

Frieze

Opinion 7

Women in the Arts: Lynn Hershman Leeson



BY LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

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'Others my age with lesser work who were men were being celebrated and collected'



For our series celebrating the achievements of women in the arts, the San Francisco-based artist and filmmaker shares her experience of the limitations and successes of her career in the art world.

As you were starting out in the arts, what were the possibilities for mentorship, collaboration and cross-generational engagement among women?

Absolutely zero.

My collaborators were dead artists I found daily at the Cleveland Museum or in the library.

What, if any, were the difficulties of embarking on a career in the arts as a woman?

Mostly the limitations you put on yourself. You don't have to accept the past standard of invisibility and omission or low prices. Invent your own reality. That's what art does anyway, and don't depend on art to sustain you.

What specific experiences have you had that shaped your understanding of gender in the workplace, the media and the arts?

Omission, rejection, being told 'I didn't know my place' by a museum director, being constantly overlooked while others my age with lesser work who were men were being celebrated and collected. I always believed, though, that 'she who laughs last' will be the final wit of the story.

What has changed today?

I got discovered when I was 72. Since then, I have had a retrospective, a book, enormous amount of sales to museums and important private collections, I am out of debt and have a gallery in New York City who believes in my work and my worth.

What are your thoughts about #Metoo and other initiatives to call attention to sexual harassment?

They are important but it is also important to know it is not the final answer and it becomes too easy to point fingers without backup information.

More needs to be done for a solid and long-lasting change.

Main image: Portrait of Lynn Hershman Leeson. Courtesy: the artist

LYNN HERSHMAN LEESON

Lynn Hershman Leeson is an artist and filmmaker based in San Francisco, California. Her multi-media work explores the intersections between gender, technology and identity. Her work will be featured in 'Architecture Effects', which opens at the Guggenheim Bilbao on 5 December.

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