



Bravo, Tony, "SFMOMA acquires first-ever NFT among more than 60 works for permanent collection," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 13, 2023

ART & EXHIBITS

## SFMOMA acquires first-ever NFT among more than 60 other works for permanent collection

Tony Bravo | January 13, 2023 Updated: January 14, 2023, 11:08 am



Lynn Hershman Leeson's "Final Transformation #2, 2022" (gift of the artist and Altman Siegel gallery).  
Photo: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has entered the NFT game.

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Among its acquisition of 63 works of art for its permanent collection, the museum now has its first-ever non-fungible token by San Francisco artist [Lynn Hershman Leeson](#), titled “Final Transformation #2, 2022,” featuring actor Tilda Swinton, SFMOMA announced Thursday, Jan. 12.

In the art world, NFTs usually contain digital files including audio, visual, text or video elements created by artists. Leeson’s NFT’s content is in conversation with her 1997 feature film “Conceiving Ada,” starring Swinton as Countess Ada Lovelace, the author of the first computer algorithm. “Final Transformation #2, 2022” includes a video excerpt from the final scene of the film as well as an image related to Leeson’s multimedia installation “Infinity Engine,” which shows petri dishes containing DNA. The accompanying text to the image – “the redeeming gift of humanity is that each generation recreates itself” – comes from the film.

The NFT is an edition of two, the first of which Leeson created for SFMOMA’s [2022 Art Bash](#) auction. It was the artist’s first foray into the medium and was sold for \$9,000, benefitting the museum.



Lynn Hershman Leeson poses for a portrait March 4, 2022, outside of her exhibition “About Face” at Altman Siegel gallery in San Francisco.

Photo: Gabrielle Lurie / The Chronicle 2022

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NFTs became a major topic in the mainstream art conversation at the height of the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020 as many visual art experiences moved toward digital presentations due to pandemic-related closures. A 2021 report by NFT data company NonFungible.com and tech analysis firm L'Atelier BNP Paribas showed the NFT market trading increased by 21,000% to \$17.6 billion over \$82 million in 2020.

Many criticized the NFT market as a cynical money grab and overinflated bubble due for collapse. By May 2022, NonFungible.com reported sales of NFTs were down around 90% compared to its 2021 peak. The energy costs and carbon footprint of NFTs have also been criticized.

For her part, Leeson said she was asked to create the second NFT specifically for the museum's collection by Rudolf Frieling, SFMOMA's curator of media arts. Both NFTs were gifted by Leeson to the institution.

"Lynn is a towering figure and pioneering spirit in Bay Area art," Frieling told The Chronicle. "She is a role model for all contemporary artists as she has continuously reinvented and recreated her own artistic identity for over 50 years, always with a critical and yet hopeful approach to technologies. This work is a fitting addition to SFMOMA's holdings as we have collected objects in all of the mediums she has worked in over her expansive career."

In the spring of 2022, the installation "Room #8" (part of Leeson's "Infinity Engine" series) was part of the SFMOMA exhibition "Speculative Portraits" (curated by assistant curator of media arts Tanya Zimbardo) and is now in the museum's permanent collection.

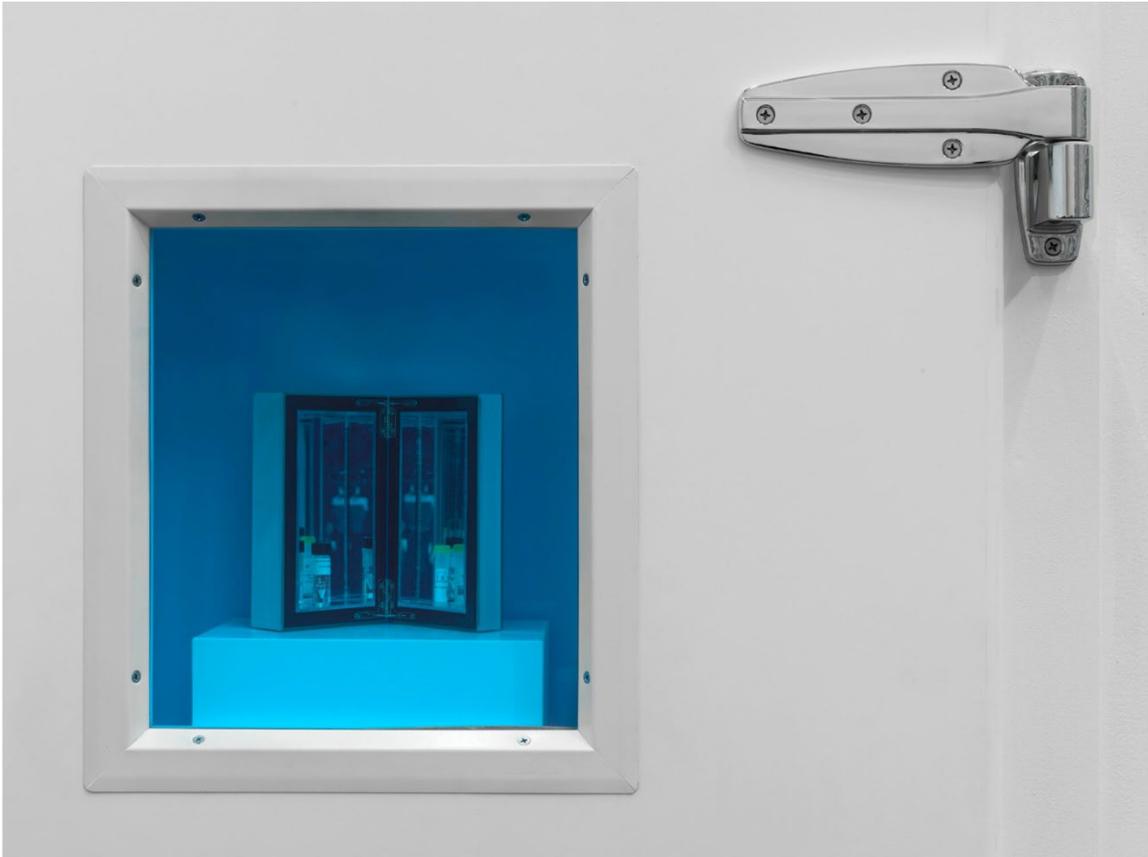
"Rudolf did my very first show in Berlin in the mid-1980s; he's seen the trajectory of what my work has been all these years," Leeson told The Chronicle. "He's one of the few curators that really looks to what new media is and what the new art forms are."

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“Room #8,” 2006-2018 by Lynn Hershman Leeson, seen in an installation view from the show “Twisted” at the New Museum in New York.

Photo: Dario Lasagni / New Museum

Leeson, 81, has been working in emerging technology-based media for five decades and was recognized last year at the Venice Biennale for her video installation “Logic Paralyzes the Heart,” featuring San Francisco actor Joan Chen as the world’s first cyborg, now experiencing an existential crisis 61 years after their creation.

But those hoping for more NFTs from Leeson are out of luck.

“I did this one in particular because Rudolf asked me to, but I doubt that I’ll be doing other ones,” said Leeson. “There are other projects I want to do more, and I don’t want to break my limited concentration.”

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Leeson is currently working on part four of her “Cyberborgian Rhapsody” in San Francisco, a film follow-up to “Logic Paralyzes the Heart,” with a script written by artificial intelligence.



Troy Lamarr Chew II, “Ask Ya Mama,” 2021; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Accessions Committee Fund purchase.

Photo: Troy Lamarr Chew II / SFMOMA

Among the others works acquired by SFMOMA are pieces by 18 artists not previously represented in the permanent collection. These include paintings and works on paper by Troy Lamarr Chew II, Derek Fordjour, Toyin Ojih Odutola and Maja Ruznic; photographs by Yolanda Andrade, Emi Anrakuji, Anthony Lepore and Tokuko Ushioda; an installation by Amalia Mesa-Bains; design works by Pentatonic and Peter Saville; sculpture by Iman Issa, Suki Seokyeong Kang and Minouk Lim; and media arts installations by Rosa Barba, Richard Mosse and New Red Order.

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The new multimedia installation “Of Whales” by Wu Tsang has been on view in the museum’s atrium since December.

The Bay Area artists represented in the acquisitions include artist and activist Yolanda López; painter and musician Mike Henderson; photographer Alice Wong; and mixed-media artists Sergio De La Torre and Chris Treggiari of the Sanctuary City Project, and Susan O’Malley.

SFMOMA Director [Christopher Bedford](#) said in a statement that the acquisitions represent “an incredible range of artistic vision and capture SFMOMA’s commitment to collecting works by artists from the region and across the globe.”



Yolanda López, “Self-Portrait, from the series Three Generations: Tres Mujeres, 1975-76,” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Accessions Committee Fund purchase.

Photo: Yolanda López / SFMOMA