

KAREN
NAVARRO



THE
CONSTRUCTED
SELF

FOTO RELEVANCE HOUSTON TEXAS

APR 30, 2021 - JUN 25, 2021

Fractured (Detail)

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy, vinyl
50 x 40" • Unique

KAREN NAVARRO
THE
CONSTRUCTED
SELF

The Constructed Self realizes meditation on identity through dynamic photo-sculptural portraits exploring self-representation. Disrupting photography's traditional two-dimensional presentation, these colorful configurations come assembled in many ways. At once colorful, surreal, and minimal, my constructed portraits invite the viewer to challenge their own perceptions and biases, by highlighting the complexities that make up who we are.

— Karen Navarro

SEEKING MULTITUDES

PATRICIA RESTREPO

ASSISTANT CURATOR AND EXHIBITIONS MANAGER, CONTEMPORARY ARTS MUSEUM HOUSTON

"Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

It is understandable that artist Karen Navarro gravitates to this pithy stanza in Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself, 51," a long standing favorite of mine. Throughout her practice and in her exhibition *The Constructed Self*, she wrestles with her complex and intersecting identities—immigrant, artist, woman, person of color—by tackling the multifacetedness of her sitters. Indeed, the mutable and multilayered forms of Navarro's work directly parallel her dynamic subjects: irreducible, everchanging, and the result of their environment. In her creative process, the artist explores how stories are constructed, which identities are valued, and whose histories are heard.

Navarro's photomontages depart from conventional portraiture, as the artist renders the image of the sitter through constructive and deconstructive methods. She is committed to exposing our implicit construction of identity, particularly in the age of social media, through explicitly layered figurative representations. "To disrupt photography's flat, two-dimensional surface, I cut and reassemble the images to build sculptures and collages," she explained. Drawing on Cubist investigations of materiality and perspective, Navarro's portraits underscore the mutability of identity in the digital age and challenge our visual perception. To this end, several of her new sculptural works are composed of numerous pieces that can be reconfigured and reassembled at will, emboldening her theoretical framework of fluidity.

Pursuing multiplicity over simplicity, Navarro embraces the power of collage. Collage entails the union of fragmentary images and ideas from diverse and disconnected origins into hybrid and blended works. This guiding ethos and practice is a radical artistic act that has been utilized by artists of various disciplines around the world for centuries. Its potential to open new possibilities and fresh ways of looking at our world holds steadfast. The rapid development of new technologies has expanded the creation and circulation of images, thereby enabling

collage production to shift alongside the advancements. Working in the digital age, defined by post-production possibilities, Navarro splices and reconstructs her photographs to reveal novel visages of members of her community. Through what filmmaker John Akomfrah has called the "affective proximity" of images, or juxtaposition, can Navarro's vision be felt.

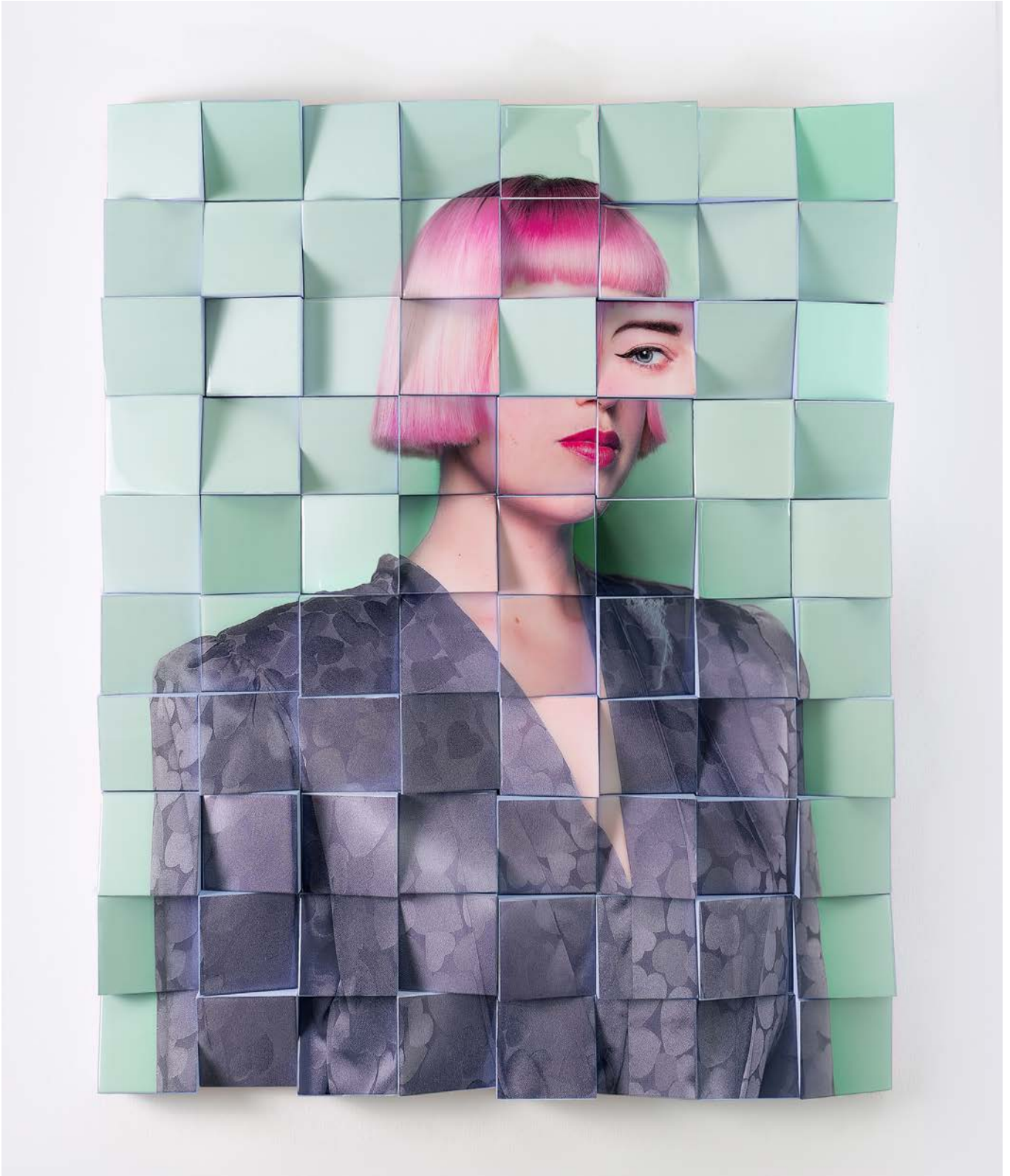
Despite societal pressure for individuals to be seen as monolithic, Navarro generously offers her sitters the chance to be rendered in all of their complexity, perhaps even beyond what they see in themselves. The writings of Lincoln Michel depict the renewed power of Navarro's celebration of the fragment in place of a perceived whole: "While the postmodernist writers used fragments to attack unity and disrupt reality, modern [contemporary] fragmented writers use them as a means of creating a coherent whole. Fragments of text like colored stones in a mosaic." Navarro's work elevates the recomposition of photographic and textual fragments. It is only through fractured narratives that history—both specific and general, personal and global, historic and contemporary—can be recognized as malleable and redirectable. This layered nature of Navarro's material and conceptual choices is evident in her photo-adjacent work, which bridges image with text and, in her work on view at Foto Relevance, light.

The seriousness of Navarro's formal and conceptual inquiries around the formation of identity, including who has agency over their own representation and what mediating forces are at play, is undeniable. Yet, her playful sensibility in rupturing of expected experience is poignant. Offering pops of neon colors, or precarious Jenga-esque sculptures experienced in the round, she introduces welcome levity and humor to this zeitgeist exploration of selfhood. Her visual recompositions offer an unorthodox outlook of how to embrace our multitudes in a moment when algorithmic reductive forces, notably through social media, are at play. Through an accumulation of fragments, Navarro offers a new understanding of what might constitute a whole. Just as her work rejects an easily digestible format, instead looking to material and conceptual complexity, we too can overturn expectations and celebrate the marvel within. Through Navarro's refusal of reductive representation, powerful presence is achieved.



Real unreal surreal

Acrylic, wood, archival inkjet print, acrylic paint, led light
16 x 12" • Unique



Untitled (perspective)

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy
35 x 28" • Unique



Untitled (rearranged)

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy
31.5 x 25.25" • Unique



Puzzled

Archival inkjet print, wood panel, acrylic paint, Epoxy
50 x 36" • Unique



I am large

Wood, acrylic paint, archival inkjet print, acrylic
16 x 12" • Unique



I contain multitudes

Wood, acrylic paint, archival inkjet print, acrylic
16 x 12" • Unique



Fractured (side view)

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy, vinyl
50 x 40" • Unique



Fractured

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy, vinyl
50 x 40" • Unique

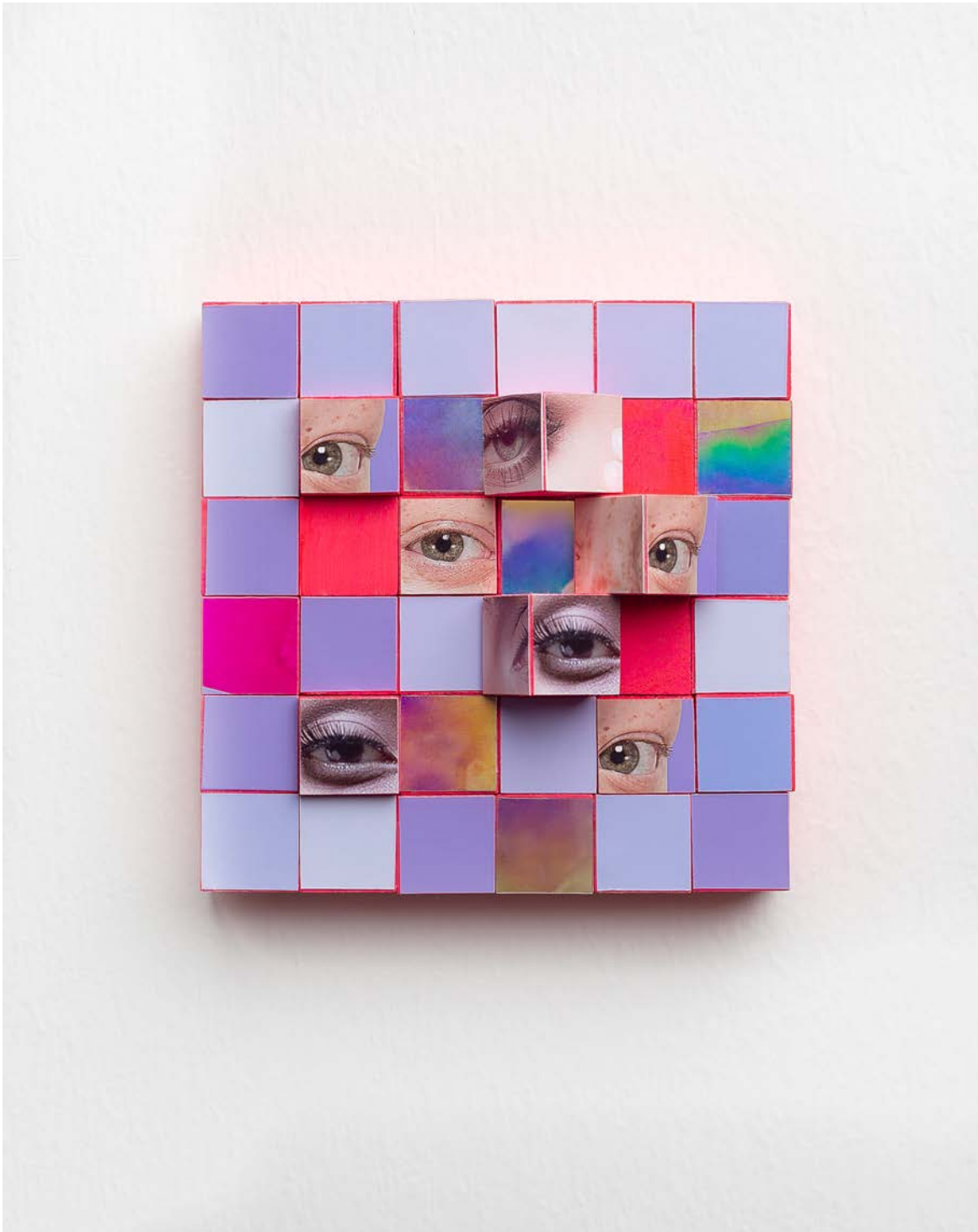


Twisted I

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy, metal rope
52 x 18 x 18" • Unique



When is that we truly belong?
Acrylic, wood, acrylic paint, led light
24 x 24" • Unique



We See You II

Archival inkjet print, wood, and acrylic paint
4.5 x 4.5" • Unique



We See You III

Archival inkjet print, wood, and acrylic paint
4.5 x 4.5" • Unique



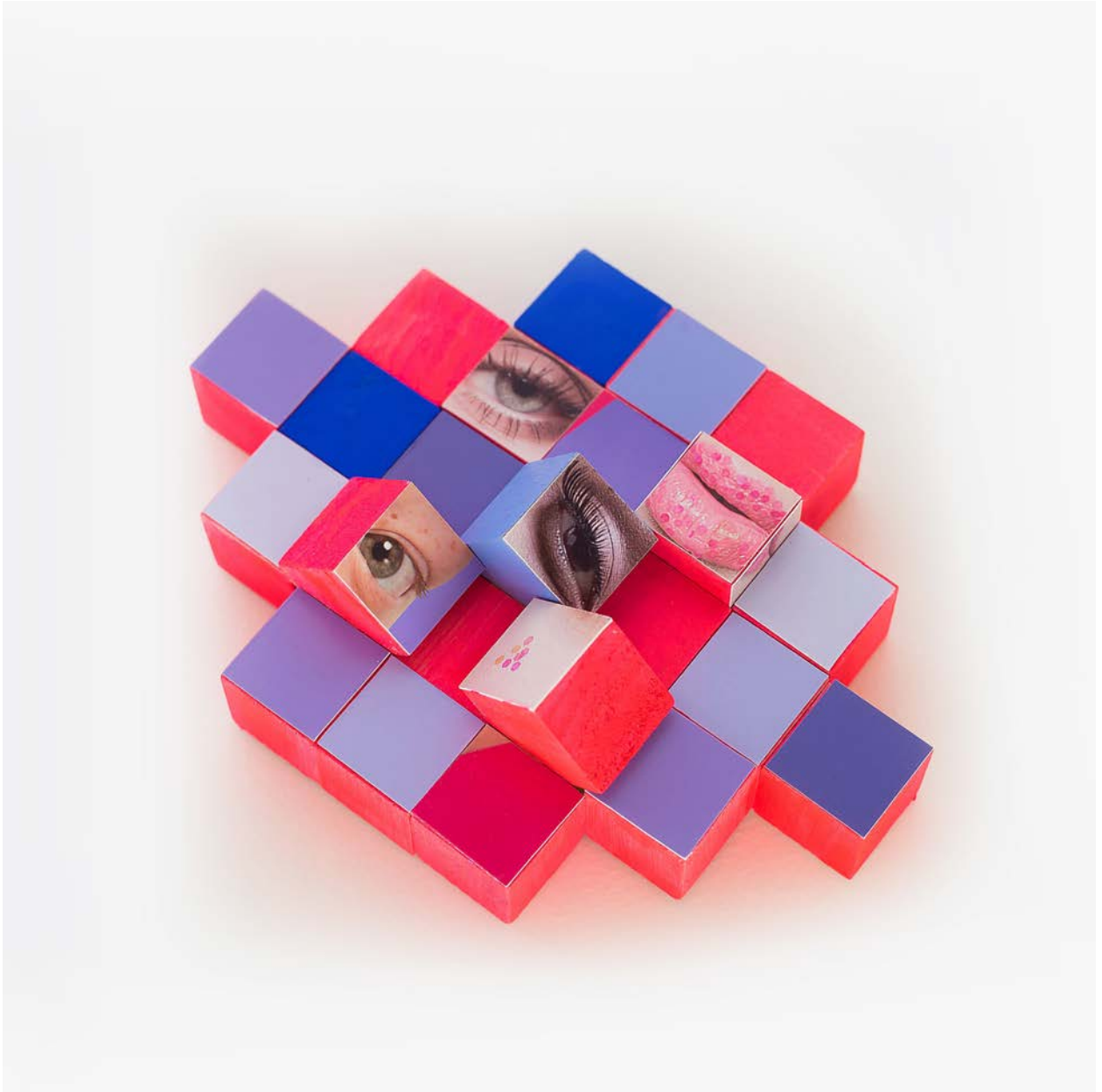
Glimpses of ourselves

Wood, acrylic paint, archival inkjet print, acrylic
12 x 8" • Unique



What is real?

Wood, acrylic paint, archival inkjet print, acrylic
12 x 8" • Unique



Love at Third Sight

Archival inkjet print, wood, acrylic paint, Epoxy
4 x 5.5" • Edition of 3



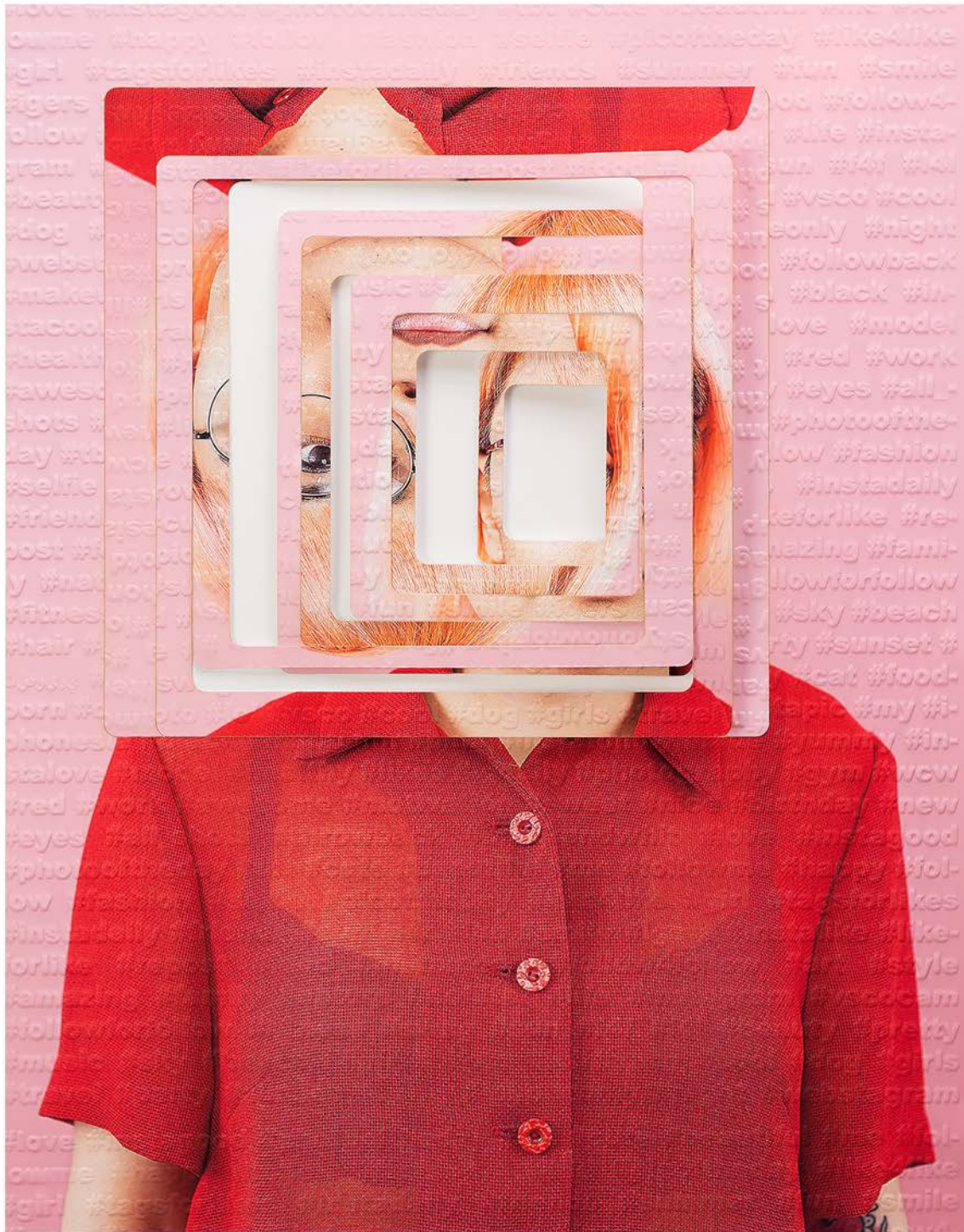
Fragment

Archival inkjet print, wood panel, acrylic paint, Epoxy
56 x 48" • Unique



Twisted variation

Archival inkjet print, wood, gesso, metal, acrylic paint, Epoxy
24 x 24 x 15" • Unique



Subject #3

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Subject #2

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



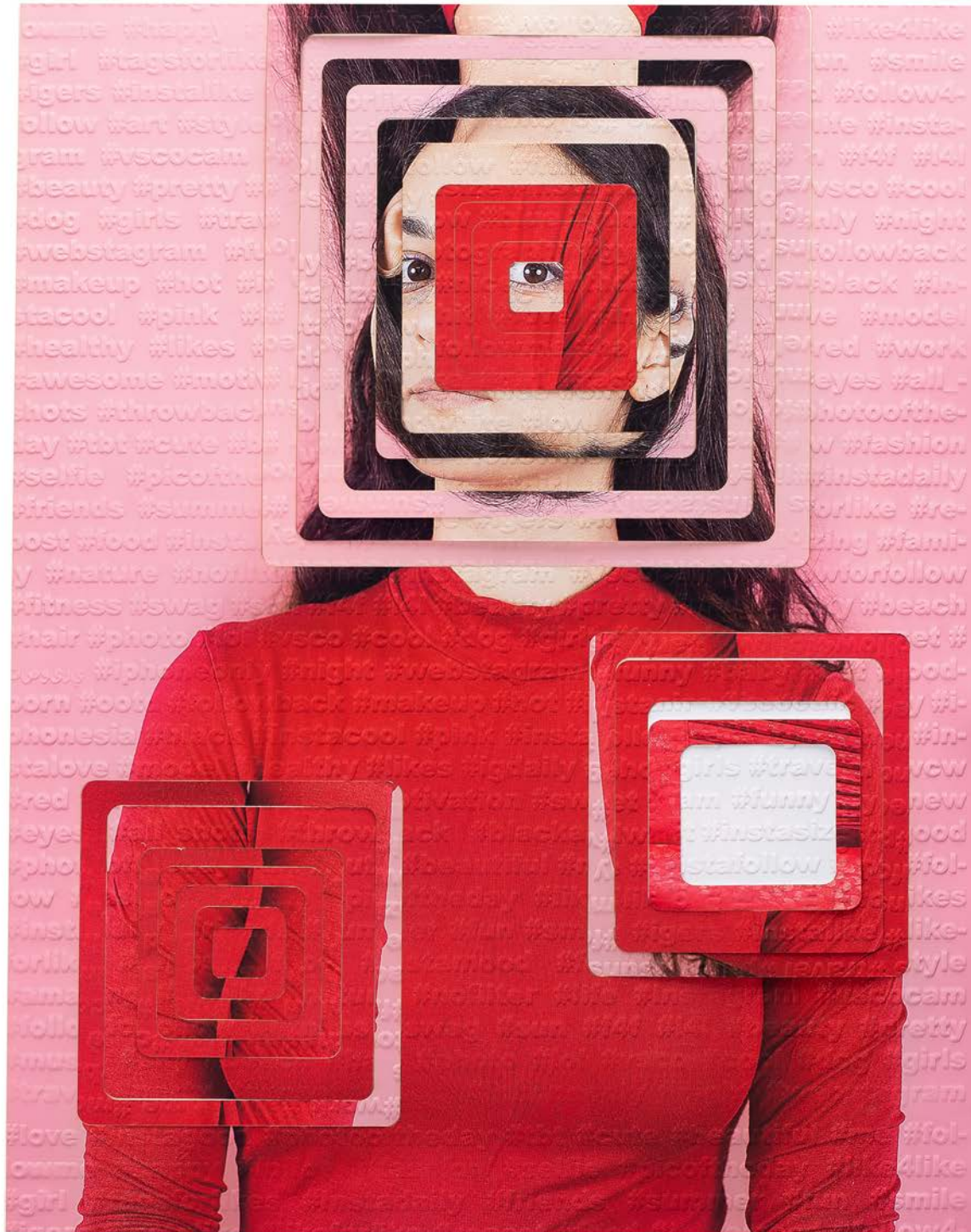
Subject #9

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Subject #11

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Subject #14

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



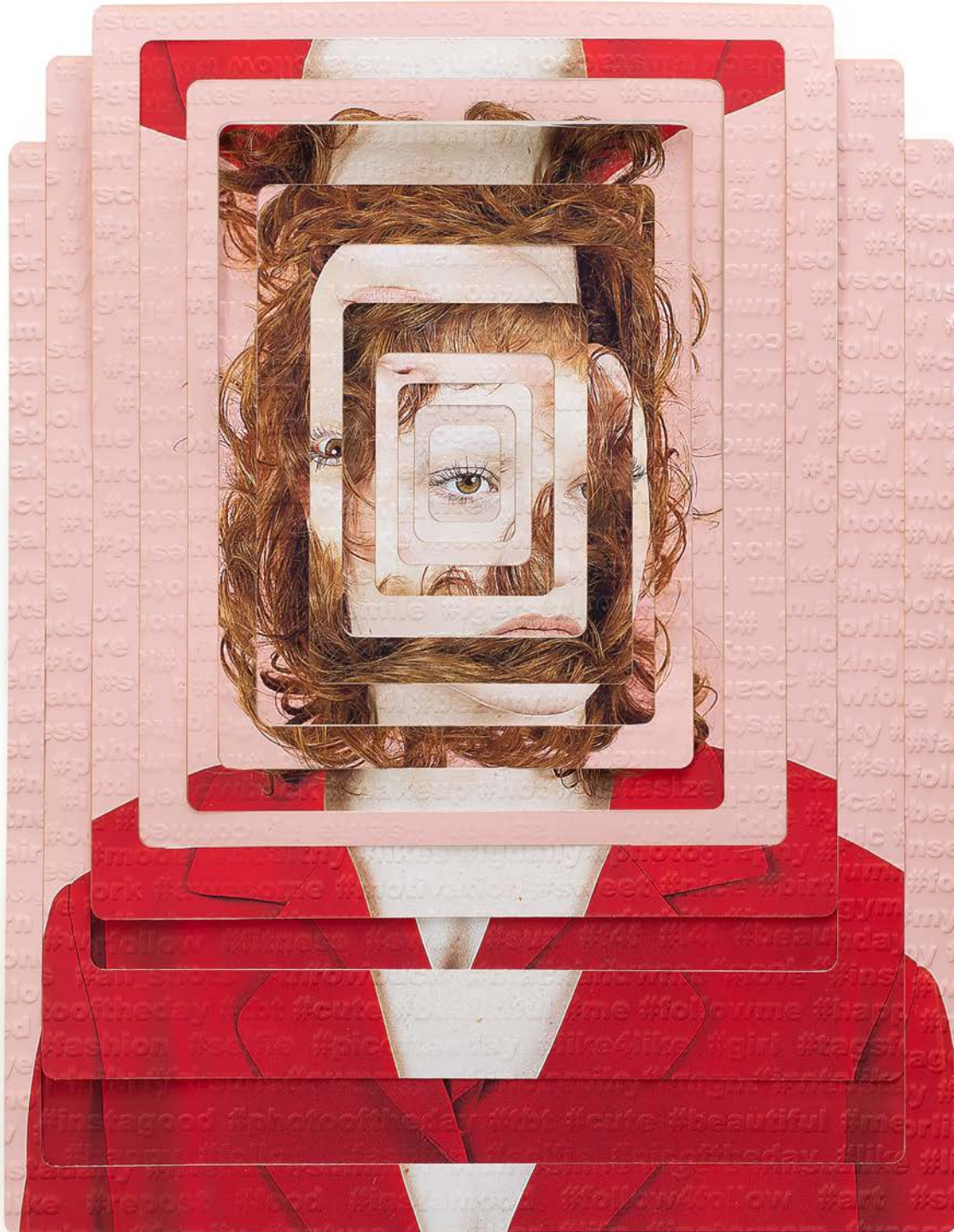
Subject #8

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Subject #7 variation 1

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



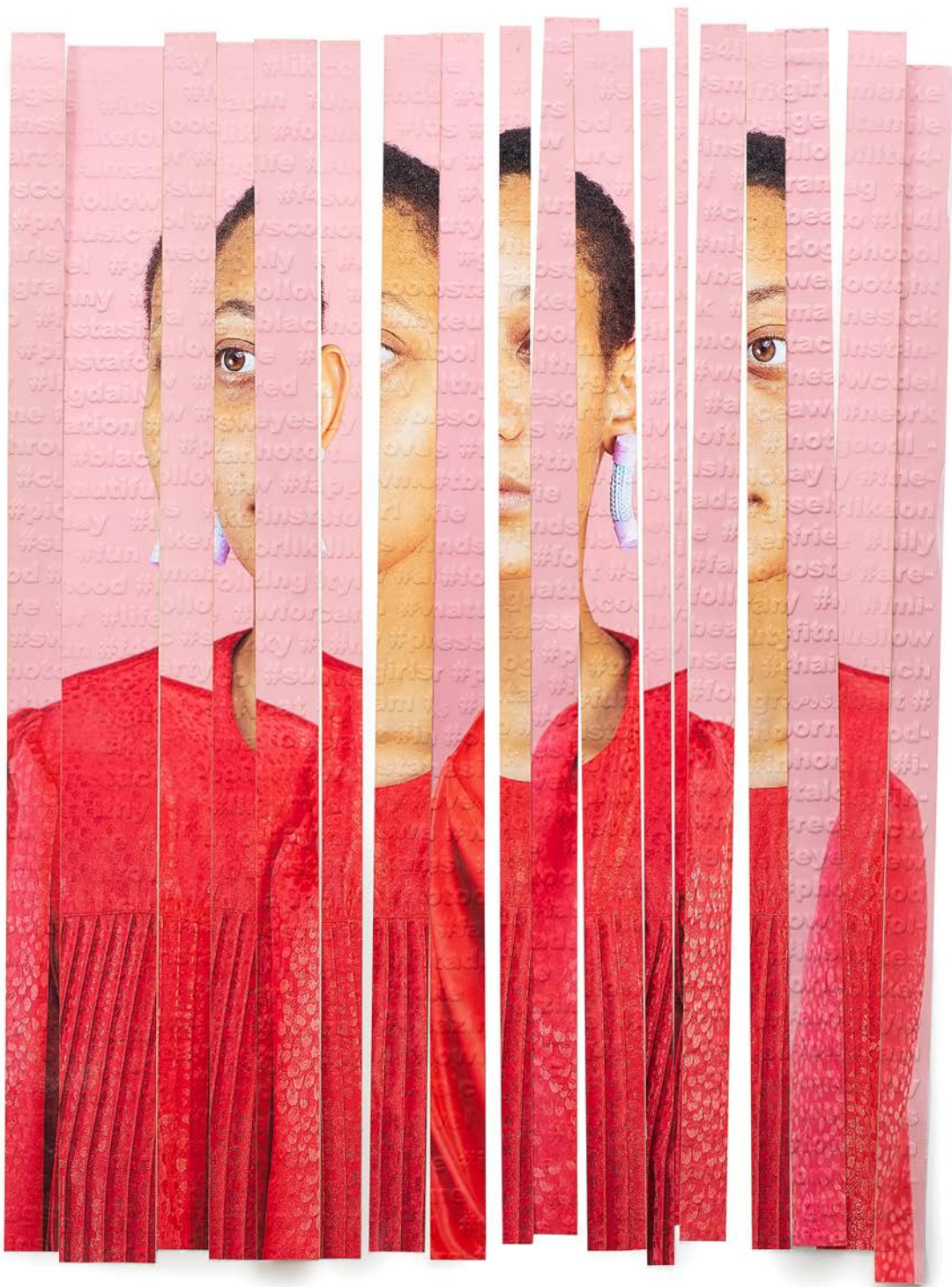
Subject #12

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Subject #10

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



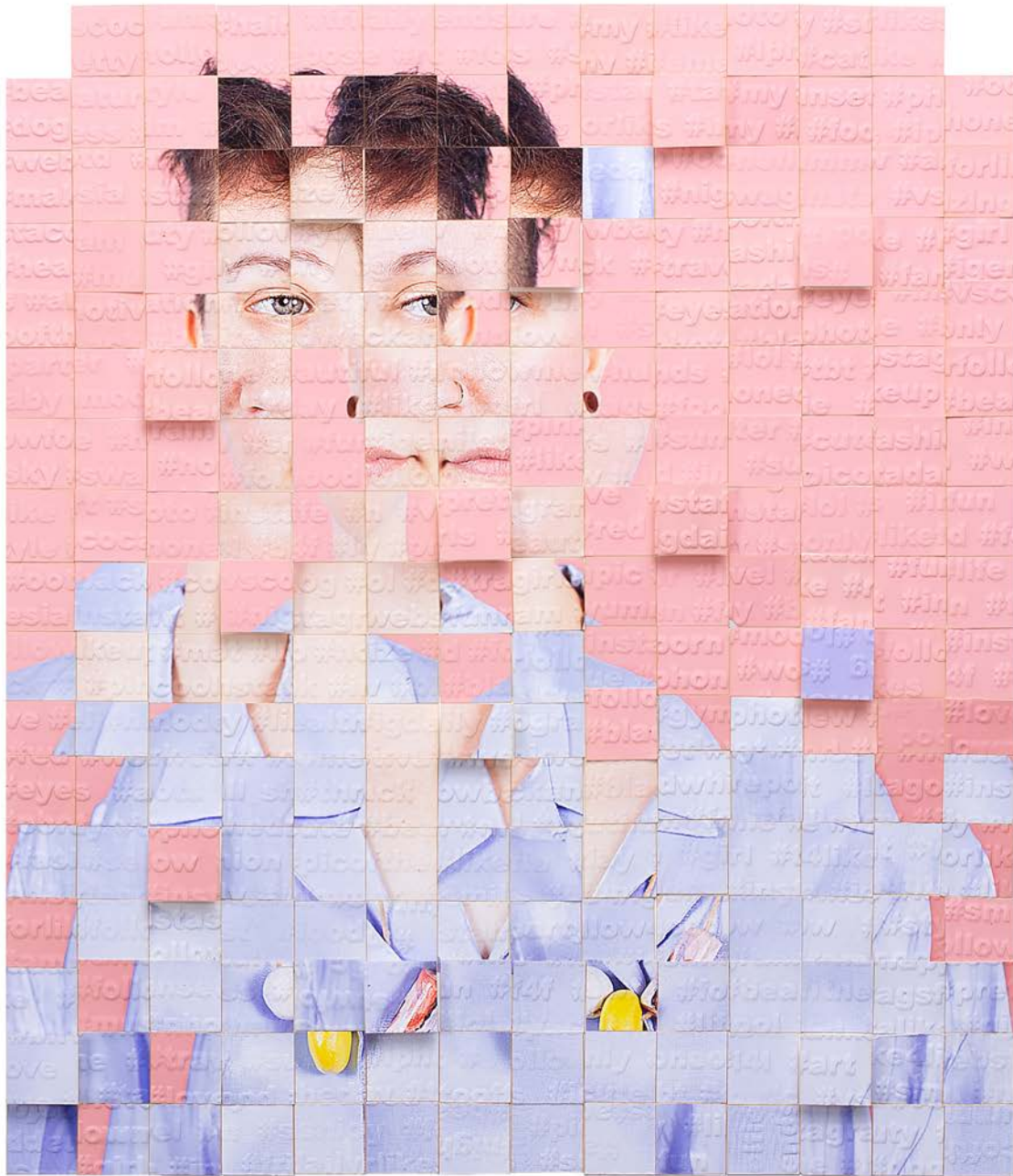
Subject #13

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



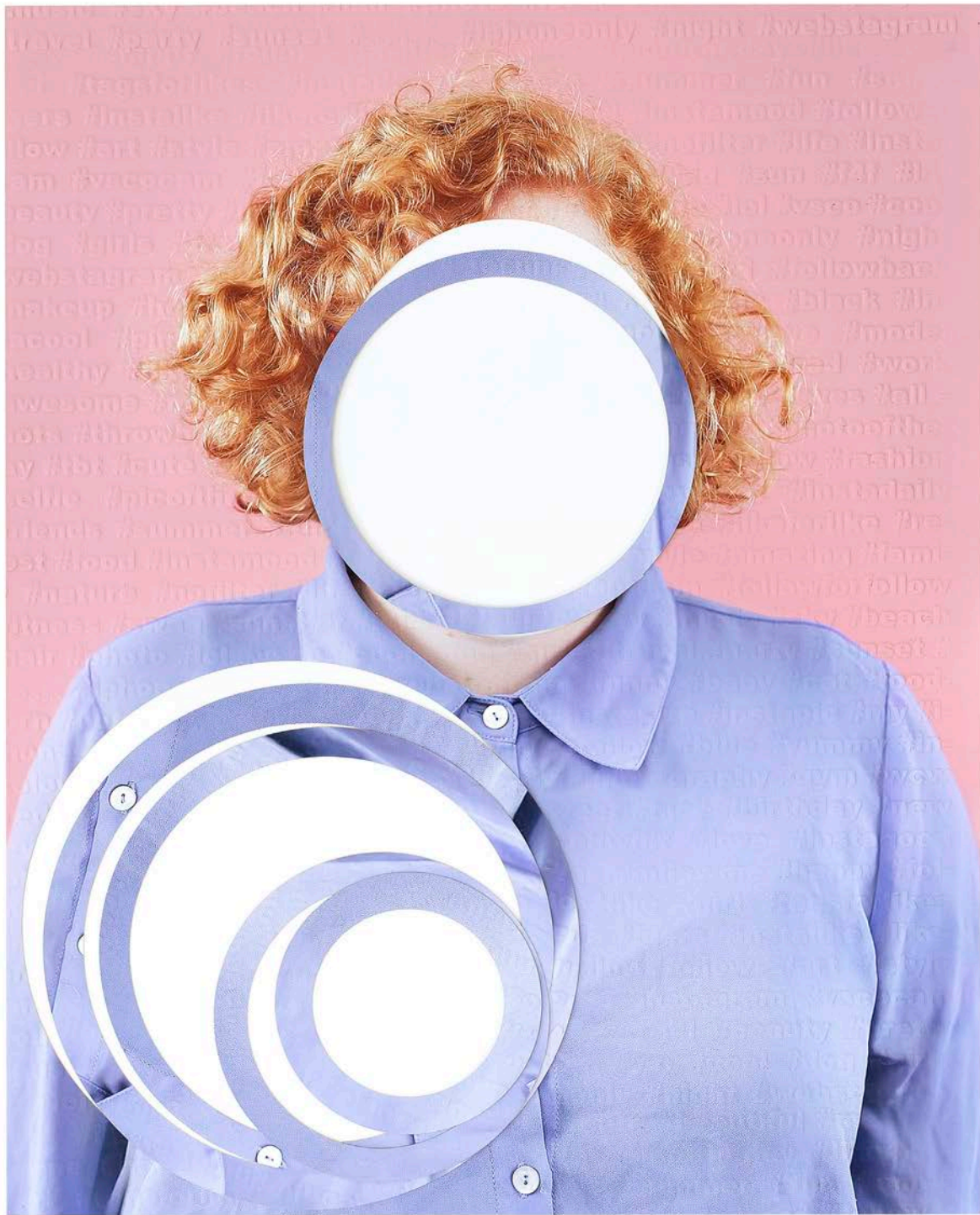
Subject #4 variation 1

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



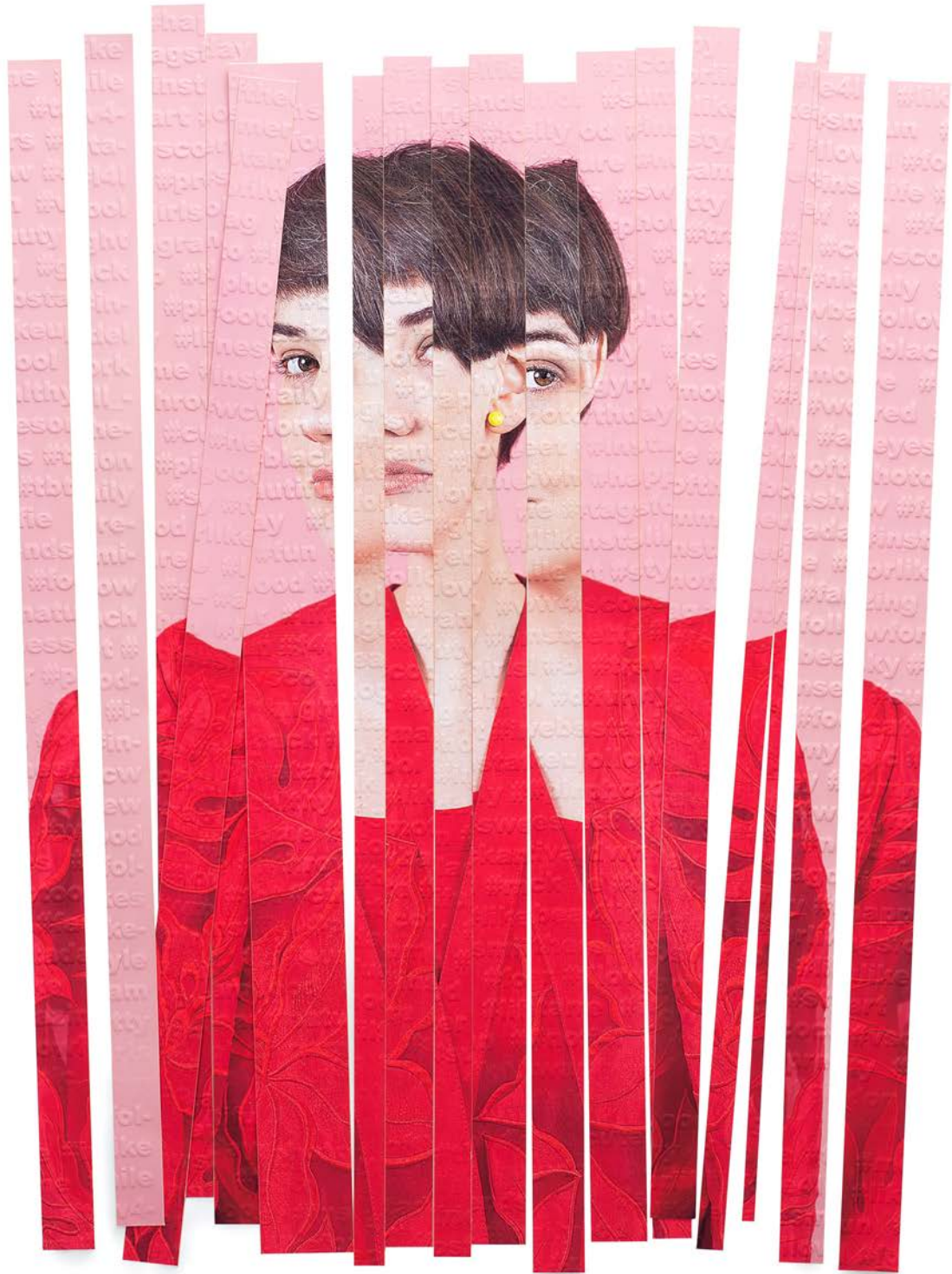
Subject #16

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



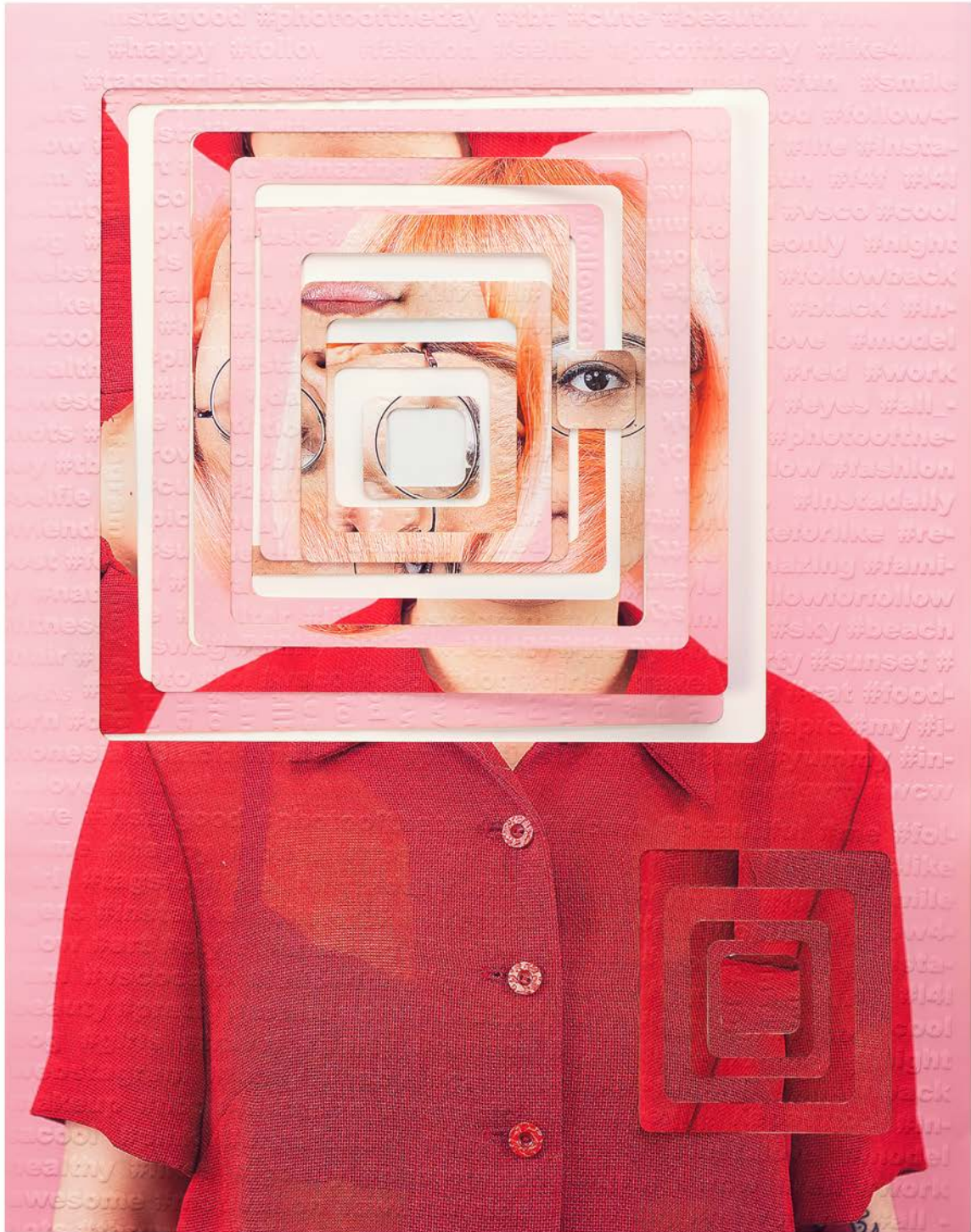
Subject #7

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Subject #5

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Subject #3 variation 1

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Subject #2 variation 1

Archival inkjet print, laser-cut and embossed on gesso panel
18 x 14" • Unique



Shine America 2043 [On view at Holocaust Museum Houston]

Archival inkjet print, wood, neon, paint, and resin
45 x 85 x 5" • Unique

K A R E N N A V A R R O

THE ARTIST

With a background in fashion design, Argentinian-born artist Karen Navarro works on a diverse array of mediums that includes photography, collage, and sculpture. Her image-based work and multimedia practice investigates the intersections of identity, self-representation, race, gender, and belonging. Her constructed portraits are known for pushing the boundaries of traditional photography, the use of color theory, surreal scenes, and minimalist details. In 2019 she received the Houston Artadia fellowship and most recently she has been shortlisted for the 2020 Photo London Emerging Photographer of the Year Award and the Lensculture Art Photography Award 2021. Her work has been exhibited in the US and abroad. Selected shows include Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH), USA; Galerija Upuluh, Zagreb, Croatia; Lawndale Art Center, Houston, USA; Elisabet Ney Museum, Austin, USA; Melkweg Expo, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Houston Center for Photography, Houston, USA; Holocaust Museum 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.

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. 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.



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