

Michael
Mapes

OPERA GALLERY





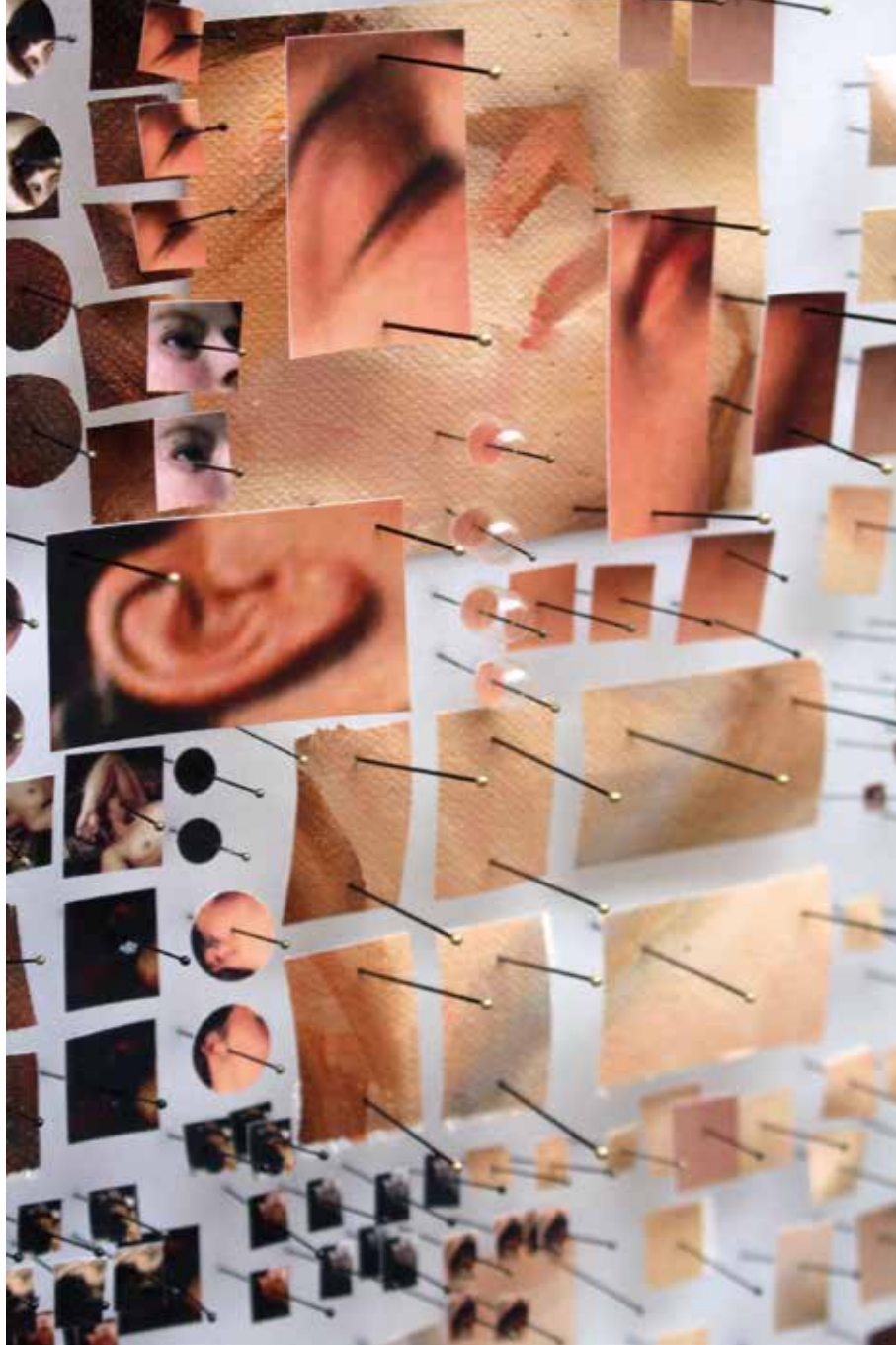
The first time we saw Michael Mapes's works we were startled by their immense creativity and novelty, first exhibited in his early "Specimen" portraiture and expounded upon in his later Dutch Masters series. Collecting hundreds of what the artist coined 'biographical DNA', Mapes diligently gathers anything from genealogical information, personal statistics, handwriting samples, fingernail clippings and hair strands, then reorganizes his 'DNA' in tiny shapes and vials before tediously layering and composing them until they form a whole.

Nearly two years later, we are thrilled to present Mapes's new body of work (pun required), in the artist's first solo exhibition in Asia. Entitled *Anatomy of the Muse*, the series explores the depiction and dissection of portrayals of women throughout Art History in the artist's painstaking assemblage style, serving as both a commentary on the function of scientific evidence and the metaphor of deconstruction in contemporary culture.

In a celebration of the artists's work over the last decade, this catalogue serves as a glimpse into Mapes's artistic practice with an essential focus on this fascinating new series.

Gilles DYAN
Founder and Chairman
Opera Gallery Group

Shirley YABLONSKY
Director
Opera Gallery Hong Kong



6 Reclining Nude Female (detail)

Anatomy of the Muse

Examine these artworks. Map their ingredients, their components that make up a whole. You may smile when, shuffling up close and peering into the canvas, a minuscule breast adorns the flesh of a thigh. You may grimace, slightly, when a casual detail reveals itself as a fingernail or a vial of hair.

But Michael Mapes isn't looking for the shock value. Nor do his works carry an overt implication aiming to push a social agenda. In what resembles a laboratory archive, Mapes collects, dissects and assembles distinctive qualities of his specimens, subverting the very practice he elicits. Rather than distancing the viewer from his subjects like the entomological findings of a scientist, Mapes's "biographical DNA" reveals a depth of character and personal history that challenges the tradition of portraiture and urges us to examine the individual as more than the sum of its parts.

Nothing is quite as it seems in Mapes' work. In his Dutch Masters series, intricately detailed representations of familiar masterpieces are arranged using countless fragments. From afar, an anonymous Dutch aristocrat stares defiantly out of the canvas in an expression of pride and status, calling forth the muted rhetoric of aristocracy for which the genre is known. Upon inspection one begins to unravel evidence of the subject's existence – photographs of family members, fabric samples, rope, coffee, tobacco, gunpowder, hair – painstakingly researched, collected and placed to breathe life into a figure long forgotten or relegated to the status of a historical concept. While 'deconstruction' may be the most obvious term to ascribe to Mapes's pixilated wholes, his technique more aptly reflects a construction of lost individuality; an insistence on considering that which is camouflaged under the impersonal veneer of history.

His new series, *Anatomy of the Muse*, sees Mapes veering into the perilous grounds of the portrayal of women throughout art history. Reclining nudes and pin-up girls conjure a vision of voluptuous femininity constructed and marketed to the masses, a concept that originated with the voyeur of the 16th century and developed into modern arguments of the male gaze. As with most feminists, my eye has been trained to detect even the slightest hint of asymmetrical power between viewer and viewed. Resurrecting candy-coloured pin-up models from the 1950s strikes an instinctive chord of patriarchy that takes a moment to recover from. But again, nothing in Mapes's work is quite as it seems: he has a way of cleverly infusing case and defense within the same piece, summoning critique as casually as he destabilizes it.



Who, or what, is the muse that Mapes is dissecting in his works? Greek mythology saw the muses as the goddesses of inspiration, the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne who were invoked by the poets to assist in the act of creation. In modern times, the muse has found a place within the context of artistic production as an elusive, magnetic figure often stripped of individual faculty for the sake of her creator. In her purest aspect in art history, the muse is the feminine element of the male artist – Salvador Dalí's Gala, Edward Weston's Tina Modotti, Pablo Picasso's medley of models, beautiful and tortured, remembered only in their fractured depictions on canvas. In a surprising reversal of gender roles, the muse exists to penetrate the man's soul in order for him to give birth to a creation, an act that elevates her to the status of the mythological idol yet consigns her to a theory, an impression. A portrait.

In *Reclining Nude Female*, a curvaceous woman sprawls lazily on an ambiguous surface. Eyes averted, she offers no obstacle for the liberal glances to her body. In her lounging state she is passive and defenseless, a pose esteemed in western art history between the 16th to 19th centuries that introduced the nude as an artistic genre in order to morally accommodate the unabashed admiration of the female form. In this piece, fragments of flesh encircle the reclining woman in a metaphorical echo of the nondescript nature of her parts. Beautiful from afar, Mapes provides his own set of similes in the visceral, slightly macabre truth that she is nothing but a composite of fleshy breasts, groins and bums.

Here a shift occurs. In both art history and this exhibition series, the introduction of the pin-up model acknowledges the element of sexual fantasy in the genre of the nude. Occupying a particular place in the latter half of the 20th century, pin-up art skirted the blade between sex and commerce that accompanied a meteoric rise of consumerism in the United States following World War II. The vocabulary of the pin-up – a term quite literally referring to the act of sticking a pin through a flimsy, disposable poster of a painted woman – offered a bolder approach to femininity that claimed to liberate both men and women from the barriers of pre-war conservatism. Risqué but not explicit, flirtatious but respectable, the good-girl-in-bad-situations of the pin-up model became a method of fabricating an idealized version of beauty and seduction. Using real women as references, famous pin-up artists such as Alberto Vargas generated a fictionalized standard of perfection created to win the

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Reclining Nude Female (detail)

Specimen 480 - Roxanne (detail)

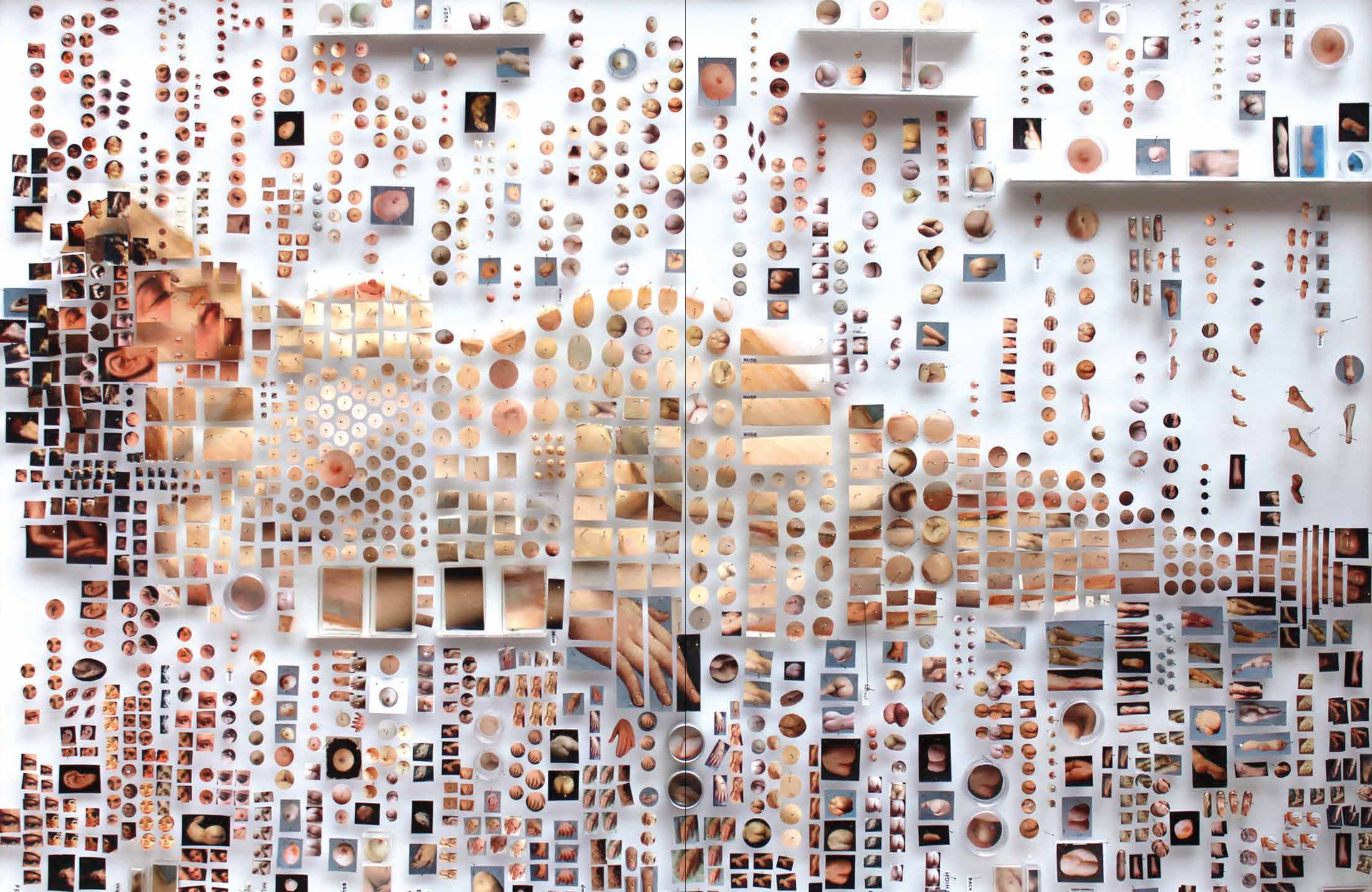
adoration of the male collective. Painted rather than photographed, Vargas and his constituents could eliminate the imperfection that made a woman human, standardizing her features into an almost scientific accuracy of form and proportion.

Specimen 480 - Roxanne is derived from the classic model of allure that adorned many a locker room in the 1950s. Anatomized into photographs, insect pins, specimen bags, pill capsules, false eyelashes, panty hose, and acrylic fingernails, among other contents, Roxanne becomes a presence that suggests an existence beyond the moment in which she is captured in pose.

The symbol of the muse has metamorphosed from the ethereal to the corporeal, but the act of deriving inspiration from the mythical female endures well into the contemporary milieu. An advertisement, a photograph, a pin-up, a lounging nude – these works elicit a few seconds of a glimpse before dissolving into the background. Mapes's approach to creation shifts the passive act of looking to the more active act of experiencing, a move that by default elicits contemplation and admission. Observing the biographical DNA of the subject reveals also the DNA of the painting itself: a brushstroke, a pin askew. These works, like the women in them, are manufactured with the intention of telling a story. Painstakingly rendered, they are both portraits of an individual and a caustic reflection on the fabrication of personal and collective history.

Gili KAREV





Previous pages

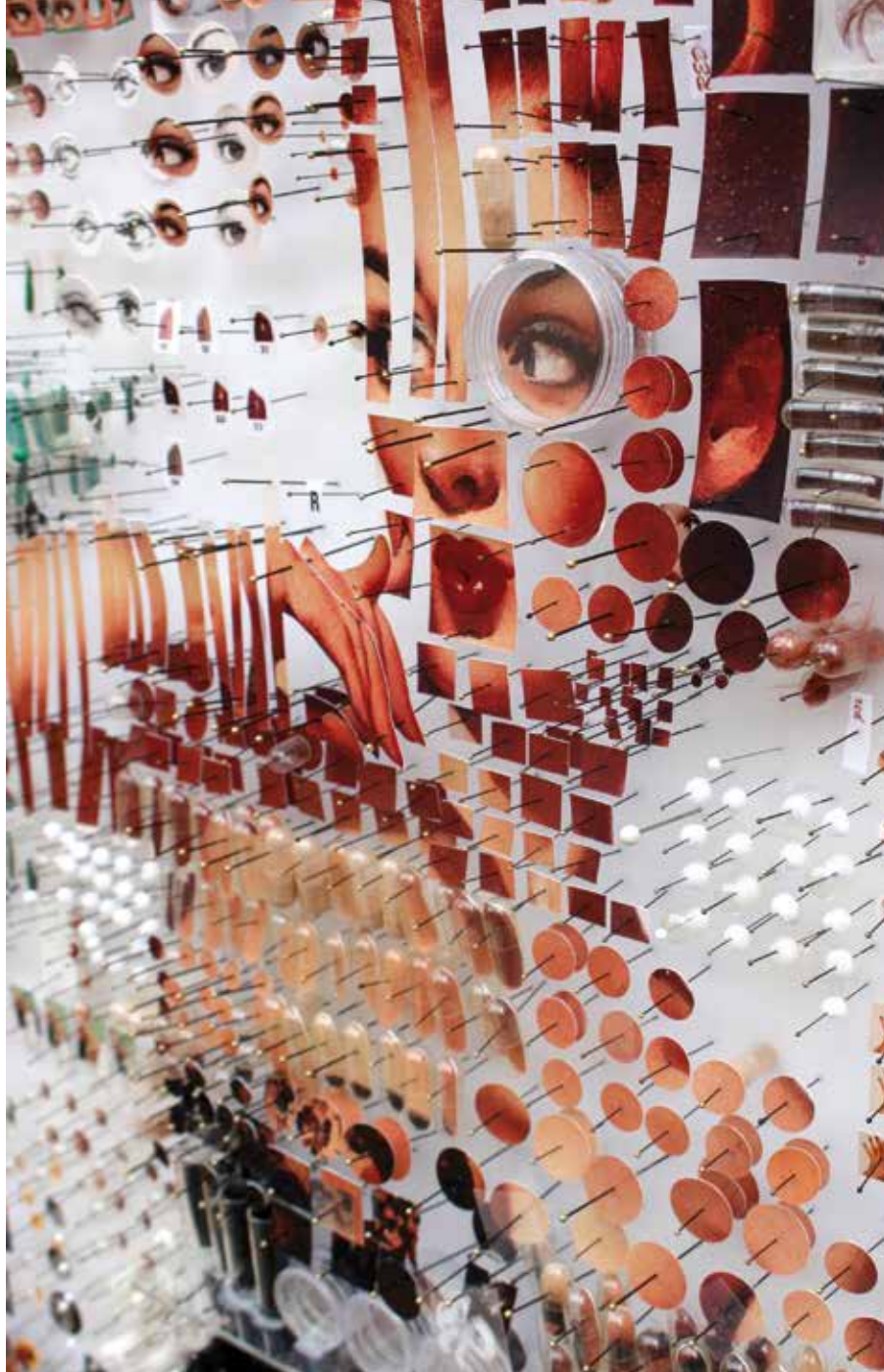
Reclining Nude Female, 2015

Oil painting on canvas, photographs, insect pins, pinning foam, pill capsules, specimen bags, magnifying boxes, plastic canisters, map pins, cotton thread
84 x 122 cm - 33 x 48 in.

12 Calendar Girls, 2015

Photographs, insect pins, pinning foam, specimen bags, plastic canisters, pill capsules, magnifying boxes, glass vials, makeup applicators, eyeshadow, acrylic nails, map pins, pastel powder, cotton thread
122 x 184 cm - 48 x 33 in.





14 Specimen 332 (red), 2015
Photographs, insect pins, pinning foam, pill capsules, specimen bags, glass vials, plastic canisters, magnifying boxes, acrylic paint, canvas, pencil drawings, doll hair, human hair, false eyelashes, acrylic nails, fabric, feathers, makeup applicators, eyeshadow, pantyhose, map pins, pastel powder
86.5 x 71 cm - 34 x 28 in.



Specimen 480: Roxanne, 2015

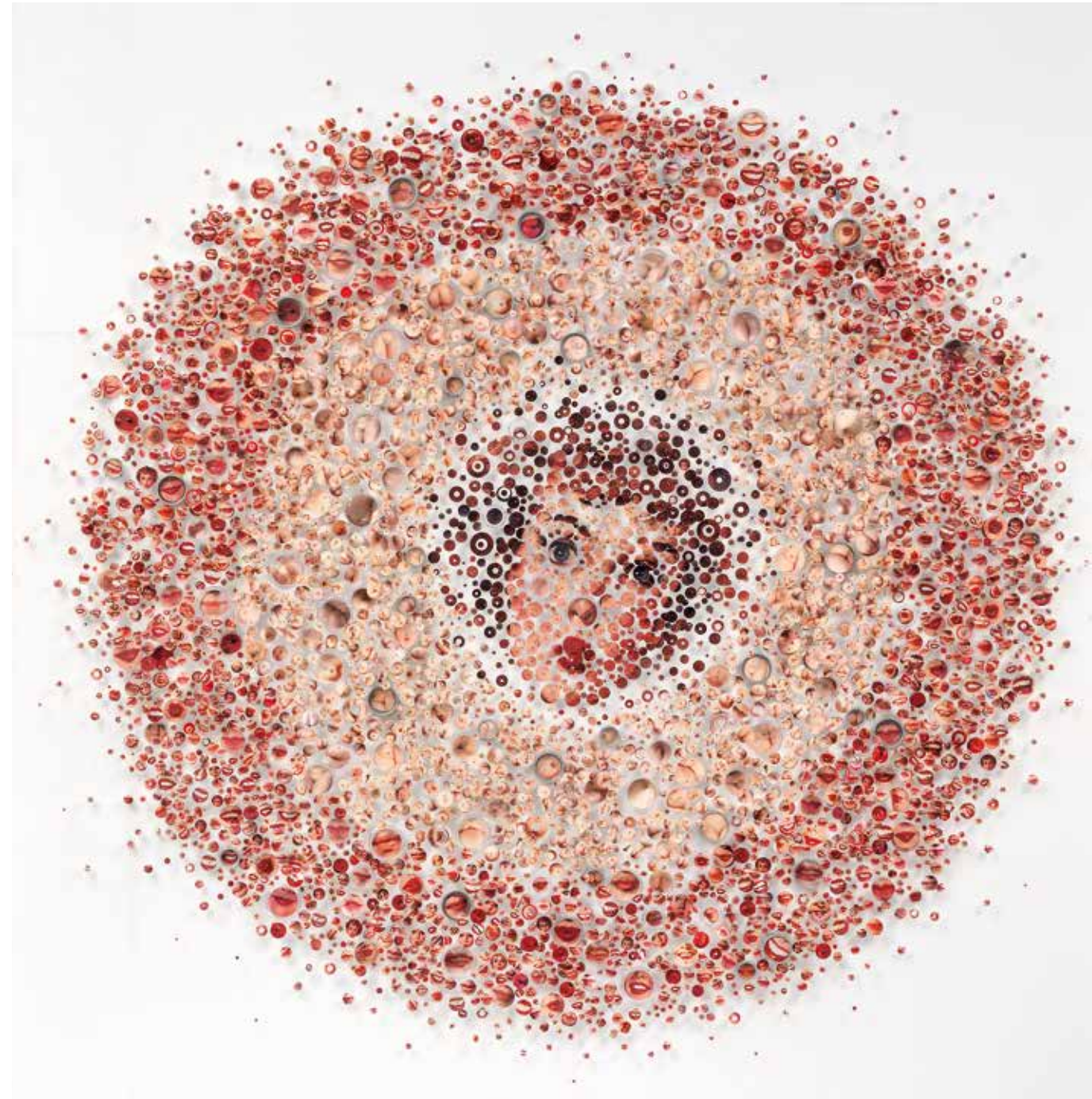
Photographs, insect pins, pinning foam, map pins, specimen bags, magnifying boxes, plastic flowers, pill capsules, mirror, false eyelash, glass vials, pantyhose, acrylic fingernails, fingernail polish, eyeshadow, printed transparencies, charcoal drawing, fabric, canvas

86.5 x 71 cm - 34 x 28 in.

Specimen 421: Annette, 2015

Photographs, insect pins, pinning foam, pill capsules, specimen bags, plastic canisters, glass vials, magnifying boxes, push pins, map pins, dried rose petals, dried rose stem, canvas, printed transparencies, cotton, human hair, pantyhose, acrylic nails, false eyelashes

86.5 x 71 cm - 34 x 28 in.



18 Target Specimen, 2015

Photographs, insect pins, pinning foam, magnifying lens, plastic containers, tin containers, painted bristol, nail polish, doll hair, pill capsules, double concave lenses

122 x 122 cm - 48 x 48 in.

Male Gaze, 2015

Giclee print, photographs, insect pins, pinning foam, pill capsules, specimen bags, magnifying boxes, magnifying lens, plastic canisters, epoxy stickers

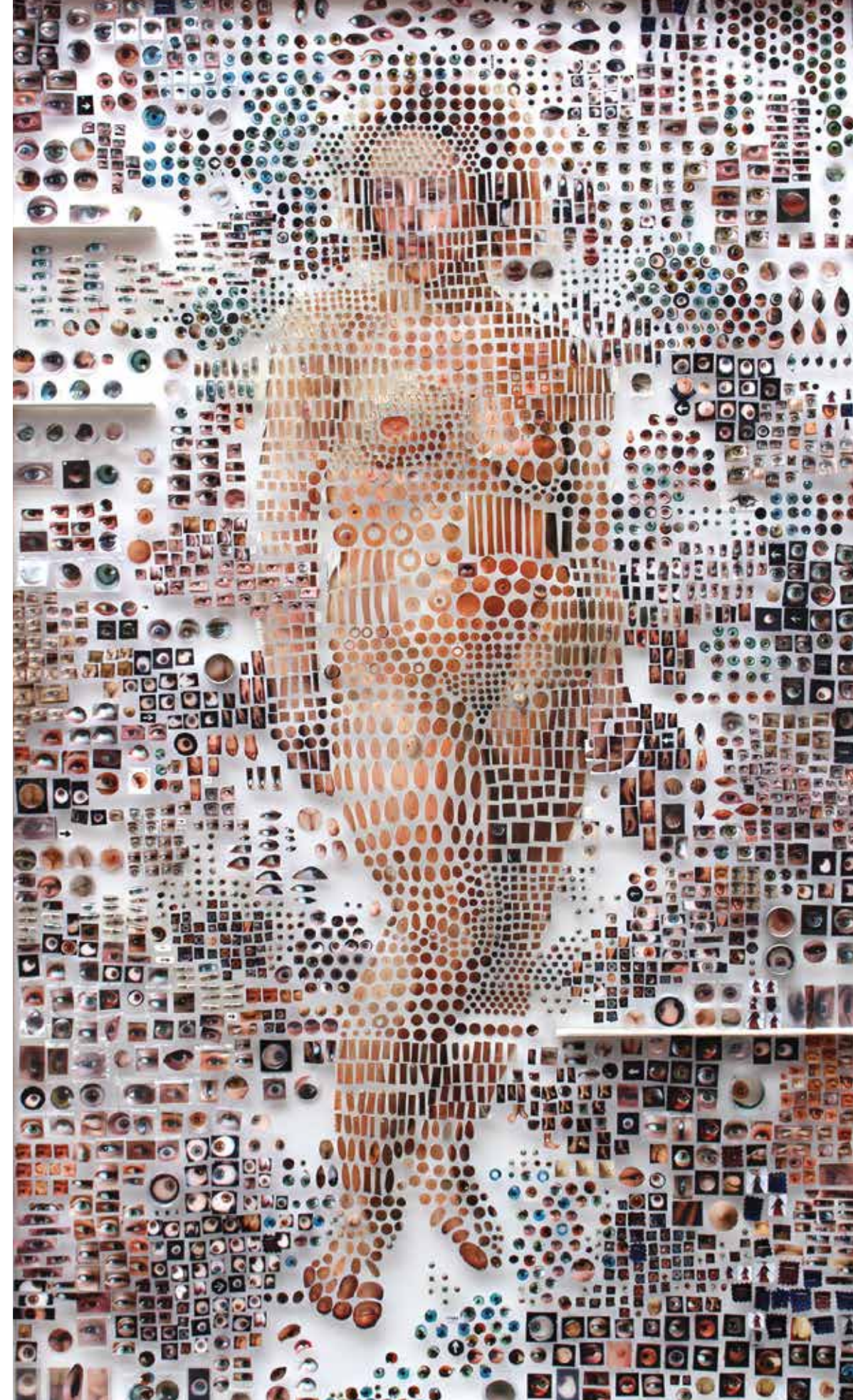
152.5 x 91.5 cm - 60 x 30 in.

Following pages

20 Botanical Female Specimen, 2015

Photographs, insect pins, pinning foam, pill capsules, specimen bags, plastic canisters, glass vials, artificial flowers, acrylic paint on paper, magnifying boxes, printed transparencies, fingerprints, false eyelashes, acrylic nails, dirt, map pins

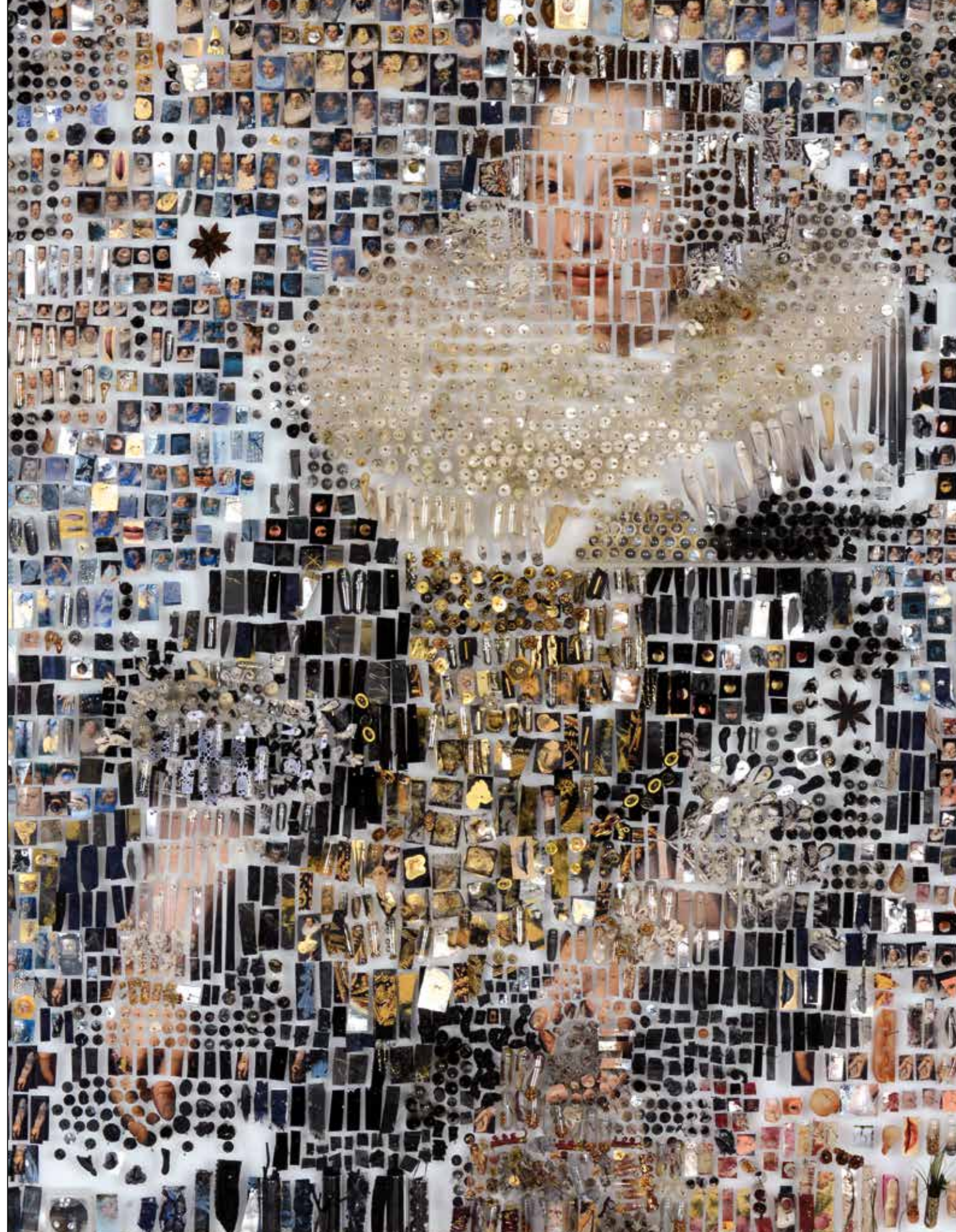
84 x 122 cm - 33 x 48 in.







24 Anonymous Young Woman, 2014
Photographs, fabric samples, painted photographs, botanical specimens, x-rays, tea, tobacco, coffee, cast resin, clay, thread, dental floss, insect pins, capsules, specimen bags, magnifying boxes
71 x 58.5 - 28 x 23 in.

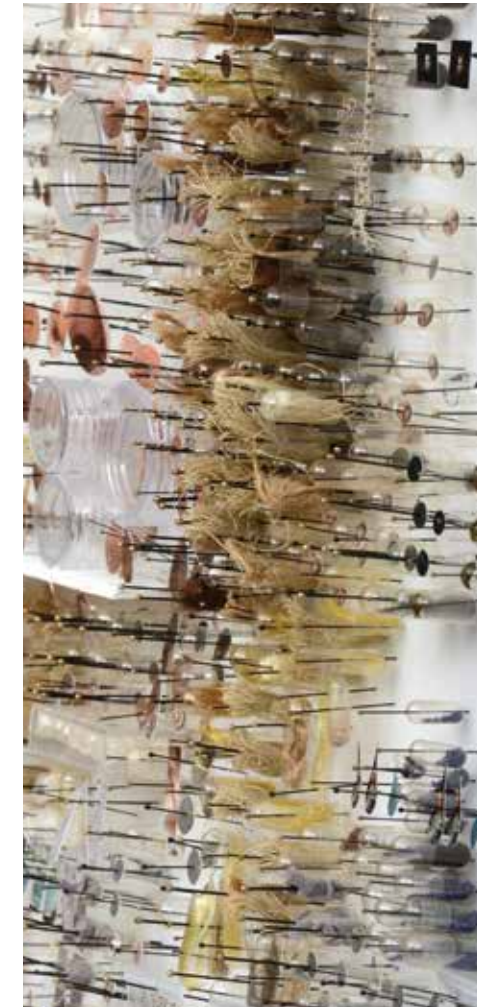


26 Case No. AYW, 2014

Photographs, altered photographs, costume jewelry, insect pins, gelatin capsules, clay, fabric samples, specimen bags, thread, magnifying boxes

28 x 28 cm - 11 x 11 in.

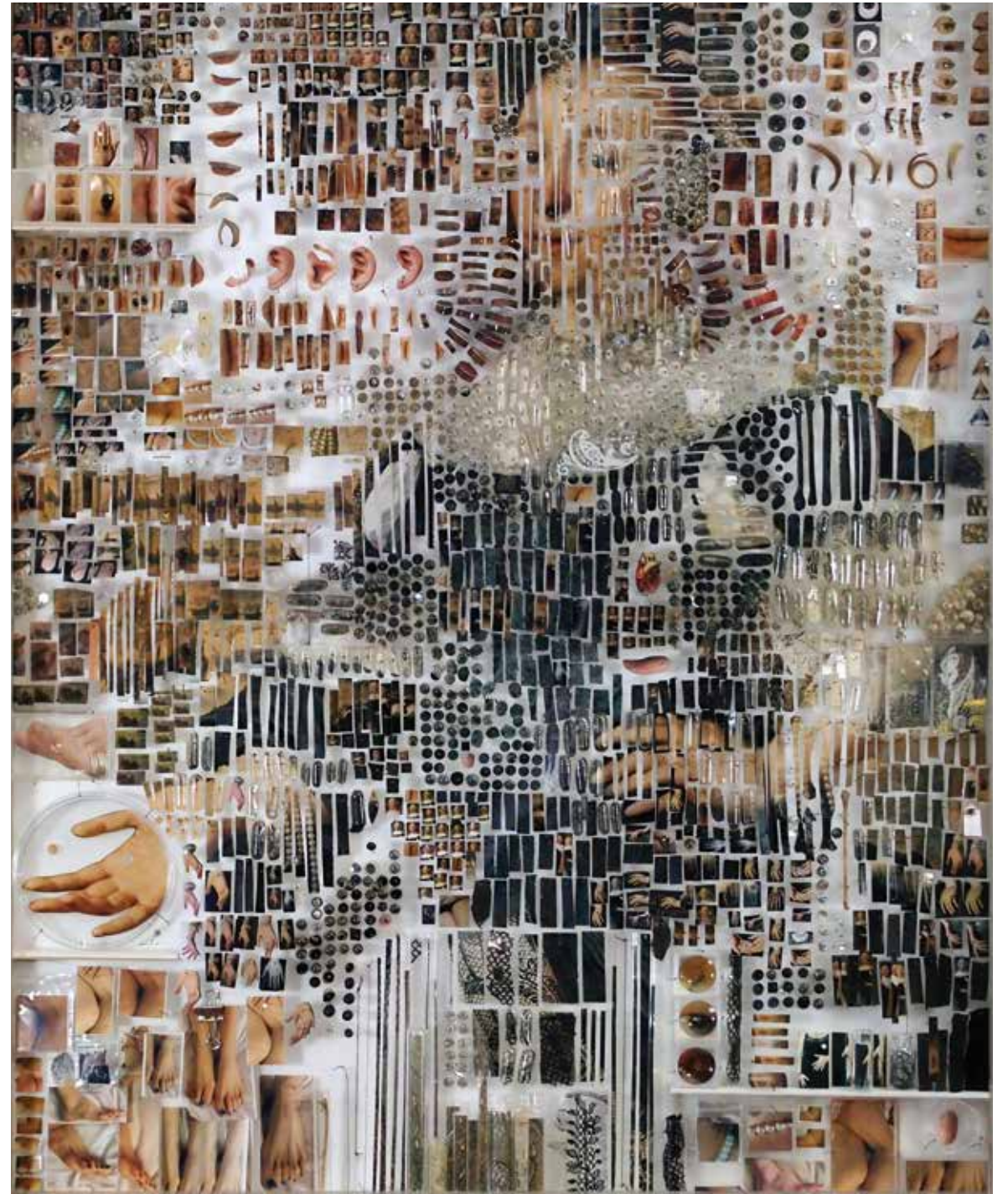
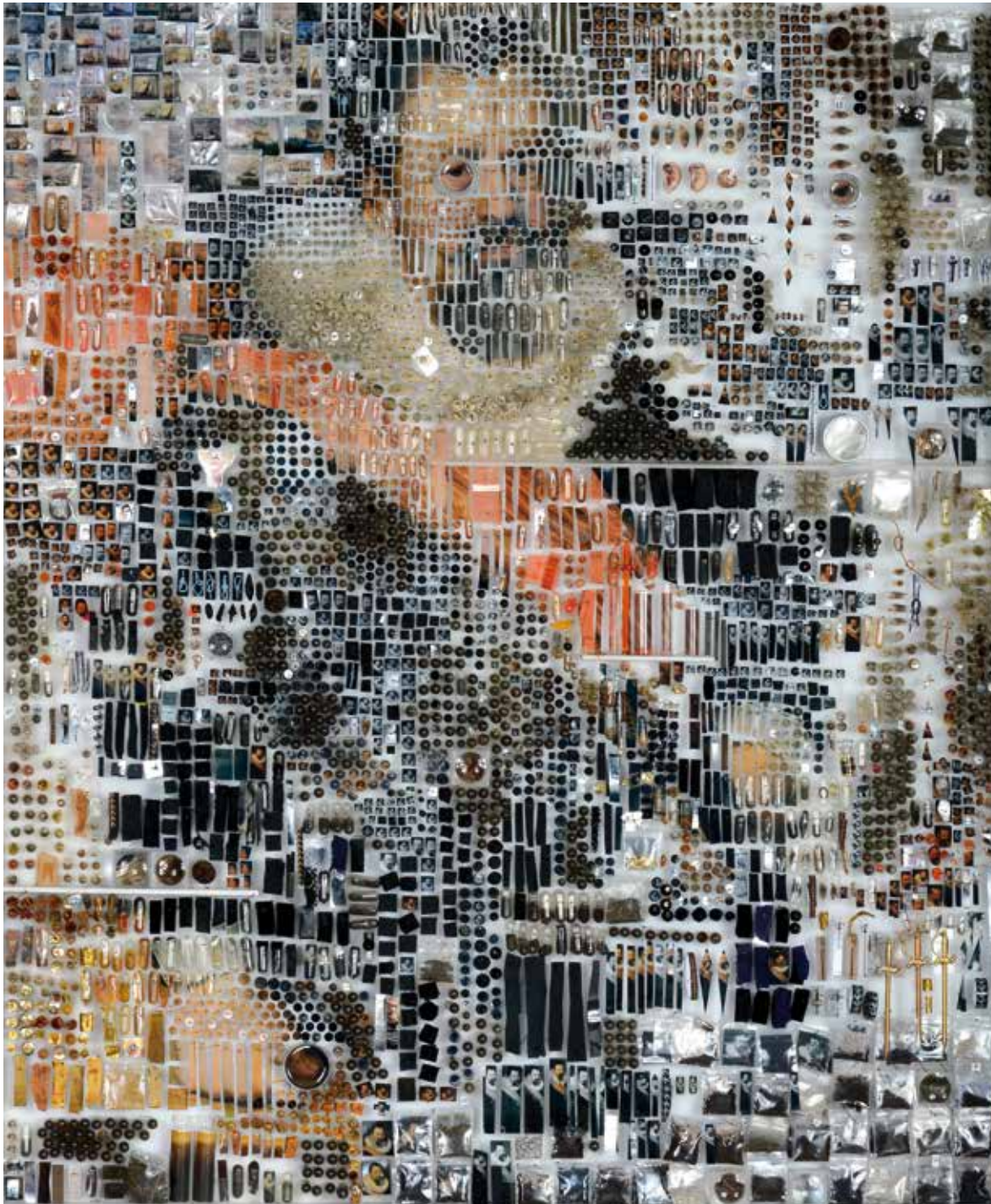


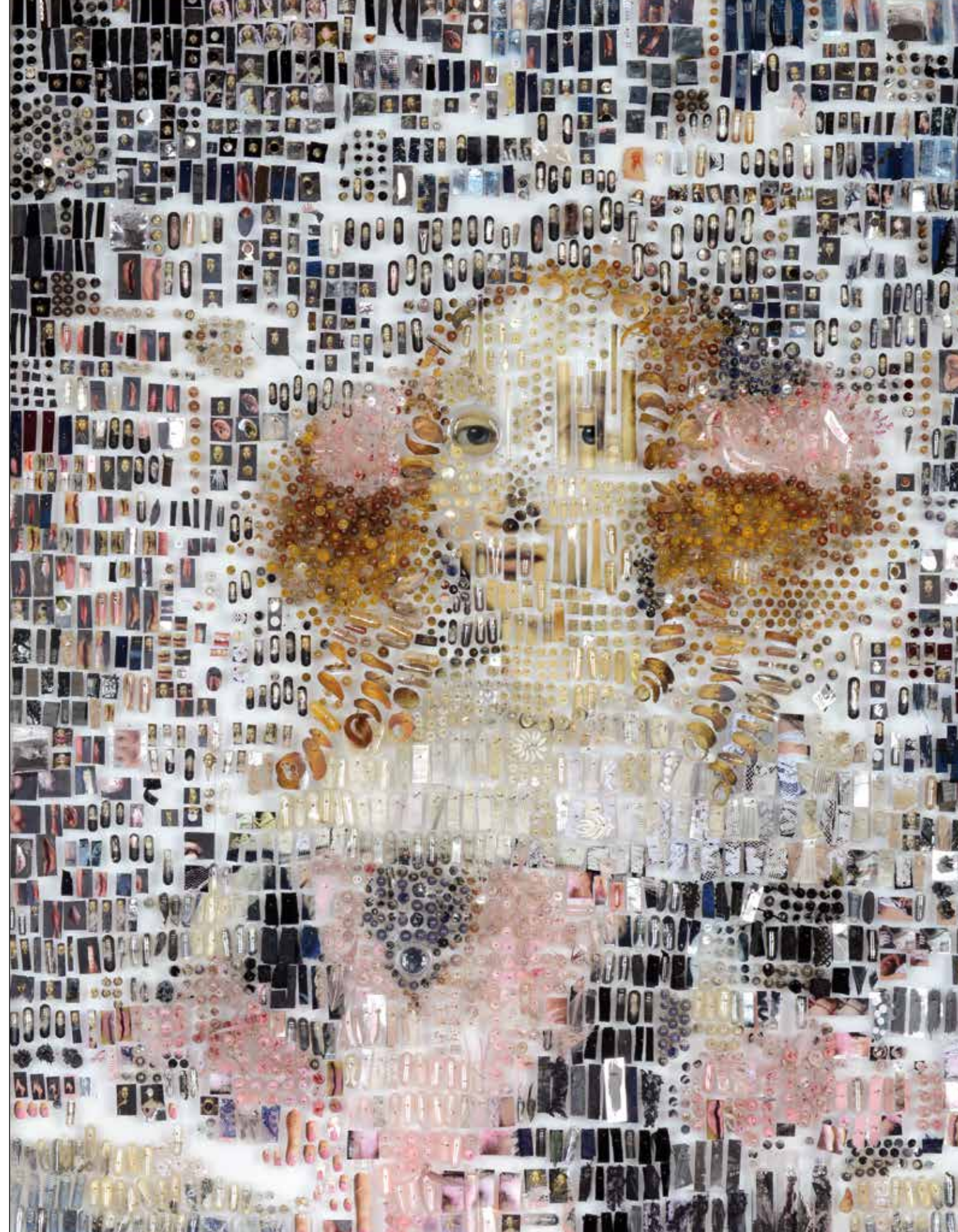


Blauw-girl, 2014

Photographs, painted photographs, fabric samples, rope, sand, coffee, tea, sugar, driftwood, doll parts, gelatin capsules, cast resin, hair samples, plastic boxes, thread, insect pins, specimen bags, petri dishes, magnifying boxes

86.5 x 71 cm - 34 x 28 in.





Previous pages

Dutch Male Specimen: Jochem, 2014

Photographs, painted photographs, fabric samples, rope, sand, sea shells, coffee, tea, tea bags, tobacco, gunpowder, sugar, driftwood, hair, cast resin, clay, thread, insect pins, gelatin capsules, specimen bags, magnifying boxes

86.5 x 71 cm - 34 x 28 in.

21 Year Old Dutch Female, 2014

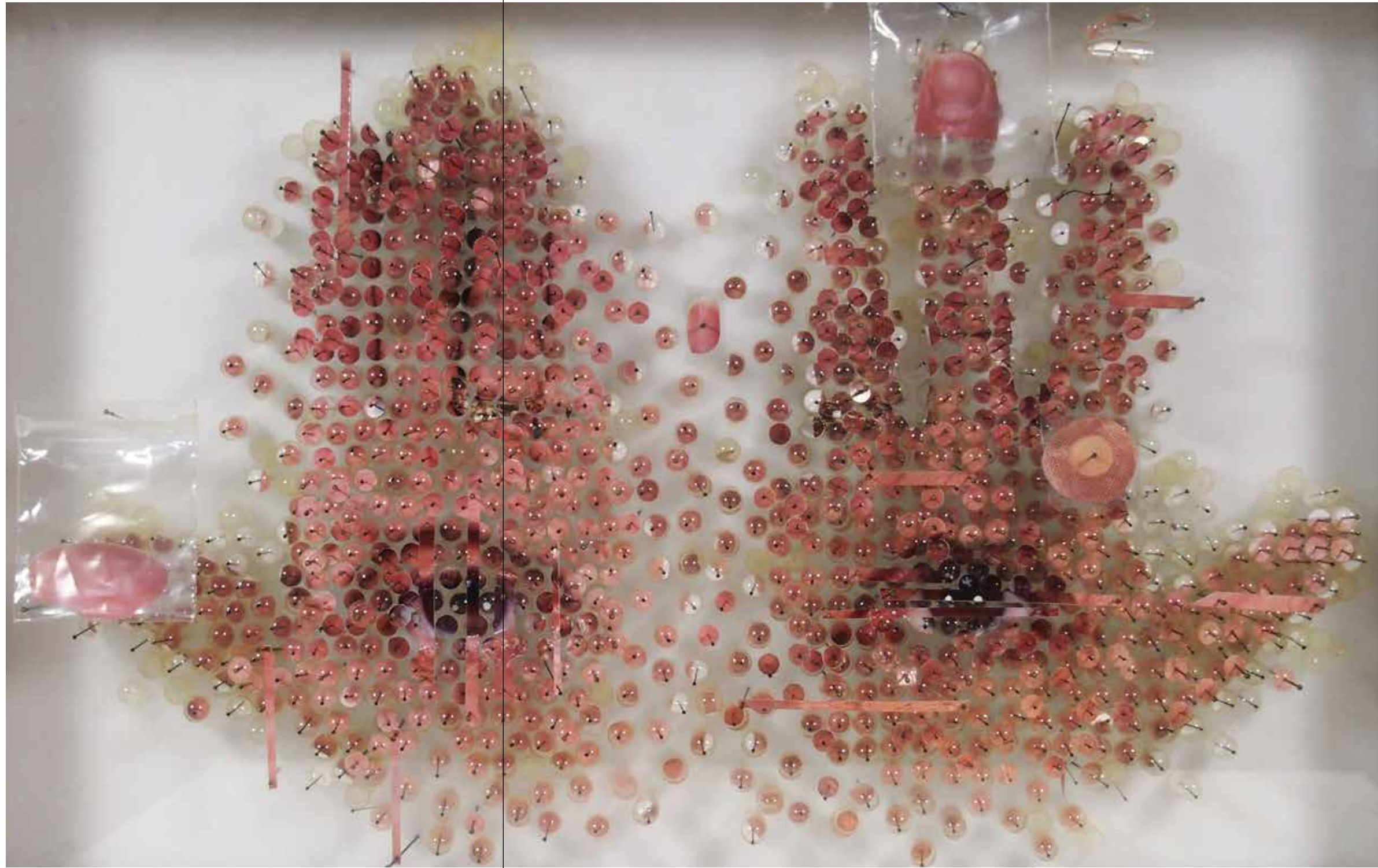
Photographic prints, insect pins, pinning foam, gelatin capsules, glass vials, painted canvas, petri dish, sequins, pill organizer, plastic specimen bags, cotton thread, cotton, cosmetic samples, costume jewelry, human hair (two sources), fabric samples, fingerprint, dried botanical specimen

71 x 58.5 cm - 28 x 23 in.

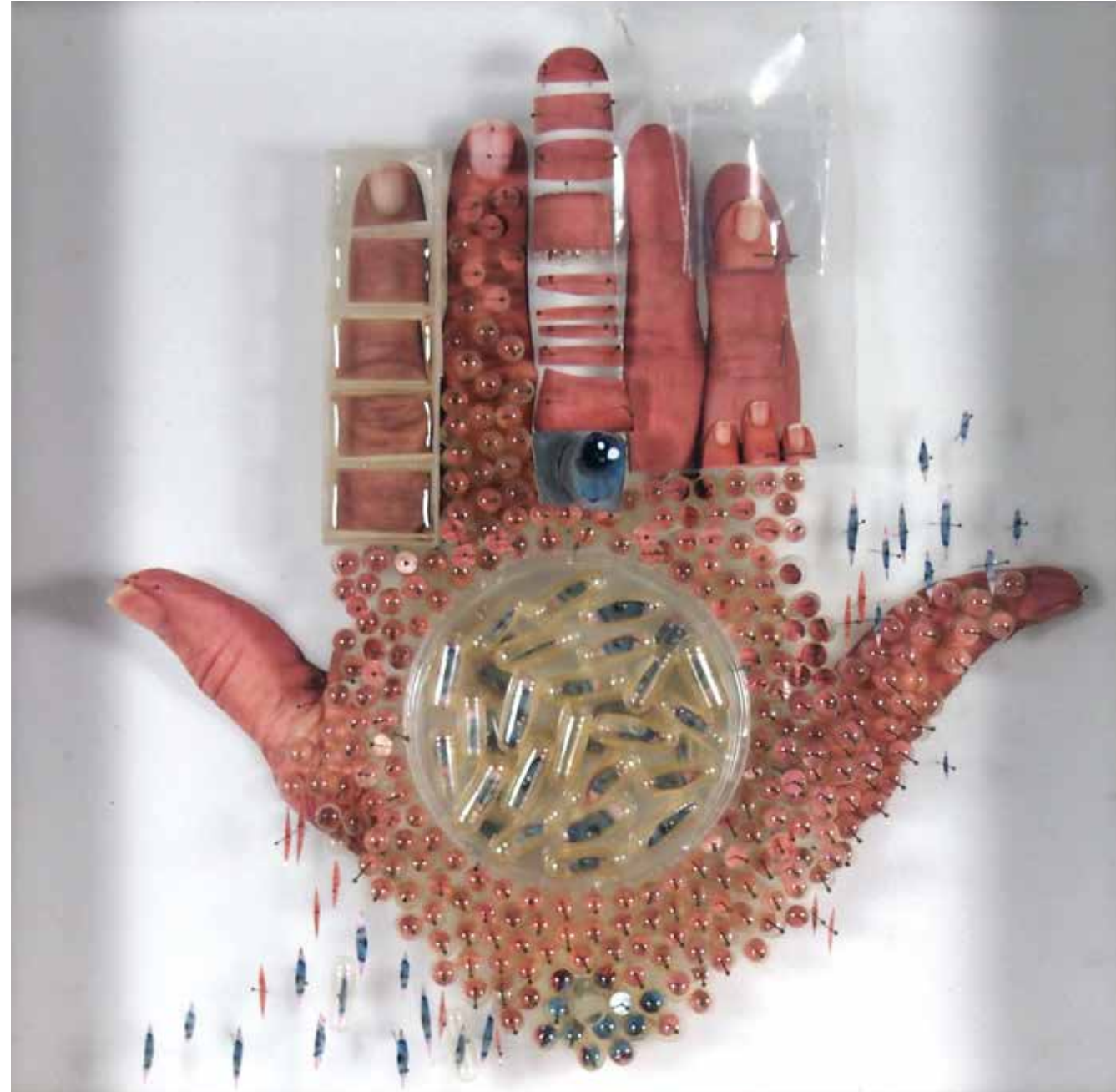
32 **Adriana: Female, 2014**

Photographs, fabric samples, painted photographs, botanical specimens, hair, crystals, costume jewelry, spics, cast resin, clay, thread, insect pins, capsules, specimen bags, perfume vials

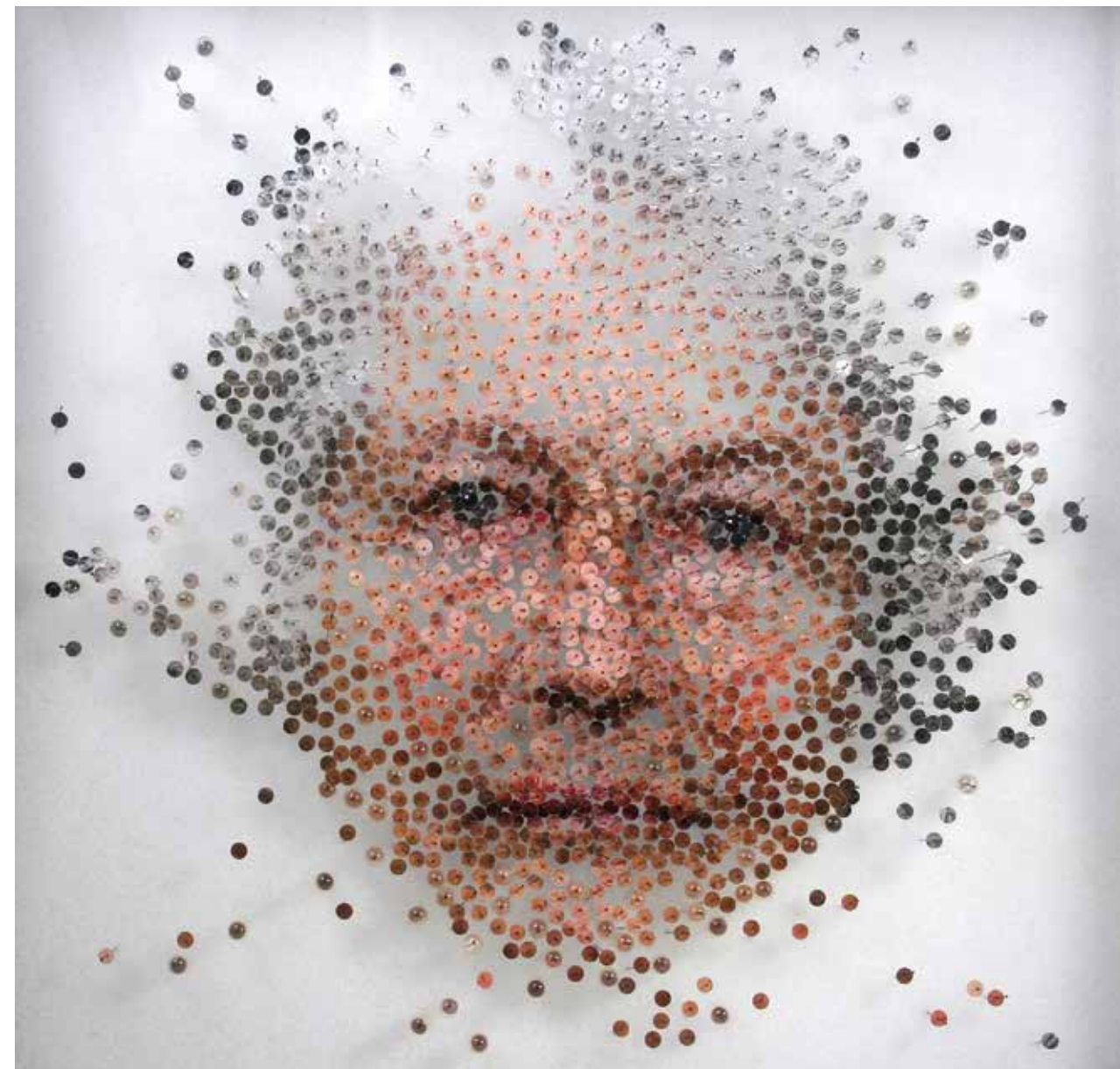
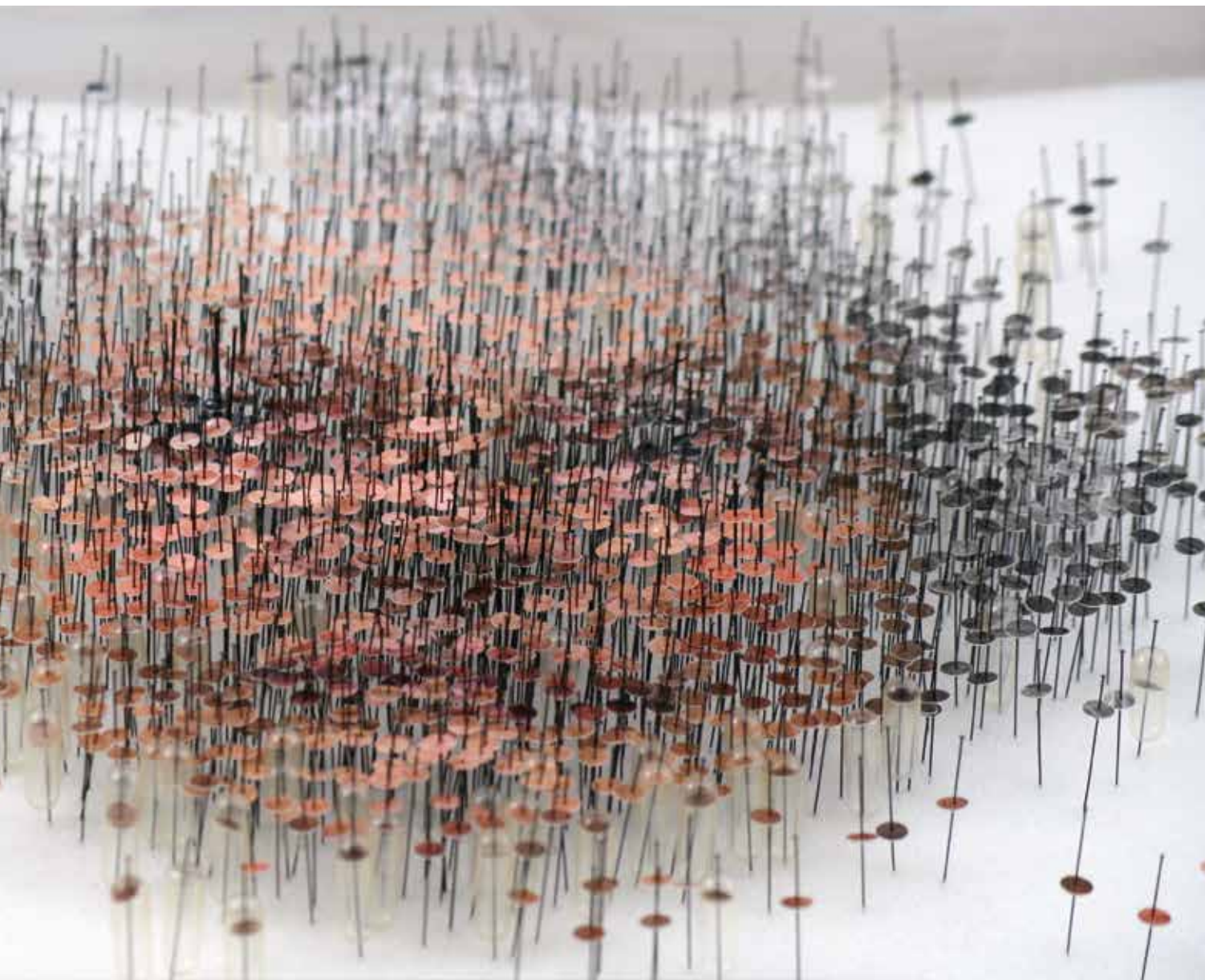
86.5 x 71 cm - 34 x 28 in.



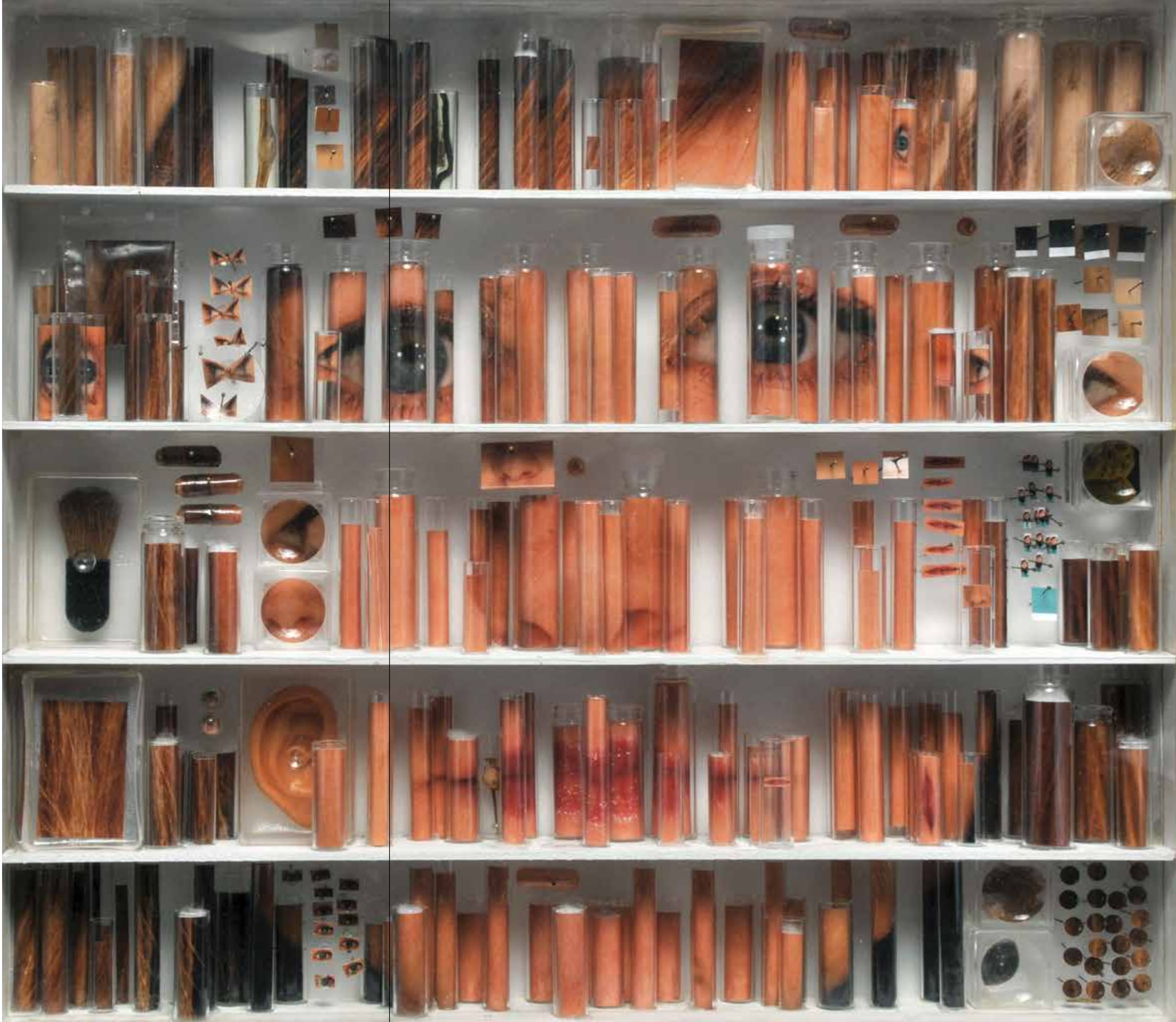
34 Specimen HC1, 2013
Photographic prints, misc collage materials, insect pins, pinning foam, gelatin capsules, plastic sample bags
28 x 43 cm - 11 x 17 in.



36 Specimen HL1, 2013
Photographic prints, misc collage materials, petri dishes, cast resin, pill organizer box, insect pins,
pinning foam, gelatin capsules
33 x 33 cm - 13 x 13 in.



38 Specimen No. 6, 2006
Photographic prints, insect pins, pinning foam, gelatin capsules
56 x 56 cm - 22 x 22 in.



Specimen No. AM, 2007

Photographic prints, misc collage materials, insect pins, pinning foam, glass vials, magnifiers, gelatin capsules, resin filled plastic containers

35.5 x 40.5 cm - 14 x 16 in.



Biography

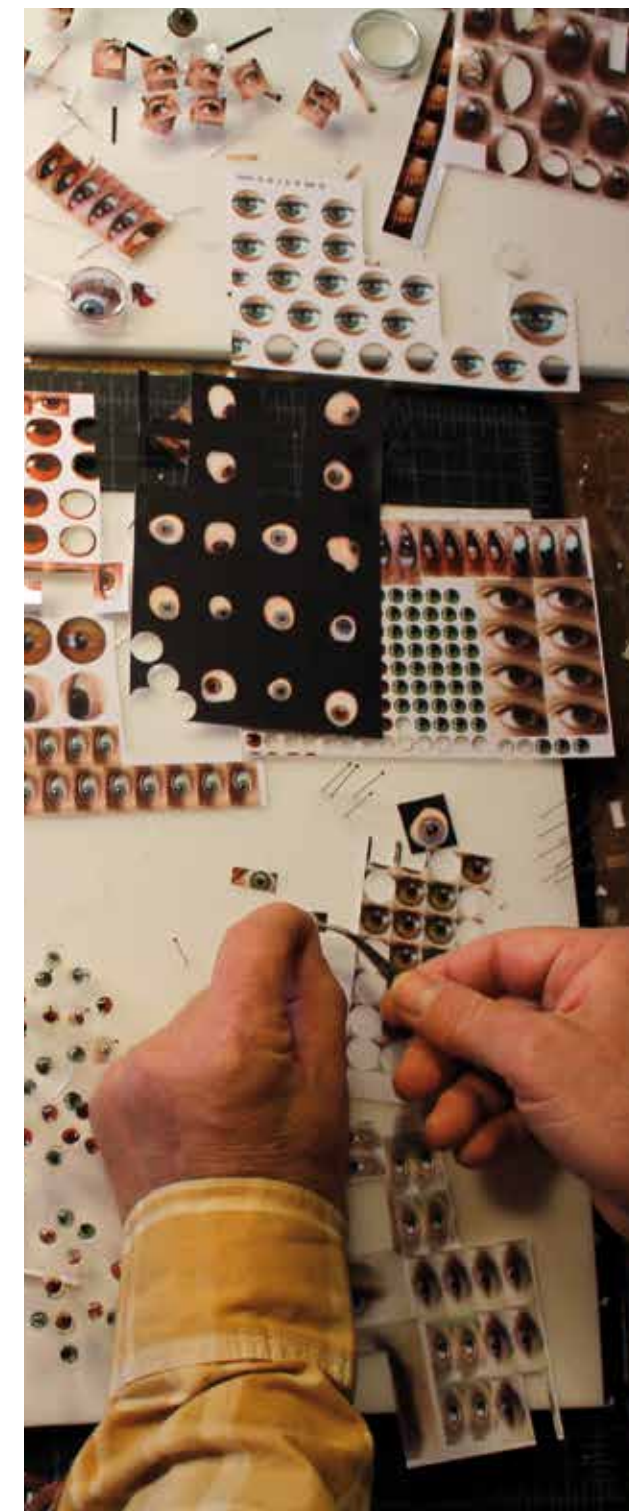
- 1962 Established in Ireland Army Hospital, Fort Knox, Kentucky
- 1966 Painted first documented portrait (family) on non-archival paper
- 1969 First family vacation - watching jets take off and land at St. Louis airport, Missouri, USA
- 1979 Decided not to attend Rhode Island School of Design
- 1984 BFA from the University of Illinois, USA
- 1984-86 Worked in the Chicago design firm Mobium with Ralph Eckerstrom, former design director for Container Corporation and founder of Unimark International
- 1986-89 Worked in the NYC design firm Bonnell Design Associates with such clients as Knoll, Herman Miller, Michael Graves Architect, Williwear Willi Donnell Smith
- 1989-90 Contemplated in Boston, Chapel Hill and then Urbana, Illinois, USA
- 1990 Formed the product development company MINC, created and produced products for direct mail, retail and museum stores. Sold several hundred thousand shirts and enjoyed the rewards of a profitable, small, creative based business while it lasted
- 1991-92 MFA from the University of Illinois. Chose not to pursue a career in teaching
- 2003 Produced a series of five-minute talk shows called *The Corn Mo Show* featuring Corn Mo, a NYC club darling, as whimsical host to a variety of national performers
- 2005 Returned to art
- 2010 Sold house and moved. Lived in various places before moving to Croton Falls, New York, USA
- 2015 Relocated studio to Santa Fe, New Mexico

Solo exhibitions

- 2013 Schoolhouse Gallery, North Salem, New York, USA
- 2008-09 Richland College, Decatur, Illinois, USA
FlexSpace, Urbana, Illinois, USA
Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois, USA

Group Exhibitions

- 2015 *Realisme*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Exhibitions and Art Fairs
- 2014 *Face to Face, Wall to Wall*, Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, Massachusetts, USA
Ampelhaus, Berlin, Germany
Cut-Copy-Paste, Beers Contemporary, London, UK
Revisiting the Golden Age, Pulchri Studio, The Hague, The Netherlands, curated by NL=US
- 2013 *Victorious*, Chelsea, New York, USA
Raw Art, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
Scope, New York, USA
KunstRAI, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- 2012 *We Find Our Way* - Parlor Gallery, Asbury Park, New Jersey, USA
Scope, Miami, Florida, USA
- 2011 *Terrible Twos* - Parlor Gallery, Asbury Park, New Jersey, USA
Outsiders & Objects - Parlor Gallery, Asbury Park, New Jersey, USA





Credits

Curator: Gili Karev
Coordinators: Shirley Yablonsky,
Aurélie Heuzard, Marion Galan Alfonso
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