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STRANGE CULTURES

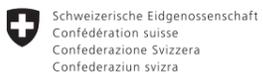


Hershman Leeson's film *Strange Cultures* is based on a true story, which the artist retells through interviews and reenactments. The wife of artist Steve Kurtz, a member of the artist collective Critical Art Ensemble, dies suddenly from heart failure, and Kurtz is accused of bioterrorism in the matter. Medics inform the FBI when they find petri dishes and other scientific devices used for biological research in his home. In his artistic practice, Kurtz deals with genetically manipulated foodstuffs and wants to make the current practices in the field of biotechnology accessible to the public by raising awareness of critical issues and lack of government regulation. His harmless experiments with bacteria turn him into a suspect. The film also deals with the paranoia in the wake of 9/11 in the US – which did not stop with artists questioning government policies in their artistic practice. Hershman Leeson's film drew international attention to this case and caused a groundswell of financial and moral support for Steve Kurtz, whose charges were eventually dropped.

Lynn Hershman Leeson: Anti-Bodies

This exhibition is supported by:
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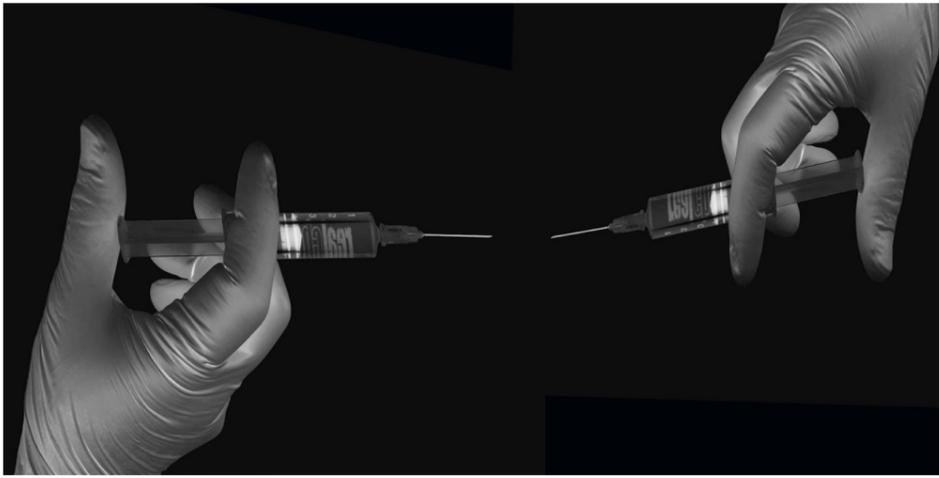
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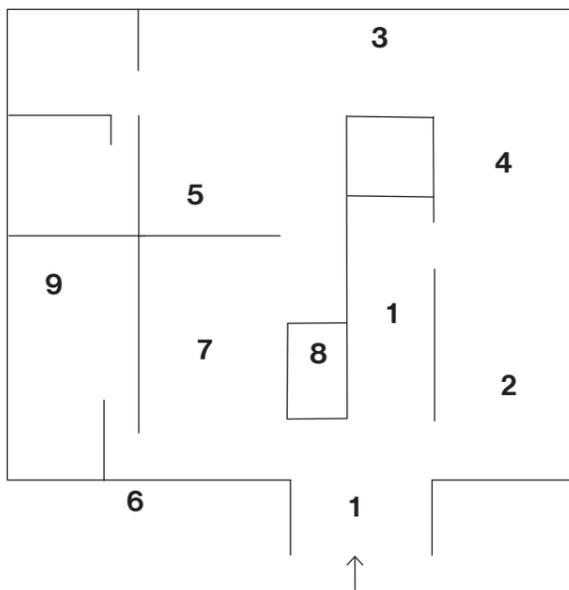


Lynn Hershman Leeson, detail from "The Infinity Engine", 2012

Lynn Hershman Leeson

Anti-Bodies

03.05.2018 - 05.08.2018



The American artist and filmmaker Lynn Hershman Leeson is one of the pioneers of media art. Since the 1960s, she has raised issues in her works about the interaction of media and identity, and the changing relationship between the body and technology. She has questioned the impact of new tools on our private sphere and our changing relationship with the real and virtual world. Her oeuvre encompasses photography, film, video, objects and installations, computer-based art, software and performance. Over and over, her works have been ground-breaking. In 1984, she created the first interactive video disk and was already dealing with artificial intelligence and virtual reality. At the end of that decade, Hershman Leeson coined the term "anti-body" to refer to a virtual identity in cyberspace in her research and her works. And indeed, there is no longer a need for a physical body in order to take on a fictitious identity in the global network. Hershman Leeson understood her anti-body to be a viral presence on the Internet, manifesting itself in artificial intelligences, such as its A.I. online persona DiNA. As developments in biotechnology present the newest challenge of our times, her current works are dedicated to these. And, accordingly, we will be presenting these ongoing and newly created works in the first solo exhibition dedicated to Hershman Leeson in Switzerland. Biological advancement, regenerative medicine, genetic research and antibody research are the threads being drawn at herein.

Curator: Sabine Himmelsbach

THE INFINITY ENGINE

The Infinity Engine is a complex, multi-room installation that Hershman Leeson has created in conjunction with renowned scientific researchers. It mirrors a functioning genetics laboratory and enables a critical look at the complex ramifications entailed by experimenting with the genome. Hershman Leeson has staged the achievements of regenerative medicine as an artwork in her own unique aesthetic. Nature is presented as an "Infinity Engine", a never ending machine, which allows for innumerable variations and developments whose evolutionary process is executed daily in our own bodies. Hershman Leeson shows how the boundaries between natural and artificial life are increasingly dissolving in the age of synthetic biology and how life can be made artificially. Her long preoccupation with questions of identity and the technological changes of our present continues in her latest work on the basis of biopolitics.

The individual rooms and installation topics are coded by the colors of DNA.

Access to the laboratory

Room 1 At the entrance there are several lab coats for visitors to put on in order to access the lab. In the first room they find themselves in the midst of a laboratory situation staged with immersive projections – the epistemological origin of modern life sciences and a place of knowledge production. A heavy laboratory door leads to the subsequent exhibition rooms.

Bioprinting

Room 2 This room is devoted to the techniques of regenerative medicine, including artificial production of human organs by means of 3D bioprinting. At its center is a three-dimensional tissue and cell structure in the form of a human nose, which Hershman Leeson presents behind glass, like a priceless museum object. The photographic work *Double Hands* illustrates this ability to construct life. Hershman Leeson is referring to Michelangelo's famous fresco of the creation in the Sistine Chapel, where God's finger touches and thus creates humanity. In Hershman Leeson's version, God's finger is replaced with hypodermic needles.

Genetic engineering / CRISPR mutations

Room 3 This space is dedicated to the pioneering possibilities of genetic engineering. One wall presents a range of hybrid cultures and countless images of genetically modified animals, showing the range of possibilities for designing and manipulating life through genetics. One video of a transgenic, luminous zebra fish in an aquarium or the picture of a glow-in-the-dark cat make us aware of how present the achievements of genetic engineering already are in today's world. The visitors are invited to access more scientific information from experts on several iPads.

Ethics

Room 4 In the ethics room, the visitors have the opportunity to read legal documents or genetic patents that are associated with

genetic engineering and which illustrate the ethical dimension of the issue. *The Infinity Engine* presents the ethical dilemma that researchers and society face today when biotechnological developments represent new treatments, on the one hand, but could equally serve the purposes of manipulation and genetic surveillance, on the other.

George Church

Room 5 In her complex installation, Hershman Leeson offers the views of numerous scientists and experts in interviews, who reflect on the possibilities and opportunities of genetic engineering. Among these is an interview with George Church, Professor for Genetics at the Harvard Medical School and Director of PersonalGenomes.org, an organization that represents the only open access point offering information on the human genome, environment and trait (GET) data. His 2012 book "RegenesiS" deals with how synthetic biology will reshape both nature and humanity.

Forensic traces

Room 6 Hershman Leeson developed an installation in which the visitors themselves become active participants. With a special face recognition software, the visitors' faces are recorded and measured and subjected to analysis of their age, mood and gender, based solely on facial features. Hershman Leeson refers in this work to the potential of DNA analysis within the next few years. Not an improbable development, if one remembers that the first full sequencing of human genetic data only became possible about 20 years ago and still cost millions. Nowadays numerous companies offer this service for a modest fee.

"In this exhibition, visitors can marvel at another antibody: the "Lynn Hershman Antibody" also created by Novartis Pharma AG. It has been researched and documented for its properties and potential applications, which are presented here in the form of scientific animations, microscopic images and documentation of the development process. The structure of the "Lynn Hershman Antibody" has proven to be extremely versatile. Another antibody, created at the same time called "Erta", however, represents the alter ego to Lynn Hershman's fictive persona "Roberta Breitmore" and, itself, refuses to connect to any antigens. Hershman Leeson's work dealing with questions of identity and uniqueness expands here into a whole new dimension. For the artist, developing an antibody with her name is a consistent continuation of her artistic practice: "Antibodies seem to have always been part of my art practice. An antibody identifies toxins in culture and then attempts to neutralize or erase them. Roberta Breitmore and later Roberta's viralized representative multiples illuminated the rampant toxins of sexism in her 1970s era. By the mid 1980s antibody photographs appeared. In 1995 the text 'Romancing the Antibody, Lust and Longing in Cyberspace' was published. While the search for antibodies exists in all of my works, identifying the antibody moves inwards with this project and becomes an inverted biological gesture that has as its goal healing from the inside out, a cyborgian dream of infiltrating the body itself and thereby attempts to create a radical and curative recovery of individual culture."

Antibodies

Room 7 One main attraction of the *Infinity Engine* is an antibody named Lynn Hershman in its molecular structure, which was developed exclusively for this exhibition. This project was created in cooperation with Dr. Thomas Huber, Senior Investigator at the NIBR Biologics Center of Novartis Pharma AG, and his team.

Antibodies are specific proteins that play an essential role in the natural immune system and are developed in research settings for therapeutic purposes. They recognize modified structures within our own bodies (called antigens) and mark them so that they are easily visible for other components of the immune system, which are responsible for the defense, and can be eliminated. Artificial antibodies can be made with genetic engineering procedures in a laboratory designed to detect specific structures. They can be used specifically for the treatment of certain diseases (for example, in cancer therapy). There is a famous story connected to this of Emily Whitehead, a seven-year-old girl from America who suffered from lymphoblastic leukemia. She had little hope of survival. In 2012, she became the first child to undergo an experimental treatment called CAR-T by Novartis. The story made headlines around the world. Since then she has been cancer-free.

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DNA and Antibody

Room 8 This room presents for the first time DNA as a storage medium for information. In the lab of the company Twist Biology, some of the artist's past video works as well as the entire documentation of the *Infinity Engine* have been saved as data strands of DNA, which are now being presented as a first DNA based artwork. The room also contains the actual crystals of the Lynn Hershman antibody, produced by Novartis Pharma AG.