LEAH BUECHLEY

Leah Buechley is an engineer, although a very unusual engineer. When studying for her engineering degrees she also took courses in dance, theatre, fine art, and design. Knowing this one can understand how she came to make the first of her contributions to the development of physical computing – to extend the range of applications into what are normally thought of as the arts. This can be seen through the 'Arduino Lilypad', a version of the Arduino which she has created to be sewn into fabrics and clothing.

Leah worked in the MIT Media Lab (MIT – the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and was the founder and Director of the MIT 'High-Low Tech' group. This was set up with the intention of applying 'high tech' techniques to what are normally thought of as 'low tech' projects. These frequently took the form of artistic creations, particularly in the visual arts.

She is also an advocate of making it possible for anyone to learn how to program physical computing devices. In her own words: 'Our primary aim is to engage diverse audiences in designing and building their own technologies by situating computation in new cultural and material contexts, and by developing tools that democratize engineering. We believe that the future of technology will be largely determined by end-users who will design, build, and hack their own devices, and our goal is to inspire, shape, support, and study these communities'. Allowing people without a technical background to develop their own technologies is an ambitious aim. Providing the support to enable them to do it is a challenge in its own right and Leah has been developing radically new ways of achieving this.

Today Leah Buechley is the owner of Rural Digital, 'a company which explores playful integrations of computation and design'. The company has extended the range of media in the application of physical computing to the arts, in particular using this technology for innovate creation in ceramics. Her work has been featured in publications including The New York Times, Boston Globe, Popular Science, and Wired.

Leah received a PhD in computer science from the University of Colorado at Boulder and a BA in physics from Skidmore College.

Leah was the recipient of the 2017 Edith Ackerman award for Interaction Design and Children.

You can hear her describe her work here: https://bit.ly/2nPNqcM