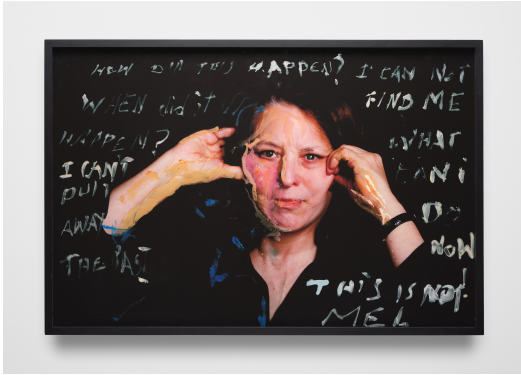


# ALTMAN SIEGEL

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Lynn Hershman Leeson  
*About Face*  
March 3 – April 23, 2022

“Under this mask, another mask. I will never finish removing all these faces.”  
– Claude Cahun, *Aveux non avenue*, 1950

Altman Siegel is delighted to present “About Face,” Lynn Hershman Leeson’s first solo exhibition with the gallery.

For Hershman Leeson, we wear masks in an attempt to articulate a multitude of identities. The artist’s consideration of masks in their relationship to personae permits her to examine the means through which identity, or the way one interfaces with the world, is an outcome of social production. She asks, why does one wear a mask? What forms do masks take? And, does one adopt different guises in order to stabilize their sense of self or to transform it? These concerns have been examined comprehensively throughout Hershman Leeson’s oeuvre. A revolutionary force in both Feminist and New Media art, the artist’s groundbreaking output has radically shaped artistic discourses around corporeal representation and its relationship to culture and technology. The artist utilizes non-traditional methods and media to consider how technological and sociopolitical upheaval informs our understanding of the individual.

For “About Face,” Hershman Leeson takes the question of the self and all its vicissitudes over time as her starting point. Through a selection of career-spanning material, this exhibition presents examples of the ways Hershman Leeson, through re-presentation, reinvigorates modes of self-identification. Beginning with a selection of paintings and sculptural pieces from the 1960s and incorporating central bodies of work like the artist’s performance as the fictional Roberta Breitmore, the exhibition traces a genealogy to new work including *Botox Before/After*, which explores the limitations of one’s ability to physically transform.

While these works differ significantly in their formal execution – “About Face” showcases examples from the artist’s painting, drawing, photography, collage, and sculpture practices – the show assesses the extent to which different masks or personae correspond with different, often contradictory, aspects of self. It is in this way that the show explores the mask’s double function as a means of assuming an identity while hiding another. While this premise could be tied to fraught concepts of subjectivity, as one’s sense of self is so often created within troublesome networks, Hershman Leeson lends a voice to fugitive selves through strategies of disengagement. In this way, she creates space for novel iterations of self to materialize.

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Hershman Leeson's practice is concerned with the question of "I," the eye, witness, and surveillance. In "About Face," these ruminations are grounded in the artist's embodied encounters with identification. Predominantly comprised of self-portraits, this presentation of work sees the artist directly confront a conundrum that recalls Arthur Rimbaud's proclamation, "*Je est un autre*" [I is another]. In the exhibition's assemblage of representations, often of herself or herself in the guise of others, Hershman Leeson considers the ways women are denied a subjectivity of their own making. This corresponds with questions of the patriarchal mechanisms by which this is enforced and the lengths to which one must go to reclaim their image. Hershman Leeson notes that, for instance, "the act of putting on makeup, which for many women is a daily activity, becomes a mask, a second existence." Through her alter egos and mutations, the artist both lives out the situation she is critiquing while fundamentally disrupting it.

In its career-spanning scope, "About Face" not only traces the artist's practice over time, but also demarcates the passage of time itself. The show integrates alternate manifestations of the same set of ideas at different points. It underscores that while Hershman Leeson's fingerprint remains the same, the progression of time, on a biological, political, technological, or economic scale, means that the nature of representation and recognition have morphed. As is the case with the artist's reconstruction of Roberta Breitmore in 2005 or recurring clock motif, representation, particularly of women, and the desire to transform it, is produced alongside broader cultural and technological shifts.

For Hershman Leeson, key structural changes – the advent of artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, social media, plastic surgery, and the cyborg – alter the methods by which individuals adopt new masks. While Botox characterizes an endeavor to slow down biological time, for example, the cyborg was an attempt to speed up. On another register, shifts in artificial intelligence mean that identity can now be pinpointed through invisible forces. Who "I" am is in flux. This is nowhere more apparent than in the context of social media, where the ability to assume endless alter egos results in the continual destabilization of self according to one's social conditions. From her earliest work to her newest output, Hershman Leeson has had the incredible ability to not only map out these transformations, but to identify the potential in their re-presentation. It is through this investigation that she is able to consider the following in this exhibition: Who am I? Who do others want me to be? And, how do I change who I'm supposed to be?

Lynn Hershman Leeson's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the New Museum, New York, NY; ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, Germany [*Civic Radar* retrospective]; House of Electronic Arts, Basel, Switzerland; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; de Young Museum, San Francisco, CA; Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France; KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, Germany; Kunsthaus Graz, Graz, Austria; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, OH; bürobasel, Basel, Switzerland; Thoma Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; and Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, UK. Group exhibitions include the 59<sup>th</sup> Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy; 13<sup>th</sup> Gwangju Biennale, South Korea; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Serpentine Galleries, London, UK; UK; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, MA; Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France; Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX; Tate Modern, London, UK; and MoMA PS1, New York, NY.

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