

January 5, 2026

Latest: [Camille Eskell. Embroidering Power](#)



Antonino La Vela Art Blog

Contemporary art criticism, thinkism, feminist & eco-art





Lynn Hershman Leeson - Infinity Engine - Photo ZKM

DIGITAL ART

FEMMINISM

INTERVIEW

When Art Becomes Responsibility: Interview with Artist Lynn Hershman Leeson

📅 [December 31, 2025](#) 👤 [Antonino La Vela Art](#) 💬 [0 Comments](#) 💎 [Lynn Hershman Leeson](#)

Technology, women, power: these are some of the central themes in Lynn Hershman Leeson's work; an American artist who has been able to anticipate the major sociocultural shifts of the last few decades.

This article about Lynn Hershman Leeson was originally written and published by me in Italian on *Artribune*, the leading Italian magazine for contemporary art. You can read the original version [here](#)



Lynn Hershman Leeson – Infinity Engine – Photo ZKM

“ Even our relationship with ourselves doesn’t last forever, wrote Quentin Crisp. It’s the key to entering Lynn Hershman Leeson’s work, where the self is built and doubled through masks, devices, and archives, from the *Electronic Diaries* to *The Infinity Engine*. At **Biennale Arte 2022** (*The Milk of Dreams*), this tension between identity and technology was made explicit with clarity.

From pioneering actions in the 1960s, she moved in the 1970s to pivotal works such as *The Dante Hotel* and *Roberta Breitmore*; in the 1980s she explored interactivity with *Lorna* and launched the *Electronic Diaries*. From the 1990s onward she brought her research into cinema and new media (*Conceiving Ada*, *Teknolust*, *Strange Culture*), later approaching biotechnology with *The Infinity Engine*.

There are artists who “look ahead”, and artists who place the future in our hands. Hershman belongs to the latter; she doesn’t prophesy, she assumes responsibility. *Lorna*

inhabiting the screen, the *Diaries* turning wounds into knowledge: they don't ask for empathy, they demand it. Freedom isn't a prize; it's a skill to train, a technique of bodies, data, and institutions. If one day AI were to imitate us better than we imitate ourselves, what would remain human is the refusal to delegate courage. As long as we can switch off the machine and light up a room of witnesses, this responsibility has a name: art. And a precise voice: Lynn Hershman Leeson.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, The Electronic Diaries

The Interview

When you created Roberta Breitmore, were you drawn to risk, or was it a survival strategy?

No: risk didn't attract me. I wanted to understand what components make up an identity within the socio-cultural fabric, and how a constructed person could move within it. Roberta, as a fictional identity, ended up accumulating more history than I did: she obtained credit cards and permits that were denied to me. If I created her today, I'd probably end up in jail; back then no one knew how to handle such a case.

What pushed you to step outside traditional circuits and invent alternative spaces (like the Hotel Dante)?

A refusal "on principle" opened my eyes: a collector dismissed one of my sculptures simply because it was made by a woman. In Berkeley, with the Free Speech Movement, I realized I didn't

have to ask permission from a system that didn't recognize me. From there came the decision to leave traditional circuits and invent self-managed spaces where I could show works the institutional circuit wasn't yet able to read and meet the public without mediation.

With *Lorna* you place the audience “in someone else’s room and mind.” How difficult was it then to propose an interactive interface in the gallery?

Very. People weren't familiar with interfaces: you could install the work and visitors wouldn't know how to proceed. It took years before museums and audiences learned to “touch” images, not just look at them.

Many of your works show the price of freedom. What did you have to dismantle, in yourself or in the system, to keep going?

I had to demolish cultural pressures and precedents that were blocking me. I understood that my artistic existence depended on a unique way of saying things; I would have made that work anyway, regardless of anyone's gaze. That choice legitimized me.

Feminism and the art market: has anything really changed for women artists?

Parity of regard hasn't been achieved. More than once, my work has been priced lower than that of my male colleagues; not for intrinsic reasons, but because of a stubborn cultural legacy that yields, but slowly.



Logic Paralyzes the Heart at the 59th international art exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia in 2022. Photo by Andrea Rossetti.

You anticipated practices that are common today, even early conversational agents. Do you feel recognized?

I made what I consider the first chatbot when no one knew what it was. Recognition doesn't always arrive; ideas circulate, sometimes without attribution. It happens.

The *Electronic Diaries* expose wounds and confession. What does it mean today to struggle, body to body, without sugarcoating?

Younger artists aren't asked to re-fight our battles; the field has changed, though not enough. We gauge change by comparing it with what came before.

Technological "singularity" is frightening: will machines surpass us? What would remain human?

We can pull the plug; machines can't. Technology is a program: it has no irony, no consciousness. The fear of a "takeover" has existed for a long time, but I don't believe in a permanent war between humans and technology; I believe in the responsibility with which we choose to use it.

In *The Infinity Engine* you address cloning, DNA, biotechnology. Can technology generate tenderness, not just control?

Yes, depending on how we use it. Phones and networks are extensions of memory and cognition; we risk forgetting how to live without them. The issue is to steer this dependence, not submit to it.

You're known for anticipating what's coming. How do you see the near future?

Life online is collective: one person can connect to millions of others, and that can help solve problems. We also have tools like genetic engineering that can correct human conditions. I'm largely optimistic; many aren't, but the outcome depends on us.



Lynn Hershman Leeson, Lorna

Can technology improve inclusion, or does it merely scale up bias?

It can help, but only if humans choose to design it that way. Technology is a tool; responsibility is ours.

You've turned the archive into resistance: *Conceiving Ada* and *Strange Culture* save stories and lives.

With Conceiving Ada I wanted to bring to light a chapter of computing history that was almost forgotten. I made Strange Culture to help Steve Kurtz; the film contributed to his release. An archive isn't a storage room; it's leverage to intervene in reality.

You were celebrated at the Venice Biennale (Biennale Arte 2022), and *Logic Paralyzes the Heart* returned in important contexts. How did it feel?

Being in Venice was wonderful, but also expensive. There was no funding; travel and production were difficult. Recognition often arrives late and illuminates the bias that had made my work invisible. It was both exhilarating and burdensome.

Sixty years after those first “guerrilla” actions in a hotel room, what has changed?

Many more women today are artists, curators, gallerists; it wasn't like that before. Technology has been legitimized as an artistic language; it wasn't when I began. And yet equality hasn't been achieved.

After decades across art, cinema, and science, what still moves you: love, anger, or hope?

Hope, together with a sense of responsibility. The questions change, and images, data, and bodies keep talking to one another. The work continues.

Related Articles

- [The Artist at the Threshold of Infinity: An Interview with Silvio Wolf](#)
- [Interview with New York Artist Arlene Rush](#)
- [The Story of the Guerrilla Girls: Interview with Alice Neel, Original Member](#)
- [Drinking the Sky, in Turin – Interview With Aki Inomata](#)
- [The Glorious Mothers – When Motherhood Becomes an Artistic and Political Act](#)

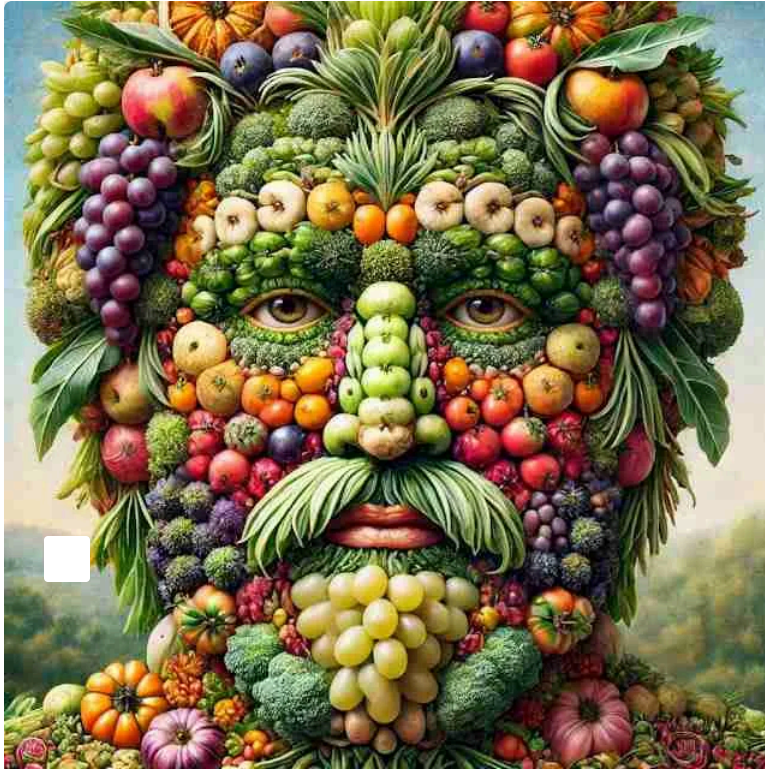
← [The Glorious Mothers – When Motherhood Becomes an Artistic and Political Act](#)

[Camille Eskell. Embroidering Power and Vulnerability Along the Edge of a Fez](#) →

Share This Post:

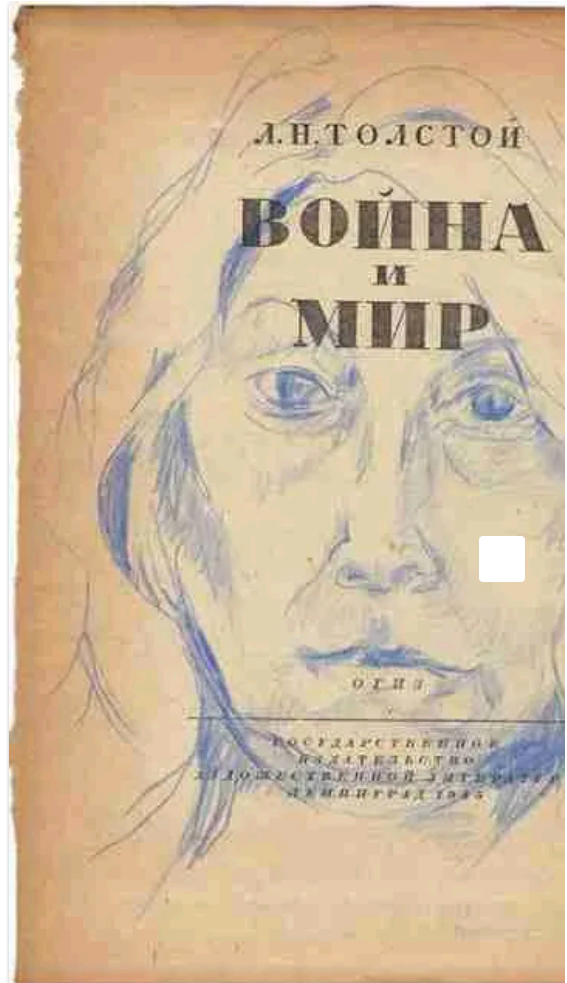


👍 You May Also Like



Art in the Age of Change: The Role of Creativity in Shaping Society.

📅 September 30, 2024 🗨️ 0



Tolstoy & I: A Journey of Art Identity, and Political Reckoning

📅 March 28, 2025 🗨️ 2

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Name *

Email *

Website

☐ Yes, add me to your mailing list

Post Comment

Subscribe

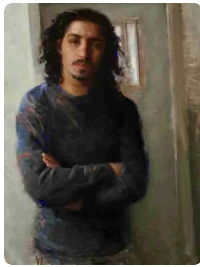
Email Address *

Get updates

Popular

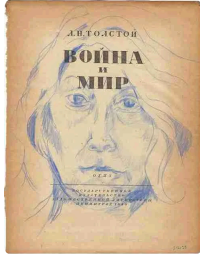
Recent

Comment



[Juliette Aristides: The Keeper of Classical Realism](#)

📅 [November 23, 2024](#)



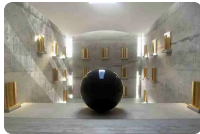
[Tolstoy & I: A Journey of Art, Identity, and Political Reckoning](#)

📅 [March 28, 2025](#)



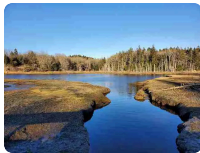
[Aviva Rahmani: A Visionary at the Intersection of Art and Activism](#)

📅 [March 18, 2025](#)



[Mono-Ha: Unveiling the Essence of Existence](#)

📅 [May 20, 2024](#)



[Blue Rocks: The Beginning of My Journey](#)

📅 [March 21, 2025](#)

Art Threads

[Abstract Art](#) [Abstract Expressionism](#) [AI Art](#) [antonino la vela](#) [antonino la vela](#)
[art](#) [art](#) [Conceptual Art](#) [contemporary art](#) [Contemporary Sociopolitical Art](#)
[Digital Art](#) [Eco Art](#) [Environmental Art](#) [femminism](#) [Installation Art](#) [interview](#) [Italian Art](#)
[lgbtq+](#) [Magical Neorealism](#) [Modern Art](#) [New European Painting](#) [news](#) [Palestinian art](#) [Performance Art](#)
[Political Art](#) [Pop Art](#) [Public Art](#) [scandal](#) [Sculpture](#) [Street art](#) [Thinkism](#)

Archives

Select Month





[Home](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Cookie Policy \(EU\)](#) [About me](#) [Contact](#)

Copyright © 2025 [Antonino La Vela Art Blog](#) | [Contemporary Art](#)