, http://www.newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town/art/lynn-hershman-leeson.

THE NEW YORKER

Art

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

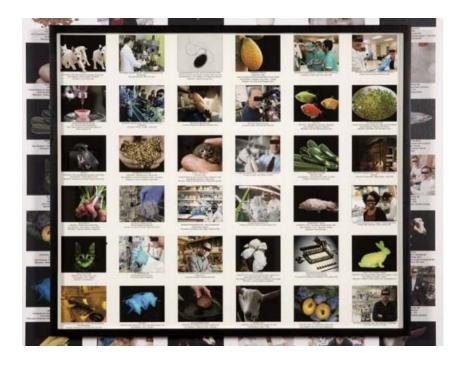
Since the nineties, the San Francisco-based artist has been best known as the director of some very distinctive films starring Tilda Swinton. But before Leeson trained her lens on the indomitable star she turned it on herself. In 1974, she created an alter ego named Roberta Breitmore, who had her own bank account, drivers license, and credit cards. It was a private performance without an audience, which was one of Leeson's points: Was a woman ever really known to anyone but herself? Now that the artist is getting the attention she deserves (a major museum survey just opened in Germany), we are treated to this loose retrospective, which delights with its idiosyncrasies and philosophical strengths. In addition to Leeson's looking-glass feminism, there's an abiding interest in science and the environment, real-world concerns that she renders both otherworldly and strangely familiar in five decades' worth of paintings, collages, and sculptural tableaux that reject signature style in favor of a wide-ranging and fantastic realism. Through April 5.

February 18 - April 5, 2015

"Exhibitions: Lynn Hershman Leeson", Art in America, February 27, 2015, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/exhibitions/lynn-hershman-leeson.



EXHIBITIONS THE LOOKOUT



Lynn Hershman Leeson

at Bridget Donahue, through April 5, 2015 99 Bowery, 2nd floor

When a young dealer opens a gallery downtown you'd expect her to show artists from among her peers, but Bridget Donahue makes a big statement with her first show-a mini-retrospective of Lynn Hershman Leeson. In recent years, the New York and San Francisco-based artist has drawn increasing attention for her decades of perennially fresh encounters between technologies and bodies. Her last New York show was in 2008 at bitforms, which specializes in new media. Yet Donahue's current presentation is grandly quiet in its focus on the old. It includes a scratched painting from the '60s, along with photographs and performance documents reflecting the artist's interest in the female body as an object of surveillance and voyeurism. New wallpaper bearing images of genetically modified organisms suggests the internalization of tech, while a projection that one must peer inside a black-box installation to see bends the viewer's body to the artist's will.

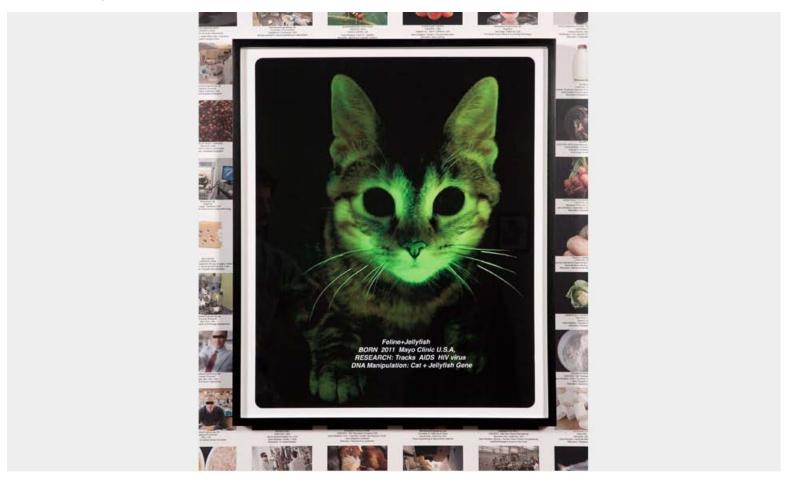
Noelle Bodick, "Lynn Hershman Leeson and the Art of Genetic Experimentation", *Blouin Artinfo*, March 3, 2015, http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/1110302/lynn-hershman-leeson-and-the-art-of-genetic-experimentation.

BLOUINARTINFO

VISUAL ARTS / GALLERIES / ARTICLE

Lynn Hershman Leeson and the Art of Genetic Experimentation

BY NOELLE BODICK | MARCH 03, 2015



Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Glo Cat (The Infinity Engine)," 2013, currently on view at Bridget Donue. (©Lynn Hershman Leeson/Courtesy Bridget Donahue, NYC/ Photo by Marc Brems Tatti)

To exhibit genetically modified fish that glow like tiny electric bulbs, Germany's ZKM Center of Art had to register as an operational genetics laboratory. State regulators come daily to take stock of the fish tank, just one of the hundreds of artworks fusing nature and technology in Lynn Hershman Leeson's current retrospective.

While this strict regulation reflects the wariness with which Germany approaches genetic experimentation — in New York City, by contrast, the jellyfish-gene fish are sold in pet shops — a laboratory does in fact feel like an appropriate venue in which to consider the work of Hershman Leeson, 73, who started making unlikely alliances between art and science well before the trendy millennial artists today.

In the 1960s, she invented wax-faced breathing machines and female cyborg drawings. Most famously, in the 1970s, she performed as Roberta Breitmore, a blonde avatar in possession of a credit card, apartment, and even a shrink. She continued her transformative experiments in identity in the '80s, mashing-up celebrity pictures (David Bowie and Audrey Hepburn, for instance), resulting in Frankensteinian progeny. Most recently, she has been producing a sci-fi film trilogy starring Tilda Swinton, while also interviewing experts on genetic biology for her "Infinity Engine," an art installation that will reenact some of the current-day experiments in genetics.

Given her work's relevance today and her prolific output, it's surprising to learn that two-thirds of the work at the ZKM retrospective, titled "Civic Radar" (through April 6), and at her new show at Bridget Donahue in New York, "Origin of the Species" (through April 5), is being shown to the public for the first time.

"[The art world] couldn't hear me — that's why I have an ear in there," she said in an interview, laughing, referring to a bioprinted human ear scaffold in the show at Bridget Donohue (more on that later). Today, it seems that we are finally ready to listen to her prescient voice, which is neither alarmist nor optimistic about technology's encroachment into our daily lives — and our bodies.

"I think technology can go either way, and it is up to us to determine as artists how we shift that to something positive," she told ARTINFO before speaking last week at a Sunday Session Panel at PS1, which touched on these themes.

At the talk, Hershman Leeson considered the dilemmas we face in our sci-fi-like present — a present, she described, as ethically unresolved. While the US experiments with regenerative tissue for wounded soldiers, for instance, Israel is developing microchips to erase traumatic memories. And while scientists strive to discover better medical treatment, corporations are looking to patent genes, threatening to reinforce current economic inequalities in healthcare.

But Hershman Leeson trains a neutral gaze, not unlike a scientist. (The artist herself studied biology in college. She sided with art, she said, because she "just always made things.") Her current inquiries into genetics began a few years ago, when she visited the Wake Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine in Northern California. There, she witnessed synthetic organisms coming out of a printer, beating and alive. "What is this thing?" she remembered thinking. But then, she realized, "This is a photographic process," one that she could appropriate in her art.

In a corner of Bridget Donahue, one such printed body part, an acrylic ear, hovers inside a translucent cube. Nearby, bright wallpaper expands across the gallery wall, showing dozens of images of genetically modified organisms — from a spider-goat crossing made in 2002 to a cat modified with a jelly-fish gene to glow green, like the fish at ZKM. It looks like a massive Google image search for "GMOs." She called these genetic manipulations the ultimate form of surveillance — but quickly added that it, of course, saves lives, too.

"You can swallow cameras, you can take pills that will track parts of your body. And they can track where you are and what is happening to your bloodline without you being aware of it," she said.

It is not the first time the artist has considered this tension between technology and privacy. In "Room of One's Own," 1990-93, on view at Bridget Donahue, a voice confronts the viewer as she approaches the boxy contraption: "Why are you here? Who are you? What are you doing?" it asks as you press your face to the peephole. Inside sits miniature dollhouse furniture and a screen showing a woman's eyes staring back. Meanwhile, a video screen captures your own eyes looking onto another screen, turning you into a double voyeur.

"Stop looking at me. Go look at your own eyes," the disembodied voice continues, sounding a warning.

But just as she instructs you to avert your gaze, the more you may wish to look. Do you stare into the glowing light, or turn away?

Karen Archey, "Exhibition Tour: Lynn Hershman Leeson's 'Civic Radar' at ZKM", e-flux, February 25, 2015, http://conversations.e-flux.com/t/exhibition-tour-lynn-hershman-leesons-civic-radar-at-zkm/1027.

e-flux conversations

Exhibition Tour: Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Civic Radar" at ZKM

Karen Archey



Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Shower," Film Still from Teknolust, 2002

While the list of under-recognized female artists is a very, very long one, it seems particularly urgent to cast light on the work of American artist Lynn Hershman Leeson. Hershman Leeson's oeuvre spans just about every medium-performance, collage, drawing, painting, filmmaking, video, installation, and most importantly, new media, for which she has made invaluable contributions to the field. Active since the 1960s, she and has

long been thought as an artist making work before her time. Hershman Leeson's work has touched on topics such as the politics of biotechnology, the cyborg, surrogate and fractured identity, feminism, government surveillance, and more. The artist even unexpectedly touts a long-running collaboration with actress Tilda Swinton, who is featured in many of her films. For you New Yorkers, there's an all-day series of events and panels at MoMA PS1 this Sunday 2/22 (where yours truly will also be speaking).

I recently toured "Civic Radar," Hershman Leeson's massive retrospective curated by Peter Weibel and Andreas Beitin at ZKM in Karlrsruhe, and happily got to see much of the artist's work. Check out some of my favorite works below.



Installation View from "Lorna" 1979–1982

Kathy Noble, "The Alternating Realities of Lynn Hershman Leeson", Mousse Magazine, February 13, 2015, 152-165

THE ALTERNATING REALITIES

MOUSSE 47 FEBRUARY 2015



Roberta going off with preacher, 1975. Courtesy: Bridget Donahue, New York

LOST AND FOUND

BY KATHY NOBLE

OF LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

Lynn Hershman Leeson's work is an incessant exploration of the nature of consciousness and its extension via technology. The way we communicate and form relationships inside a network of social and institutional ties are two of the themes of the artist's research approached by Kathy Noble in anhaustive overview of her versatile output, from the early pieces to the production of feature-length films featuring Tilda Swinton, starting in the 1900s, on themes like identity, cloning and feminist politics.

"Tell me your first memory... I'm anxious to get to know you..."
[1] she said in a breathy lilt, as I stood

1. Text from the audio component of *Self Portrait As A Blonde*, 1967, Lynn Hershman Leeson.

directly in front of her. "What was your first sexual experience, can you remember? I would like you to tell me about it in detail..." she asked: I am instantly transported back to my fourteen year old self. "I feel really close to you... I am so glad I have got to know you... I want to know you better... What are you afraid of? What do you hear in your head at night?" I hear the call of death every night, I think to myself. "Have you ever been in love? With whom? Did they love you back?" Yes. With multiple people. They said they did, but how can I ever truly know? "Talk to me. Tell me everything about yourself. Don't hold back..."

Lynn Hershman Leeson's Self-Portrait As A *Blonde* (1967)—from which these questions emanate, as heard by the viewer standing in front of the work activating a sensor—takes the form of a wax cast of her face, topped with a blonde wig, displayed in a vitrine with a tape recorder underneath. It is part of a series of sculptures that Hershman Leeson made in the mid-1960s whilst living in Los Angeles; there she took evening classes and learned to cast—using her own face because it was the most easily accessible. She created a series of casts in different colours—which wore a variety of wigs, while some talked or breathed when their sensor was activated—to show in an exhibition at University of California's Berkeley Art Museum entitled "Completed Fragments". This was a response to protests regarding the less than half of one percent representation of women in the museum's programme. Prior to installation, the museum's director Peter Selz asked Hershman Leeson not to include these sculptures, but only to show her drawings: the artist stood her ground and installed the works as she had originally planned. However, she returned to the exhibition days later to find that the works had been removed, and was told by the curator Brenda Richardson that "sound does not belong in the museum".

2. Pamela Lee, *Genealogy in Wax*, catalogue for "Civic Radar" exhibition, to be published by ZKM in Spring 2015

In 1967 it was not unheard of for sound and video works to be shown in institutions and galleries—for example, Jean Tinguely's Homage to New York was shown at MoMA, New York, in 1960, a self-destructing sculpture-cum-performance involving various elements of sound. As such, what was considered to be so offensive, disturbing, or unwanted, in these audio-sculptures that they needed to be removed? The wax casts of the artist's face are eerily disturbing—recalling both mummies and death masks—but that is also part of their power. However, the act of communication that occurs creates an extremely intimate relationship between object and viewer: the inanimate object comes alive, as if it has its own consciousness, and thus in that moment, I did feel as if I were having an active relationship with her. Regardless of their "failure", they are an extremely important moment in Hershman Leeson's life as an artist, and arguably sowed the seeds for much that followed. How we communicate and form relationships with others, with society, or for that matter, with ourselves, alongside how our being and consciousness exists, in different forms, within the network of institutional and social relations, via bodies and technology, underpins much of what Hershman Leeson has made over the last six decades.

This act of dismissal or refusal by the institution influenced Hershman Leeson to conceive her first sitespecific work, The Dante Hotel (1973-74), which proved to be the first of many activities that took place in the "real" world. She rented a hotel room at the Dante Hotel in San Francisco and installed two replicas of bodies in the bed, their faces made of casts, one white and one black, the room scattered with a fictional woman's possessions, as "artefacts" of her existence there, including glasses, tampons and nail polish, alongside a wall drawing and a series of 24 images of the wax woman on the bed, accompanied by a soundtrack comprised of Molly Bloom's soliloquy from James Joyce's Ulysses whispered from the closet, and the chorus of Elton John's Rocket Man from a radio. [3] Visitors could visit the room at any time of day, and the news of

3. Jeffrey T. Schnapp, *(No) Vacancy*, catalogue for "Civic Radar" exhibition, to be published by ZKM in Spring 2015.

the existence of the works spread by word of mouth—until the exhibition was shut down when a frightened visitor believed the body was a corpse and called the police.

Hershman Leeson began to imagine a life for the fictional person who had inhabited the Dante Hotel room. So Roberta Breitmore was born—or perhaps more accurately emerged slowly into the world, as Hershman Leeson did not purposefully plan her "life" in advance. Breitmore's psychology and physical persona were slowly developed as Hershman Leeson literally "lived" through different situations and interactions dressed and performing as Breitmore, such as going to charity shops, traveling around the city, visiting bars. Breitmore was inserted into the institutional network of our existence by obtaining a

driver's license, a checking account, and a credit card, seeing a psychiatrist, and placing personal ads in newspapers seeking friendship, to which she received genuine replies, displayed as part of the artwork *Roberta Breitmore* (1973-79). The work now consists of the paraphernalia of Roberta's life, a video of the artist becoming her alter-ego, a series of photographs of Roberta with drawings, lines and notes on them, alongside correspondence and ephemera—the psychiatrist's records which describe her as fitting the criteria for borderline personality disorder and schizophrenia. After several worrying experiences in her interactions via the personal ads—which advertised for friendship—Hershman Leeson decided to clone Breitmore and sent three different women out into the world dressed and behaving as her.

Roberta Breitmore has been readily compared to the later work of Cindy Sherman and Laurie Simmons, and also considered in the context of Hershman Leeson's peers Eleanor Antin and Suzanne Lacy, who both performed as fictional characters: Antin as the ballet dancer *Eleanor Antinova* and Lacy as *The Baq Lady*. However, in contrast to these staged personae, Hershman Leeson quite literally became Breitmore, inserting her new persona into the structures of lived reality, leaving a footprint via her records, and having "real" relationships with those she chose to encounter, thus creating a sentient being with a history. The network of physical and psychological evidence of Breitmore's existence is extremely prescient in relationship to Hershman Leeson's later works that use technology in different forms to create multiple versions of a character, such as Lorna (1979-84) and Deep Contact (1989), not unlike a younger generation of artists working today, such as Ed Atkins, Cécile B. Evans and Jordan Wolfson, who fuse "real" and "virtual" worlds to play with the disjuncture between lived experience and fiction.

"A Cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction. The international women's movements have constructed 'women's experience', as well as uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression and so of possibility. The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion." [4]

4. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto", Simians and Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature, Routeledge, 1990, p. 298.

Donna Haraway first published "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" thirty years ago in the *Socialist*

Review, in 1985. Haraway was working contemporaneously to Hershman Leeson, and presents several ideas that relate to aspects of the artist's output (Hershman Leeson has stated she first used the term "cyborg" in the 1960s, alongside making works that include "cyborg" in their titles) **[5]**. First, Haraway argues that rather than being controlled by technological

5. Interview online http://kubaparis.com/interview-lynn-hershman-lee-son/

advances, we—in particular women—must harness scientific and technological breakthroughs for political advancement of a form of socialist feminism. Second, Haraway's idea of fiction and lived experience existing simultaneously, and one affecting the other—in a blurring of science fiction and social reality—is one that Hershman Leeson has repeatedly considered. However, Haraway also imagines a somewhat utopian vision of a genderless world enabled by technology, something Hershman Leeson does not necessarily subscribe to, as her protagonists remain "female" in their characteristics, no matter how they are constructed to exist. Since The Cyborg Manifesto was written we have, of course, lived through the revolution of the Internet and its related technologies—a revolution whose reaches are still unknown.



Teknolust (still), 2002. Courtesy: the artist and Gallery Paule Anglim, San Francisco

At this point in the mid-1980s, Hershman Leeson was making several different series of works; first *The Electronic Diaries* (1983-88), and then the "Phantom Limb" series of images. She began making *The Electronic Diaries* as an exercise with which to learn how to make and edit video; and again, as when casting her face, she has stated that the easiest thing to do was to use herself as the subject. "I would sit in a room alone—again, I could not afford a cameraman, or an editor, or actors—so I just sat in a room and talked. And then watched how I witnessed myself talking, and I almost became another person, so fiction did blend

with reality. And I liked that, as things that were fictional often ended up seeming more real than the things that actually occurred. Although, to be honest, they are about 95 percent real." [6] In some ways, the camera

6. Unpublished interview by Kathy Noble with Lynn Hershman Leeson, 2014.

thus became an extension of her psyche, a kind of mirror of aspects of herself—and the ensuing performance of her history and of a construction of her consciousness became a blur of lived experience and fiction. This relates to the concurrently made "Phantom Limb" series, in that the latter works are comprised of images of women with cameras, and other technologies attached to their bodies, often replacing their heads. As such, the technology becomes a kind of metaphor for another form of consciousness and a form of surveillance of both the self and the exterior world. As such, Haraway's emphasis on the need to harness technology as a tool for political empowerment, versus its use as a form of controlling mechanism by the capitalist military industrial complex, seems implicit in both these series.

In the 1990s, Hershman Leeson embarked on a vet to be completed series of feature films starring Tilda Swinton as the lead character(s), the first of which was Conceiving Ada (1997), which tells the tale of Ada Lovelace, a mathematician who conceived the first computer algorithm, mixed with a dose of sci-fi fantasy. The second was *Teknolust* (2002), a beautifully magical creation in which Swinton plays multiple roles as clones of the main protagonist, bio-geneticist Rosetta Stone. Stone clones herself to create three "Self Replicating Automatons" named Ruby, Marine and Olive, after the digital rainbow. They need male sperm to survive, as they only have Stone's DNA, so Ruby is sent out into the world on dates, programmed to perform emotional interactions via the clichés of movies projected into her brain whilst she sleeps. Teknolust draws on many of Hershman Leeson's earlier explorations of identity, personhood, cloning, cyborgs, feminist politics and the communication we use to form relationships, in particular on how this is all intrinsically shaped via society and culture. To be conscious is to forever be in the present: yet what Hershman Leeson's work suggests is that we, in fact, live simultaneously in the past, present and future, and thus we embody multiple experiences and identities: all the selves we could be, all the selves we have been, all the selves we have failed to be and all the selves we will never be. Her work could be seen as an on-going exercise in addressing the nature of this consciousness and, in particular, its extension via technologies, which in turn proposes that this consciousness, in part, is defined by our communications and relationships to ourselves and one another. However, not even Hershman Leeson can predict what will happen to our digital selves—are they forever to be stuck in limbo, like zombies floating around in a black hole of data?

William J. Simmons, "Lynn Hershman Leeson", Frieze Magazine 169 (2015), February 16, 2015, http://frieze.com/issue/review/lynn-hershman-leeson/.

frieze

Lynn Hershman Leeson

Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie

An important precursor of the Pictures Generation, Lynn Hershman Leeson has been left out of traditional accounts of conceptual photography. Her retrospective at Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) has finally injected much-needed momentum into this staid discourse. Entitled 'Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar', and curated by Peter Weibel and Andreas Beitin, the exhibition spans the length of Hershman Leeson's career, from the early 1960s to the present. This massive but meticulous and intelligently organized show brings hundreds of objects into a single space – presenting a beautifully vibrant archive that never feels dated. Hershman Leeson's career has encompassed performance, photography, film and painting – work that has often prefigured the projects of other artists.

Discussions of Photo-Conceptualism have changed little since curator Douglas Crimp's initial manifesto for the movement-defining 'Pictures' exhibition at Artists Space, New York, in 1977, in which he concluded that 'underneath each picture is always another picture'. After viewing Hershman Leeson's retrospective, we cannot repeat the same truisms about the construction of identity and the constant citation of the image. Something different is happening here: for Hershman Leeson, behind each body is always another body, in a strange dance of presence and absence.

For example, in the 1973–79 'Roberta Breitmore' series, Hershman Leeson lived as an imagined woman named Roberta, starting some years before Cindy Sherman created her *Untitled Film Stills* (1977–80). During the six-year span of the project, Hershman-Leeson-as-Roberta got a driver's

About this review

Published on 16/02/15 By William J. Simmons



Shower, still from the film *Teknolust*, 2002

license, was psychoanalyzed, opened a bank account and interviewed potential roommates for an apartment share. Hershman Leeson meticulously documented the scenes, clothes, objects and paperwork involved in this performance and, in doing so, summoned a human being into existence from photographic evidence. Inviting other women to act as surrogates, Hershman Leeson produced a number of iterations of Roberta, until the character was ritually exorcized on Lucrezia Borgia's grave at the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara in 1978.

In the photograph Roberta's Replacement At Her Temp Job After She Was Fired (1978), a nameless woman has replaced Roberta, herself a fiction, producing the effect of a double absence. Hershman Leeson's signature crosses slightly onto the edge of the silver gelatin print, as if to ground the imagined situation in the real via the corporeality of the artist's hand. The piece marks an oscillation between embodiment (the body of the woman who replaces Roberta) and disembodiment (the absent Roberta who, in turn, has already replaced Hershman Leeson). Similarly, another photograph, Roberta Contemplating Suicide on the Golden Gate Bridge (1978) reminds us of the importance of the (specifically female) body to the discourse of Postmodernism. We see Roberta from behind, standing near the edge of San Francisco's iconic bridge. The moment is charged with the potential for a body to hurl towards the water, but whose body – Hershman Leeson's or Roberta's?

Such explorations of photography and performance reach a pinnacle in Hershman Leeson's most recent project, The *Infinity Engine* (2013–ongoing): a functional replica genetics lab that explores the limits of Postmodern insights into identity in light of developments in regenerative medicine. bio-printing and DNA programming. Created in collaboration with a team of scientists working in the fields of synthetic biology and bioelectronics, the lab has created a flesh-like human nose using biological print technology and interactive facial-recognition software that attempts to predict the viewer's DNA profile. This work suggests ways in which we can copy bodies through images, as well as the potential realization of the Postmodern vision of endless citation – a future free of bodies and populated instead with discursive chimera. But Hershman Leeson also uses The *Infinity Engine* to ask whether this is a world we want: in which we become a series of bodies-cum-photographs and photographs-cum-bodies. This may be the limit of the Pictures Generation – the final coalescence of art and life – but to what end?

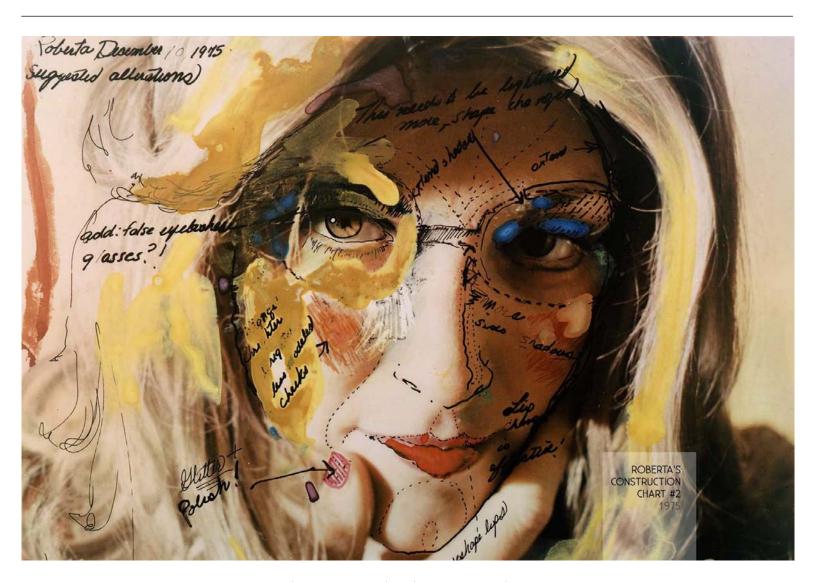
William J. Simmons

Zachary Kaplan, "Origins: Lynn Hershman Leeson in NYC", Rhizome, February 19, 2015, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2015/feb/19/origins-lynn-hershman/.

RHIZOME

Origins: Lynn Hershman Leeson in NYC

ZACHARY KAPLAN | Thu Feb 19th, 2015 1:43 p.m.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, Roberta's Construction Chart #2, 1975

The sophistication and prescience of Lynn Hershman Leeson's decades-long engagement with identity under networked conditions, bioengineering, surveillance, and on becomes more evident with each year (and its attendant tech, genetic splices, and corporate and governmental intrusions). Gratifyingly, then, 2015 promises the continued run of the artist's retrospective at ZKM |

Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe, with its forthcoming comprehensive monograph, and, opening tonight, a solo presentation:

Long before the digital revolution and the virtualization of everyday life, Lynn Hershman Leeson created surrogate personas to investigate relationships between humans and technology, and the media's potential as a tool to counter censorship and political repression. *Origins of the Species* traces these prophetic concerns in works that span from 1968 to 2014, including photography, collage, sculpture, and interactive installations. The exhibition maps Hershman Leeson's early gestures toward the split self, her notion of "Self Portrait as Another Person" exercises, and her parsing of the double bind of voyeurism and surveillance that has, in recent decades, become increasingly fraught.

Alongside this solo, Hershman Leeson will convene this Sunday at MoMA PS1 in a panel called "The Future of Humanity":

In an era of programmable DNA when human organs can be printed and banked, limbs regenerated and new life forms created daily, who will have the power to make decisions that affect us all? Will wealth alone determine who benefits from biological engineering? What will it mean to be human?

Participants include Karen Archey, Aimee Mullins, Oron Catts, Melissa Logan, Patricia Maloney, Luke Massella, Aimee Mullins, Keith Murphy, Anicka Yi, and Dr. Josiah P. Zayner.

You'll see us out at both—this kind of focused, thematic presentation with temporal breadth, as represented by the solo exhibition and its concurrent public program, seems particularly urgent at a moment when Silicon Valley, and its adherents worldwide, seem committed to a confused "posthuman."