

Roberta Breitmore 1982-1989



“With a practice spanning more than forty years, Hershman Leeson has worked in performance, moving image, drawing, collage, text-based work, site-specific interventions, and later new media / digital technologies, and interactive net-based works, making her one of the first truly multi-disciplinary artists. In the pantheon of feminist artists, she also holds a special place, having investigated the question of gender, identity politics, and selfhood – a key field of interest in her practice – in-depth, over time and with a complexity that far surpasses many of her peers. This complexity is best manifested in Hershman Leeson’s seminal project *The Roberta Breitmore Series* (1974-1978). Nearly forty years on, the importance of *The Roberta Breitmore Series* cannot be over-estimated. The questions it raised about the ungraspable, fluid state of identity, about ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’, the difficulty to often draw the line between fact and fiction, biography and autobiography, the impossibility – perhaps - of entirely achieving that ancient Greek dictum of ‘knowing thyself’, the question of how appearances deceive, and the fundamental constructedness of identity remain; perhaps now stronger than ever given the advent of the internet and the emergence of virtual identities; and of course the increased importance attached to image and self-styling in our ‘lifestyle’ conscious culture of appearances.

From 1974 until 1978, the artist conceived of, constructed and ‘developed’ a fictional persona and alter ego: that of Roberta Breitmore. The creation of Roberta Breitmore consisted not only of a physical self-transformation through make-up, clothing, and wigs which enabled the occasional role-playing, but a fully-fledged, ‘complete’ personality who existed over an extended period of time and whose existence could be proven in the world through physical evidence: from a driver’s license and credit card to letters from her psychiatrist.

Katerina Gregos, October 2011

188 objects, photographs and documents. In the collections of The Museum of Modern Art New York, The Tate Modern, The Whitworth Art Gallery, Donald Hess, Arturo Schwarz, The Walker Art Center, and others.

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON



Roberta had credit cards, an apartment, dental records and a drivers license. She corresponded with people and established relationships with them. She even placed a small announcement in a newspaper in which she advertised for a roommate. The people who responded became part of her fiction. Hershman indicates that Roberta accumulated 43 letters from individuals and had 27 adventures, the most dangerous was when she was asked to join a prostitution ring at the San Diego Zoo. To escape her "John" she transformed into "Lynn" in a public restroom.

Roberta's childhood data was established before she was released into the world. She reflected the values of her culture. She penetrated trends such as EST, Weightwatchers and most significantly, experienced resonant nuances of alienation. Roberta saw a psychiatrist, had her own language and handwriting, clothing, gestures and moods.

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES

**INTERIM DRIVERS
LICENSE (TEMPORARY)**
DIVISION OF DRIVERS LICENSES

VALID FOR 60 DAYS FROM _____ DATE _____

Roberta Breitmore
3007 Jackson
San Francisco, CA 94115

SEX HAIR EYES HEIGHT WEIGHT PRE LIC EXP
F Brun Brn 5-0 155 None

DATE OF BIRTH 1-19-45 SOC. SEC. NO. _____

OTHER ADDRESS CLASS 3 3-AXLE HOUSE CAR AND ALL 2-AXLE VEH. EXCEPT BUS OR 2 WHEEL MOTORCYCLE. MAY TOW VEH. UNDER 6000 LBS. GROSS.

CLASSES
ADDITIONAL PRIVILEGES
ONLY AS CHECKED BELOW

NONE.

4 MAY DRIVE 2-WHEEL MOTORCYCLE.

2 MAY DRIVE ANY SINGLE VEHICLE OR BUS EXCEPT 2 WHEEL MOTORCYCLE.

1 MAY DRIVE ANY VEHICLE OR BUS EXCEPT 2 WHEEL MOTORCYCLE. MAY TOW ANY VEHICLE OR COMBINATION OF VEHICLES.

SEE OVER FOR ANY OTHER CONDITIONS MUST WEAR CORRECTIVE LENSES

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DL22 Date _____

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TRACER USED





"Americans show greater differences gesturally"



"Do crossed arms mean that 'I am frustrated?'"



"A hand to the face may serve as a barrier"



"Crossed legs point to each other. "



"Crossed arms do the same thing"



"Crossing arms defines posture"



"Does she try to avert attention avoiding your eyes?"



"Is she sitting stiffly and not relaxed?"



"Covering legs reveals frigidity fear of sex."

ROBERTA'S BODY LANGUAGE CHART

(photographed during a psychiatric session)

January 24, 1978



Lynn Hershman applying Makeup to First Roberta Multiple, Dr. Kristine Stiles 1988.