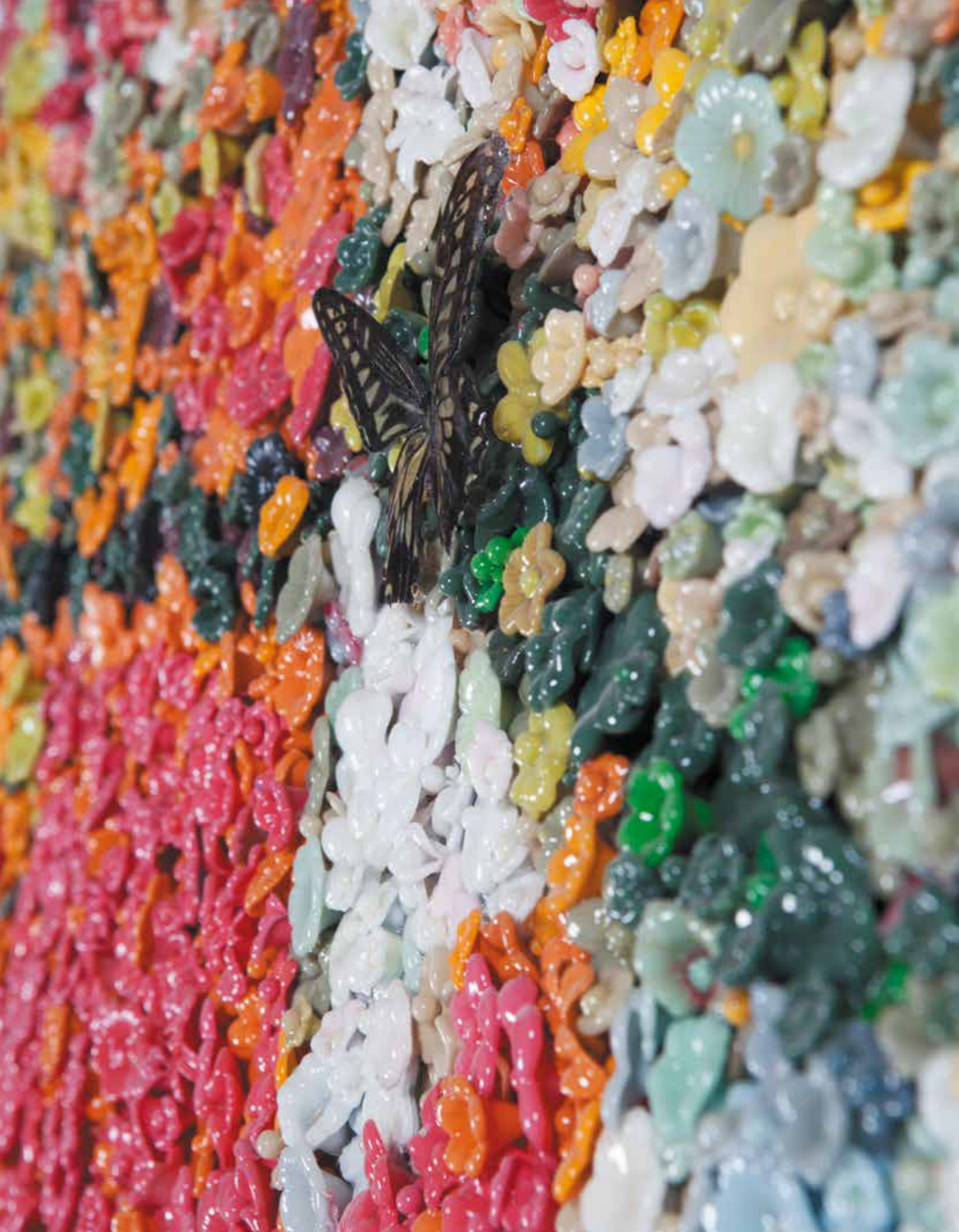




OPERA GALLERY

Joe
Black
Ways
of
seeing

OPERA GALLERY



Ways of seeing

FOREWORD

Joe Black was a great discovery for us and he struck us straight away as one of the most interesting artists we had seen in a long time. We invited him to show us more of his work and he kindly accepted the offer. Immediately, we understood how promising his work and avant-garde technique were and we knew we wanted to work with him.

Joe Black's love of materials is obvious and, combined with his skills and great meticulousness; it is an instrument for original creation. A true perfectionist, he is able to painstakingly build works of art using thousands upon thousands of apparently insignificant small objects.

But his work goes even further; making the material used not only a means to an end, but also a code, a symbolic language giving the finished work a deep and meaningful sense. Joe Black seeks to enhance his artworks by selecting objects that will pay tribute to the iconic imagery it depicts.

The exhibition 'Ways of seeing' is his first ever solo exhibition. This is an occasion for the artist to showcase his talent and love for perfection to the London art scene - gathered in the British capital at the occasion of Frieze 2013, as well as to present new works that have never been shown to the public before. In this exhibition's display, one should expect to see more of Joe Black's breathtaking large-scale portraits, alongside tributes to the Masters of history of art that have influenced him; and new techniques that the artist is experimenting with.

Since its creation in 1994, Opera Gallery has strived to offer collectors not only the finest competence and expertise on the current art market, but also to stand out as a major player for the development of contemporary art, notably promoting and supporting contemporary creation. Our collaboration with Joe Black is an illustration of this self-assigned mission.

Political, clever, tongue-in-cheek, Joe Black's powerful mix of image selection and craftsmanship is stunning. He is rigorous in his commitment to produce excellence and demonstrates a level of skill that falls outside our understanding of what is possible.

Opera Gallery takes great pride in representing this young artist internationally and we are delighted to introduce his work to all of our collectors through this milestone exhibition.

Gilles Dyan
Founder & Chairman
Opera Gallery Group

Jean-David Malat
Director
Opera Gallery London

**“It is only
about the
image and
the impact
the image
makes.”**



Artist's statement

Through his work Joe Black explores the way we see pictures by making imagery that is both seen as a whole and as a collection of small composite parts. His aim is for the audience to experience the grand and the intricate at the same time. 'Close up' and 'far away' are important in Joe Black's work.

Combining his craft skills, love of materials and an innate desire for perfection, the production process is intrinsic to his work. The final result for which he strives is a sense of wonder about how the pieces are constructed. His drive and inspiration for the work is very much about the process of making the pieces. The meticulous nature of the work is a necessity, and integral to the work.

His choice of imagery comes from popular culture as easily recognizable, iconic portraits. However, in Joe Black's interpretation of the portrait, the merging of old and new technologies presents the subject in a totally new context. In an age of immediate digital media, Joe Black has intentionally created a time-consuming, alternative form of pixilation, assembled entirely by hand. His work evokes a sensory response where the audience is invited to look deeper than the surface of the work to reveal something unexpected.

He selects small common objects to pay tribute to, or add another dimension to the subject of the piece he is making. By looking, the object materializes and gives expression to the personality of the subject, beginning the metamorphosis of the ordinary into something extraordinary. The objects signify hidden meanings within the work and although Joe Black has his own ideologies, whether personal, political or social, the work is left open to interpretation. Through the very act of seeing the images, the story within the work is revealed to the audience.

"Whenever the intensity of looking reaches a certain degree, one becomes aware of an equally intense energy coming towards one through the appearance of whatever it is one is scrutinizing."

John Berger



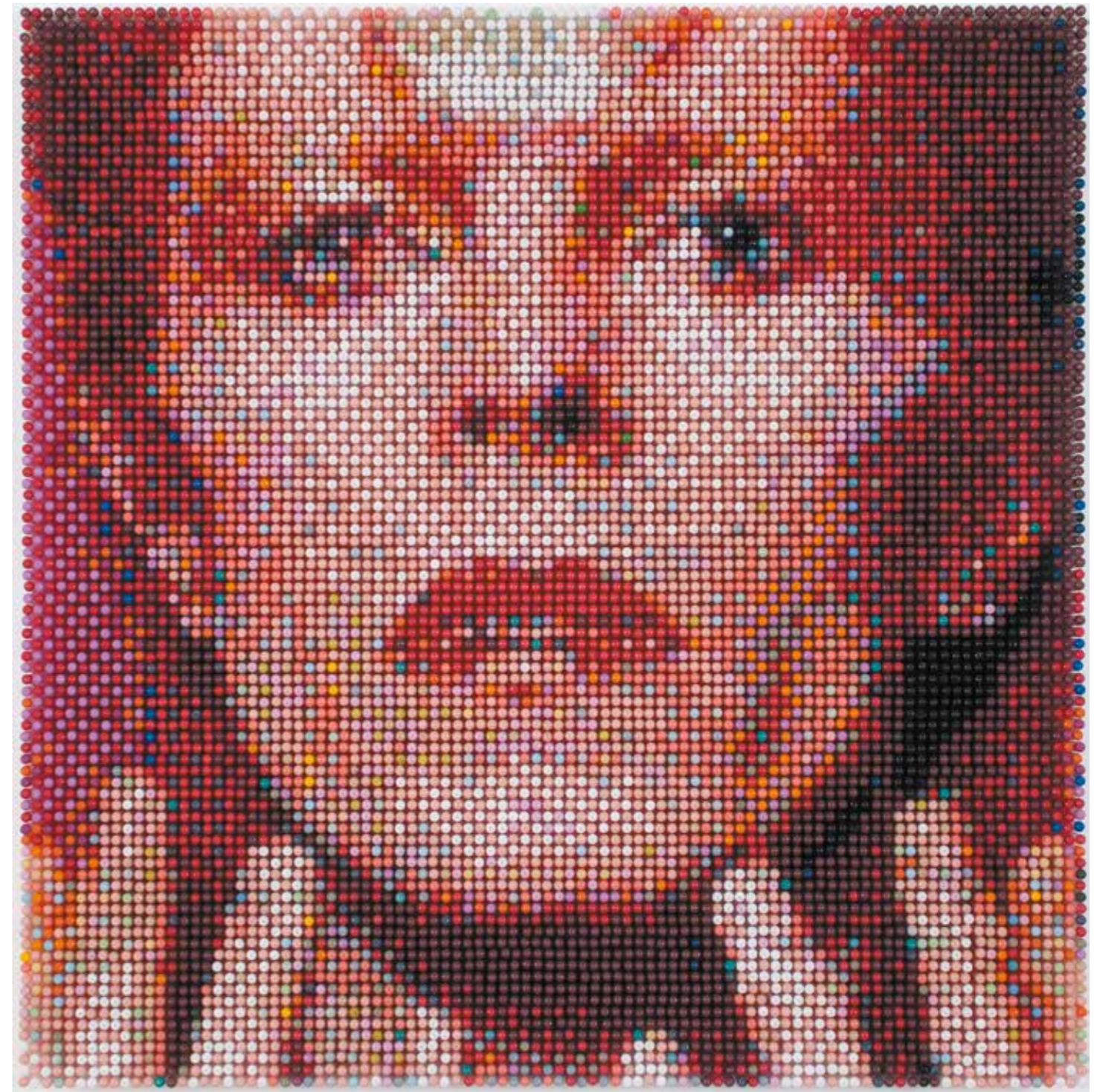


Experimental

9,000 hand-painted test tubes on aluminium
150 x 150 cm - 59.1 x 59.1 in.
2013

David Bowie has constantly pushed the boundaries of creativity and innovation. This portrait constructed from thousands of test tubes reveals his outlandish Ziggy persona and references ideas of experimentation and moments of discovery.

9,000 test tubes

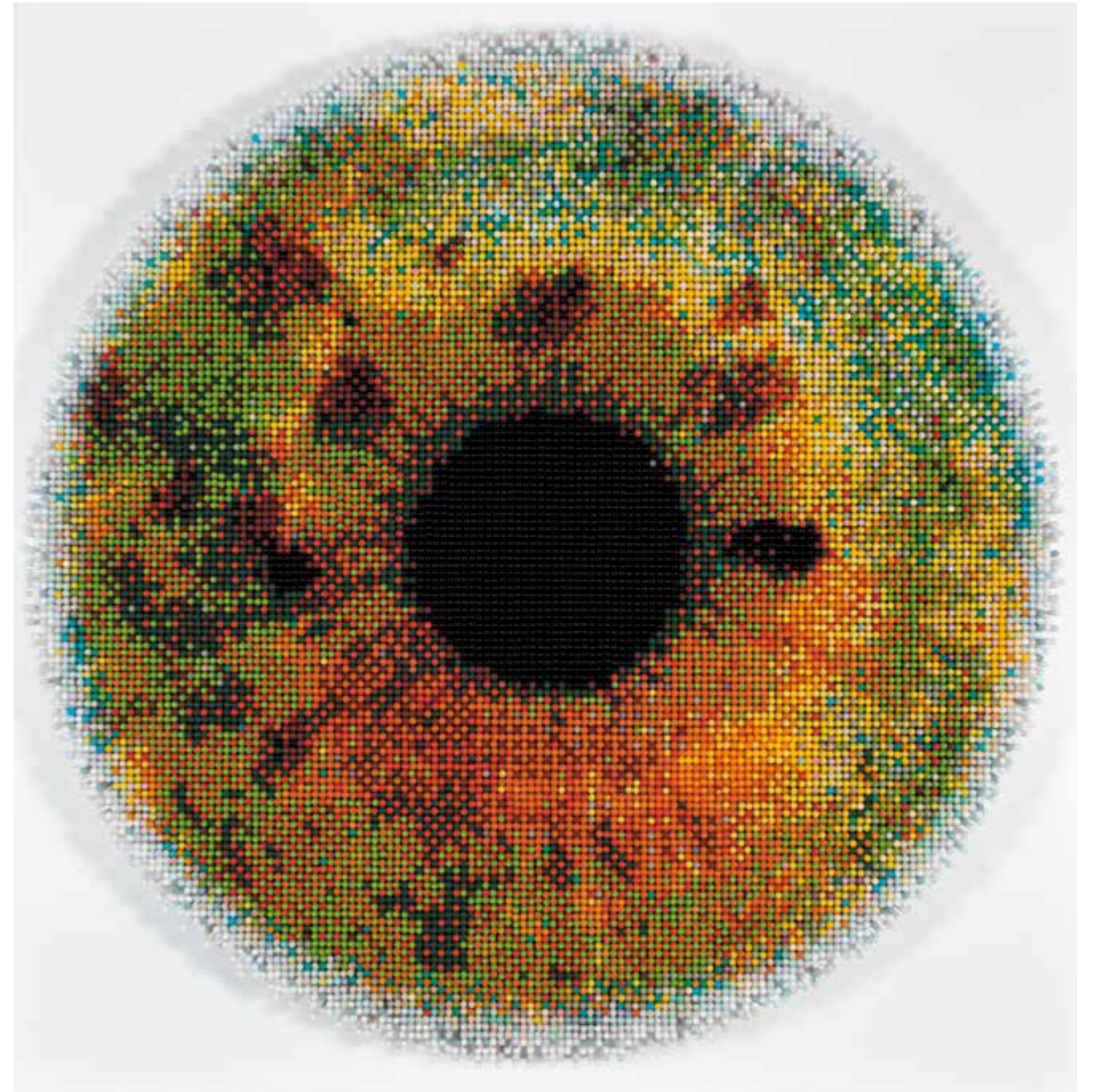


15,000 test tubes



Ways of seeing (test)

15,000 hand-painted test tubes coated in resin and mounted on a dye-cut aluminium disc
190 x 190 cm - 74.8 x 74.8 in.
2013







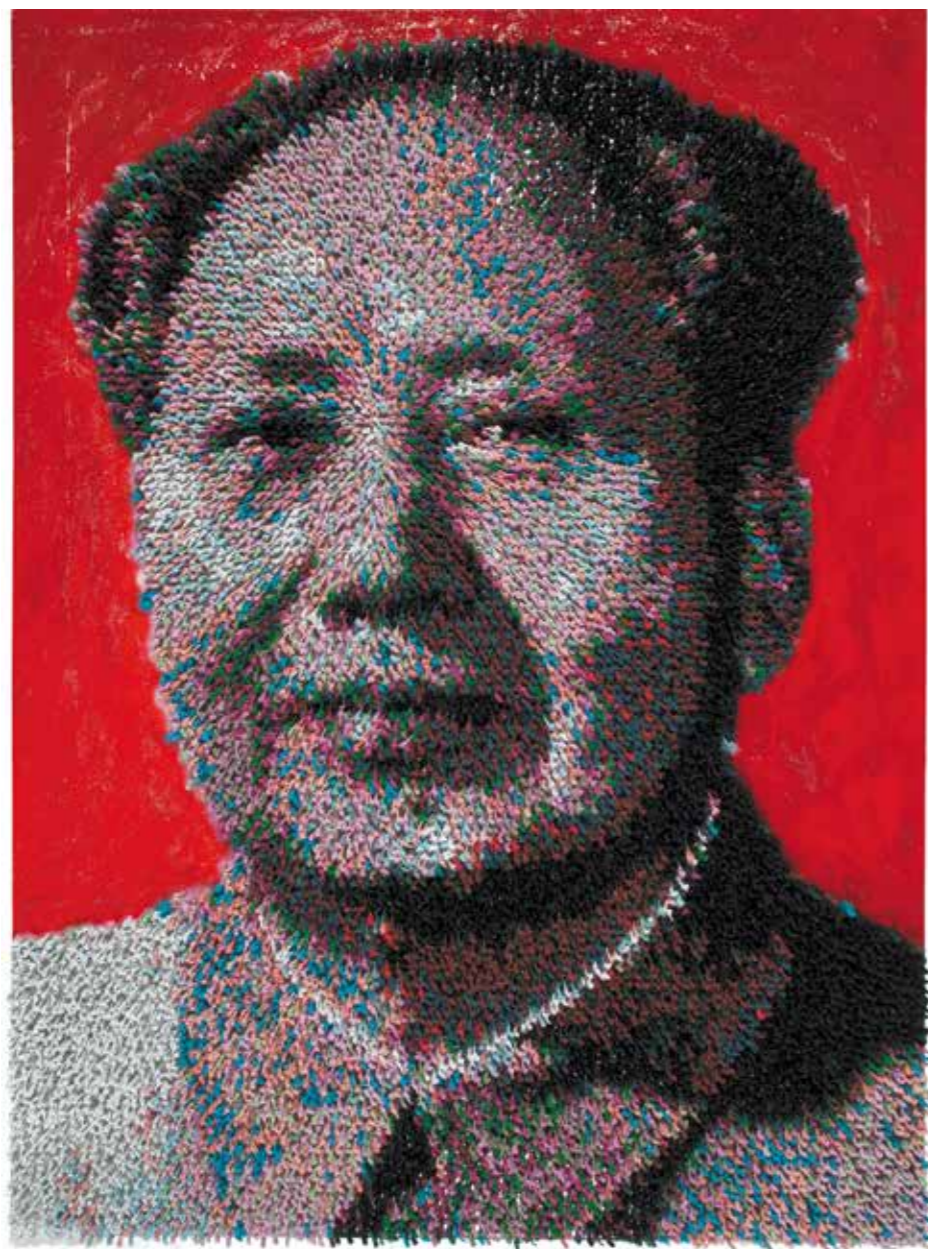
Workers of the world, unite!

Mixed media and 15,000 hand-painted plastic toy soldiers on wood
310 x 215 cm - 122 x 84.6 in.
2012



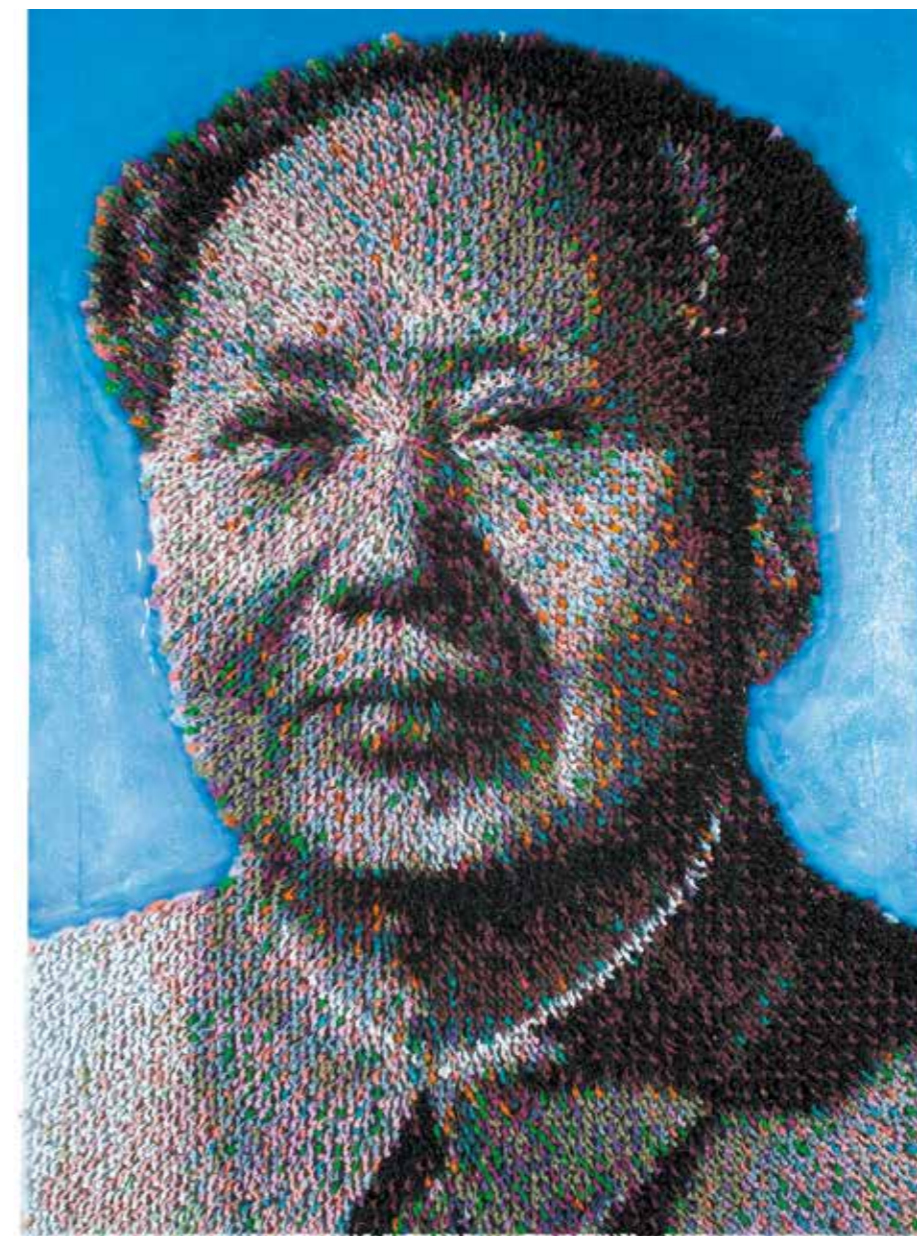
15,000 plastic toy soldiers

Mao red & Mao blue



Mixed media with 10,000 hand-painted plastic toy soldiers on wood
240 x 180 cm - 94.5 x 70.9 in.
2013

The work references the power of Chairman Mao to lead his Red Army and the population of China under communist rule. The image plays on a quote from the Little Red Book and encapsulates the idea of one man as a unifying and equalizing force over thousands.



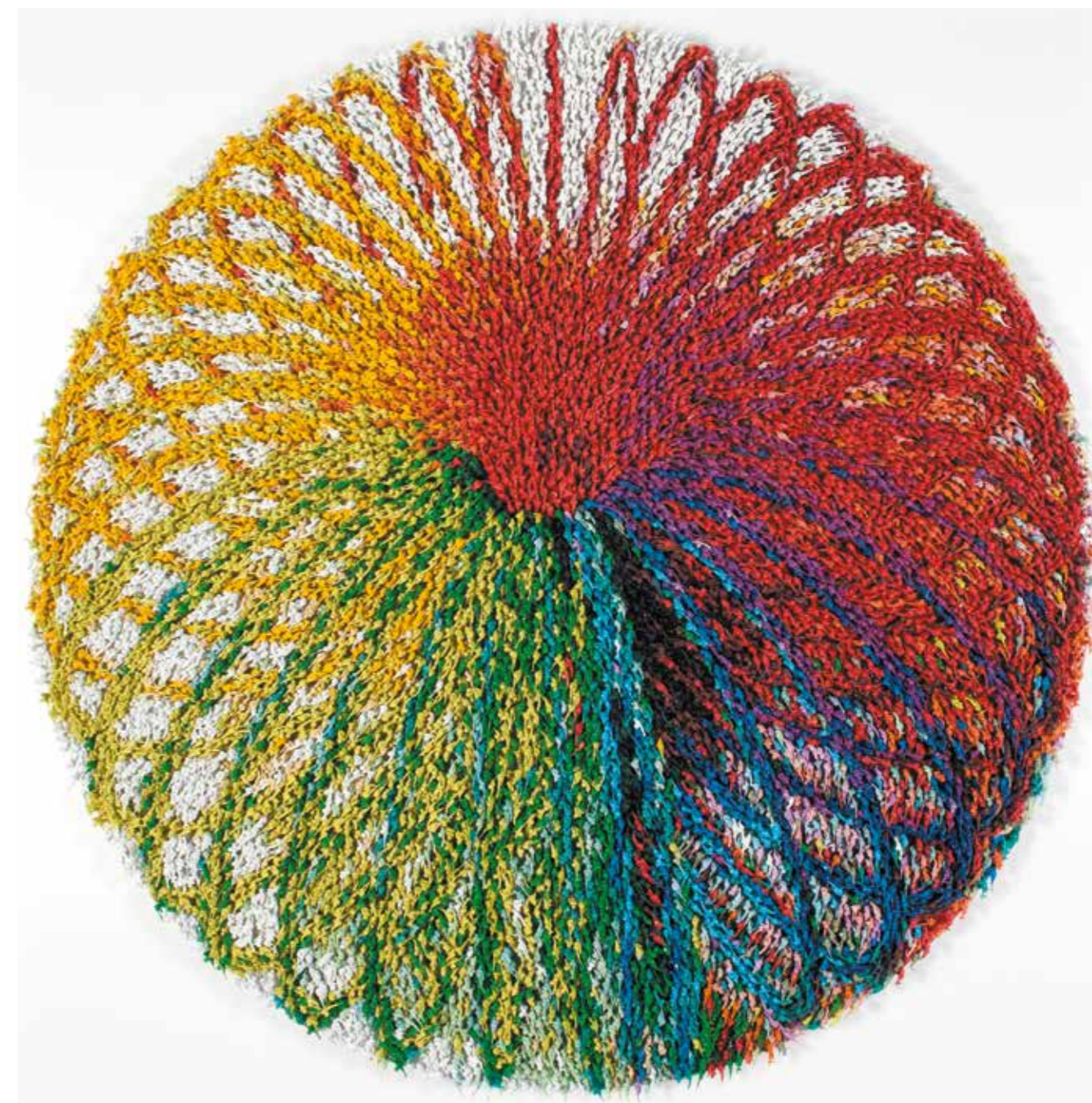
Mixed media with 10,000 hand-painted plastic toy soldiers on wood
240 x 180 cm - 94.5 x 70.9 in.
2013

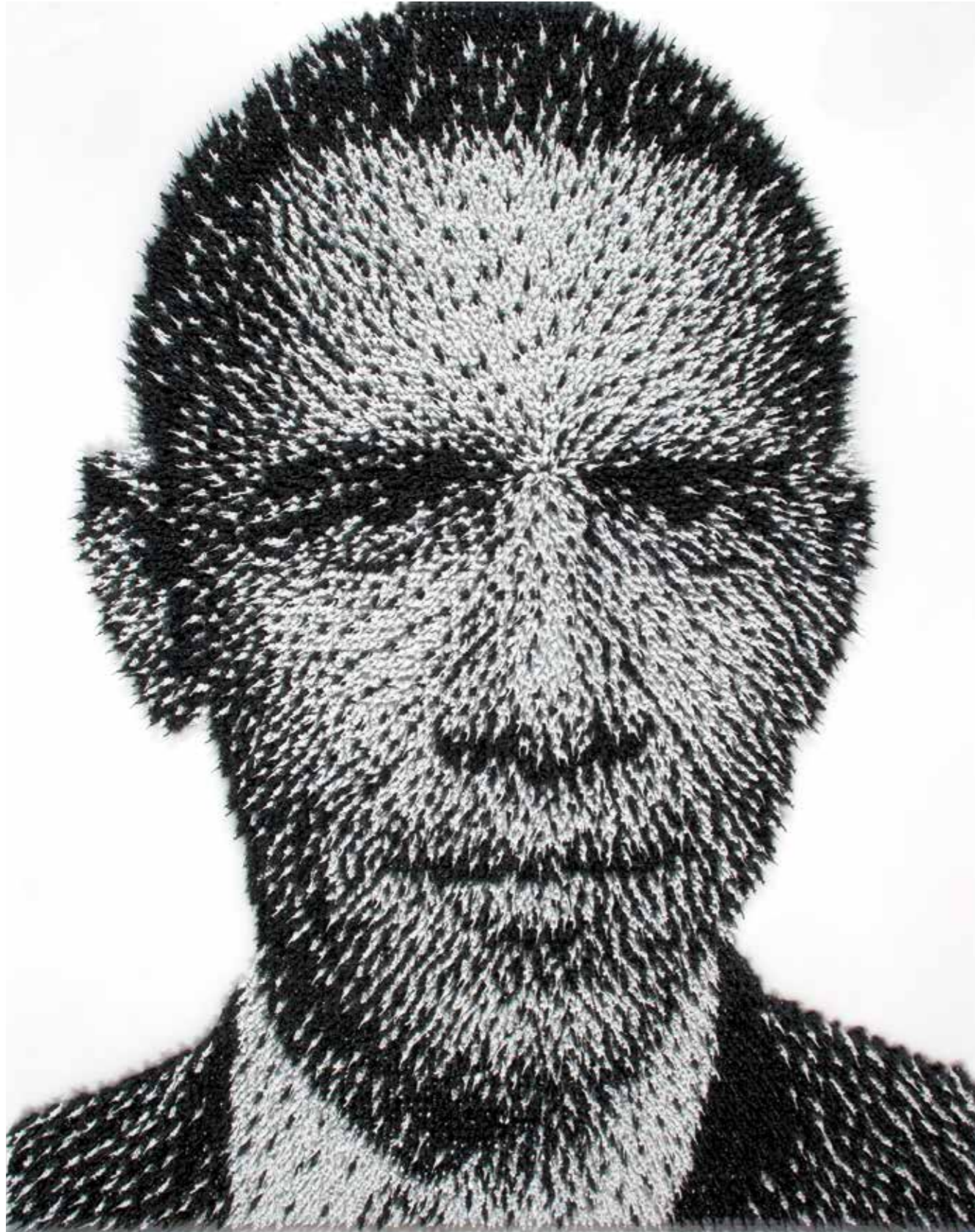
7,000 plastic toy soldiers



United colours

7,000 cellulose spray-painted plastic toy soldiers coated in resin on a dye-cut aluminium disc
190 x 190 cm - 74.8 x 74.8 in.
2013





11,000 plastic toy soldiers



Shoot to kill

11,000 hand-painted plastic toy soldiers mounted on aluminium and resin coated
231 x 187 cm - 90.9 x 73.6 in.
2013

This portrait of Obama makes reference to the order to kill Osama Bin Laden. The stark black and white soldiers could indicate the ethos of good and evil, or right and wrong that is embedded in America's dealings with Eastern nations.

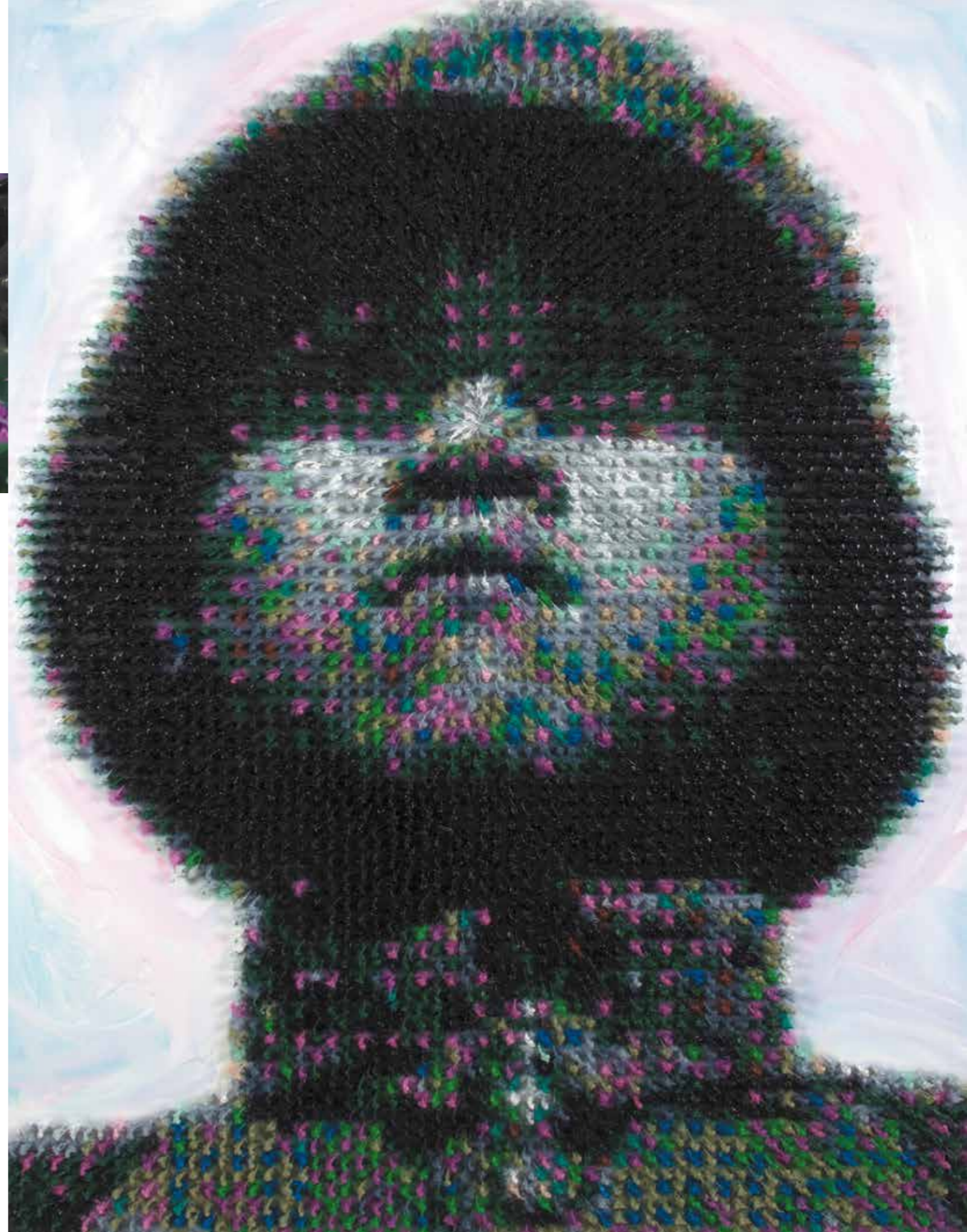
5,500 plastic toy soldiers

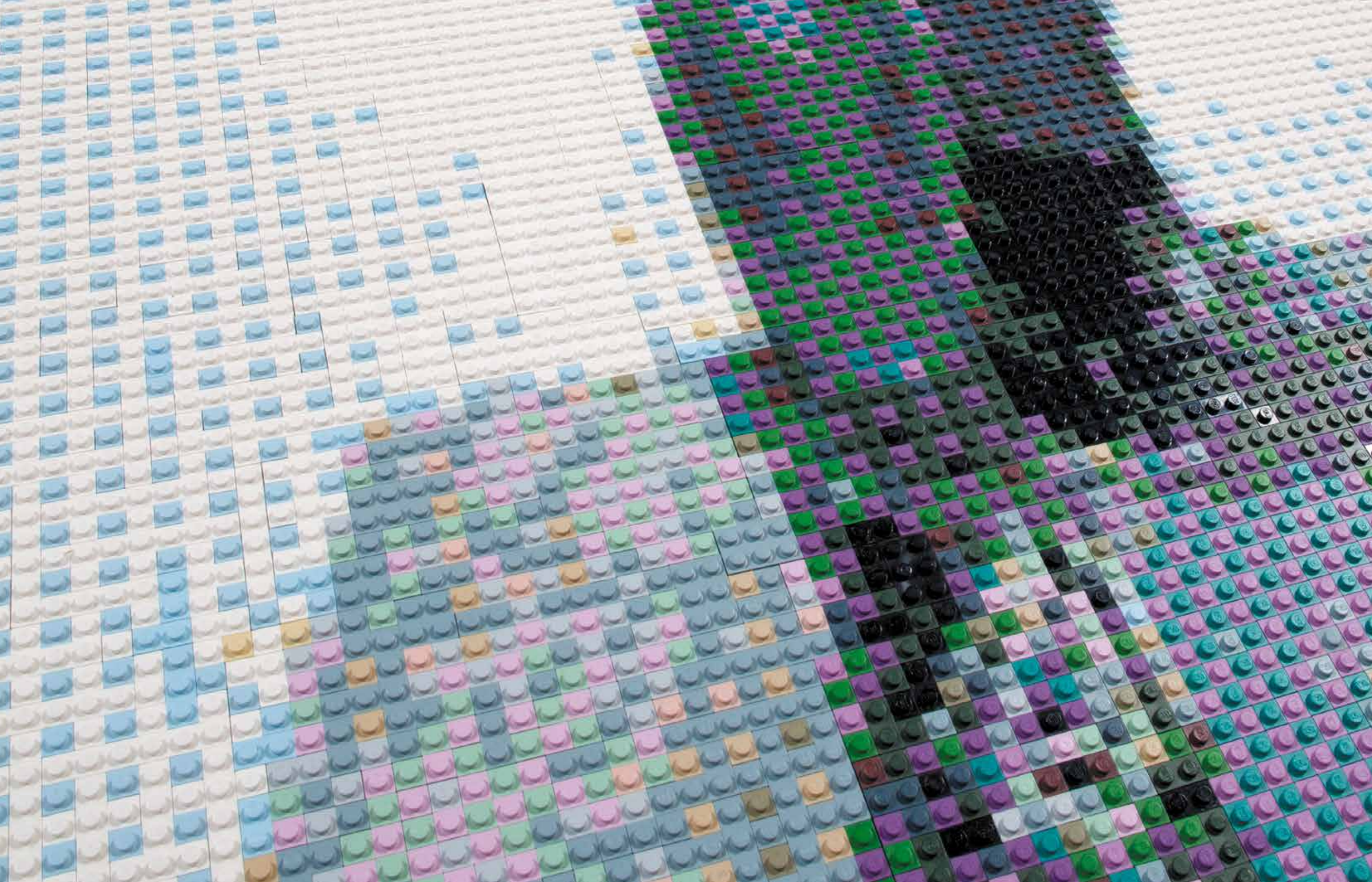


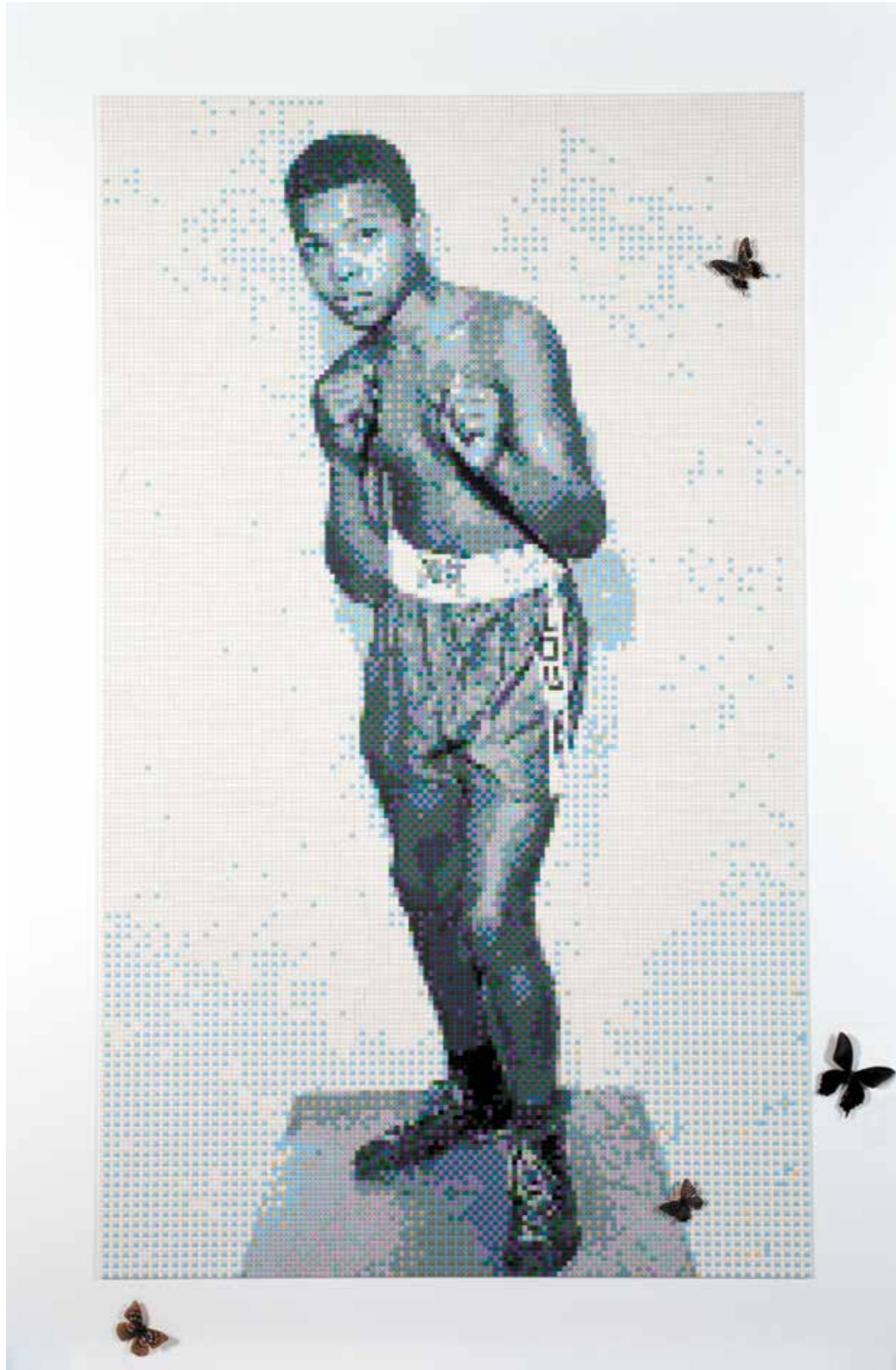
Made in China

Mixed media with 5,500 hand-painted plastic toy soldiers on wood
245 x 196 cm - 96.5 x 77.2 in.
2012

Made in China depicts the portrait of a Chinese soldier boy, as taken by legendary photographer Robert Capa. The image was used on the front cover of LIFE magazine, May 1938 to cover the Sino Japanese War. The toy soldiers are manufactured in China, hence the title.







Life's a ring

15,611 individual Lego bricks, cellulose spray-painted with resin coated real butterflies on aluminium
220 x 140 cm - 86.6 x 55.1 in.
2013



15,611
Lego
bricks

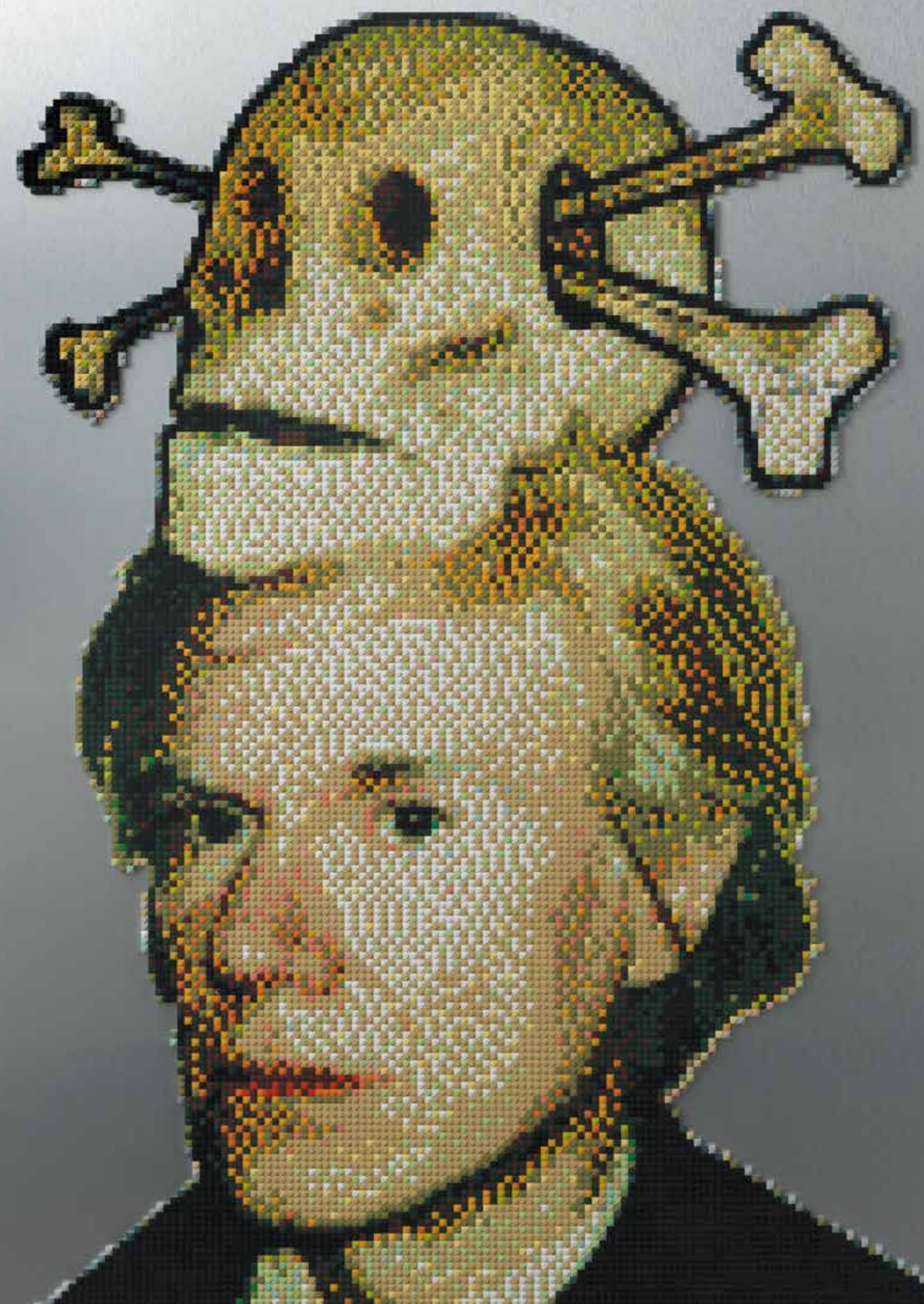
8,651 Lego bricks



Long live the King

Mixed media with 8,651 individual Lego bricks, cellulose spray-painted on aluminium
192 x 154 cm - 75.6 x 60.6 in.
2012

Taken from the set of photographic self-portraits Andy Warhol created in 1968, when his obsession with death became a more dominant theme in his work, after he was shot; the piece shows the skull and crossbones, which have been adopted and reproduced on a mass scale by the urban art market of today, as a symbol of rebellion and anti-establishment. However, the image of Warhol with the skull and crossbones draws attention to the fact that Warhol was the original rebel, commentator on the mainstream and ground-breaking in his mass production of printed imagery from 'The Factory'.

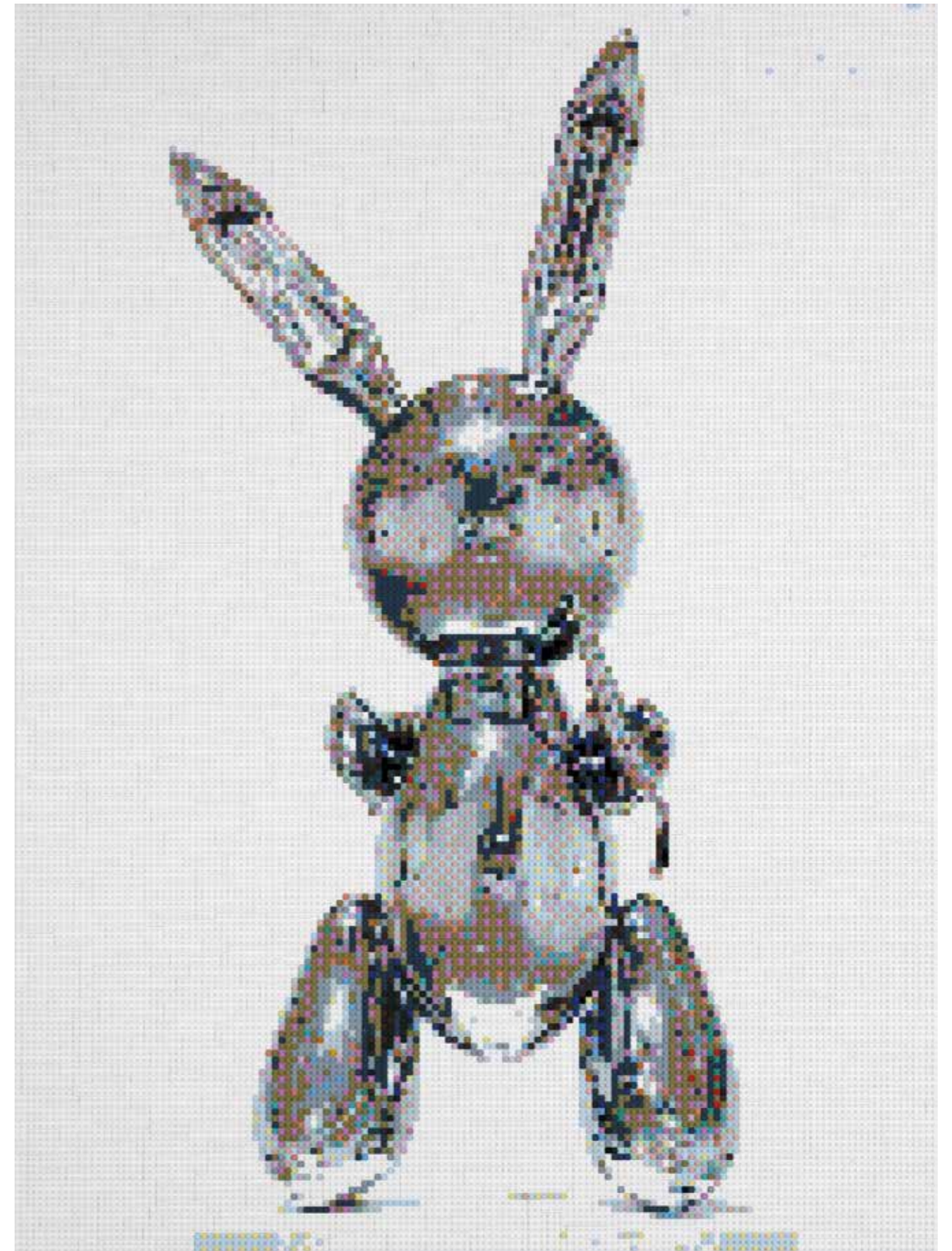
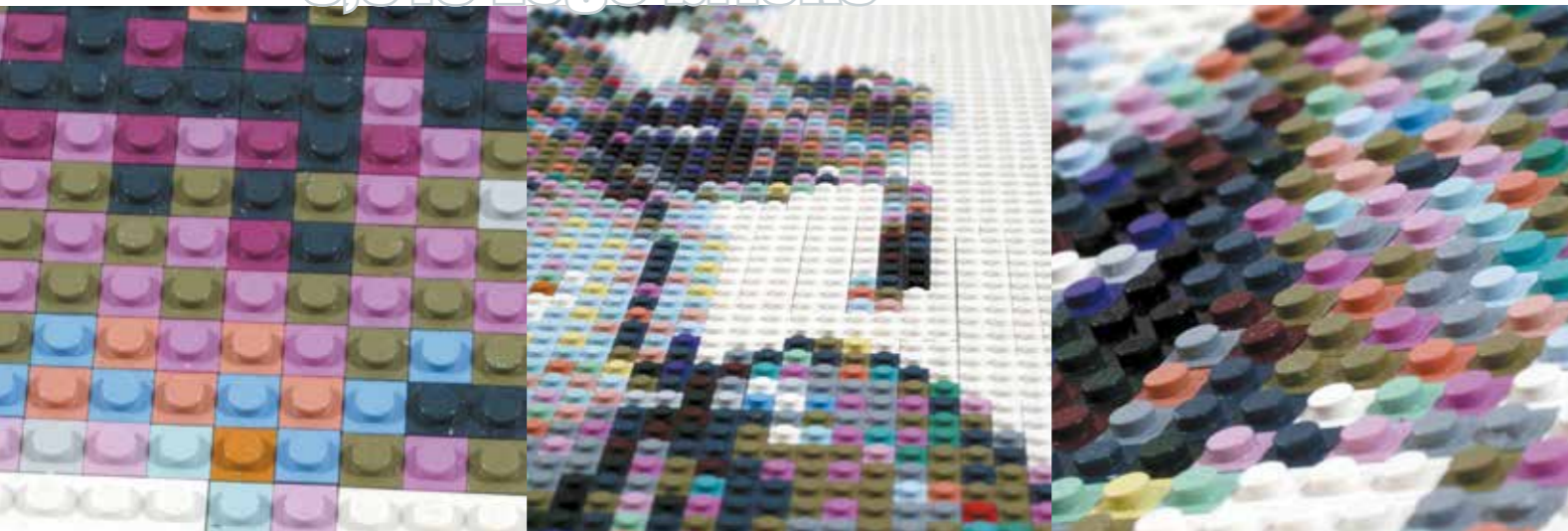


Playing with Jeffrey

Mixed media with 8,018 individual Lego bricks, cellulose spray-painted on aluminium
185 x 147 cm - 72.8 x 57.9 in.
2012

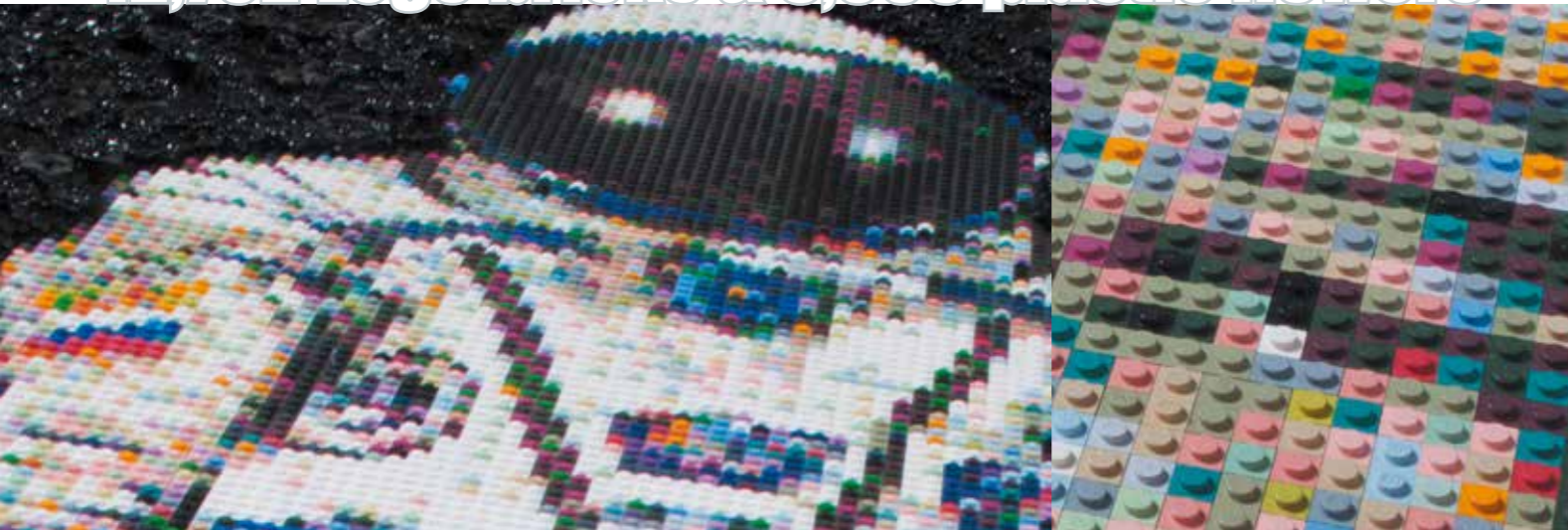
This work appropriates the work of Jeff Koons, who in turn is known to appropriate and re-contextualise objects to challenge ideas of what constitutes high art. The inflatable rabbit has gone through another transformation in this piece, from steel sculpture to two-dimensional image constructed from Lego. The qualities of surface and form are present within the work, as in the original. The image is seductive and plays with ideas of consumption and luxury.

8,018 Lego bricks





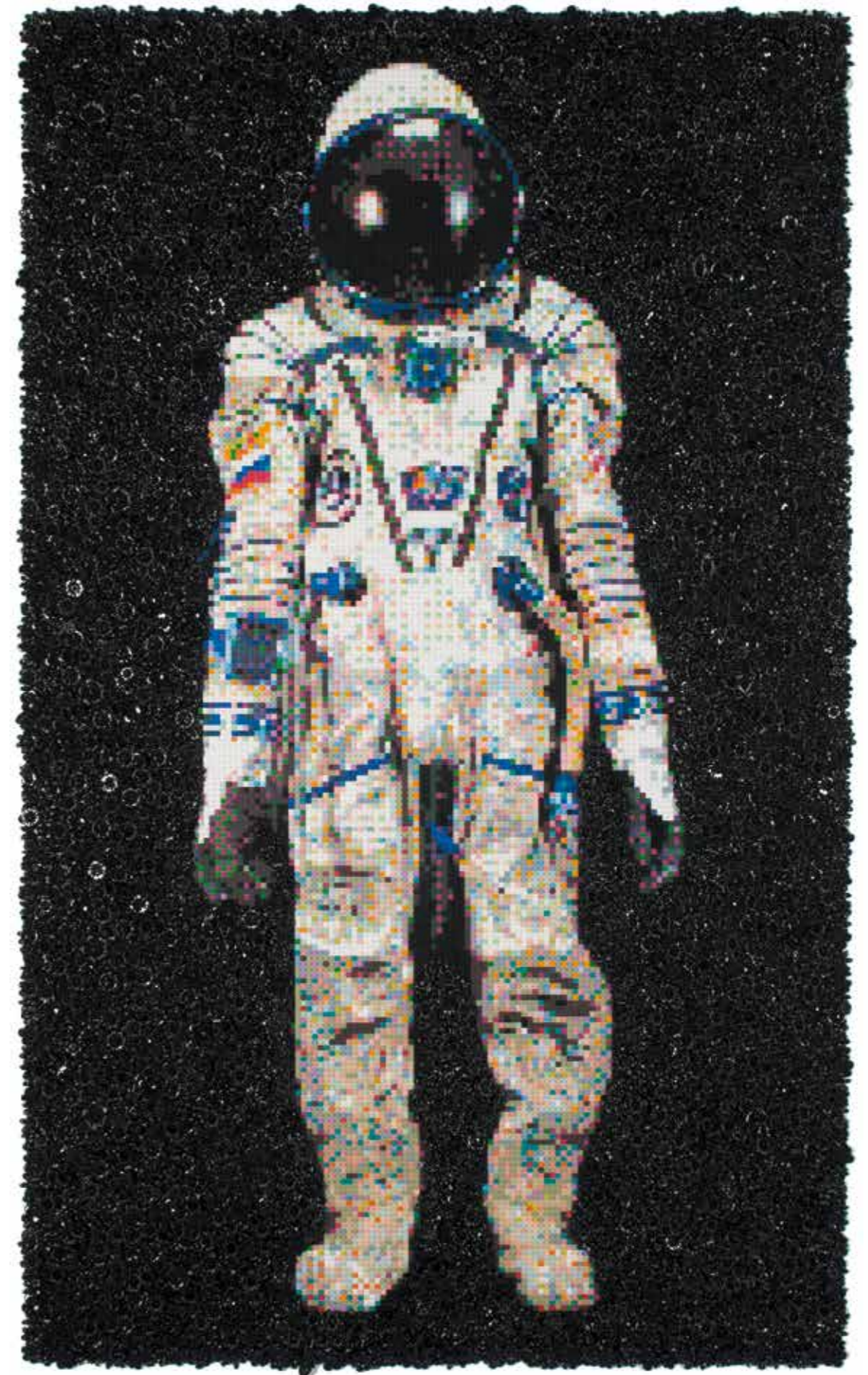
12,702 Lego bricks & 5,000 plastic flowers



Does my bum look big in this?

12,702 individual Lego bricks, cellulose spray-painted and 5,000 black lacquer acrylic flowers mounted on aluminium
200 x 120 cm - 78.7 x 47.2 in.
2013

This piece was inspired by the story of the first female Russian astronaut Valentina Tereshkova, who was not allowed to touch any of the spaceship's instruments during the 1963 voyage. The work depicts the first French women's astronaut suit made-up of flowers and Lego, which symbolise the gender roles that boys and girls are conditioned to follow and the inequalities between the sexes.



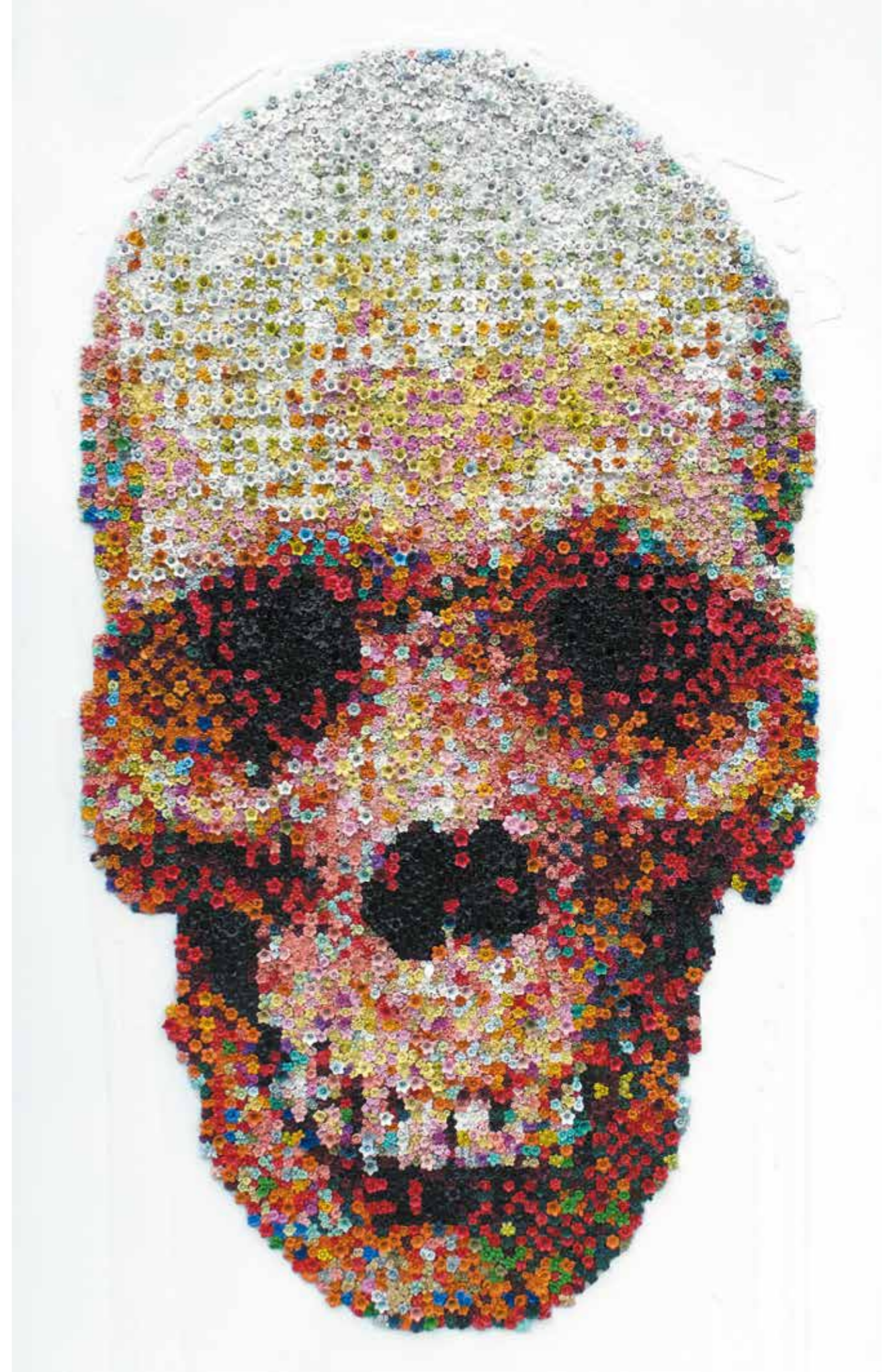


Do you get it Damien?

12,000 hand-sprayed plastic flowers with oil paint on aluminium
214 x 133 cm - 84.2 x 52.4 in.
2012

This piece is a nod to Damien Hirst's iconic motif of the skull, a symbol used throughout the history of art, but made mainstream and of huge monetary value by Hirst.

12,000 plastic flowers



40,000 plastic flowers



Life's a spin

High dense foam board mounted with 40,000 hand-painted acrylic flowers
and resin coated with real butterflies on a dye-cut aluminium disc
190 x 190 cm - 74.8 x 74.8 in.
2013





35,000
plastic
flowers

**Happy
happy**

High dense foam board mounted with 35,000 hand-painted acrylic flowers on a dye-cut aluminium disc
190 x 190 cm - 74.8 x 74.8 in.
2013

Everyman pink & Everyman blue

Sculpture - Pink
High density polystyrene with 65,000
pinned acrylic flowers painted and lacquered
H: 185,5 cm - 73 in.
2013

Sculpture - Blue
High density polystyrene with 60,000
pinned acrylic flowers painted and lacquered
H: 180 cm - 70.9 in.
2013

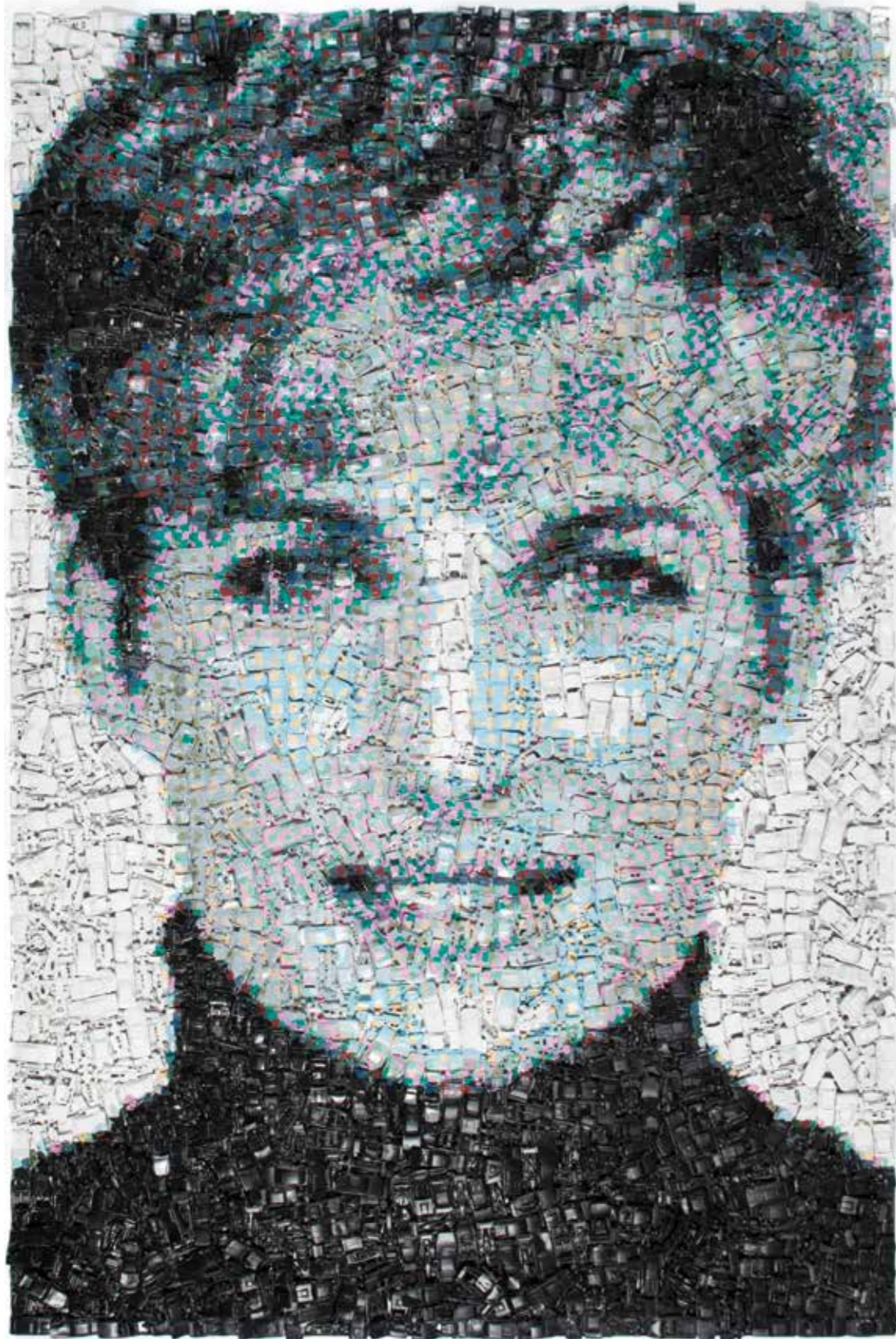
60,000 plastic flowers



65,000 plastic flowers







1,500 smashed toy cars



Untitled

Hand-painted marks on 1,500 smashed toy cars on aluminium
160 x 120 cm - 63 x 47.2 in.
2013

This stark portrait of Diana is a comment on the media created sensationalism that surrounded Diana in her life and death. Even her shocking death was a self fulfilling prophecy for the media. The feeding frenzy began in an attempt to satisfy the media and public's greed, and insatiable appetite for Diana.

"Unsurprisingly this was the first artwork selected by the media and PR agencies to promote the show Ways of seeing"

Joe Black

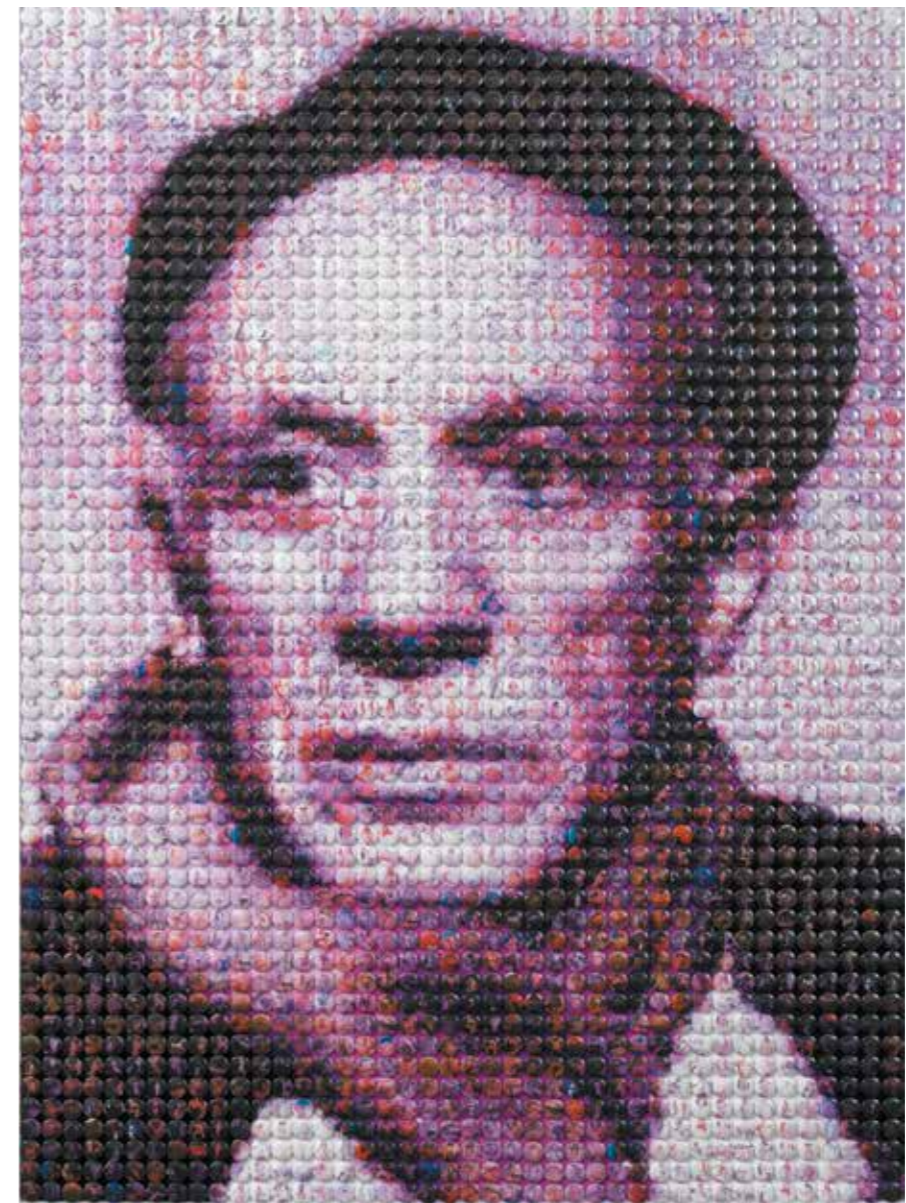


Blue period & After the blue, pink

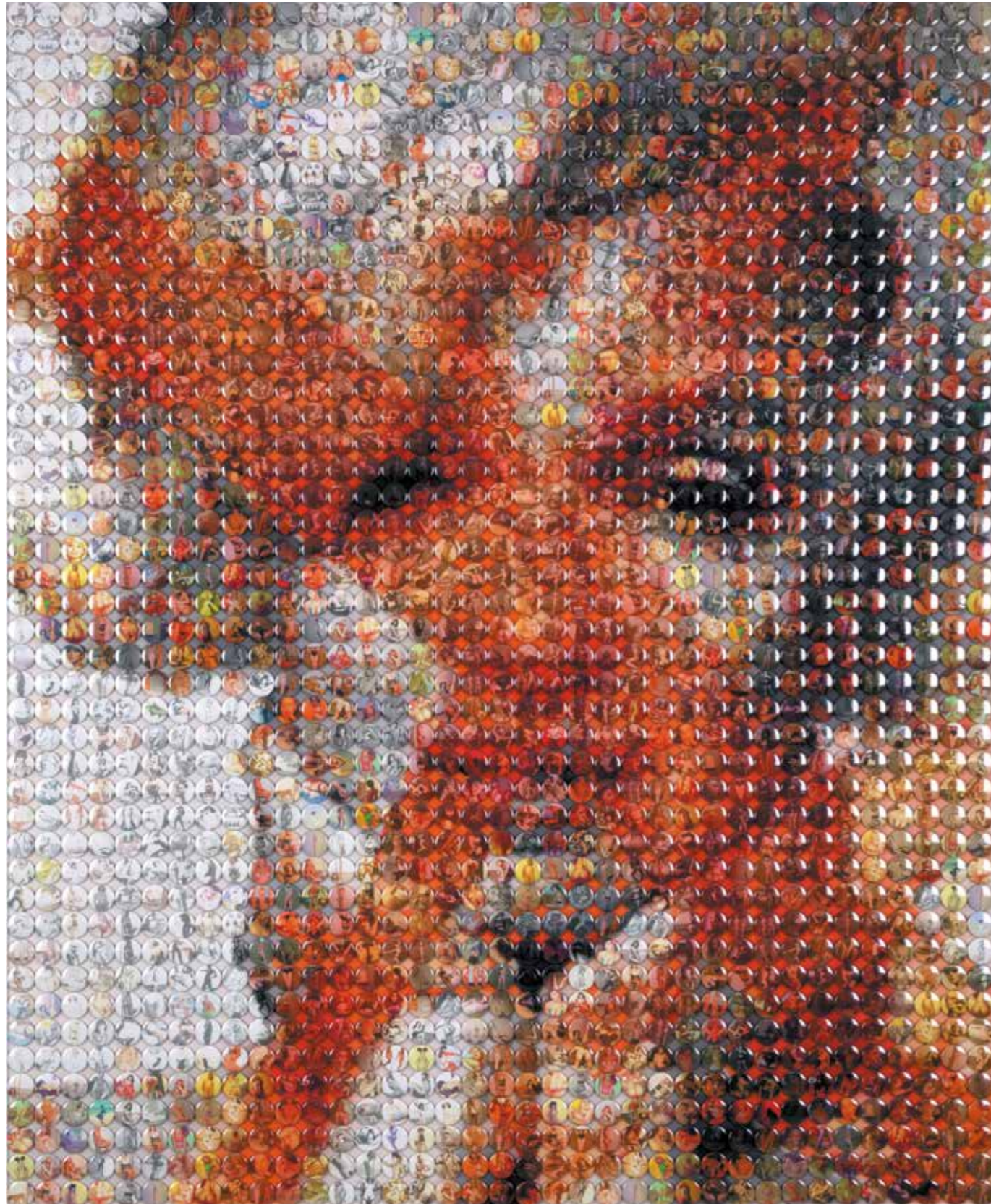


2,394 handmade badges and stencil on wood
180 x 143 cm - 70.9 x 56.3 in.
2012

The portrait is a reference to the Picasso's rose paintings of the early 1900s, following his blue period when he produced a body of work that depicted solitary figures, including prostitutes and beggars. The pornographic badges and simple monochromatic arrangement of colour, play with ideas of modern day appropriation of old Masters. The flesh tones of the badges are reminiscent of the peach and rose tones of the paintings of Harlequins, nudes and circus performers that Picasso was painting at this time.



2,394 handmade badges and stencil on wood
168 x 130 cm - 66.1 x 51.2 in.
2013



1,665 handmade badges



Smack my bitch up

Mixed media with 1,665 handmade badges on aluminium
138 x 118 cm - 54.3 x 46.5 in.
2012

The work takes the photograph of Marilyn taken by Bert Stern in the three-day session for Vogue, six weeks before her death in 1962. The close up image shows her intrinsic natural glamour and sexiness, as well as her vulnerability and innocence. From the 2,500 photographs taken at the shoot she put crosses through the ones that she didn't like of herself. Behind the cross and within the face of Marilyn the badges in this piece show dehumanised women bound and tied, as nothing but sex objects. This surface of pornographic imagery draws out a sense of dislocation and emptiness that Marilyn is known to have felt in her life.

"A sex symbol becomes a thing. I hate being a thing."
Marilyn Monroe

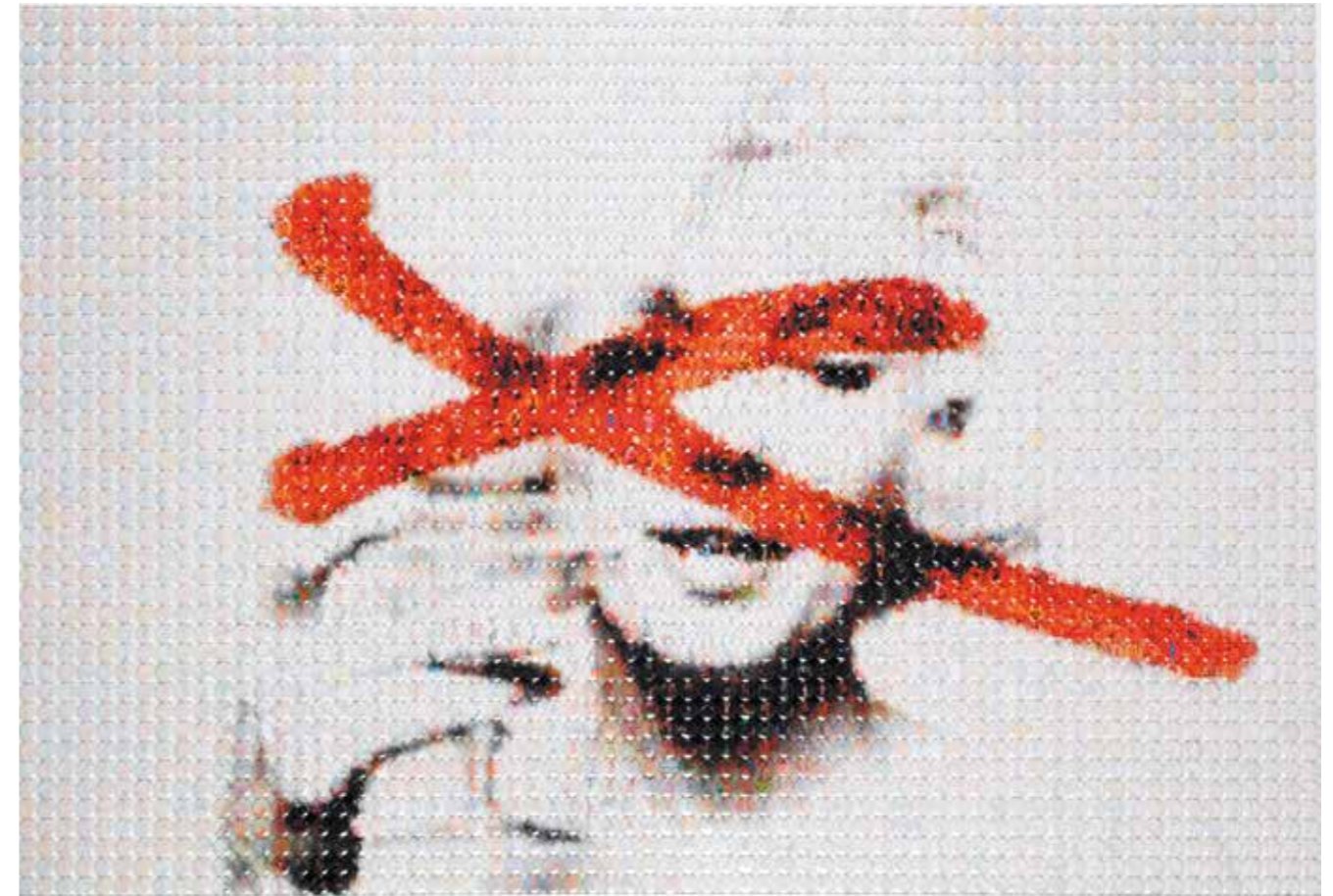
Save our souls X & XX

Save our souls X
3,000 handmade badges
mounted on aluminium
140 x 190 cm - 55.1 x 74.8 in.
2013

Save our souls XX
3,000 handmade badges
mounted on aluminium
140 x 190 cm - 55.1 x 74.8 in.
2013

These revealing portraits of Marilyn taken just before her death are made-up of thousands of pornographic and religious images, which hold significance in the context of current stories in the media around exploitation by those in power.

3,000 handmade badges





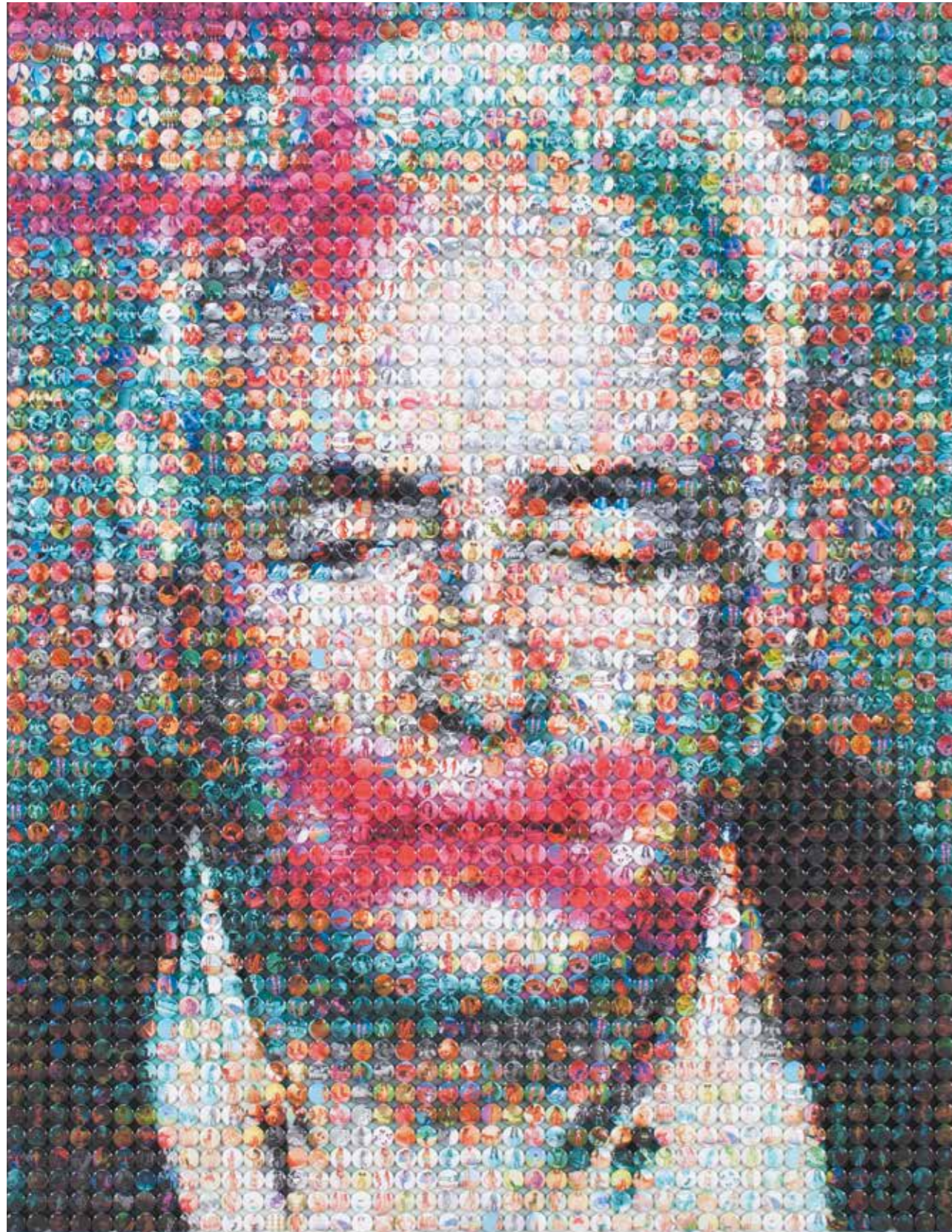
Sell everything

Mixed media with 1,849 handmade badges on wood
146 x 146 cm - 57.5 x 57.5 in.
2013

This work depicts the cultural icon Salvador Dalí who cashed in on celebrity and sold himself on personality as well as the merits of his art. Grandiose, eccentric and attention grabbing, was he as blatant and explicit as the sensationalism of a pornographic image?



1,849
handmade
badges



4,000 handmade badges



La Pig

4,000 handmade badges on aluminium
170,5 x 137,5 cm - 67.1 x 54.1 in.
2013

In 2012, Joe Black was invited to participate in Paris Match's anniversary art exhibition. He once again created a controversial yet humorous work, depicting former IMF President Dominique Strauss-Kahn.

La Pig is made of small badges depicting pornographic images, along with photos of piglets, that are assembled to portray the face of the fallen French politician known as 'DSK'. The picture he based his work on is the one taken of DSK when he has been arrested in NYC in May 2011 and charged with rape. The politician's mouth seems to have been crossed with lipstick, which is a strong visual point in the artwork. In the top left corner, the artist made his version of the Paris Match logo: images of the Eiffel tower ('Paris') and football babes ('Match').

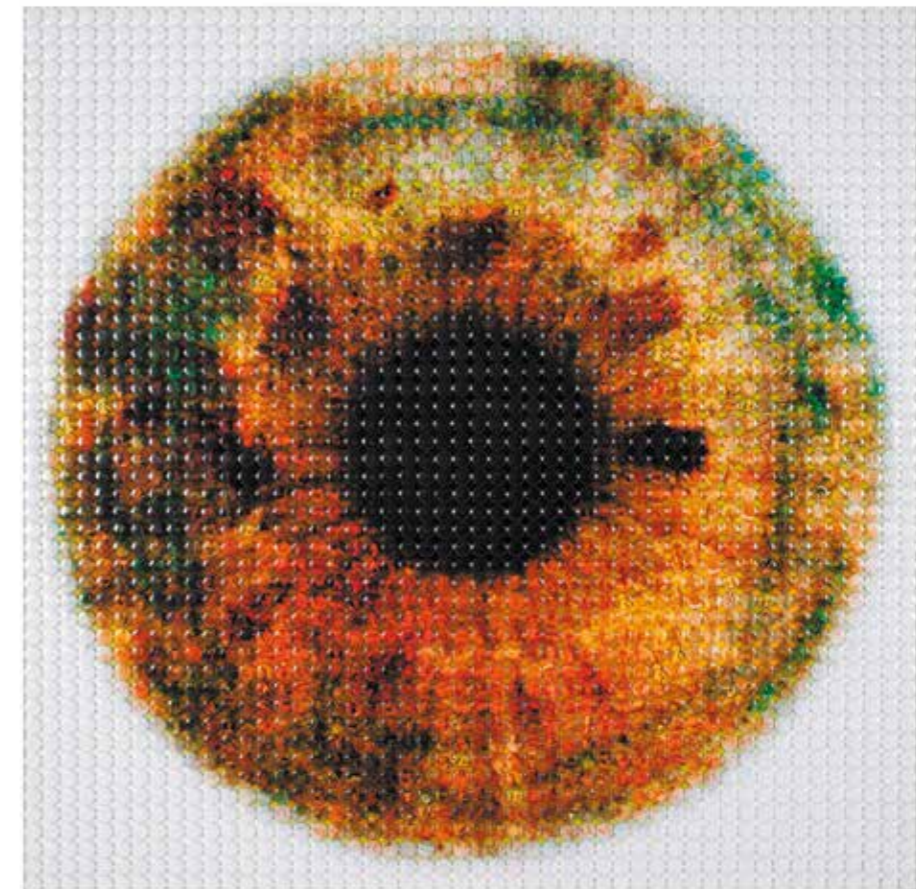
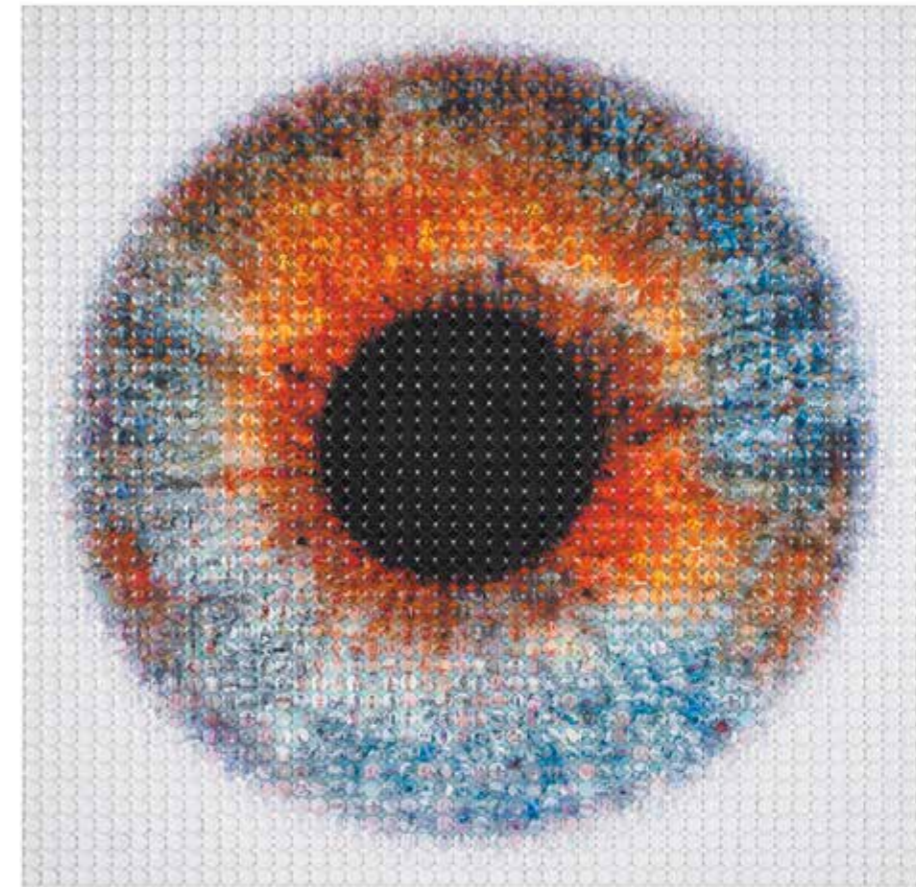
Ways of seeing blue & yellow

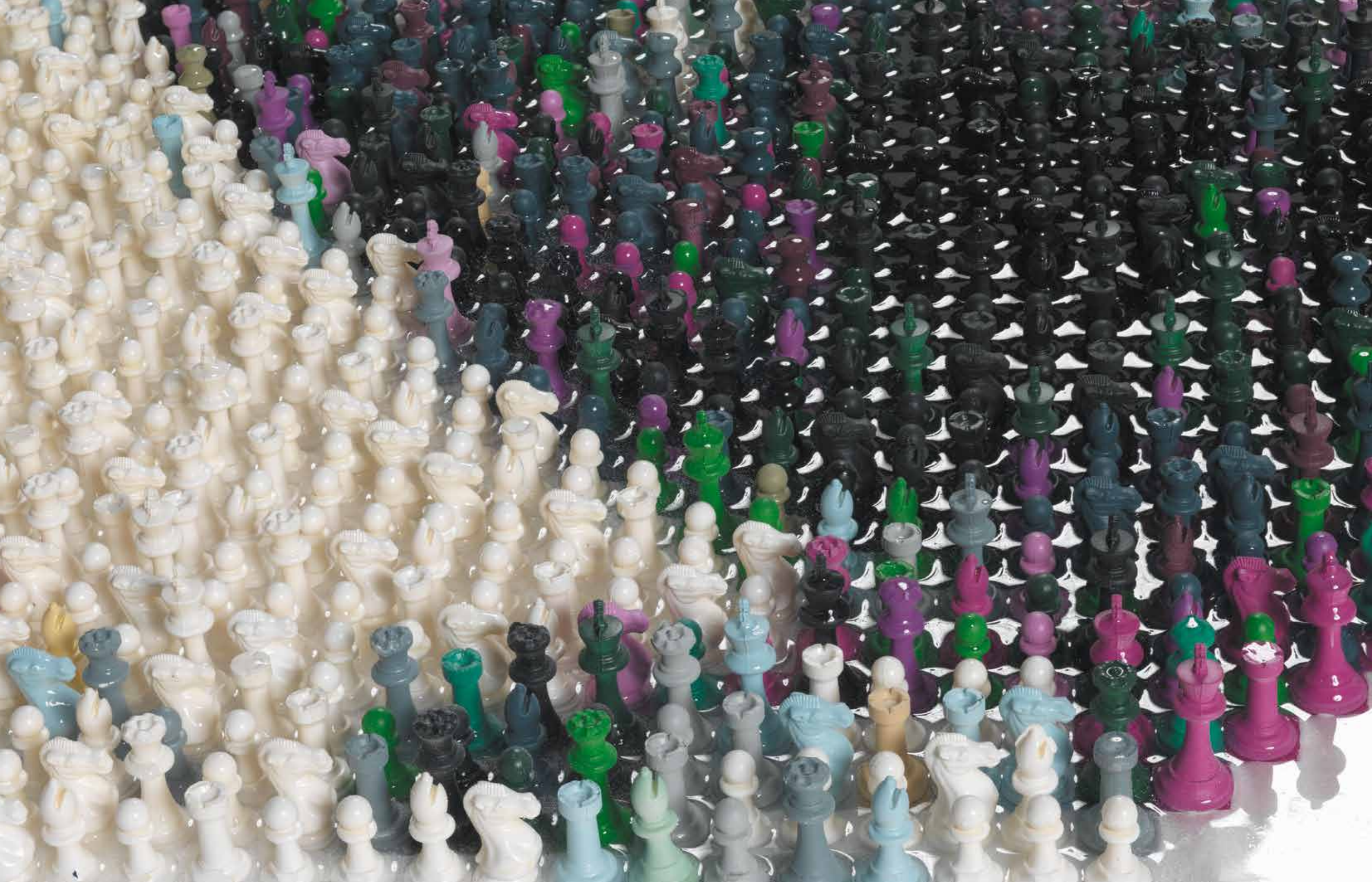
Blue
2,500 handmade badges
mounted on aluminium
140 x 140 cm - 55.1 x 55.1 in.
2013

Yellow
2,500 handmade badges
mounted on aluminium
140 x 140 cm - 55.1 x 55.1 in.
2013

The eye, which is made-up of pornographic imagery, is a comment on the way in which we are exposed to too much in our society. We see everything close up, in graphic detail and nothing is off limits. From celebrities, to our personal lives and the products we buy everything is up for public consumption.

2,500 handmade badges





Cold Hero

Mixed media with 9,000 hand-painted chess pieces on aluminium
232 x 193 cm - 91.3 x 76 in.
2013

The 1950's saw space become the arena for competition between America and Russia.
The portrait depicts the winner, America's reluctant hero Neil Armstrong.

9,000
chess
pieces





Star

Mixed media with 10,000 hand-painted chess pieces on aluminium
234 x 183 cm - 92.1 x 72 in.
2013

The portrait of Stalin signifies the Soviet Dictator as a player who out manoeuvred his political opponents to become a super power. Stalin's cult of personality and the idea of branding is also a theme within the work.



10,000
chess
pieces



Outward inward

نحو الخارج نحو الداخل

120 handmade Airfix planes sprayed with cellulose paint and lacquer glued to aluminium with a resin coat
90 x 90 cm - 35.4 x 35.4 in.
2013

120 Airfix planes



An interview with Joe Black

YOUR PATH

You are a self-taught artist, how did you start and what attracted you towards the artistic field?

I was always interested in drawing, which I think is the basis to all artistic activity. I also enjoyed photography and discovered I had a good eye for the aesthetic. Everything has been done before. I saw something similar to what I do now by another artist and liked it. I liked the way it worked, it appealed to me and the way I think. I saw a formula to how it worked and I expanded on it. I wanted to push the idea as far as it could go.

You used to work as a commercial artist and illustrator, then turned to full-time fine art? What triggered that change of career?

I enjoyed working as a commercial artist for many years but ultimately you're producing work that has boundaries as you are working to a brief. For me it started to feel that my work was being watered-down to something that I really didn't have too much connection with. I wanted to produce work that had no constraints and be able to experiment with my work, which the art world allows me to do.



YOUR INSPIRATIONS

Where do you get your inspiration from?

I think inspiration comes from many things and it's hard to pinpoint where exactly. When working on pieces, especially the badge pieces, they are often springboards to other ideas. A lot of the times I'll find an image I like and it will take sometime before I come up with what material to use and to work out how to create an artwork. It's a process of links and connections as ideas form. I also often use quotes as starting points for work, things I hear on TV or read can get me researching new imagery.

Many of your works reference Masters and masterpieces of art history. What artists have influenced and/or still influence your work?

I don't think 'influenced' is the right word, but I admire many artist's work, from Ron Mueck's amazing craft skills in producing hyper real sculptures to Anish Kapoor's work, which plays with the senses and makes you feel part of his pieces.

What other contemporary artists do you especially appreciate nowadays? With who would you like to be exhibited/to create a collective artwork if you had the opportunity?

I appreciate the work of many contemporary artists, but there are too many to mention. Although, I admire a lot of contemporary artists it doesn't necessarily mean that I would like to exhibit or create a collection with them. The artists I'm thinking of would not necessarily sit comfortably with my work in terms of style and aesthetic.

THE PORTRAIT

You do a lot of portraits - is this a favourite subject of yours? Why is that?

Portraiture really interests me, because of its importance in history. Portraits have documented people and their lives. Then with the invention of photography to record a likeness, painters have attempted to express the internal life of the sitter. A portrait gives me a lot of scope to play with the relationship between the subject and material used to hopefully express another meaning.

Do you wish to focus exclusively on portraits or are you willing to explore new themes in the future?

Hopefully in this solo show you'll see I've started to move a little more towards abstract pattern and colour in some of the pieces. This is something I wish to explore further in the future. There are pieces I'm working on for next year that are quite removed from what I'm doing at the moment.





YOUR TECHNIQUE

Your use of little objects to construct large-scale works is very emblematic, how do you select the material used to create a work? What comes first: the desire to work with a particular media or material or the desire to make a specific portrait?

It works both ways; sometimes the image will dictate which material and other times the subject matter will. Half the battle is sourcing materials.

I have boxes of new and interesting objects/materials that I am keen to use, but have not found the right subject matter or imagery yet. It can be a long process getting the media and material to marry up for a final artwork.

How much time is there between the idea of a work and the finished piece?

It varies quite a lot but generally we are talking weeks and months, although the 'Made in China' piece took a lot of working out with trial and error, and took about a year from initial idea to finished piece. It's the same with the flower piece. They're definitely labour-intensive, but I really like how they work once the piece is finished.

Do you have a desire to explore new mediums and new techniques?

Yes, most definitely. There are many new materials and techniques that I am excited to experiment with. For me the material, craft and mechanics of how to produce the works is really important and often it's the process of working it out that drives me to the finished piece.

Obviously, I plan as much as I can but it's not until the piece is finished that I know whether it will work or not. I find this is sometimes frustrating, but ultimately it gives momentum to get to the finished piece. Seeing the final overall effect is very satisfying.

What is your relation to media and technology? Can you develop the idea of 'pixilation' that you pursue in your work?

I do use technology to develop and plan my work and I appreciate that the pieces have a pixelated quality. This is more a by-product of the work rather than a central aspect.

YOUR MESSAGE

What reaction do you expect from the viewer when they look at your work?

I don't expect any reaction but if the work does get a reaction, whether good or bad it works for me. Generally, I think the best reaction is from people viewing the piece from a distance and then viewing it up close. Seeing their reaction to something that they didn't expect to see is great. I like how this experience is the same for the viewer, regardless of the actual image or materials used.

What kind of feelings do you want to convey? Values?

I'm not trying to convey any feelings or values. I like to leave that to the viewer to decide. Although I do have motifs running through my work and possible ideologies it is more interesting for me to hear other people's views on a piece and how they perceive the relationship between material and subject.

YOUR ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Do you have any particular project/dream that you'd like to do?

Yes, many projects but it's too early to say what direction they will take. I'd like to play with scale a lot more, both with the size of the objects and the scale of the final piece. Perhaps also experiment with more sculptural work.

In which major museum would you like to be exhibited one day?

I feel that's quite a big question but if I were to have a choice then Tate Modern in London or Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York. I think they are both quite obvious choices as their collections for me are probably the most inspiring.



JOE BLACK BIOGRAPHY

“I’m interested in small things working together to create a whole detailed image - something that takes on two viewing points. One, when you stand close to a piece and the image you get is a sea of small units or colours, and it’s not until it is viewed from a distance that you can see the detail of the whole image... The further away from the image, the more you see.”

Born in 1973, in the United Kingdom, Joe Black studied as a sculptor before moving on to illustration and working for many years as a successful commercial artist before becoming a full-time fine artist. Joe Black is now focused solely on his personal body of art.

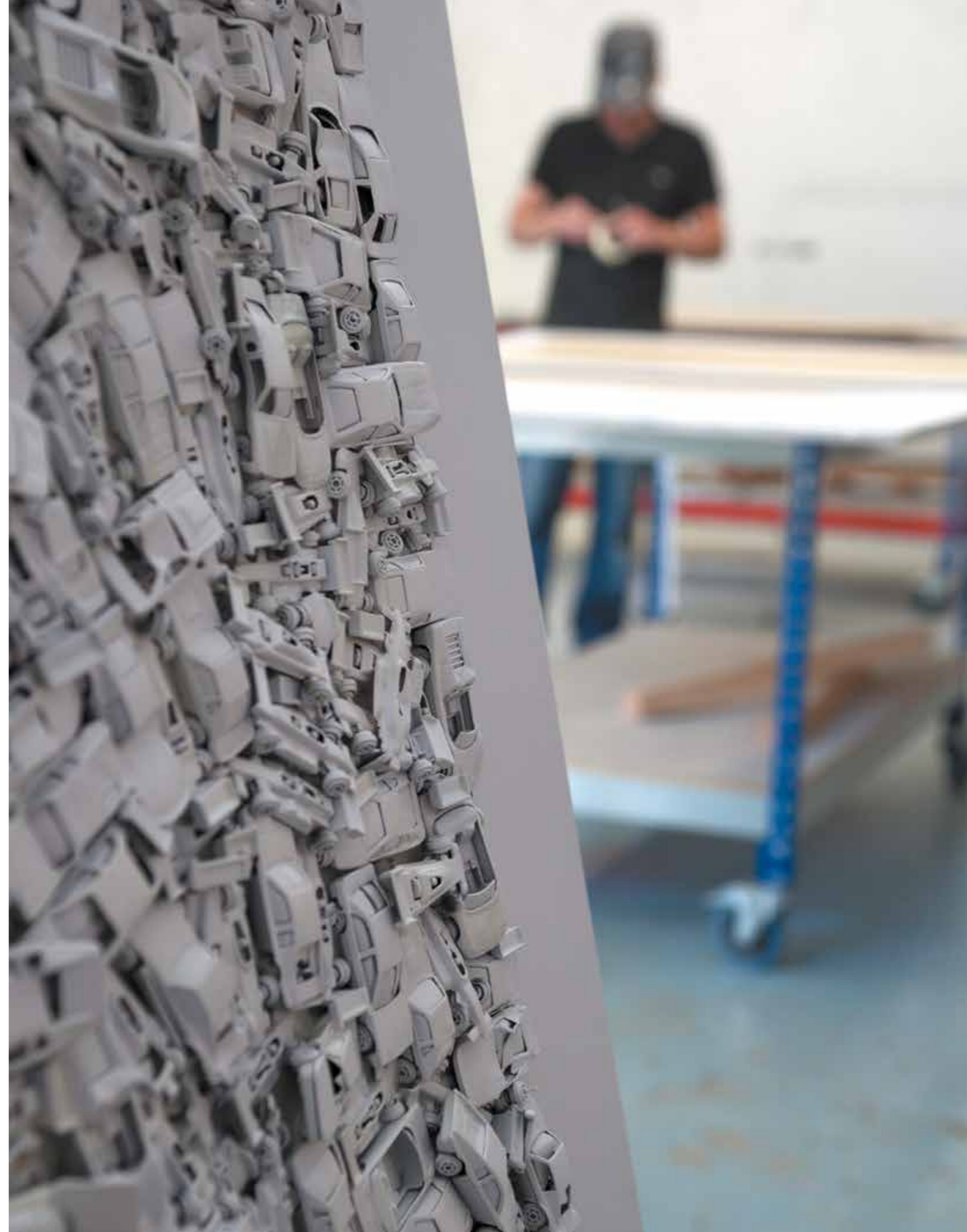
Combining his love of materials with his craft, skills, technique and a passion for perfection, each piece is painstakingly created using thousand upon thousand of ball bearings, plastic pins, toys, badges, Lego bricks or any other little object that Joe Black will come across and be inspired by.

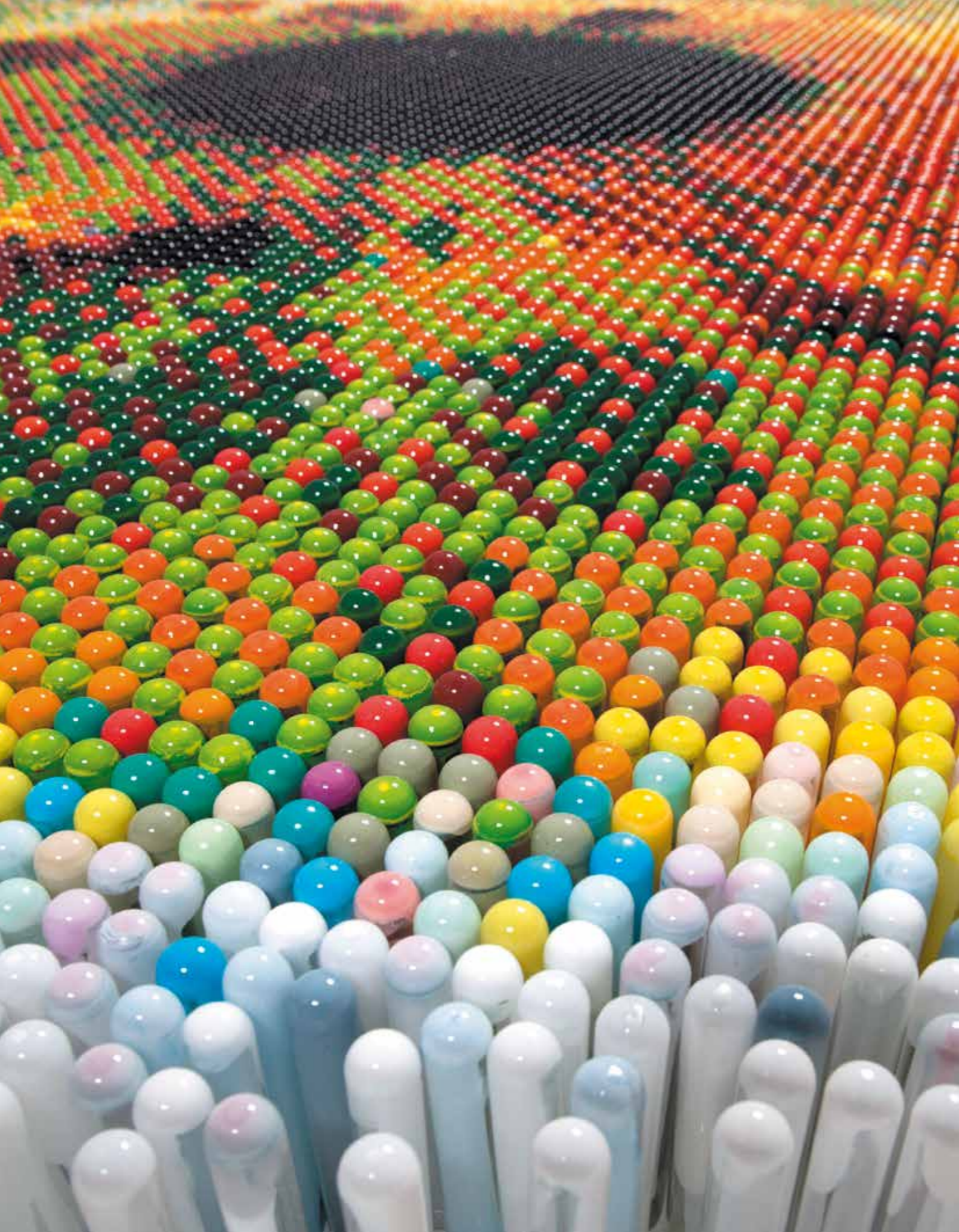
According to the artist himself, he will use pretty much anything small enough to build his large-scale imagery artworks and creating vast tonal effects. In addition to these contrasting tones, Joe Black constantly seeks to further enhance his pieces by selecting an object that will pay tribute to the iconic imagery it creates. This is perhaps best illustrated by his use of plastic toy soldiers in his depiction of Robert Capa’s iconic boy soldier piece ‘Made in China’ (2011).

Since committing himself to the world of full-time fine art, Joe Black has stormed the art world, stunning it with his powerful mix of image selection and craftsmanship. He is at the vanguard of the current Pop Art movement and in the great traditions of craftsman before him.

Joe Black is rigorous in his commitment to produce excellence and he demonstrates a level of skill that often falls outside the viewers’ understanding of what is possible.

Since early 2012, Joe Black is exclusively represented by Opera Gallery worldwide. The same year, he was selected to feature in Opera Gallery’s warehouse pop-up show ‘Urban Masters’ in London, as well as in the homage exhibition to Marilyn Monroe ‘I want to be loved by you’ that was presented in Paris.





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