

# THE SHED Press Release

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Installation view: *First Person Plural, The Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman, 1984-96*, KW Institute for Contemporary Arts Berlin, 2018. Four-channel video installation. Photo: Frank Sperling. Courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC.

**Artists Engage and Critique Emerging Technologies in *Manual Override* at The Shed, November 13, 2019 – January 12, 2020**

**Group Exhibition Featuring Work by Lynn Hershman Leeson, Morehshin Allahyari, Simon Fujiwara, Sondra Perry, and Martine Syms**

**Press Preview: Tuesday, November 12, 9:30 am – 12 pm**

*NEW YORK, NY, October 23, 2019*—The Shed explores the impact of technology on our lives in ***Manual Override***, a group exhibition that will include six works, four of which are newly commissioned. On view in The Shed’s Griffin Theater from November 13, 2019 through January 12, 2020, the exhibition features work by **Lynn Hershman Leeson, Morehshin Allahyari, Simon Fujiwara, Sondra Perry, and Martine Syms**. *Manual Override* is organized by critic **Nora N. Khan**, The Shed’s first guest curator, with **Alessandra Gomez**, curatorial assistant.

*Manual Override* features artists who critique the social, cultural, and ethical issues embedded in emerging technological systems and infrastructures ranging from mass surveillance to predictive policing. Central to the exhibition is the idea of a manual override, or human interference in an automated system, a gesture in response to an error in programming, or poor judgment in design. “How do you pause a system you can’t see, touch, or access? As these systems become

increasingly oppressive and beyond our understanding, and management, what options do we have?” asks Nora Khan. In response, each artist posits new forms of “overriding” to subvert the values of invasive technological systems. They do so through building networks of artistic collaboration across scientific and technological fields, including genetic engineering, simulation design, machine learning, and experimental computation.

For decades, pioneering artist and filmmaker Lynn Hershman Leeson has been working with scientists, geneticists, and engineers to explore the impact of technological progress on our understanding of the self. Hershman Leeson premieres the final episode in her seminal video series, *The Electronic Diaries* (1984-2019), and the new Shed commission, *Shadow Stalker* (2019). A new generation of artists—Morehshin Allahyari, Sondra Perry, Simon Fujiwara, and Martine Syms—have developed research practices that echo Hershman Leeson’s hybrid collaborative model, which serves as the conceptual foundation for *Manual Override*.

“*Manual Override* challenges us to think in new ways about the ever-growing role and effect of technology in our lives,” said **Alex Poots**, Artistic Director and CEO of The Shed. “Inspired by the groundbreaking work of Lynn Hershman Leeson, whose vision continues to influence generations of artists, our guest curator Nora Khan’s exhibition explores the intersection between art, science, technology, psychology, and sociology in contemporary life. An important part of *Manual Override* is the range of new commissions that enable featured artists to realize their ambitious vision.”

#### **Exhibition Overview:**

In the exhibition, Lynn Hershman Leeson presents a new Shed commission, *Shadow Stalker* (2019), which addresses predictive algorithms that increasingly forecast, score, and rank individuals’ future employment, criminality, and finances based on a mix of demographic and historical data. The installation offers a select reveal of data submitted voluntarily by visitors to underscore the bad logic of predictive algorithms today, and closes with a new film featuring actress **Tessa Thompson**.

Hershman Leeson also premieres the final film to close her acclaimed *Electronic Diaries*, a series of five films created over 30 years. *The Electronic Diaries* (1984 – 2019) explore the complex interplay between DNA editing, trauma, identity, and survival. *Manual Override* is the first time the complete series, including the final premiere, will be shown at a US institution. Also on view is Hershman Leeson’s *Room #8* (2018), the final room in a multi-room installation called *Infinity Engine*. Inside of *Room #8* are two glass vials containing the LYNNHERSHMAN antibody and the artist’s research for the past two decades (including the *Electronic Diaries*), which have been converted at the molecular level to synthetic DNA.

Morehshin Allahyari's new work *She Who Sees the Unknown: Kabous, The Left Witness and The Right Witness* (2019), commissioned by The Shed, features a VR film, sculptures, and a bedroom installation. Upon entering a bedroom modeled after the artist's childhood room in Iran, a visitor will lie down on a daybed and put on a VR headset to view a film about Kabous, a jinn (an intelligent spirit common in pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian, and Islamic mythology) who brings nightmares and sleep paralysis to human bodies. Surrounding the bed are two 3D-printed sculptures of the "witnesses" of Kabous. Through the stories of four generations of women (Allahyari's grandmother, mother, herself, and an imagined monstrous daughter), Allahyari connects concepts of war, trauma, and childbirth to the mind's possible manifestation of epigenetic trauma, stored in DNA through generations.

Working closely with a theme park ride production company, Simon Fujiwara has developed an immersive simulator ride experience for two people, who experience a ride through the real world as we experience it today: mediated daily through a flood of hyper-images, which has begun to collapse the very sense of reality with the images we consume. As part of the installation *Empathy I*, visitors sit in a pair of roller-coaster ride simulator seats, situated in front of a large curved screen, primed to experience a ride through a fantasy landscape or historical play. Instead, they find their seats syncing and moving with a precisely edited film sewing together found footage from online, mimicking its cuts, breaks, and motion, and the gestures of individuals in it. The ride shudders, lifts, slides towards and away from the screen, embodying the experience of these clips—ranging from scenes of crisis to home videos of anonymous families. The visitor's perspective is collapsed with the eye of the camera; they become at once voyeur and participant, in a deeply visceral experience of dominant image cultures today. To get to the ride, the viewer must move through a highly orchestrated waiting room, select a number from a ticketing machine, sit, and mill around, as anticipation builds for their number to be called. As they wait, they might pull one of multiple copies of *Fifty Shades of Grey* from a coffee table, hinting wryly at our collective sadomasochistic relationship to the hype of tech culture.

Sondra Perry's new commission for The Shed is *you out here look n like you don't belong to nobody: heavy metal and reflective* (2019), a film installation and continuing meditation on the history of metal and its intersecting relationship with geological time, architectural foundations, industrialized labor, slavery, and how spaces experience and manifest trauma. Perry's film documents her work with metallurgists to source and melt down an iron meteorite, her past ten years of webcams and computer "metallic trash," a piece of metal from The Shed's building, and 18th-century shackles found through an unsettling online collecting subculture. She also created a custom scent reminiscent of iron and copper that was inspired by the process, to be released into her exhibition space, to complement the film.

Martine Syms' piece *Shame Space* (2018) centers around an interactive video installation in which monitors appear inside a metal stud structure alongside

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acrylic panels printed with photographs. Visitors can interact with the protagonist *Mythicbeing* (my thick being) via an SMS chatbot programmed by the artist that controls the appearance of animation, image, and text across the monitors, live-editing the narrative of *Shame Space*. In an unfolding conversation, the visitor is pulled into a wry and self-aware dialogue around artistic success, neoliberalism, performance and shame, as these factors construct self-image in our digital age. The surrounding architectural structure includes installation trash and debris left inside the metal frame, and the computers that control the video playback are left exposed.

**Publication:**

*Manual Override* will feature a digital publication, including essays by guest curator Nora N. Khan, and critics **Rahel Aima**, **Jessica Lynne**, and **Mike Pepi**. Visitors to the exhibition can access essays on The Shed's website through a simulated airdrop.

**About the Artists:**

Over the last five decades, artist and filmmaker **Lynn Hershman Leeson** (b. 1941) has been internationally acclaimed for her art and films. Cited as one of the most influential media artists, Hershman Leeson is widely recognized for her innovative work investigating issues that are now recognized as key to the workings of society: the relationship between humans and technology, identity, surveillance, and the use of media as a tool of empowerment against censorship and political repression. Over the last 50 years she has made pioneering contributions to the fields of photography, video, film, performance, installation, artificial intelligence, interactive as well as net-based media art, and bio art.

**Morehshin Allahyari** (b. 1985) is an artist, activist, writer, and educator. She was born and raised in Iran and moved to the United States in 2007. Her work deals with the political, social, and cultural contradictions we face every day. She thinks about technology as a philosophical toolset to reflect on objects and as a poetic means to document our personal and collective lives and struggles in the 21st century. Allahyari has been included in numerous exhibitions, festivals, and workshops around the world, at venues including the Venice Biennale di Architettura, New Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, Pompidou Center, Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal, Tate Modern, Queens Museum, Pori Museum, and the Dallas Museum of Art, among others. She is the recipient of the Leading Global Thinkers of 2016 award by *Foreign Policy* magazine. Her 3D *Additivist Manifesto* video is in the collection of San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

**Simon Fujiwara** (b. 1982) is a British-Japanese artist living and working in Berlin. His work takes multiple forms including theme park-style rides, wax figures, robotic cameras, "make-up" paintings, and short films that address the complexity and contradictions of identity in a post-internet, hyper-capitalist world. Fujiwara often investigates themes of popular interest, such as tourist attractions, famous

icons, historical narratives, and mass media imagery, and has collaborated with the advertising and entertainment industries to produce his work in a process he describes as “hyper-engagement” with dominant forms of cultural production. His work can be seen as a complex response to the human effects of image fetish, technology, and social media on his generation.

**Sondra Perry** (b. 1986) makes videos and performances that foreground the tools of digital production as a way to critically reflect on new technologies of representation and to remobilize their potential.

**Martine Syms** (b. 1988) uses video and performance to examine representations of blackness. Her artwork has been exhibited and screened extensively, including presentations at the Museum of Modern Art, Hammer Museum, ICA London, New Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Studio Museum in Harlem, among other institutions. She has lectured at Yale University, SXSW, California Institute of the Arts, University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins University, and MoMA PS1, among other venues. Syms’s recent presentations include *Boon, Secession, Vienna*; *Projects 106: Martine Syms*, Museum of Modern Art; *Borrowed Lady*, Simon Fraser University Galleries, Vancouver; *Fact and Trouble*, ICA London; *COM PORT MENT*, Karma International, Los Angeles; and *Vertical Elevated Oblique*, Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York. From 2007 – 11 she was the co-director of the Chicago artist-run project space Golden Age, and she currently runs Dominica Publishing, an imprint dedicated to exploring blackness in visual culture. She is the author of *Implications and Distinctions: Format, Content, and Context in Contemporary Race Film* (2011). Her first US solo museum exhibition, *Projects 106: Martine Syms*, premiered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in May of 2017, traveling to the Graham Foundation in Chicago in 2019. She is a faculty member in the School of Art at the California Institute of the Arts.

#### **About the Curator:**

Nora N. Khan is a writer. Her practice takes the form of criticism, with a focus on digital visual culture and art that makes arguments through software, teaching, and a range of artistic collaborations, from opera librettos to installations. She is a professor at Rhode Island School of Design in Digital + Media (D+M), where she teaches writing, experimental criticism, critical theory, and artistic research to MFA graduate students in D+M, Graphic Design, and Industrial Design. She is a longtime editor at [Rhizome](#), and currently, *Prototype*, the book of Google’s Artist and Machine Intelligence Group.

She has published fiction and criticism for over ten years in forums like *4Columns*, *Art in America*, *Flash Art*, *Mousse*, *California Sunday*, *Spike Art*, *The Village Voice*, and *Rhizome*. In 2019 her short book [Seeing. Naming. Knowing](#), a polemic on machine vision and predictive policing, was published by *The Brooklyn Rail*, and then translated into Spanish as *Ver, Nombrar, Saber*, by Diego Gerard and diSONARE (Mexico City). In 2017, she co-wrote, with artist and writer Steven

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Warwick, [Fear Indexing the X-Files](#) (Primary Information, 2017). Forthcoming is a new book, *The Artificial and the Real* (Art Metropole, 2019). She often contributes essays for exhibitions, such as at the Serpentine Galleries (Ian Cheng and Sondra Perry), Chisenhale Gallery (Yuri Pattison), Venice Biennale – Estonian Pavilion (Katja Novitskova), Swiss Institute/Centre Pompidou, MAXXI, HeK Basel, and Kunstverein in Hamburg (Jeremy Shaw), in books published by Koenig Books, Sternberg, CURA, Mousse, and Information Office.

Last year, she collaborated with Sondra Perry, Caitlin Cherry, and American Artist to create [A Wild Ass Beyond: ApocalypseRN](#) at Performance Space, New York. Her writing has been supported by Fogo Island Arts (Islands Arts Writing Residency, 2019), a [Critical Writing Grant](#) (Visual Arts Foundation and Crossed Purposes Foundation, 2018), an Eyebeam Research Residency (2017), and a Thoma Foundation 2016 [Arts Writing Award](#) in Digital Art. Her essays have been translated into German, Italian, Thai, and Chinese.

**About The Shed:**

Located on Manhattan’s west side, where the High Line meets Hudson Yards, The Shed commissions original works of art, across all disciplines, for all audiences. From hip hop to classical music, painting and sculpture to literature, film to theater and dance, The Shed brings together leading and emerging artists and thinkers from all disciplines under one roof. The building—a remarkable movable structure designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Lead Architect, and Rockwell Group, Collaborating Architect—physically transforms to support artists’ most ambitious ideas. Committed to nurturing artistic invention and bringing creative experiences to the broadest possible audiences, The Shed, led by Artistic Director and CEO Alex Poots, is a 21st-century space of and for New York City.