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The Art Detective pro

I Glimpsed the Art World's Future in Times Square. It's A.I.-Based, Female, and Mind-Bending

Laurie Simmons has taken over the famous site with a groundbreaking A.I.-driven art installation.



Laurie Simmons' Autofiction: Moving Pictures, Waiting & Looking Up. Photo: Michael Hull, Courtesy of Times Square Arts

Katya Kazakina • December 20, 2024 • \propto_0° Share This Article

Shortly before midnight on Wednesday, I found myself in Times Square, standing in the rain, in the presence of several of the art world's greats, like critic Roberta Smith and artists Louise Lawler, Marilyn Minter, and Laurie Simmons.

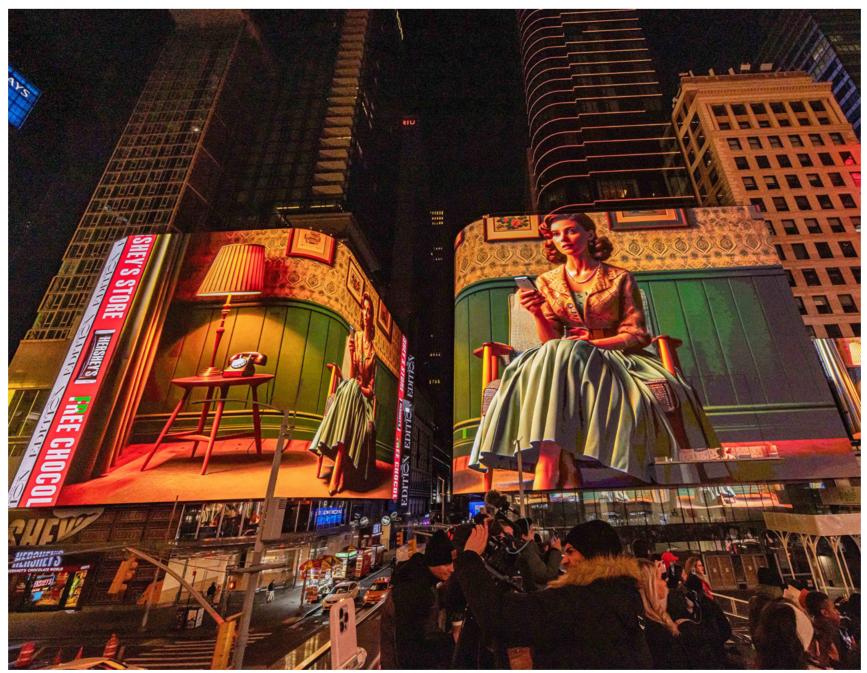
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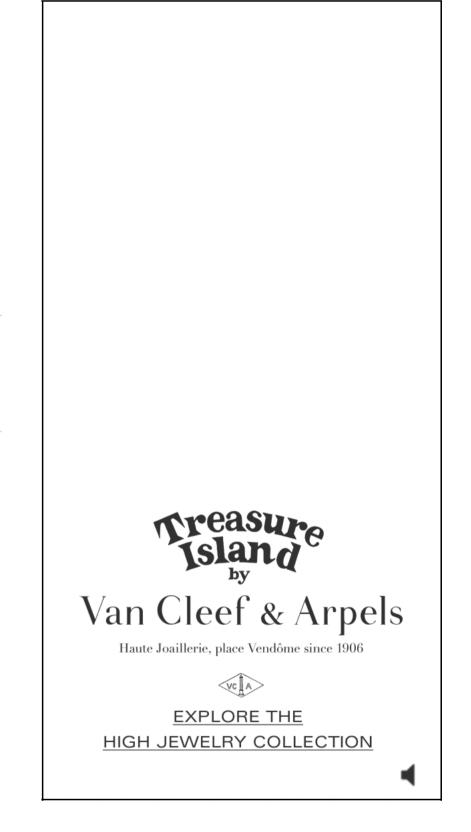
We were all waiting to see Simmons's latest project, which involved her literally taking over Times Square. The anticipation was thick. It was like waiting for the ball to drop.

"It's better than New Year's Eve," Minter, zipped up in a red raincoat, said. "Because it's Laurie Simmons."

Suddenly, at exactly 11:57 p.m., 92 electronic billboards all around Times Square stopped pulsating with ads for Coca-Cola, Broadway plays, and fashion brands, and began a synchronized 10-second countdown.

Then a digitally animated young woman appeared on all 92 screens, with "Autofiction: Moving Pictures" written in white letters across her blue T-shirt. For the next three minutes, a parade of pensive, vacanteyed women appeared in rooms color-coordinated with their attire. They looked like they were waiting for something.





Sell V Search Q

Photo: Michael Hull, Courtesy of Times Square Arts

The images came like waves, perfectly synchronized on all those screens, forming a monumental, ravishing immersive art installation. A spell descended over one of the busiest spots of New York City.

It was a little surreal to see hundreds of people looking up at screens that were showing A.I.-generated women looking down at their cell phones. Somewhere in between, there was an axis where the two realities met and something new came into being.

"I felt like I was a child at a fireworks display," Simmons, 75, told me today. "Everyone was looking up and pointing and telling each other where to look. And in this case, saying my name over and over. It was not like anything else I've ever done."

The experience also felt very "next gen," to use the tech term for products developed with the latest technologies that often replace existing ones.

In the art world, "next gen" is the talk of the town, from the aisles of trade shows like Art Basel Miami Beach, to cutting-edge institutions like London's Serpentine Galleries, to new podcasts like <u>Artwrld</u>.

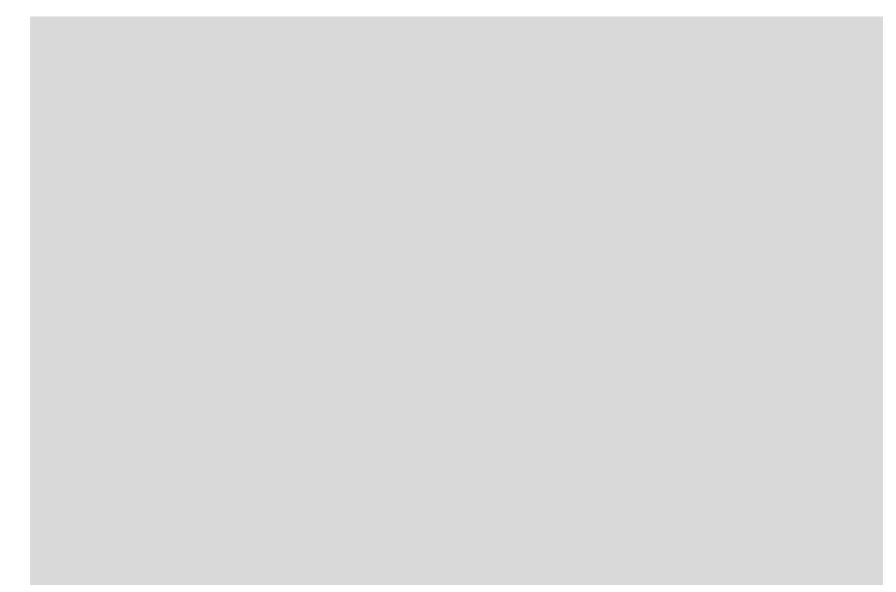


Photo: Michael Hull, Courtesy of Times Square Arts

Everyone is trying to figure it out. What will the next generation of artists dream up? What tools will they use? Will A.I. make traditional art obsolete? How will this affect collecting? The "Great Wealth Transfer" is under way, with the estimated \$84 trillion poised to change hands by 2045. What art will newly rich millennials and Gen-Zers buy? Will they buy art at all?

I turned to Hans Ulrich Obrist, the omnipresent artistic director of London's Serpentine Galleries and whisperer to billionaire collectors like <u>Maja Hoffmann</u>.

"In the 19th century we had the novel," Obrist told me by phone. "In the 20th century, cinema became a very important medium. Now, it's gaming."

He cited some interesting stats. Last year, more than three billion people played video games, about a third of the global population, he said. The average age of the players was around 35.

"So it's not just teenagers in their parents' basements," Obrist said.

Photo: Michael Hull, Courtesy of Times Square Arts

New technologies have long been a priority for the Serpentine. It launched Serpentine Arts Technologies in 2013 and collaborated with artists including KAWS, who made images for *Fortnite*'s landing page, and Rafik Anadol, whose generative A.I. work recently entered MoMA's collection. (My Artnet colleague Ben Davis <u>compared it to a lava lamp</u>.) Artist Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley will explore Black trans stories in a gaming-inspired show next September.

"I visit studios all the time," Obrist said. "When I talk to artists they say that their dream is to make video games."

It's easy to see why. This year, the Serpentine presented a video game project, "Third World: The Bottom Dimension," by <u>Gabriel Massan</u>. It caught the eye of superstar Madonna, who asked the young Brazilian artist to create a set for her Celebration tour.

Tapping into the new zeitgeist is important for institutions because it attracts new audiences, Obrist said. Scores of youngsters attended the Serpentine's KAWS exhibition after seeing it in ultra-high-definition <u>on</u> <u>the online game *Fortnite*</u>. Many brought their parents.

"Usually it's the other way around," Obrist said.



Laurie Simmons' *Autofiction: Moving Pictures, Waiting & Looking Up.* Photo: Michael Hull, Courtesy of Times Square Arts

Gaming's appeal to artists is multi-pronged, Obrist said. It allows them to build new worlds and to collaborate with writers, musicians, animators, and other creatives.

He was quick to point out that technology is not going to replace traditional media like painting and sculpture. "It's a new, additional possibility for artists," he said.

That is is precisely how Simmons, an acclaimed Pictures Generation figure known for photographs and films that explore identity and gender roles, sees her "collaboration" with three A.I. platforms. She's been creating new imagery based on work she's done since the 1970s.

Take the iconic dollhouse, known as *Kaleidoscope House*, from 2001 that sits on a pedestal at the ICA Miami, lent by Miami collector and real estate developer Craig Robins. Simmons created it with architect Peter Wheelwright. A few blocks away, a 10-foot architectural detail of the house is installed inside an <u>atrium</u> in the Design District. Scan a QR code, and your phone generates a selfie in one of 100 interiors from the original *Kaleidoscope House*. You leave with a digital artwork. You also "get a clue of what life in *Kaleidoscope House* would feel like," Simmons said. Her photographs of some of these interiors were exhibited a show at Deitch Projects in New York in 2001.

It's a heady brew of old and new, real and unreal.



Photo: Michael Hull, Courtesy of Times Square Arts

"I hate calling myself an A.I. artist," Simmons said. "But from the moment I tried it, it felt like it was a continuation of the kind of imagery that I've always worked with. And it also gave me a new way to find that interstitial space between fantasy and reality, doll and human, which is always where I've operated."

Curiously, A.I. made Simmons work more hands-on, a major departure from her previous approach to image making. But A.I.'s imperfections required her to improve the images by hand with paint, embroidery, and collage, fixing hands that looked like packages of hot dogs and drooping faces.

"So in a sense, using technology from the 21st century forced me to go back to my early roots as an artist and to become a studio artist again," she said.

None of this surprises Obrist, who used A.I. in a survey of Judy Chicago at the Serpentine last summer. "Yes, the legendary Judy Chicago," he said, when I gasped in disbelief. While the core of the show was works on paper, it had an augmented reality component that allowed visitors to make digital sculptures with the artist.

"The future is mixed reality," Obrist said. "And then of course you have to keep in mind what Martha Rosler said, that the future always flies in under the radar. So there will be a lot of unexpected things we could never predict."

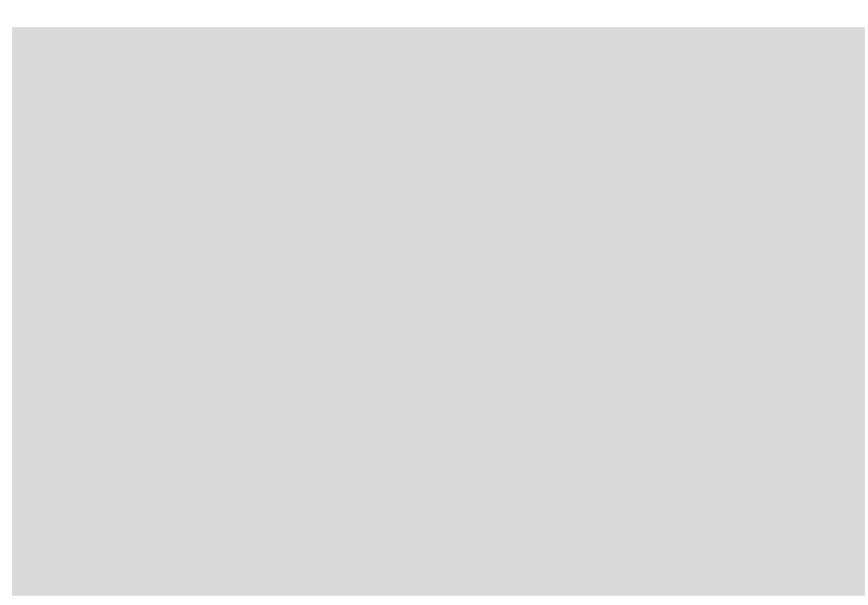
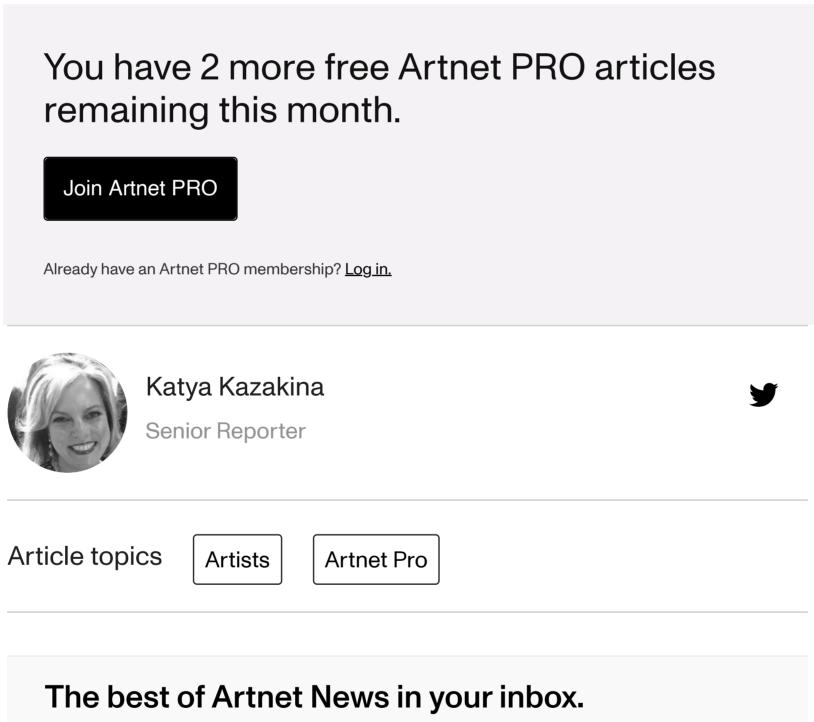


Photo: Michael Hull, Courtesy of Times Square Arts

Laurie Simmons and Peter Wheelwright's The Kaleidoscope (...Bigger) House is on view at 3930 NE 2nd Avenue in Miami through March 31. Simmons's project in Times Square, Autofiction: Moving Pictures, Waiting & Looking Up, is on view nightly from 11:57 p.m. to midnight, through December 30. It's organized by Times Square Arts.



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