

KAREN NAVARRO



SOMOS MILLONES

FOTO RELEVANCE HOUSTON TEXAS

JAN 13 - FEB 25, 2023

# KAREN NAVARRO

## SOMOS MILLONES

*Somos Millones* (we are millions) is a visual expression of identity through Karen Navarro's uniquely deconstructed and reconstructed portraits of first, second and third generation American immigrants. Navarro's mixed-media works investigate a sense of belonging as influenced by race, migration, and the artist's own indigenous identity. By exploring her ancestral culture, and her experience as an American immigrant, she creates connections between a vast constellation of identities in the present time — connections which reinforce a vision of a more just future. Navarro utilizes crowdsourced skin tones, data, and language to craft deeply resonant portraits and experiential installations, inviting the viewer to see the world through her gaze.

The phrase "somos millones" makes reference to a rallying cry of the Mapuche Indigenous population in Argentina and Chile. Mapuche are the largest indigenous groups in Chile, numbering about 1.5 million people, with another 200,000 in Argentina. As is the case with many indigenous populations whose lands were colonized, despite their numbers, they are subject to discrimination and erasure by their governments. Navarro's exhibition title references the plight of these indigenous peoples, silenced on their ancestral lands, or spread across the globe through migration, but still present and still fighting for recognition and justice.

**Cover Image: Despojo**

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
69.5 x 46 " • Edition of 3 + 1 AP

# NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

2021 - 2022

*Neither Here Nor There* (2021 - 22) is a series of portraits that use collage to visually represent the intersections of identity, representation, race, and belonging within first, second, and third-generation BIPOC American immigrants. Navarro fragments, removes, mixes, isolates, reconfigures, and assembles images to speak about the impact of migration and race on the formation of identity and how generational history, geographical location, and other factors shape it.

Navarro is interested in the contradiction of creating work that is made out of a photograph but ceases to be one once separated into pieces and once other materials like wood, paint, and resin are added. No longer a photograph, but not quite a sculpture either — it exists in between both mediums. This hybridity of the final artwork conceptually embodies Navarro's experience as an immigrant, of feeling that she does not belong here nor there.

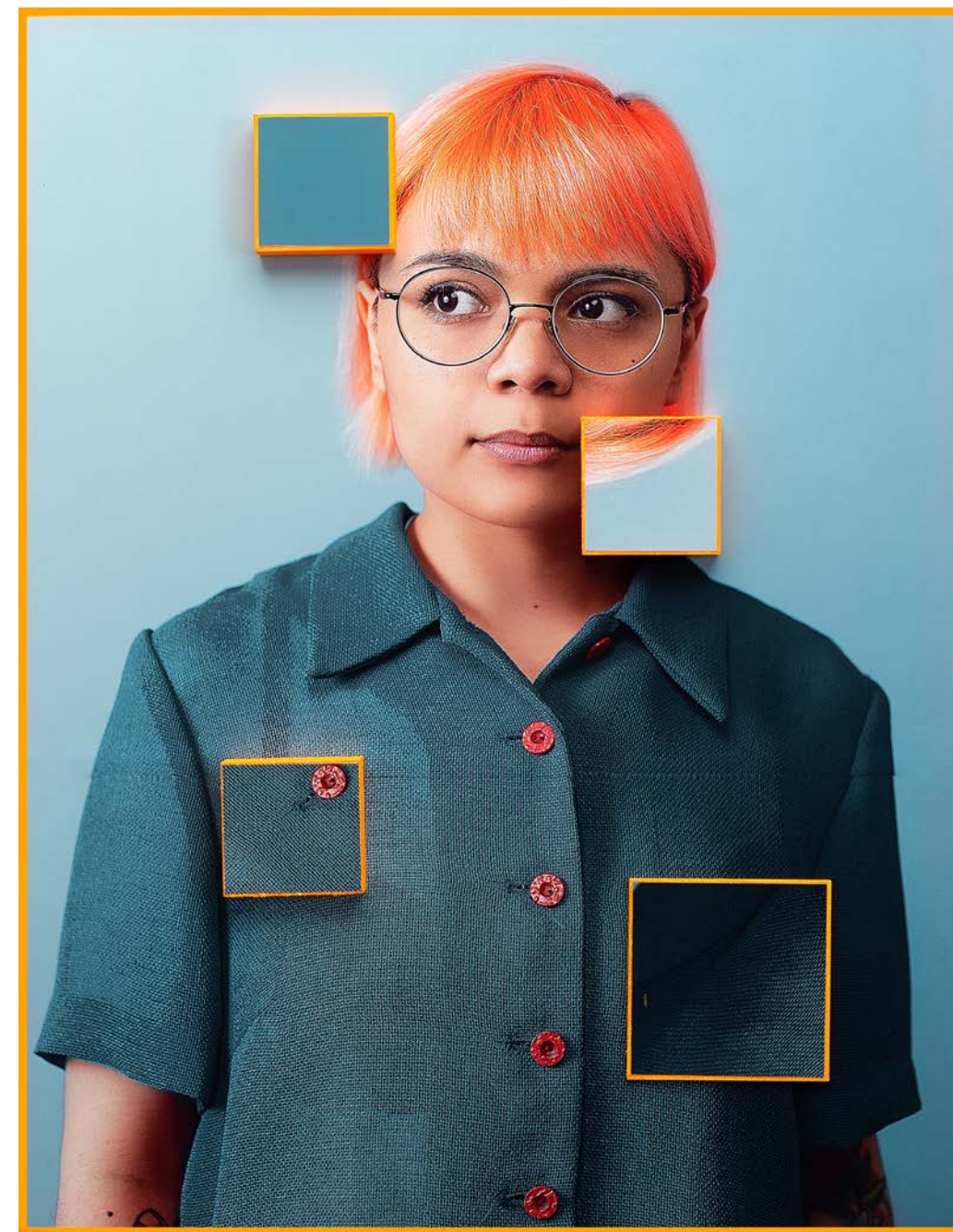
Navarro migrated to the United States somewhat recently during a time of heightened racial tensions. Around this time, she learned through her father that they are descendants of the Mapuche People from southwestern Argentina. She describes going through this period of adaptation while learning to process this new piece of information making her feel as if her identities were fragmented and some pieces were missing, a feeling she believes many share.

As Navarro looks for her place in the world, creating these portraits of others helps her to feel as if she belongs. She searches for connections among each sitter's vastly different stories which validate her own experiences. Navarro states: "I take up space to celebrate each one of them, our stories, our BIPOC identities and beauty. I take action into re-thinking the history of portraiture, by answering the question by whom and for whom to heal deeply personal and historical wounds."



**Fragmentos**

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
69.5 x 46" • Edition of 1 + 1 AP



**Fracciones**

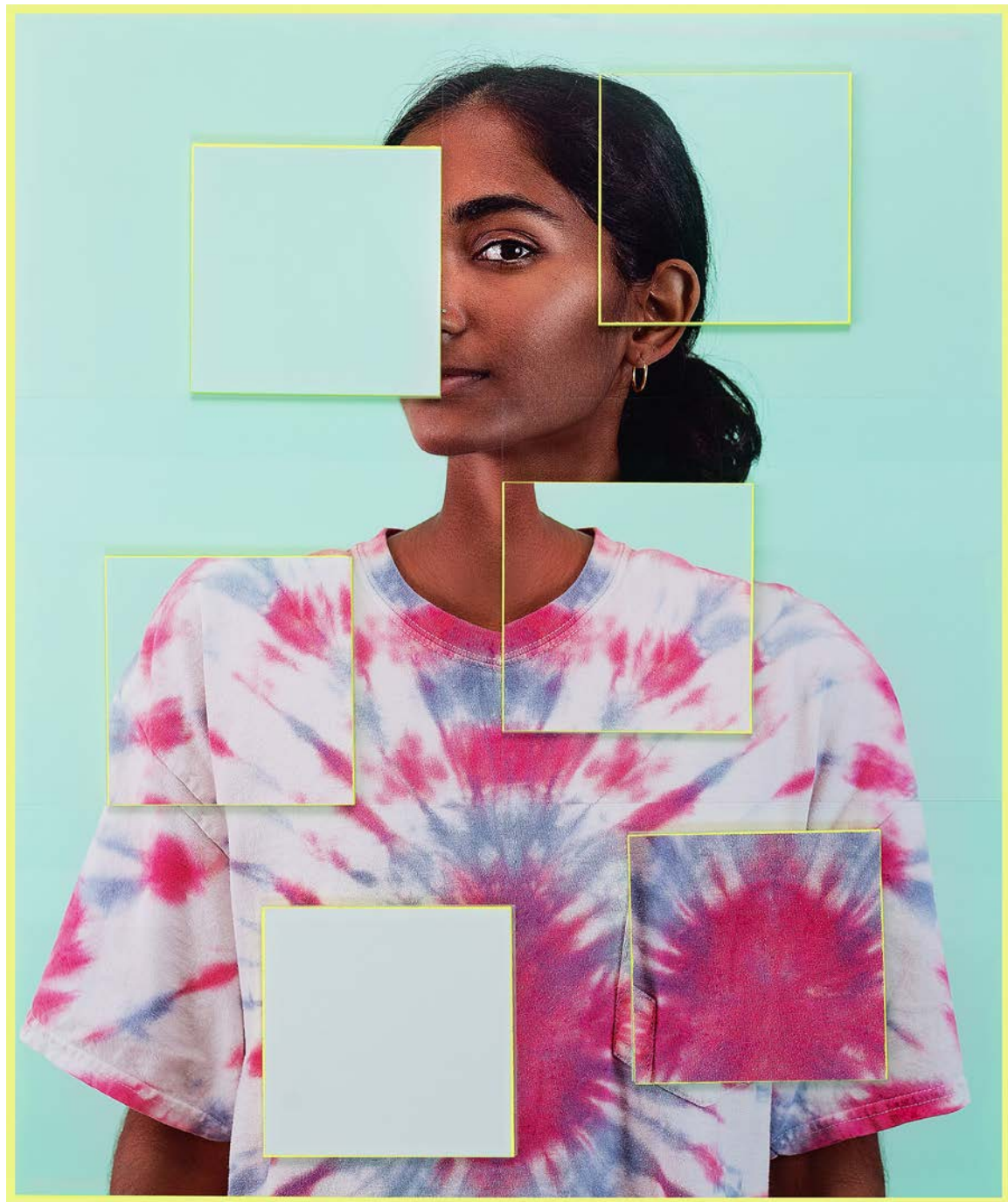
Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
18 x 14" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Segmented**  
Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
66.5 x 45" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Reconstructed**  
Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
20 x 19" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Fractional**

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
20 x 24" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Displaced**

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
24.75 x 23" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Despojo**

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
69.5 x 46" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Dislodged**

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
28.75 x 22.75" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Fractional II**  
Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
20 x 24" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Sliced**  
Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
27 x 27.5" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



# AMÉRICA UTÓPICA

2021 - ONGOING

*América Utópica* is an ongoing art project that uses crowdsourced skin tones, data, language, and other materials to create mixed-media works that explore themes of race, migration, sense of belonging, identity between communities, and Navarro's indigenous identity.

Navarro's discovery as an adult that she is a descendant of indigenous peoples from South America, combined with her experience migrating to the United States in 2014, deeply shook her understanding of identity. It sparked an interest in colorism, how minorities reconstruct identities, a migrant's sense of belonging, their collective trauma, and the historical erasure of indigenous groups.

While navigating these subjects and trying to understand the historical and political implications of identity, Navarro couldn't help but perceive herself as "the other." Her otherness as a woman, as a Latin American immigrant, and as the byproduct of colonialism has made it difficult to find a sense of belonging. This feeling has inspired the creation of works that aim to reconnect Navarro with her ancestral Indigenous culture. Through the work, she creates moments of belonging, retaking ownership of her cultural identity, long erased and silenced by the historical white, colonial gaze.

Historically, black and indigenous people of color have been – and continue to be – marginalized, discriminated against, and underrepresented. Migrants negotiate with a feeling of both acceptance and rejection, being native and outsider, as if no longer belonging in their home countries, but not fully belonging in their new homes either.

To speak about her migrant experience and connect it to the context of the United States, Navarro creates demographic portraits of America using skin colors submitted by participants. The quarantine which began in March 2020 completely halted her previous portraiture work. Soon after, the socio-political situation in the U.S. took a turn over the death of George Floyd, who was brutally murdered at the hands of the police. Navarro's artistic process shifted in response. She began collecting images of skin tones via an open call from willing participants. Her curiosity about skin tones had grown steadily and expansively since she first moved to the U.S. and had to fill out a migration form for the first time, and later the census.

By exploring her ancestors' culture, and her American immigrant experience, Navarro creates connections between her identities in the present time. These connections reinforce her vision of a more just future. *América Utópica* proposes an alternative space that addresses painful political histories while simultaneously carving out spaces for existence.

HECHOS DEL MISMO BARRO

**Mismo Barro**

Found stones, clay, magnets and flashe paint  
12 x 186" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



**Somos Millones (We Are Millions)**  
Wood, obsidian stone, LED, flashe paint  
12 x 34 x 3" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP



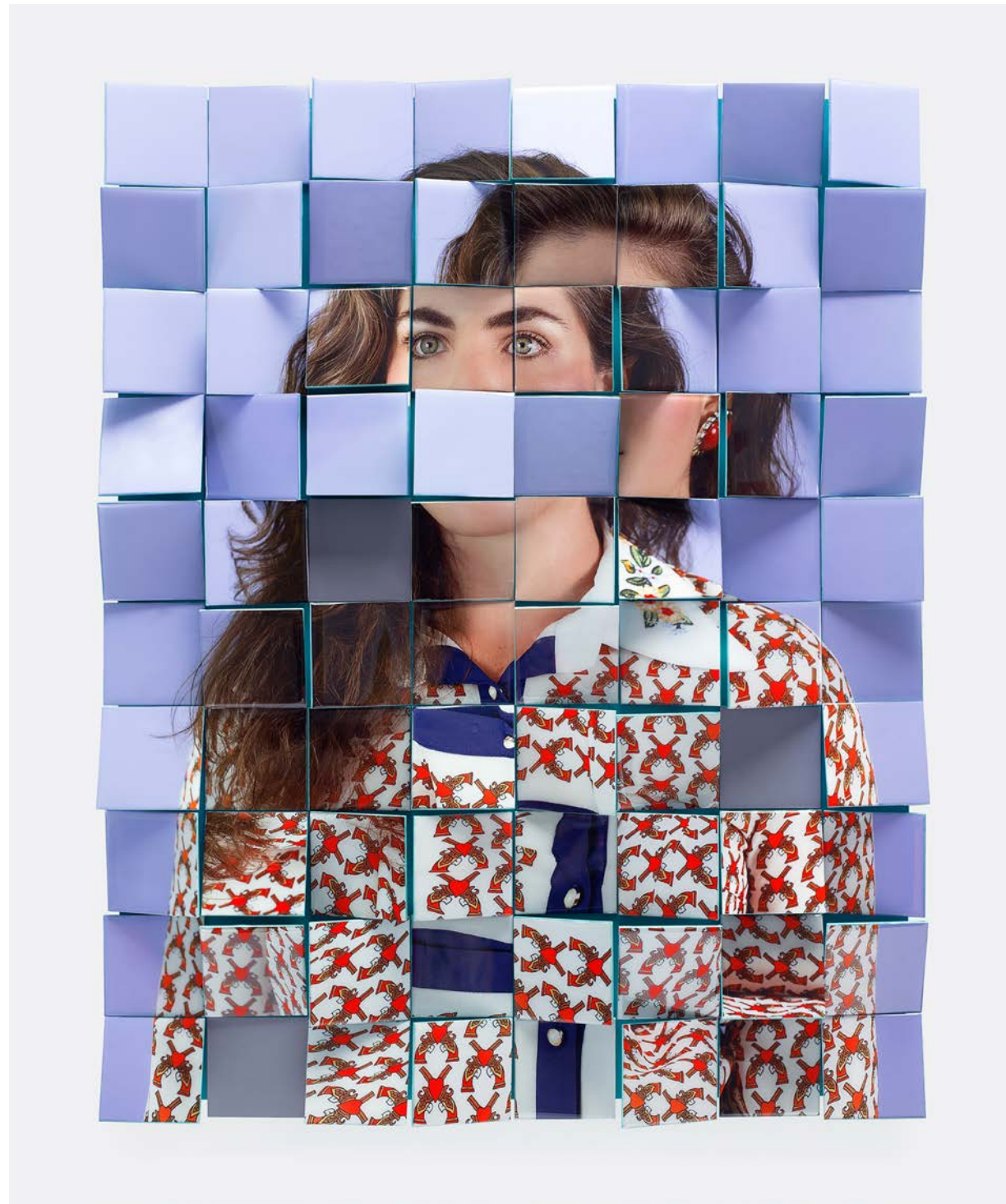
**Shine America 2043**  
Archival inkjet print, wood, epoxy, acrylic paint, acrylic, vinyl, neon lighting  
45 x 90" • Unique

# THE CONSTRUCTED SELF

2019 - 2021

*The Constructed Self* explores themes of identity and self-representation through unconventional portraiture. Using digital photography as a foundation, Navarro transforms traditional prints into three-dimensional objects by cutting and incorporating tactile elements such as wood, paint, and resin. The labor-intensive techniques she applies to create these sculptural objects not only allow for a physical deconstruction of the images, but also become a form of meditation that reflects her efforts in trying to reconstruct and make sense of her own identity.

Some of the pieces that make up these dimensional portraits can be rearranged and displayed in various ways to express the notion that identity is a social construct. At once colorful, surreal and minimal, Navarro's constructed portraits invite the viewer to challenge their own perceptions and biases by highlighting the complexities that make up who we are.



**Untitled (perspective II)**

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
30 x 24 x 3" • Edition of 1 + 1 AP



**Rearranged II**

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
32 x 30.5" • Edition of 1 + 1 AP

# KAREN NAVARRO

## THE ARTIST

Karen Navarro is an Argentinian-born multidisciplinary artist currently living and working in Houston. Navarro works on a diverse array of mediums that include photography, collage, the use of text and sculpture. Her image-based work and multimedia practice investigate the intersections of identity, representation, race, and belonging in reference to her migrant experience, her Indigenous identity and the history of colonization and its influence. Her constructed portraits are known for pushing the boundaries of traditional photography and the use of color. Navarro has won numerous awards and grants for her mixed-media photography, among them the Artadia Fellowship, the Top Ten Lensculture Critics' Choice Award, and the HCP Beth Block Honoraria, and has been shortlisted for several more, including the Photo London Emerging Photographer of the Year Award and The Royal Photographic Society, IPE 163. Her work has been exhibited in the US and abroad. Selected shows include Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), USA; Galerija Upuluh, Zagreb, Croatia; Holocaust Museum Houston, USA; Artpace, San Antonio, USA; Melkweg Expo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Houston Center for Photography, Houston, USA; and Museo de la Reconquista, Tigre, Argentina. Navarro's work has been featured in numerous publications, including ARTnews, The Guardian, Observer, Rolling Stone Italia, and Photo Vogue Festival Italia.



### Pieces

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy  
20 x 20" • Edition of 3 + 1 AP

# FOTO RELEVANCE

Since 2016, Foto Relevance cofounders Geoffrey C. Koslov and Bryn Larsen have focused on the exhibition and acquisition of museum quality contemporary fine art photography and photography-based work. Joined by Suzanne Zeller in 2019 who leads the program as Assistant Director, Foto Relevance is dedicated to providing a platform for an innovative selection of American and international photographic artists pushing the boundaries of photography. The gallery has mounted monographic exhibitions as well as group shows to investigate current trends and themes in contemporary art, showcasing a broad range of both darkroom and digital photographic techniques. In addition to promoting the work of artists, Foto Relevance provides guidance, educating individual collectors and corporations in the acquisition and sale of art. Foto Relevance is a member of the Houston Art Gallery Association (HAGA). The gallery is located in the historic Museum District of Houston, Texas.