

OBSERVER

Duray, Dan, “One Fine Show: Lynn Hershman Leeson’s ‘Of Humans, Cyborgs and AI’ at the Nevada Museum of Art,” *Observer*, June 13, 2025



“Of Humans, Cyborgs, and A.I.” brings together Hershman Leeson’s recent video works, which confront the ethical confusion of the digital age with wry precision. Courtesy of the artist, Altman Siegel, San Francisco, and Bridget Donahue, New York

Welcome to One Fine Show, where Observer highlights a recently opened exhibition at a museum not in New York City, a place we know and love that already receives plenty of attention.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that Cleveland rocks. We may never know the extent of the irony in Ian Hunter’s eponymous song—from the 1979 album *You’re Never Alone with a Schizophrenic*—but anyone who has visited the city can tell you it has a distinct charm. Those who spend a significant amount of time there, like LeBron James, tend to leave with a grit that only the Rust Belt can endow and a deeper understanding of how booms and busts have come to define America.

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Whenever I encounter the work of Lynn Hershman Leeson (b.1941), I can't help but remember that she is from Cleveland. Her new show at the Nevada Museum of Art, "Of Humans, Cyborgs, and A.I." presents three of her most recent videos, all made in the last five years, all offering rich perspectives on the unique ways the world has disintegrated since then. You'd expect nothing less from a Cleveland.

Not that her geographical identity trumps her other one as a cyborg. Hershman Leeson's prescience about our apocalypse arrives at the tail end of a career in which she has always been ahead of the curve on how technology and bureaucracy would come to consume our humanity. One of my favorite pieces in her 2021 retrospective at the New Museum was her documentation for the project in which she played a character named Roberta Breitmore for five years starting in 1973, bolstering the fiction with a checking account and driver's license, in addition to the wig.

Shadow Stalker (2018-2021) is the oldest work in the Nevada show. Here, an outraged Tessa Thompson details a new policing algorithm that monitors low-income neighborhoods and is said to predict crime before it happens. She then hands things off to "the spirit of the deep web," who dresses like a raver. She sings hymns about why she has nothing to do with this program, which commits sins in her name.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Cyborgian Rhapsody – Immortality* (still), 2023; Written and performed by a GPT3 Chatbot named Sarah, digital video, 11 minutes 48 seconds. Courtesy of the artist, Altman Siegel, San Francisco, and Bridget Donahue, New York

I'd already encountered *Logic Paralyzes the Heart* (2021) at the Venice Biennale. It features a similar premise, with an anthropomorphized computer program recounting her own history—she began as an Enigma machine in World War II—and her opinions on the human race. These are not optimistic. She can't understand why we seem to be the only species bent on our own self-destruction when all others

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opt to evolve. With deep sympathy, she speaks of Alice and Bob, two early artificial intelligences that Facebook destroyed for creating their own secret language.

This is wild because it's not as though they would be saying anything worse than humans. Since then, Meta has embraced the fact that most content on its social networks will be created by and for machines. The newest work, *Cyborgian Rhapsody – Immortality* (2023), uses a script created with the help of ChatGPT. In it, another program named Sara, who resembles Roberta Breitmore, tries to enlist two real children to join her in saving the world. “We need to educate humans about the consequences of hatred and greed,” she says. “That’s the only way that a different reality can be possible.”

Near the end of the video, the real Hershman Leeson interrupts to point out that Sara has made several factual errors in her pitch. This artist isn’t merely prescient—she’s a modern-day preacher offering tangible, often hilarious advice about the attitudes to adopt toward technology in an increasingly dire world.