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Exploring media pioneer Lynn Hershman Leeson's monumental Düsseldorf show

Lisa Long, artistic director of the Julia Stoschek Foundation examines Hershman Leeson's path breaking 'Electronic Diaries' in an interview with STIR.

by [Manu Sharma](#) Published on : Oct 20, 2024

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The Julia Stoschek Foundation in Düsseldorf, [Germany](#), is currently presenting *Lynn Hershman Leeson: Are Our Eyes Targets?*, the [new media art](#) pioneer's first [solo exhibition](#) in the city. The centrepiece of the show is her magnum opus, *The Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman Leeson 1984–2019* — which celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2024. Beyond this, the art exhibition features other video pieces, [collage art](#), and [interactive installation](#) works, exploring Hershman Leeson's groundbreaking practice at the intersection of [art and technology](#), in depth. The show extends from April 11, 2024 - February 2, 2025, and is curated by Lisa Long, artistic director of the Julia Stoschek Foundation. Long joins STIR in an interview to discuss Hershman Leeson's work.

The (*Electronic Diaries*) enables us to grasp how these tools and structures shape the understanding of ourselves and each other, and how we create and circulate images of ourselves in the world. – Lisa Long, artistic director, Julia Stoschek Foundation



Installation view of *The Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman Leeson 1984–2019*, six-channel video installation, 74', colour, sound, 1984 - 2019, Lynn Hershman Leeson Image: Alwin Lay

The [American artist](#) is an important name in new media art and [video art](#) in particular. Her *Electronic Diaries*, originally begun on a whim in 1984, is a deeply affecting work that grew in length and scope, and presents her as a complex individual experiencing the joys, sorrows, and challenges of life. Some may find Hershman Leeson's raw honesty unpalatable, but as she points out in an early section of the work, the truth is often harder to digest than any fantasy. Long tells STIR, "*The Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman Leeson 1984-2019* is one of the artist's most important works, even if the series is technologically not her most advanced. What is so impressive about the series is that it tells the story of a simple power switch: a woman who picks up a camera and begins to speak about her life, confessing some of her innermost feelings and experiences. In doing so she regains control over her narrative and is able to emancipate herself from the preconceived notions others might have of her."



The artist speaks in *The Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman Leeson 1984–2019*, six-channel video installation, 74', colour, sound, video still, 1984 - 2019, Lynn Hershman Leeson Image: Courtesy of Lynn Hershman Leeson and Anglim Gilbert Gallery, San Francisco

When the [curator](#) mentions that Hershman Leeson's *Electronic Diaries* is not among her most technologically advanced [multimedia art](#) pieces, she is likely alluding to works such as *Infinity Engine* (2018), which is explored towards the end of the artist's diaries. This installation, partially commissioned by the Zentrum für Kunst und Medien (ZKM), Karlsruhe in Germany saw the [multimedia artist](#) build a functional genetics laboratory, complete with lab reports on the latest developments in the world of genetic engineering. There was even a 'capture room', in which facial recognition software was deployed to capture images of users, revealing the particulars of their DNA and adding it to an evolving repository.



Various collage works by Lynn Hershman Leeson, installation view, 1984 - 2019, Lynn Hershman Leeson Image: Alwin Lay

Returning to Hershman Leeson's diaries, her pathbreaking [digital art](#) features sections where the [new media artist](#) reflects on how the evolution of media and technology shapes our existence. Among other highly prescient ruminations, she also highlights the disturbing tryst between consuming and endorsing violence in media (particularly the news) and causing violence in one's surroundings.



Shadow Stalker, video, 10', colour, sound, installation view, 2018 - 2021, Lynn Hershman Leeson Image: Alwin Lay

It is fair to claim that Hershman Leeson was several decades ahead of her time, for she saw the potential of media to subvert itself. This can be evidenced clearly through the conscious manner in which she deployed [digital technologies](#). For example, in her diaries, Hershman Leeson's portraiture of herself and the other women her camera encounters is consciously tailored to defy one-dimensional narratives, as they are told by a primarily masculine media engine in the [United States](#). To quote Long, "The (*Electronic Diaries*) enable us to grasp how these tools and structures shape the understanding of ourselves and each other, and how we create and circulate images of ourselves in the world." The [art exhibition](#) at the Julia Stoschek Foundation explores the oeuvre of one of the most important [women artists](#) in new media art, and a name that carries great weight in contemporary [American art](#).

'Lynn Hershman Leeson: Are Our Eyes Targets?' is on from April 11, 2024 - February 2, 2025, at The Julia Stoschek Foundation.

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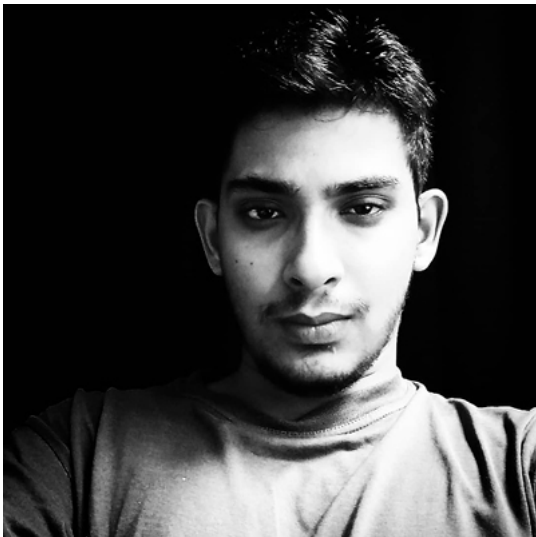
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As a writer, Manu mines the depths of the internet for subversive and evocative practices. He holds a Master in Asian Art Histories from LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore. Going beyond his digital and new media focus, his work also treads topics ranging from queer culture to the art birthed by conflict. When Manu is not busy with his writing, you can find him hard at work, making noise music and glitch art, as a member of multiple creative projects. He remains a strong believer that the medium is, in fact, the message.

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