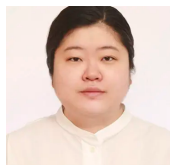


Lifestyle | Food and Travel | Life and Trends

'First Person Plural' traces Lynn Hershman Leeson's many selves through six decades of tech-driven art

Seoul Museum of Art presents Lynn Hershman Leeson's first Asia solo exhibition, featuring 200 works exploring identity.



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A view of the "Lynn Hershman Leeson: First Person Plural" exhibition at the Seoul Museum of Art Seosomun main branch in Jung District, central Seoul, on Oct. 20.

YONHAP

Most people get through the day as several personas at once: The one answering work emails, the one curating an Instagram grid, the one on a second social media account nobody at the office knows about. Koreans have a breezy word for these alter egos — *bukae*, short for "subcharacter" in Korean — and switch between them as needed.

American media artist Lynn Hershman Leeson had a *bukae* in 1973, long before the word existed, named Roberta Breitmore. She wore a blond wig, heavy eye makeup and red lipstick, rode a bus into San Francisco, opened a bank account, got a driver's license and placed a newspaper ad for a roommate. Roberta lasted five years. When Hershman Leeson, now 85, began to fear for her safety as Roberta, she ended it in 1978 with an exorcism in Italy.

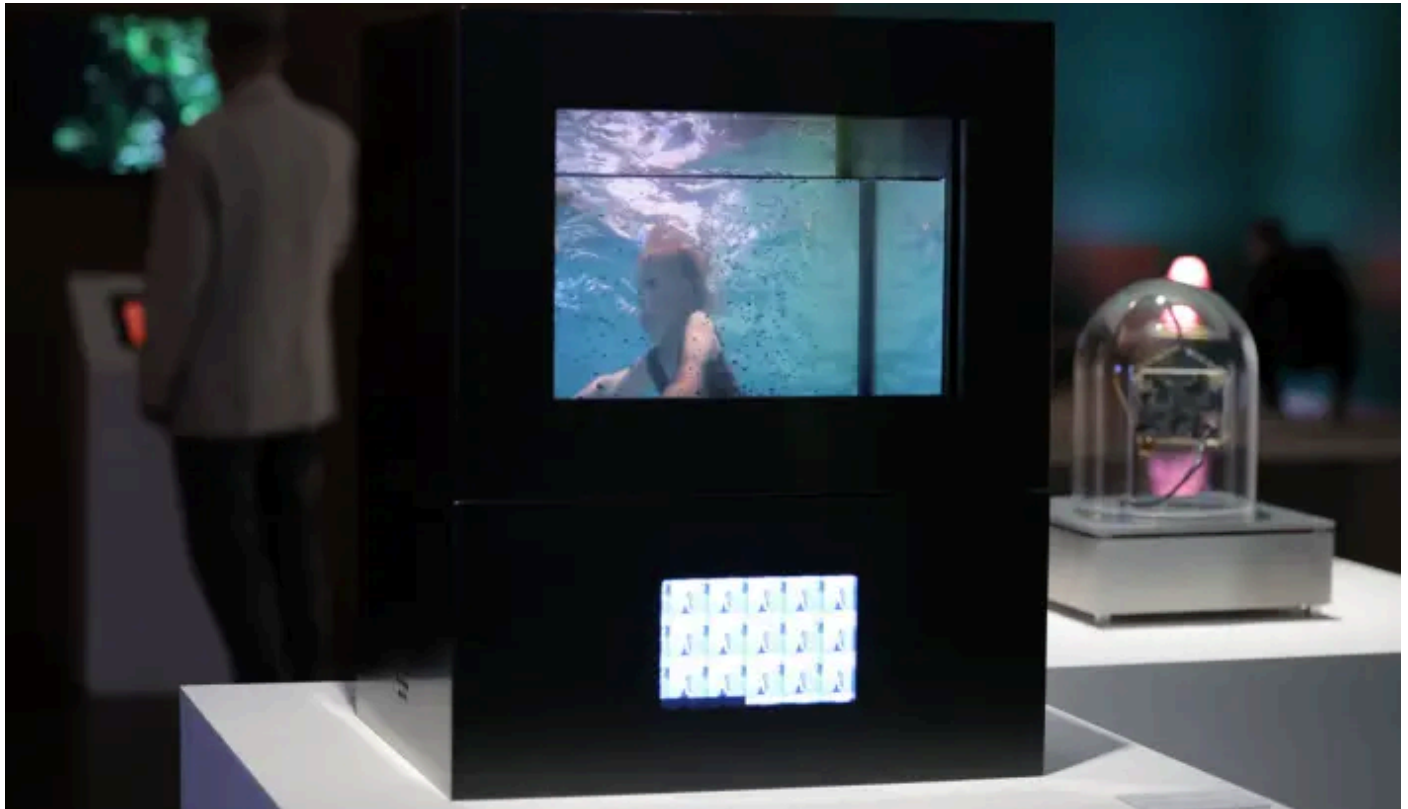
(SeMA) Seosomun main branch in Jung District, central Seoul. The show gathers some 200 works by Hershman Leeson from six decades, the artist's first museum solo exhibition in Asia.



American media artist Lynn Hershman Leeson's artwork is seen on display at the Seoul Museum of Art Seosomun main branch in Jung District, central Seoul, on Oct. 20.

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"This year our museum's agenda is technology, and we agonized for a long time over which artist could show it best," said Choi Eun-ju, SeMA's director, at a press conference Tuesday for the exhibit. "For some 60 years, every time a new technology appeared, Hershman Leeson took it into the language of art before anyone else did."



American media artist Lynn Hershman Leeson's artwork is seen on display at the Seoul Museum of Art Seosomun main branch in Jung District, central Seoul, on Oct. 20.

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"I'm hopeful that this exhibition will give you a chance to meet some of the many selves that have evolved in order to become who I am, and also inspire you to think about what your many selves are as well," Hershman Leeson said in a video message, her health having kept her from traveling to Seoul.

The first section of the "First Person Plural" exhibition, "Confessions of a Chameleon," opens to the sound of shallow breathing. In 1966, pregnant and confined to an oxygen tent for a month because of a heart condition, Hershman Leeson could hear little but her own breath and began molding faces out of wax — later the "Breathing Machines," which breathe straight at visitors who come near.

"As a child, Hershman Leeson experienced domestic violence and sexual abuse at home, and that made her think about the traces of abuse stored in her body,"

double of herself."

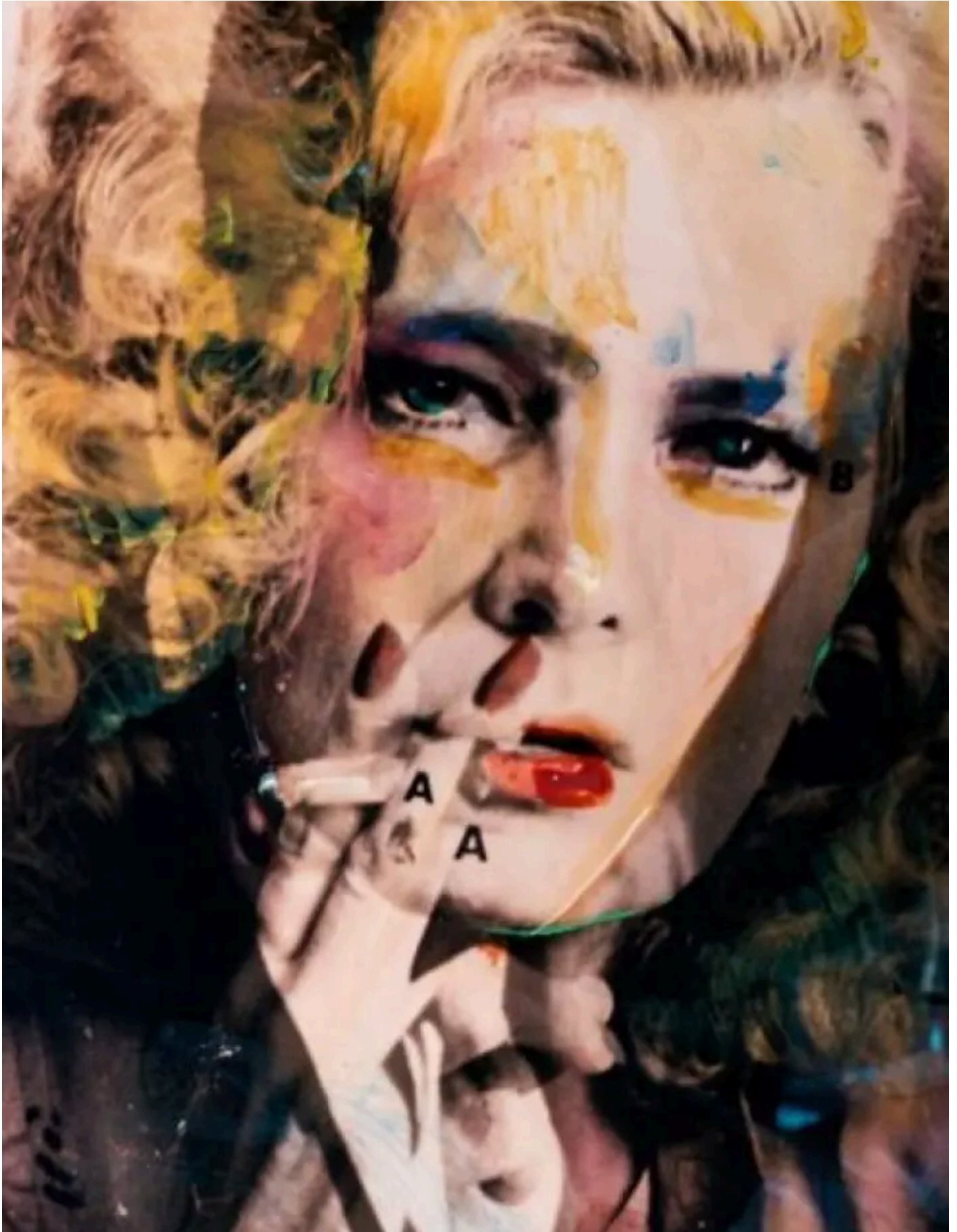
"Beyond those personal experiences, you have to look at the civil rights movement and the counterculture, the norms society placed on women artists at the time, and the new technologies she came across in San Francisco — all of it together," Bang added.

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After that, the machines representing Hershman Leeson's personas multiply. Two telerebotic dolls, "Tillie" and "CybeRoberta," sit before a mirror at the exhibition space at SeMA with cameras for eyes, posting what they see to a website where strangers can turn their heads.



Visitors look around artwork at the "Lynn Hershman Leeson: First Person Plural" exhibition held at the Seoul Museum of Art Seosomun main branch in Jung District, central Seoul, on Oct. 20. YONHAP



Plural" exhibition at Seoul Museum of Art SEOUL MUSEUM OF ART

In "Lorna," viewers control an agoraphobic woman's life with a remote control, reminiscent of a life simulation game. "Agent Ruby," a chatbot built between 1998 and 2002, frowns and purses her lips as she talks. Along with "Deep Contact," those two are the first of the artist's interactive works to run in Korean, synced by the media collective Seoul Express.

"If AI does what I do this well, then what is my own ability? How can I prove my identity? I imagine everyone has asked themselves that at least once," Bang said of the show's timing.

The last section of "First Person Plural," titled "Edited Future," moves from screens to cells. Its centerpiece, "Room No. 8," presents an antibody developed with the Swiss drugmaker Novartis, its amino acids arranged to spell out the artist's name.

Tied programs to the exhibition will also run from November through January, with Seoul Art Cinema holding 12 screenings of three features shot by Hershman Leeson: "Conceiving Ada" (1997) and "Teknolust" (2002), both starring Tilda Swinton, and the documentary "Women Art Revolution: A Secret History" (2012).

"First Person Plural" runs through Feb. 21 next year, and admission is free for all.

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