



Constructing Roberta Breitmore  
Lynn Hershman Leeson, 1975  
① Lighten with Dior eyestick light. ② "Peach Blush" Cheekcolor by Revlon. ③ Brown contour makeup by Coxy. ④ Shape lips with brush, fill in with "Date Mate" scarlet. 5. Blond wig. ⑥ Ultra Blue eye-shadow by Max Factor. ⑦ Maybelline Black liner top and bottom. ⑧ \$7.98 three piece dress. ⑨ Creme Brûlée liquid makeup by Artmatic.

## PROGRAMS

**OPENING NIGHT PARTY**  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 7-10PM  
GRAND LOBBY & DOWNSTAIRS GALLERIES  
\$12 advance / \$15 door / Members FREE

**TECHNO REVERIES AND ALTER EGOS:  
THE FILMS OF LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON**  
SATURDAYS, MARCH 4 THROUGH 25, 2PM  
SCREENING ROOM / \$10

**!WOMEN ART REVOLUTION** (2010, 83 min, digital)  
**TEKNOLUST** (2002, 82 min, digital)  
**CONCEIVING ADA** (1997, 85 min, digital)  
**STRANGE CULTURE** (2007, 75 min, digital)

**LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON IN  
CONVERSATION WITH ELEANOR COPPOLA,  
MODERATED BY AMELIA JONES**  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15, 7 PM  
SCREENING ROOM / \$10

**CIVIC RADAR BOOK DISCUSSION WITH  
B. RUBY RICH AND PEGGY PHELAN,  
MODERATED BY ELIZABETH THOMAS**  
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 7 PM  
SCREENING ROOM / \$10

**TANIA LIBRE SCREENING**  
PLEASE CHECK YBCA.ORG FOR SCREENING  
DATES AND TIMES.

This film documents the personal and emotional fallout of artist Tania Bruguera's unjust detentions through sessions with psychiatrist Dr. Frank Ochberg, one of the founding fathers of modern psycho-traumatology.

Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Roberta's Construction Chart*, 1975. Hess Art Collection. Image courtesy the artist.

Cover image:  
Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Twins*, 2003. Courtesy the artist.

*Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar* is curated by Peter Weibel and Andreas Beutin, and organized by ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe. The presentation at YBCA is organized by Lucía Sanromán, Director of Visual Arts, YBCA.



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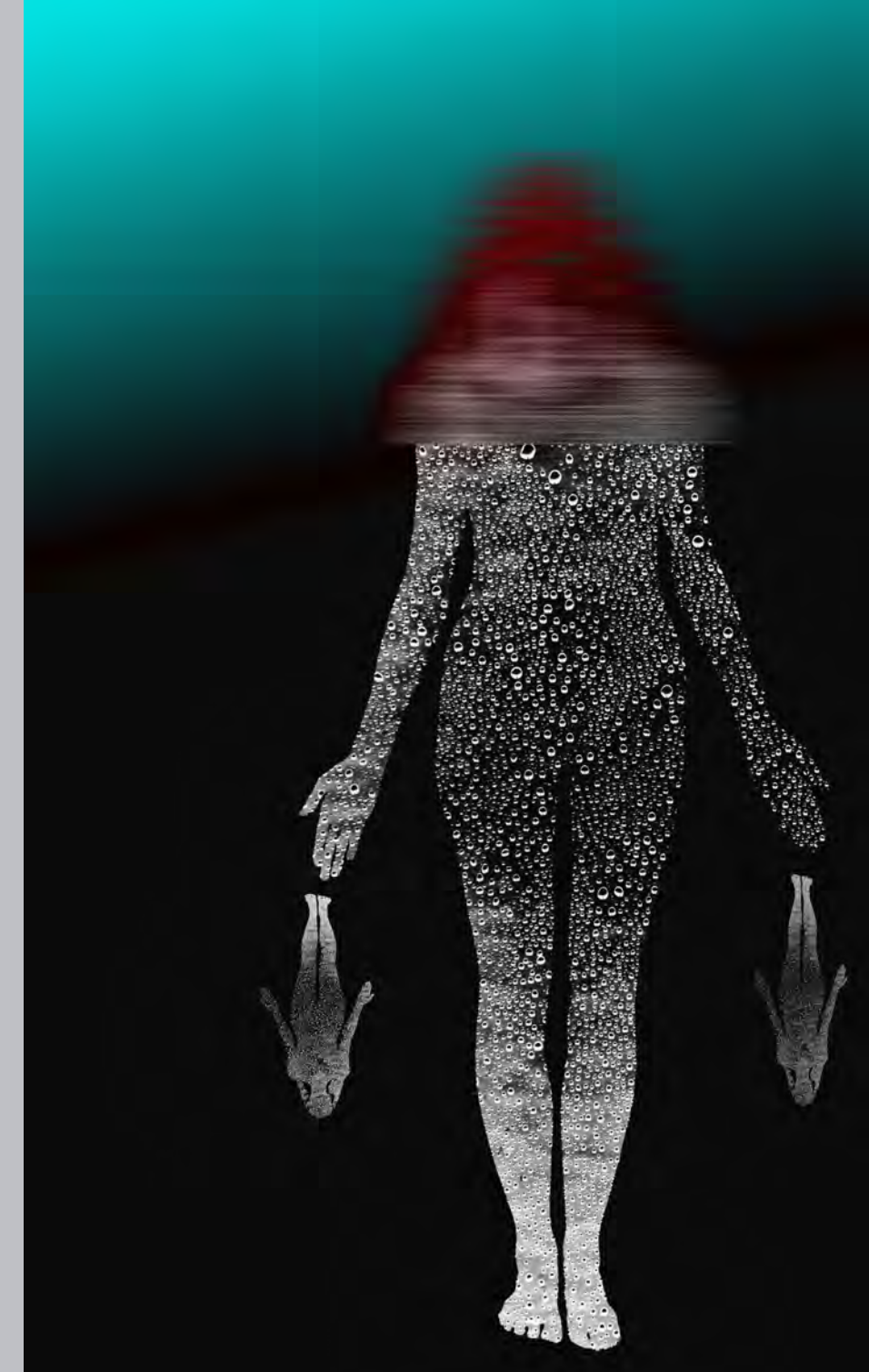


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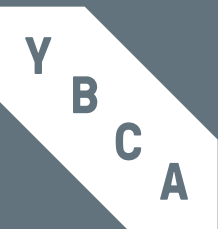


FEB 10-  
MAY 21, 2017

DOWNSTAIRS  
GALLERIES

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#LYNNHERSHMANLEESON

**LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON:  
CIVIC RADAR**



## HOU HANRU: INTERVIEW WITH LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

**HOU HANRU:** Let’s start from the beginning. What made you decide to become an artist and choose to work with new technology?

**LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON:** I was always, from the time I was two or three, writing, painting, and drawing. It’s in my nature. At a certain point in my life, I thought it was equivalent to breathing; it was how I survived. While I was growing up in Cleveland, I visited the Cleveland Museum of Art every day. Looking at that great collection was, for me, a way of breathing. Later, I was interested in not competing with history but in creating something new, something that didn’t exist before.

**HH:** What was the context at the time? What was the relationship then between technology and the way people lived their everyday lives?

**LHL:** It was the 1960s. Even then, there was massive surveillance of Americans. But it wasn’t in the public consciousness. People didn’t have computers in those days. The media was omnipresent and assumed to be omniscient, too—as was advertising, which imposed identities based on commercially driven and idealized archetypes.

**HH:** Were there new aesthetic languages invented through the influence of media and technology? What was the first generation for this expression?

**LHL:** The Media Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and its Aspen Project were clear precedents for Google Maps—that is, for information sharing and location mapping. Many of the works that were produced there were also, of course, predecessors of social media, as means of making connections and enabling interaction, making it possible for a user to talk back, to have a conversation, with the technology.

**HH:** So interaction was really the core concern at the time?

**LHL:** Interaction is politically important. It

was acknowledged then as being essential for empowerment on a mass scale.

**HH:** Yes, even in terms of music. Rock ’n’ roll broke the barrier between the stage and the audience. Do you see media art as part of this cultural avant-garde?

**LHL:** It continued the dialogue, using the tools of that time to magnify the possibilities for cultural change. Back then, when we were still in the electronic age, media art exploited an electronic force to extend it.

**HH:** So from the very beginning you saw art as giving you room to breathe—as a part of your life and your body. Then you discovered the possibility of extending this breathing room into the world of technology, the cyber world. At the time, did you feel that the cyber culture would be the future of human life?

**LHL:** Always, yes. And I made objects as far back as 1957 that resembled cyborgs. The word wasn’t even coined until 1960, by the biologists Manfred Clynes and Nathan Klein, but I was making robotic figures with organic features nonetheless. In high school, I used the very first Xerox machines to manipulate wrinkled images of bodies: they would go through the machine and come out in a different way.

**HH:** One could also say that a lot of your work has to do with questioning not only your personal identity but also that of human beings in general. At a certain point, you decided to question your body and to invent another kind of identity, an avatar. You created a parallel image of yourself, a new persona.

**LHL:** Of course, I wasn’t the first to do that. Several other people did it before me—Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, and Joseph Beuys, for example, but they did it theatrically or for a photograph while I extended it into a lived experience. *Roberta Breitmore* began as a tabula rasa but was fleshed out in time and through her encounters with real life. She reacted to things, and what happened in her life mirrored culture. She was both a political reflection and refraction, a kind of double helix.

**HH:** And do you see that work as having a strong political implication?

**LHL:** Totally political. Why do it otherwise?

**HH:** The fact that you invented this new identity poses a question about the identity of women in an age of such technological leaps, in the age of technology. How was this transposition connected to what’s happening in society?

**LHL:** Women artists didn’t have a history, and many artists, not just me, created identities or specific histories as corrections, imagining what such a history could eventually be. Roberta’s life was eventually archived as a testament to a history of censorship, repression, and other exclusionary practices that were foisted on particular gender or racial groups. As a reflective device, Roberta could shine a light on those dark, difficult times.

**HH:** How then were you personally connected to the feminist movement of the time? Did you have direct contact with activists in this circle and other artists who were working within it?

**LHL:** I never was part of a group. I worked outside of every system. It is easier to be a witness as an outsider.

**HH:** Did you work alone in your studio, how did you exhibit your work, and did you have a community?

**LHL:** I worked with great difficulty. Making art was something I had to do, compulsively. At first, I was able to exhibit my work by literally fabricating critics to write about me. In other words, I published articles about myself in *Flash Art* and *Studio International* to convince people to look at my work. Some people say it was dishonest, but exclusionary practices are also dishonest. The boundaries became like prisons. It’s not insignificant that around seventy percent of the works in the retrospective had never been seen before. People told me it wasn’t art.

**HH:** You’re fascinated and even dominated by the world of technology, the power of

technology. Do you feel yourself at once immersed in this world and trying to keep a distance from it?

**LHL:** I’m trying to be objective. There is really only so much from which you can distance yourself. You participate in your culture without knowing it. But still I am aware that as much as technology contributes to society, it also penetrates all aspects of life, robbing individual freedom and identity in a perverse and terrorizing manner.

**HH:** The revelations about the National Security Agency’s and another institutions’ surveillance of society has become a major controversy today. On the other hand, people are somehow feeling helpless. Some are indifferent, but many are feeling helpless as they face this power and control.

**LHL:** I think that people at this point have been trained from an early age to feel helpless. The education system teaches people not to be radical, not to have a voice, not to understand their power, and to not be unique. It is easier for a government to manage conformists. What other countries with the wealth America has would go this long without proper health care or education? Why hasn’t there been a major uprising about the shooting of an unarmed black teenager by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri? In the 1960s, people believed they could change things. Now there’s a culture of profound fear and denial, as well as a presumption and acceptance of helplessness.

**HH:** Society has celebrated the acceleration of technological progress for over fifty years now. Do you see this helplessness or indifference as contradictory? On the one hand, we are using technology in everything we do; on the other, we regret it because our critical capacity is reduced facing that power.

**LHL:** Absolutely. As we use technology, it also uses and surveys us. There is a double bind of voyeurism and surveillance. The most perverse type of surveillance is the biological tracking of our bodies. We will be watched not only externally but also internally—from the inside out.

**HH:** The way that you transform your own image in your work predicted this revolution. You have tried to invent for yourself an alternate persona. And that persona is often being mutilated as well.

**LHL:** Mutilated and mutated, simultaneously.

**HH:** Are you getting more optimistic, or the opposite?

**LHL:** You have to be optimistic about the advantages of technology—I have a desire for utopia, and I hope that the technology is used in an inspired way. I may be naive, but I think an awareness of both the dangers and the benefits can provide a method of survival in an enhanced and profound manner. I trust the younger generation.

**HH:** So, in that sense, technology could help?

**LHL:** It has already changed how candidates win elections. It has tremendous power in that it is the first language for young people. For my generation, it’s a second language. So people speak it differently.

**HH:** Another important medium for your work is film. You work not only with installation and video but also feature film, a medium common to science fiction?

**LHL:** Some of my films are related to science fiction. *Strange Culture* (2007) seems like science fiction. *Conceiving Ada* (1997) was based on real science, so was *Teknolust* (2002), and *The Infinity Engine* (2014) will be as well. I use interviews with scientists as the basis for the dialogue.

**HH:** You made *!Women Art Revolution* about your own generation of women artists. What is the relationship between you as an individual, independent artist and your context—that whole, changing context from the early days of 1970s feminism to today, as a political, social situation? Your film *Strange Culture* also tackles this question. How do you see the role of artists in the world?

**LHL:** Art for me has to be political. Why do it otherwise? I think that there is an opportunity in art to take risks, and it can therefore have tremendous resonance.

Women artists of my generation were courageous to participate in their culture by using social content, rather than just working with formalist issues. Of course, this tendency is not limited to women artists; many artists throughout history have had this impulse and will into the future.

*This text is excerpted from a longer conversation between Lynn Hershnan Leeson and Hou Hanru, Artistic Director, MAXXI | Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome. The full conversation, which took place August 23, 2014 in San Francisco, can be found in the Lynn Hershman Leeson: Civic Radar catalogue.*

## ARTIST BIO

Over the last five decades, artist and filmmaker Lynn Hershman Leeson has received international acclaim for her art and films. She is recognized for her innovative work investigating issues that are now recognized as key to the workings of society: the relationship between humans and technology, identity, surveillance, and the use of media as a tool of empowerment against censorship and political repression. She is considered one of the most influential media artists and has made pioneering contributions in photography, video, film, performance, installation, and interactive as well as net-based media art.

Her activist films on injustice within the art world and society at large have been praised worldwide. *!Women Art Revolution* won first prize in the Montreal Festival for Films on Art and was hailed by the Museum of Modern Art as one of the three best documentaries of 2012. Holland Cotter of the *New York Times* called it “the most comprehensive documentary ever made on the feminist art movement.” Her 2009 film *Strange Culture*—which the *New York Times* deemed “the perfect balance of form and content” and *The Nation* called “a brilliant and moving examination of fear and its manipulation”—resulted in the release of an artist facing a prison sentence of 23 years.