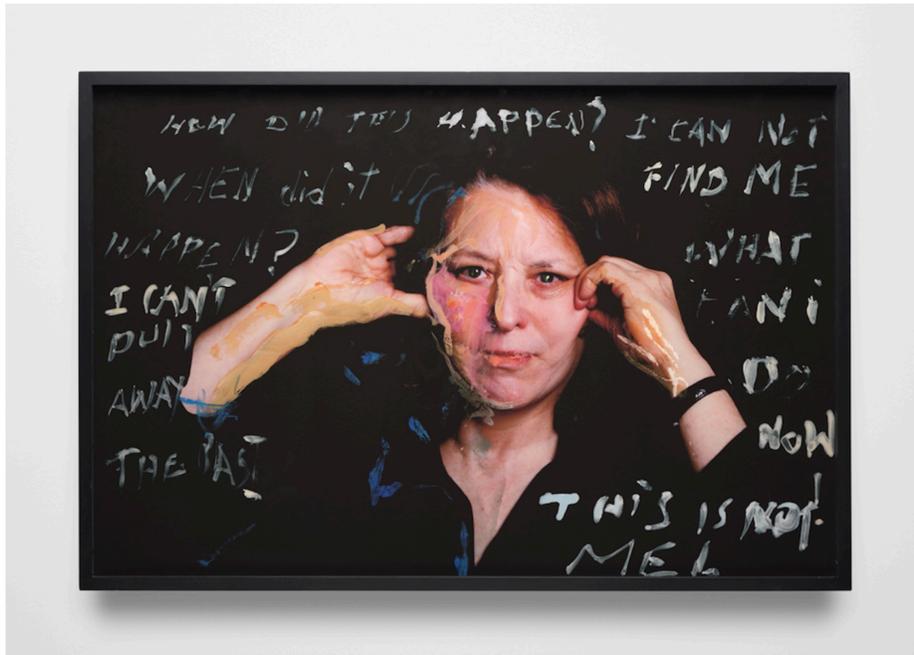


HYPERALLERGIC

Wilson, Emily, "Lynn Hershman Leeson Thinks It's Time That Her Work Is Recognized," *Hyperallergic*, April 11, 2022

Lynn Hershman Leeson Thinks It's Time That Her Work Is Recognized

"For years, I couldn't show my work, I couldn't get a gallery, and people in New York wouldn't pay attention to me," she says. "So I think I deserve it — just for not giving up if nothing else."



Lynn Hershman Leeson, "How Did This Happen?" (2012), archival digital print, 28 x 42 inches (all images courtesy the artist and Altman Siegel)

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SAN FRANCISCO — Lynn Hershman Leeson’s first solo exhibition at San Francisco’s Altman Siegel includes an old-fashioned metal lunchbox with a ceramic mouth inside; a digital print of a cat crossed with a jellyfish; digital prints of cyborgs; and stamps that the artist made with her image on them and sent out because, in her own words, “I wanted the government to cancel my face.”

Lynn Hershman Leeson: About Face features collages, paintings, drawings, sculptures, and videos from the last five decades of Lynn Hershman Leeson’s career. Reflecting on how the show came about, the artist describes how she kept seeing faces as she looked through her collection of work over the years — which makes sense, since so much of her work is about identity, along with other themes like erasure and time.

“You know, it’s like Duchamp said, that if you’re lucky you have three ideas in your lifetime. They’re all the same idea but they look different,” she said, laughing and adding that maybe she only has two ideas: “[one] using technology like sound and sensors, which is really where the AI in cyborgs comes from, and maybe the other one is about identity and loss of self and where the blur of reality ends and what makes something fiction.”



Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Reconstructing Roberta" (2005), digital print on aluminum, 39 3/4 x 29 5/8 inches

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This line blurring reality and fiction was the subject of one the artist's most important bodies of work: a five-year series revolving around the creation of the fictional character of Roberta Breitmore. Starting in 1973, Hershman Leeson performed Roberta Breitmore going about her daily tasks, such as getting a driver's license and apartment, or putting an ad in the newspaper for a roommate. Ways of altering your face and erasing your identity come up again and again in the show, such as in "Reconstructing Roberta" (2005), where marks on her face show where she will be getting Botox, an eyelid lift, and a dermabrasian peel, among other alterations.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Self Portrait as Another Person" (1965), wax, wig, glass eyes, makeup, tape recorder, Plexiglas, wood sensor, sound, 20 x 15 x 12 inches

Walking through the exhibition before sitting down for an interview, Hershman Leeson pauses in front of a wax head with a wig, sensors, and a tape recorder.

"This is a historic piece because it's really the first media work anybody ever did," she said. "You stand in front of it and if you listen, it talks to you. It was really about interaction and technology, but nobody had ever combined sound and interaction before, so nobody knew what it was."

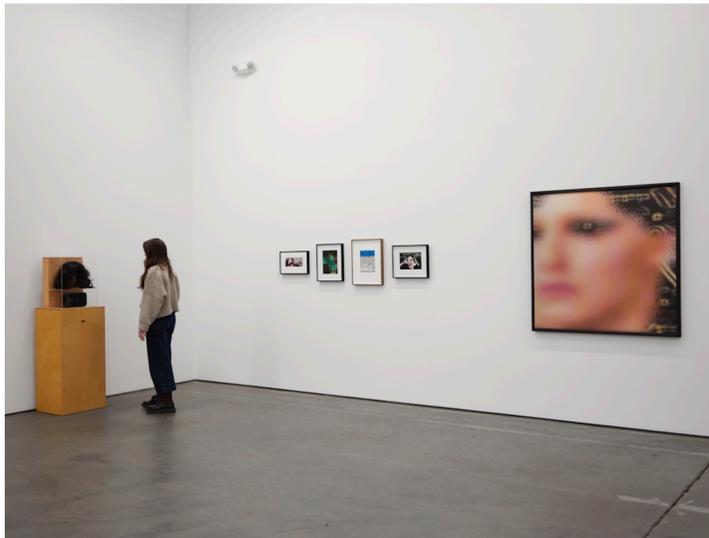
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This sculpture, “Self Portrait as Another Person” (1965), is from Hershman Leeson’s *Breathing Machines* series, which she made after developing respiratory problems while pregnant. The artist recorded her breathing and added the sound to the pieces, along with snippets of dialogue, like “What’s your name?” and “I want to know all about you.” Hershman Leeson submitted the piece to the Berkeley Art Museum at University of California, Berkeley in 1966 when invited to present work as part of a showcase of female artists. However, the *Breathing Machines* were met with such ire from the museum’s curator — who, put off by the disconcerting, breathing, and interrogatory sculptures, told the artist that sound wasn’t art — that the show closed a day after its opening. Though extreme, it is an example of the resistance that Hershman Leeson’s work met for decades.



Installation view of Lynn Hershman Leeson: *About Face* at Altman Siegel, San Francisco

Now, after years of feeling ignored, Lynn Hershman Leeson is finally receiving attention from the art world, with her practice combining art, technology, and performance often called ahead of its time (“The Artist is Prescient” was the headline of a [New York Times review](#) of her show last year). Her 2010 documentary, [!Women Art Revolution: A Secret History](#) on 40 years of the feminist art movement was selected by MOMA as one of the best documentaries of the year. In 2014, the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe in Germany mounted the first [major retrospective](#) of her work. Last year, she had her first [solo museum exhibition](#) at the New Museum in New York. And later this month, she will be presenting a new video at the Venice Biennial, “Logic Paralyzes the Heart,”(2022) about a 61-year-old cyborg.

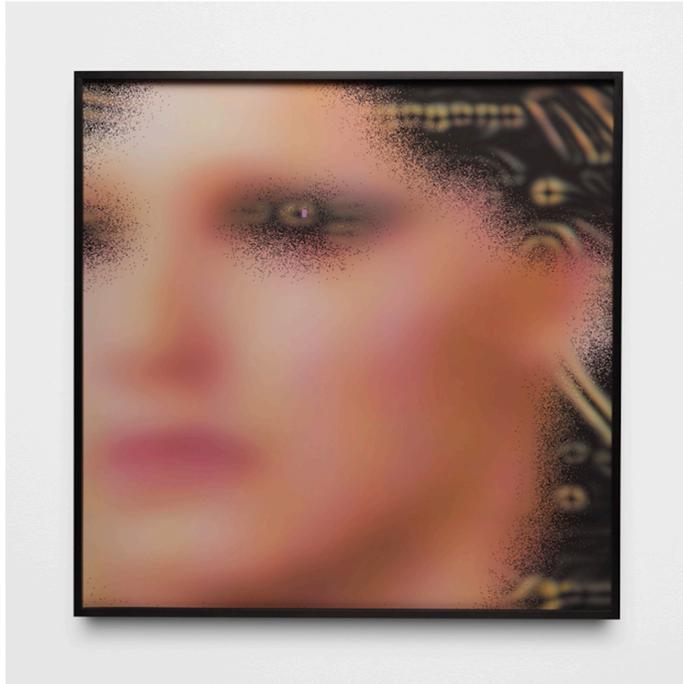
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Hershman Leeson thinks it's about time, as she has been making and doing things — such as exploring sensors, artificial intelligence, and cyborgs — that no one else was making or doing for decades. “For years, I couldn't show my work, I couldn't get a gallery, and people in New York wouldn't pay attention to me,” she says. “So I think I deserve it — just for not giving up if nothing else.”



Lynn Hershman Leeson, "Transgenic Cyborg" (2000), digital print, 49 x 48 3/4 inches