

Lynn Hershman Leeson

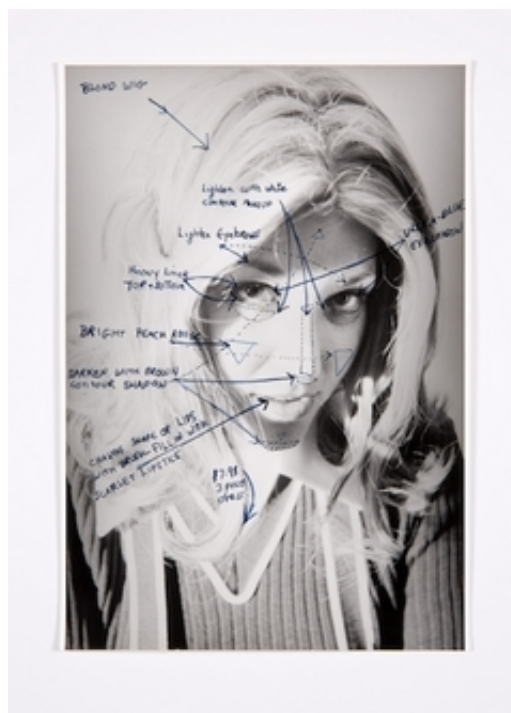
BRIDGET DONAHUE
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From 1974 to 1978, Lynn Hershman Leeson doubled as Roberta Breitmore. She rode the bus, signed a lease, and solicited encounters with strangers, whom she met by placing personal ads in San Francisco city newspapers. The performance was ongoing and, for the most part, unwitnessed, sporadically documented in photographs taken by private investigators under the artist's employ. "To me, she was my own flipped effigy: my physical reverse," Hershman Leeson has described. "Her life infected mine."

Concerns with duplication and bodily impurity organize Hershman Leeson's oeuvre, which here receives a retrospective gloss. The iteration at stake is almost always of the artist's self, rehearsed through the genre of self-portraiture and technological media (photography, video, Second Life, and so forth) that are themselves duplicative. Again and again, Hershman Leeson calls us to the precarity of our status as subjects. Selfhood emerges as a sebaceous thing, slippery and secreted like so much glandular waste. It's work that feels proleptic, loosely 1990s even in its '70s moment.

A pair of C-prints, titled *Roberta and Blaine in Union Square*, 1975, frame Breitmore on a bench beside a middle-aged man, his face puffy and his hair pomade-slicked. The scene seems a filched view of some vague impropriety, the whole thing seedy and synthetic. Breitmore's outfit (platinum wig, prefab cardigan) heightens the effect, lending her the air of a department-store mannequin.

Innervated by plastics, life, like the self, becomes alien, as indexed in Breitmore's incarnation as a telerobotic doll in *CybeRoberta*, 1996, which viewers can manipulate remotely. A nearby photograph, *Construction Chart Drawing*, 1973, finds Breitmore's face dissected, as if it were a cadaver. Tenuously organic, the artist's alter ego figures as a vacant (because partially mortified) site. Mediated and surveilled, Hershman Leeson is perpetually elsewhere.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, *Construction Chart Drawing*, 1973, ink on gelatin silver print, 9 1/4 x 6 1/2".

— Courtney Fiske