

KW

Lynn Hershman Leeson
19 May – 15 July 18



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *The Dante Hotel* (detail), 1972/73
Site-specific hotel room installation, Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue Gallery

Lynn Hershman Leeson

First Person Plural

19 May – 15 July 18

Opening: 18 May 18, 7 pm

Address:

The Shelf, Prinzenstraße 34, 10969 Berlin-Kreuzberg

Opening hours:

Wed–Sun 11 am–7 pm, Thu 11 am–9 pm

Admission: 5 € / reduced 3 €

Free admission on Thursday evenings between 6–9 pm

U8 Moritzplatz / Bus 140 Prinzenstraße/Ritterstraße
Partly accessible for wheelchair users

KW Institute for Contemporary Art presents *First Person Plural* by American artist Lynn Hershman Leeson (born 1941 in Cleveland, US). The exhibition, taking place in a large abandoned warehouse in Berlin Kreuzberg, brings together selected video works from the 1970s–90s as well as the installations *Lorna* (1979–83) and *Venus of the Anthropocene* (2017).

Hershman Leeson has made pioneering contributions to performance art, conceptual art, new media, and film since the 1960s. Her visionary technological experimentation is matched by her daring deconstruction of gendered identity in a misogynist and technologically-mediated world. This exhibition aims to show how Hershman Leeson has consistently been at the forefront of the debate around media, innovation and technology's relationship to the workings of society, and how, throughout her career, she has used her art as a tool of empowerment against censorship and political repression.

The title of the exhibition is taken from Hershman Leeson's long-term diaristic film project *First Person Plural, the Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman* (1984–96), which constitutes the central focus of the exhibition. The film records Hershman Leeson's struggle, transformation, and transcendence as her personal story unfolds before the camera; illustrating how the personal becomes political and cultural. Taking the form of a video confession, the work took 12 years to complete and covers psychological scars from childhood memories of physical and sexual abuse, struggles with self-acceptance, illness and domestic violence. These personal experiences are then paired with news coverage of the time. In the tradition of feminist performance work of the 1970s, the four-part film plays with the autobiographic construction of identity while repeatedly calling the truthfulness of the account into question. Despite its wide distribution, the work was staged as an intimate self-produced DIY confessional, asking how and for whom we construct ourselves and where our experience ends and another's begins. Just as her image multiplies on screen, the title suggests a schizophrenic splintering

of identity. Whether this should be understood as a symptom of personal or of societal trauma is open to question.

Lorna (1979–83) is one of the first interactive media installations of its kind. It allows the user to explore and control the world of an agoraphobic woman named Lorna. Staged in her tiny one-room apartment, filled with clues to her situation, such as notes, magazines, pieces of clothing, a checkbook, etc., the TV and the telephone present Lorna's only connection to the outside world. With the help of the remote control the users are able to guide Lorna's life through various interactive chapters that allow the viewer to make decisions remotely for her and understand her potentials and limitations. The work ultimately ends in one of three possible endings and is accompanied by multiple soundtracks.

Venus of the Anthropocene (2017), Hershman Leeson's most recent installation, presents the visitor with a mirror and a vanity table—stereotypical sites of female introspection—paired with a white anatomical figure with golden organs and a blue wig. Instead of one's own reflection however, the mirror reveals itself to be a screen that employs facial recognition software to read the visitor's age, gender, and mood, exploring how we rely on technology for self-identification and the role of our bodies in an increasingly mediated world.

Other films presented in the exhibition are: *Seduction of a Cyborg* (1994), *A Commercial for Myself* (1978), *Commercials for New York* (1974), and *The Dante Hotel* (1972).

Lynn Hershman Leeson

The Novalis Hotel

19 May – 17 June 18

Address:

Hotel Novalis, Novalisstraße 5, 10115 Berlin-Mitte

Opening hours:

Wed–Sun 11 am–7 pm, Thu 11 am–9 pm

Free admission

U6 Oranienburger Tor / Tram 12, M5 Torstraße/

U Oranienburger Tor

No wheelchair access

On the occasion of her solo exhibition *First Person Plural*, Lynn Hershman Leeson revisits her iconic installation *The Dante Hotel* in the form of a new commission entitled *The Novalis Hotel*.

The Dante Hotel (1972–73) was one of Hershman Leeson's early site-specific installations, marking the beginning of her work around the character Roberta Breitmore. The artist developed this alter ego over many years in private and public performances, which ultimately led her to produce her visionary works investigating the relationships between humans and technology, identity and surveillance. *The Dante Hotel* was presented in a run-down hotel in the North Beach neighborhood of San Francisco for almost one year from late 1973 to mid 1974. The hotel offered 24-hour access and anybody could sign in at the reception to receive the key to room number 47. The room had signs of a female guest, wax figures, a sound installation of a person breathing heavily and various other accouterments—all clues to the identity of the resident, putting the viewer in the role of a voyeur and thus opening up new perspectives on various forms of surveillance.

For *The Novalis Hotel*, the artist presents an inverted version of *The Dante Hotel*. Here, identity is probed as no longer a body shaped by societal conventions, but identified as generative reproduction of information that is both disembodied and directly tied to our genetic material and the entities that control its surveillance. Upon arriving at Hotel Novalis, visitors are given the opportunity to have their forensic traces analyzed by drinking from a plastic cup. Thereafter they are presented with the key to room number 5, in which Hershman Leeson offers visitors a glimpse into the life of the enigmatic woman staying at the hotel. The room contains clothing, toiletries, a computer, and cryptic notes, entries, and text conversations on her phone, allowing the visitor to slowly assemble an idea of the identity of the woman, namely Roberta Lester, and why she resides in Berlin. Other clues give insight into various scientific protocols linked to forensic analysis and the study of genetics. The traces left behind by the visiting audience will undergo further forensic analysis and the results will be presented in a

conversation between Hershman Leeson and the forensic scientist Lutz Roewer, presented on the last day of the installation (June 17, 2018). The conversation will be accompanied by a screening of Hershman Leeson's science fiction film *Teknolust* (2002).

The Novalis Hotel continues Hershman Leeson's fascination with the ethical consequences of scientific advances, especially tied to identity formation and personal freedom. The installation prompts us to reflect on our own responsibility in how far we can take control of these innovations, and to what degree we can foresee the consequences that our current actions may have on future generations. Through continuously situating her work alongside the latest developments in science, she is affirming our responsibility to imagine and actively influence how innovation is implemented.

Public program

Lynn Hershman Leeson in conversation with
Lutz Roewer, followed by a screening of *Teknolust*
17 June 18, 5 pm
Gropius Bau, Niederkirchnerstraße 7, 10963 Berlin
Admission: 5 € / reduced 3 €

Public guided tours

through the exhibition *Lynn Hershman Leeson:*

First Person Plural

Every Thursday at 7 pm (German)
Every Saturday at 3 pm (English)
Address: The Shelf, Prinzenstraße 34,
10969 Berlin-Kreuzberg
Included in the exhibition ticket

Guided group tours, 60 minutes

70 € / reduced 50 €, plus reduced admission fee/person
For further information on guided tours, please contact
Duygu Örs at do@kw-berlin.de or +49 30 243459-132.

KW Institute for Contemporary Art
KUNST-WERKE BERLIN e.V.
Auguststraße 69
10117 Berlin
Tel. +49 30 243459-0
info@kw-berlin.de
kw-berlin.de

Annual Ticket – KW Lover* 35 € / reduced 25 €
Combined Day Ticket KW / me Collectors Room Berlin
10 € / reduced 8 €

Colophon

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Curator: Anna Gritz
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Interns: Alina Isabella Rentsch, Maria Rogucka, Nan Xi
Texts and Editing: Anna Gritz, Krist Gruijthuijsen,
Friederike Klapp, Katja Zeidler

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