ALMINE RECH

Hajime Sorayama
CYBER LADIES' WORLD

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Hajime Sorayama interviewed by Jérôme Sans
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Jérôme Sans: *You started your career in advertising, then worked in illustration, art, fashion, design, and even technology, having collaborated with Sony to make a robotic pet. What would you say your main occupation is?*

Hajime Sorayama: I work in entertainment. I never think of myself as an artist as I don't know what "art" is.

JS: *When did you start working on "feminine cyborgs" or "sexy robots"? The theme seems to be more and more relevant in our increasingly technological society.*

HS: I painted the first pinup robot in 1980. It was commissioned work for the Japanese whisky, Suntory.

JS: *While robots are usually seen as machines designed for human consumption, you portray them with highly human qualities through eroticization. Where does the idea come from?*

HS: I've been interested in machines and metal since I was child. I am addicted to the shine of metal. As I was born male, the female body provides aesthetic qualities which I never bore of. It's like a natural or primitive emotion that was handed down from my ancestors 200,000 years ago.

JS: *There is a unique closeness that unites Japanese people and technology, a true symbiosis leading to technology infiltrating every corner of Japanese society. Do you think that your work is influenced by the digital culture that is very present in Japan and in Asia in general?*

HS: I'm not sure how to answer that, but when I collaborated with Kim Jones for Dior, people started telling me my work represented Japanese culture, which is ironic because my family are ashamed of me.

JS: *What is your relationship to eroticism? It seems to be at the center of your work since the early 80s, namely the naked or pin-up girls and legendary western Hollywoodian actresses like Marylin Monroe. When did they become part of your iconography?*

HS: The United States won against Japan in the second world war and continued to introduce their culture to our country in the 1960s and 70s, including pornography showing blonde women. For my generation being a teenager in the 1970's, it was very influential, more so than any weapon.

JS: *How is your work perceived in Japan since nudity and eroticism is often censored by what is a quite puritan society?*

HS: Japanese or Asian art history also comprises a huge amount of works created using erotic topics. I really don't understand why we need to feel shame about nudity, sex, or eroticism, since we all know how we were conceived.

JS: *You are internationally recognized as the primary innovator of "hyperrealism" through your airbrush technique. When did you develop this technique?*

HS: I learned how to use an airbrush from my godmother, the artist Harumi Yamaguchi. I needed it to represent the air and shine of metal in my paintings.

JS: *Are you comfortable with this label of "hyperrealism" in your work and did you feel close to the hyperrealist artists working at the same time in Europe and in America?*

HS: I don't care what people call me, but I don't like to be associated with anyone I don't' know.

JS: *Your work mixes eroticism, robotics, myth, and fantasy. You participated in the change of our vision of eroticism notably by exploring the imagery of technology and sexuality. Is your "cyber erotic" art still provocative?*

HS: If you think so, I'm honored. Extreme technology is often super sexy.

JS: *You started working with publications and magazines making several albums of your drawings. What is your relationship to magazines and media?*

HS: For me, it's both artistic work and advertising.

JS: *Your work seems to play on a paradoxical strategy: there is a "retro" feeling with representations of cultural icons from the 60s, like Marilyn Monroe and at the same time, a futuristic attitude with the figure of the cyborg. Do you feel part of a retro-futurist approach?*

HS: Oh... don't try to make me embarrassed about being an old man! I just work on what I like. For me, it doesn't make sense to think about what is “retro” or “futurist”. I just want to survive forever through my work.

JS: *Your lifelike female robots are characterized by sensuality and flexibility that seem to contrast with the cold, lifeless metal of the robotic body. Why confront the coldness with body heat to create half-metal, half-human creatures?*

HS: Actually, I just paint metallic skin for all my robots. Then they all have their own personality, as they are all my daughters.

JS: *Why do your work focus mostly on female representation?*

HS: As I am man, I respect females and I have been addicted to painting them since I was eleven or twelve years old...

JS: *Your work centers upon an ongoing pursuit of beauty regarding the human body and the machine. It allows you to modify the body without being confined to anatomical limitations, while mimicking western beauty ideals. The standards and sensuality of bodies in advertising melt into the coldness of metal, but what is your position in taking up these canonical bodies that are debated today in favor of more diversity?*

HS: I just paint based on my own aesthetic.

JS: *Today, we are no longer sure what belongs to nature and what does not. Cyborgs are between nature and manufacture, between organisms and machines: they go beyond the logic of organic reproduction. The ideas of Nature, Man, Machine are categories that are being redefined. How do you approach the redefinition of categories between Nature, Man and Machine?*

HS:I like the idea of something or someone who can choose whether they wear an external skin, or change their body and what it is made of.

JS: *In her* Cyborg Manifesto, *the feminist writer Donna Haraway proposes that the cyborg is a feminist political method: as fiction, the cyborg is capable of changing the world, because it explores other possible modes of relationships and sociability. Do you agree with her?*

HS: If we wish so, then so it shall be.

JS: *Your work has inspired many people including George Lucas and his “Star Wars” saga, Marvel’s “Iron Man”, and more recently Alex Garland’s “Ex Machina”. Are you in dialogue with these filmmakers and have you developed a relationship through these characters and this aesthetic?*

HS: I never met with George Lucas in person but I can understand his way of thinking. I think that's enough for both of us.

JS: *What is your relationship to science-fiction? What does it mean to you?*

HS: I am always thinking through a fictional vision. It's the most creative moment for me before painting.

JS: *Which directors do you find influential in this field?*

HS: Walt Disney.

JS: *Have you ever imagined making your own scenario for a science-fiction movie, making your characters come to life?*

HS: Maybe.

JS: *Did you imagine creating your own universe in the Metaverse to make all your characters live in these digital realms and interact with your audience?*

HS: I'm too old to think about such an issue.

JS: *What do you think of NFTs?*

HS: I understand the concept. Maybe it will help me to survive forever.

JS: *The biological, geological and climatic upheavals that are now evident, as well as recent scientific research, force us to recompose a human and non-human world. How, today, can creation help to build a different and more inclusive view of the world?*

HS: It's simple: if we can't manage ourselves in the right way, we will disappear.

JS: *What do you think about technological obsolescence in our anticipation of the future?*

HS: It might be an option.

JS: *What do you think the rise of artificial intelligence will bring?*

HS: It will make it harder for human beings to prove they are unique.

JS: *In the age of avatars and while we spend a large part of our lives online, do you think the process of identity's construction is shaped by social networks and virtual worlds through which we navigate?*

HS: No, even if I'm happy to be alone in my studio for a long time so I can concentrate on my work, I have realized we are going to lose our capacity to socialize. This will destroy our unity and cause chaos. I'm fine as an old man, but we should think of our younger generations.

JS: *How do you see the future?*

HS: I don't know. Let's see if I live for more than 300 years.