

THE ASSEMBLY

CUMULATIVE PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY ART



PREFACE

Opera Gallery Hong Kong is delighted to present “The Assembly: Cumulative Practices in Contemporary Art” for our Autumn exhibition. The exhibition presents the works of a mixed selection of exciting contemporary artists from Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States, China and Europe who use materials that aren’t usually considered as art mediums. With fresh approaches and innovative techniques, we witness the ‘every day’ transform into the spectacular.

Our interest in artists who work with common materials grew from our desire to be involved in the artistic process from inception to completion. An attraction to the transformative action of the artist gives us great insight into, not just finished works of art, but the method and process involved in their making. Rooted in ‘new artistic practices’ from the 1960s and 1970s, these contemporary accumulation artists add to this tradition by looking back to a history of art practice that elevates various materials from having a functional value to an aesthetic value.

All of the artists selected follow a process of accumulation that begins with a similar narrative: selecting a material or an object, the original purpose for which is not artistic; collecting and amassing the material, often by the thousands; then, by repetition, assembling an artwork that changes the original intention of the object. The magic that lies behind this systematic process is the search for new perceptions and realities, ultimately providing a transformative experience for all involved.

What connects these disparate artists is a perseverance in rethinking, remaking, appropriating and reassembling in order to bridge our experience between past and present. Sometimes the most mundane materials can become the most spectacular through re-contextualising and thus reinvigorating.

What connects us to this work is our part in the process: as collectors, lovers and owners of art we are accumulators too, adding to the final chapter in the narrative of accumulation art.

Gilles Dyan
Founder & Chairman
Opera Gallery Group

Victoria Scott
Director
Opera Gallery Hong Kong

INTRODUCTION

Accumulation. The word has different connotations for different people. Perhaps it is the element of accumulating experiences through one's life, forging what and who we are or will be. The cumulative moments of anger, bliss, courage and despair will, whether we like it or not, become the building blocks of our psyche and define how we think and act.

Maybe it is the accumulation of time spent on a project, or even an idea. A collection of thoughts and concepts: a process of amassing 'things', of moving back and forth between you and yourself, or between you and others that contribute to the complexity of our lives. While there is a raw power to spontaneity and improvisation, the duration of time, as experiences and thoughts slowly compile, provides a space for concepts to grow and morph from the singular to the collective. This cumulative process of time and labour can help us reflect upon our own lives as well as upon the worlds we live in with multiplicity, especially when viewed through the lens of accumulation in art.

Accumulation in art is by no means new. The oldest version is undoubtedly the mosaic. Made of numerous small pieces of coloured stone or glass, one such mosaic, found in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq), was created nearly 5000 years ago. However, it is unlikely that they deliver a similar message to the accumulation

art on display here at Opera Gallery Hong Kong. The pieces exhibited reflect upon current questions of 'Accumulation', touching on topics such as the environment, society, politics and popular culture, through the cumulative act of collection and re-organisation.

Many of the works on display in this exhibition point to modern society's collective guilt and outright obsession with the accumulation of anything and everything. Must we have it all? Must we constantly collect? What defines the best and must we have it, too? Must we own, collect and colonise our surroundings and our world? The artists on display attempt to moderate or control this commercialised world, by directly targeting capitalist consumption and its resultant waste through the artistic process of amassing or gathering objects that had an entirely different past life. Common materials are transformed, given new identities and fresh meaning.

A significant part of what we purchase is either used once or ultimately becomes useless. The artists in 'The Assembly: Cumulative Practices in Contemporary Art' challenge us to question the expected function of particular materials and objects. One such artist who addresses these concerns directly is David Mach. Mach's stunning pieces, entirely made of thousands of matches, transform a disposable, utilitarian object, through repeated

use, into something majestic and current.

Similarly, Joe Black's skull made of 10,000 candles shows that the multiple of an object adds up to a collective impact. Contrasting the warmth and splendour of the coloured candle, with the fragility of life by using actual melted candles repeated over and over transforms the everyday into beauty as bright, brilliant moments cumulating in a fiery demise. Fleeting moments provide temporary reflection but have we lost sight of our sense of permanence, of longevity of commitment?

While some pieces convey the idea of accumulation through the most fleeting materials, others make use of lasting, heavy and highly reusable resources such as Federico Uribe's *'The Eye of Knowledge'*, a mandala-esque creation made of books. Each re-presentation of a publication provides a new reading for the history of knowledge. Presented out of their original context, the books challenge us to re-evaluate our own place in history providing, at times, an uncomfortable platform to challenge our known world. Seo's sense of uncertainty surfaces again in his exquisitely unnerving *'Anguish 24'*. Made up of thousands of iron chain links, a faceless human on their knees becomes a symbol for social anxiety in a fragmented world. Meticulously welded metal chains, link, piece by piece, a story of contrasts: metal's brute strength versus human vulnerability.

The closer we look into the pieces exhibited, both physically and metaphorically, the more we are pressed against a mirror, made up of thousands of smaller mirrors, reflecting our soul, made up of thousands of smaller souls. The plethora of different messages conveyed by accumulation in art can be seen in each of the works on display; from the bits and pieces that mould into larger groups of things to eventually create a single whole, to the fleeting memories; from a method created many millennia ago, initially as a means to embellish the ground, to a reminder of the ultra-capitalist, super-consumer, money-hungry, commercially fetishist world we call home.

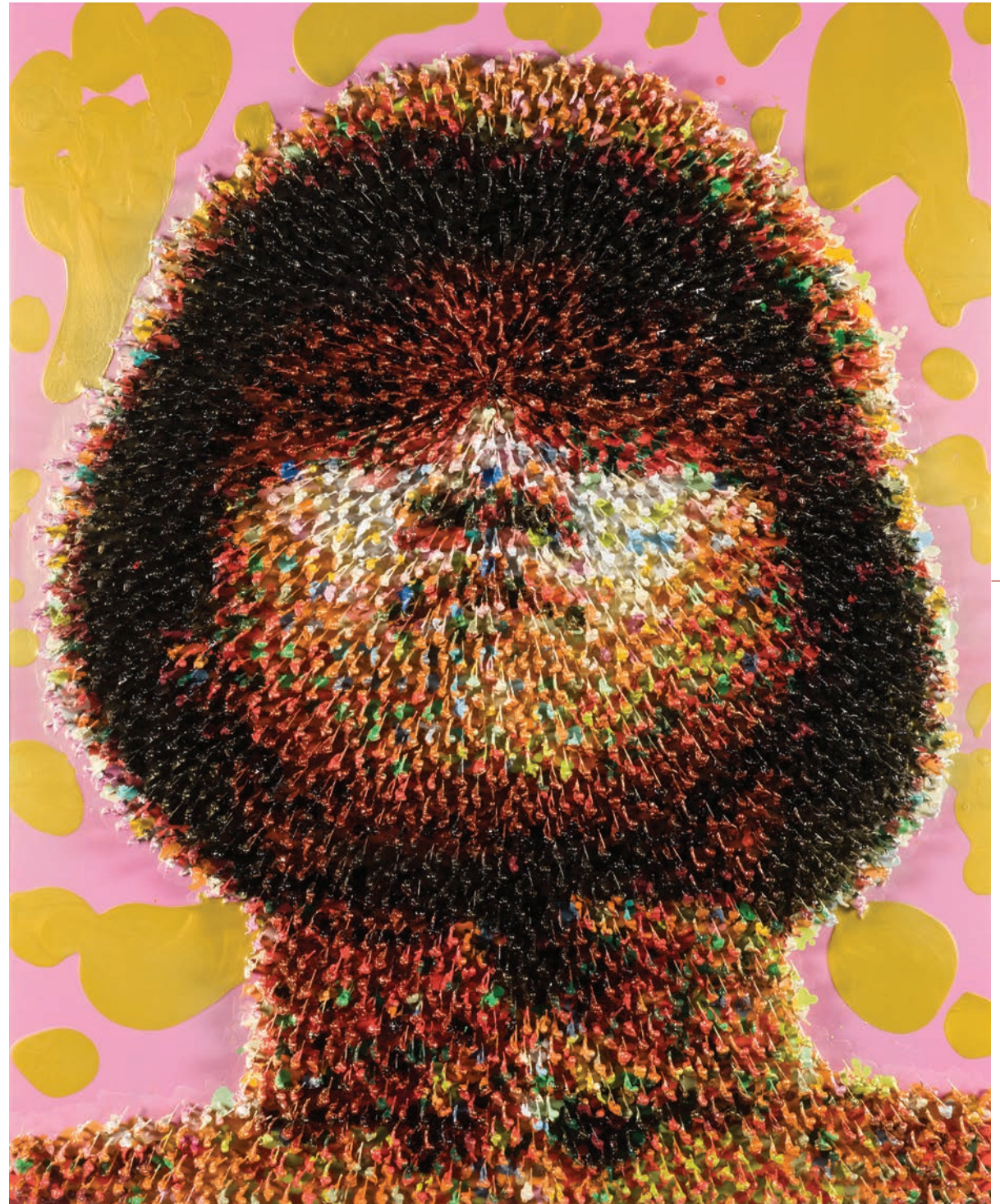
JOE BLACK (b. 1973)

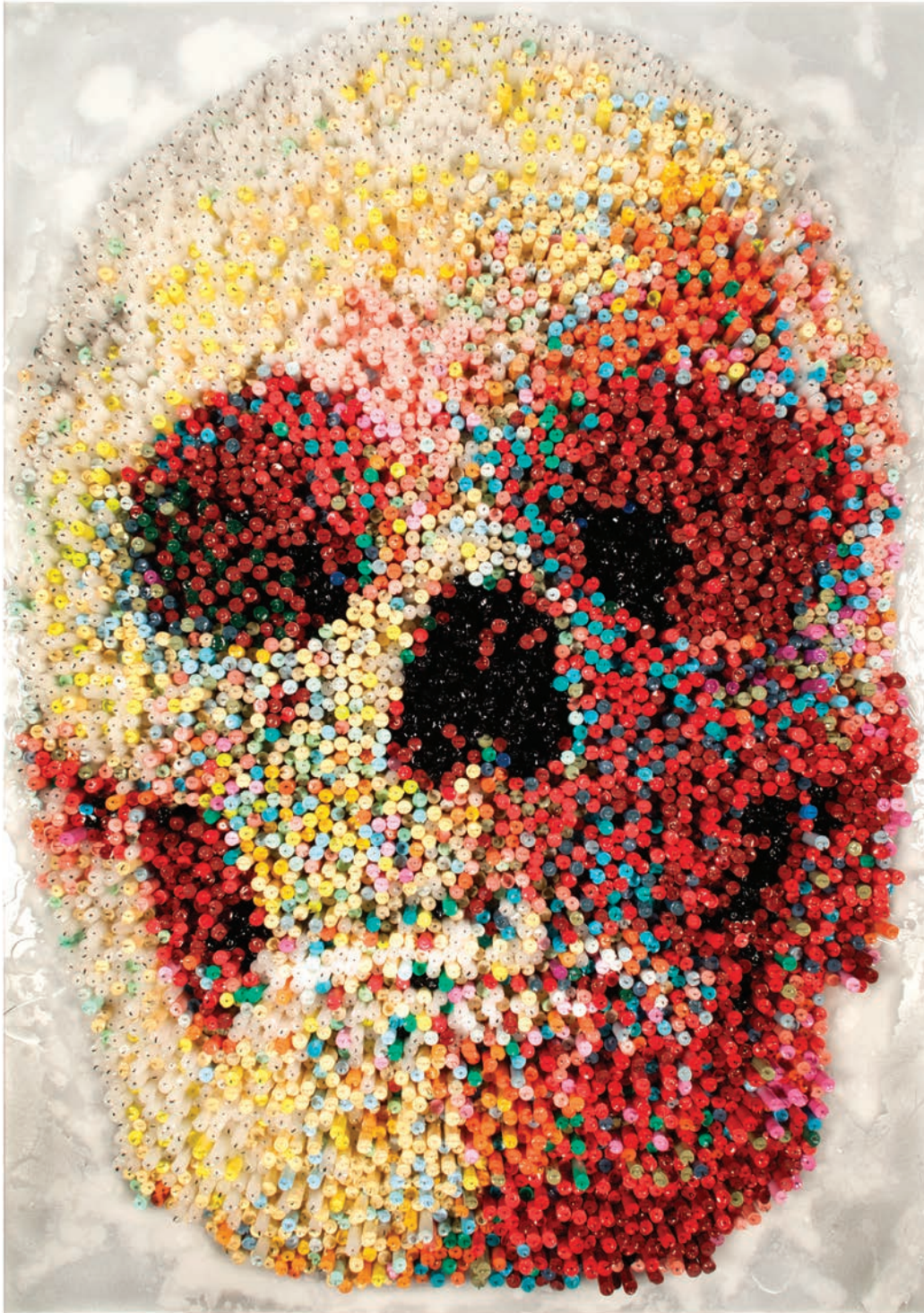
Joe Black is a British contemporary artist known for his large-scale works based on popular imagery and made from thousands of small objects. He explores the relationship between art and object by creating monumental and ironic compositions. Through his work, Joe Black explores the fragmentation of perception through imagery that is both seen as a whole and a collection of small composite parts. The artist is famous for revisiting the portraits of easily recognisable icons from pop culture.

His work has been exhibited in solo and group shows worldwide.

Made in China (Communist), 2014
1000 gold and bronze spray painted soldiers on aluminium with gold tint resin coating
51.2 x 31.8 x 3.9 in. - 130 x 101 x 10 cm

Cover of the catalogue: detail of Made in China (Communist), Joe Black





Angels with Dirty Face (end), 2014
10,000 spray painted candles on aluminium with resin coating
68.5 x 49 x 6.3 in. - 174 x 124.5 x 16 cm

BAHK SEON-GHI (b. 1966)

South Korean artist Bahk Seon-Ghi majored in fine arts sculpture and travelled to Milan to complete his studies at the Accademia di Belle Arti Brera.

His floating charcoal works accumulate into forms that we perceive as familiar objects, delicately suspended on the edge of existence and obliteration. It questions how the object takes form through our own filters of perspective and memory.

An aggregate 201103, 2011
Charcoal, nylon threads, stone and mixed materials
106.3 x 23.6 x 23.6 in. - 270 x 60 x 60 cm





FEDERICO URIBE (b. 1962)

Colombian artist Federico Uribe works on the conceptuality of things and is influenced by Pop Art through the use of everyday life objects associated to a clear reference to the codes and history or the classical arts. His first works were sensual and troubling paintings that tackled Catholic notions of pain, guiltiness and sexuality. He starts sculpting in 1996 and, collecting common objects and combining them, he has created works of art of new aesthetics, full of colours, irony and reflection. Distance and proximity are key factors of the interactions that exist between the artist and his public. Moreover, the title of his artworks are particularly important as they reveal the connexion between language, literature and the objects he uses.

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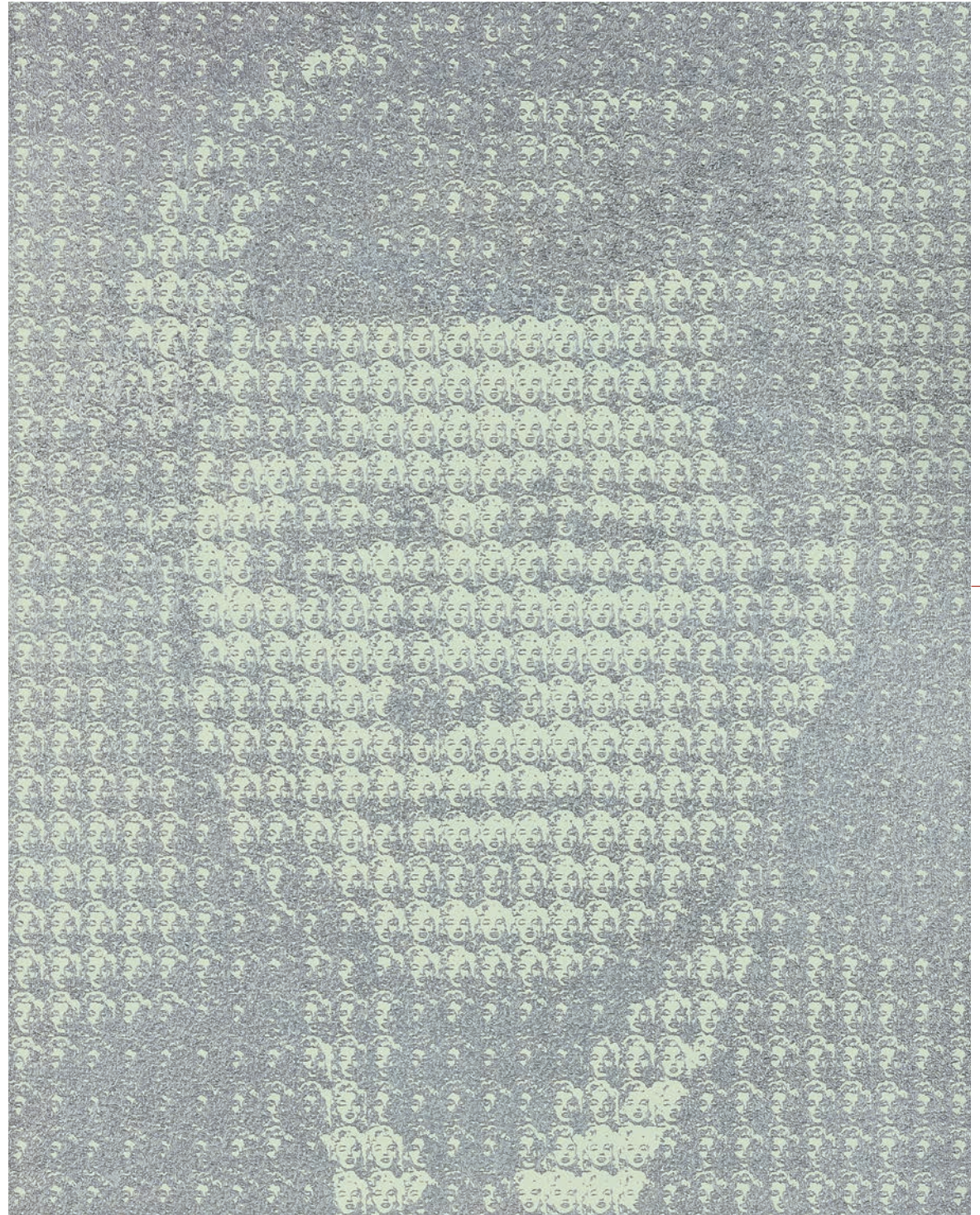
The Eyes of Knowledge, 2011
Books
39.4 x 40.6 x 19.7 in. - 100 x 103 x 50 cm

KIM DONG YOO (b. 1965)

Korean artist Kim Dong Yoo studied at Mokwon University's College of Fine Art, receiving his BFA in 1988 and his MFA in Painting in 1990. He is known for appropriating stereotypical images from Pop culture in his work, as well as subverting and disorientating these subjects by playing on illusions. Dong Yoo's novel approach to portraiture combines elements of Pointillism with the reiterative spirit of Pop Art, while paying tribute to Pop culture emblems that influenced him his whole life. Resembling screen prints or pixilated images, his works are rather created through a unique and elaborate painting process, whereby each

portrait of a celebrity or a well-known individual is made up of hundreds of units of smaller, individually painted faces. The artist's technique is unique and clever, yet painstaking and time consuming, resulting in an image that fascinates viewers and draws them in to examine his works in detail. Further depth and meaning are added by the Dong Yoo's choice of both miniature and overarching portraits, often carefully selected in a witty play on the relationships, gossip and scandals that define celebrities. Dong Yoo has exhibited in a number of solo exhibitions in Korea, including major venues such as the Sungkok Art Museum, Kumho Museum of Art and the Savina Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as internationally in Germany, China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, the UK and the USA.

Kennedy, 2006
Oil on canvas
44.5 x 35.4 in. - 113 x 90 cm





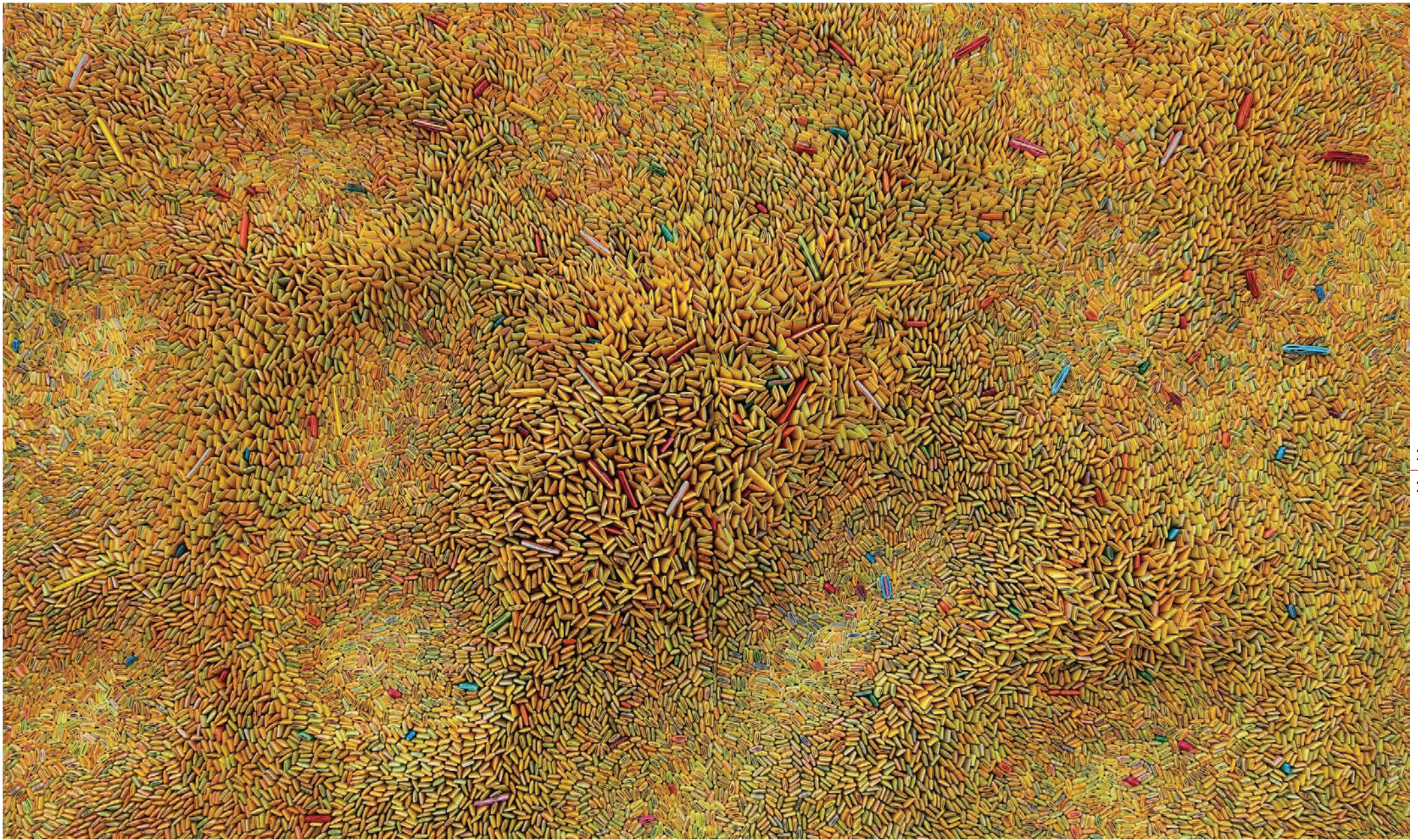
KIM ILHWA (b. 1967)

Korean artist Kim Ilhwa's work Seed Universe is composed of tens of thousands of seed units. Each seed unit has the combination of straight lines and circles, which compose a tiny single universe in her own physical terms. The materials are not given, but created personally for the each single universe. The Korean artist dyes each sheet of paper by hand with thousands of different colours and cuts and rolls the layers of paper to make it rigid. It gives her an emotional bonding to each single universe. Not a single universe has the same shape, look, colour in her work.

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Seed Universe 27, 2015
Hand-dyed hanji paper
46.9 x 36.6 x 8.3 in. - 119 x 93 x 21 cm



Seed Universe 8, 2015 (diptych)
Hand-dyed hanji paper
64.6 x 103.9 x 5.9 in. - 164 x 264 x 15 cm



DAVID MACH (b. 1956)

British artist David Mach is considered as one of the leaders of the New British Sculpture movement. He studied at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and the Royal College of Art, London. In 2000 he was appointed as Professor of Sculpture at the Royal Academy Schools, London.

He is best known for his flowing assemblages made from mass-produced objects such as coat hangers, magazines, matchsticks and tires. His work

often seeks to express the discontinuity between the mundane, mass-produced, household objects and the exotic and wild aspects of the animal they are used to representing. Mach held his first solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery in 1982 and has continued to gain prominence since.

In 1988 the artist was nominated for the Turner Prize at the Tate Gallery, London, and in 1992 was the recipient of the Lord Provost's Prize, Glasgow.

Much of his commission-based work has been exhibited in some of the world's most prestigious museums, including the Tate Britain, the National Portrait Gallery, London City Art Center of Edinburgh and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. He was elected Royal Academician in 1998, and he lives and works in London.

Betty Boop, Yellow Match Head, 2011
Matches, edition of 4
18.5 x 16.1 x 11.8 in. - 47 x 41 x 30 cm

Marilyn, 2011
Matches, edition of 4
15.7 x 14.2 x 13.8 in. - 40 x 36 x 35 cm



SEO YOUNG-DEOK (B. 1983)

Korean artist Seo Young-Deok is a fine observer of the world he lives in. Since graduating from the University of Seoul with a degree in Environmental Sculpture, he has been probing and analysing urban life as an ethnologist. A symbol of post-modern civilisation, the city is an inspiration. Through his artworks, Seo Young-Deok depicts a disoriented society where man cannot find his place. Today's urban denizen is overwhelmed, stifled by a reality of his own making. Freedom, born from the objective relationship between the individual and the space he inhabits, becomes fragile and anaemic in this hostile environment. Nature is shattered, domesticated, reduced to a machine; and she uses mankind as a mere cog in this immense apparatus of life. The material used by the artist bears witness to his desire to play with the real, the raw; transforming it; giving voice to it.

Anguish 24, 2015
Iron chain, edition of 8
51.2 x 25.6 x 25.6 in. - 130 x 65 x 65 cm



SUH JEONG MIN (b. 1962)

The artwork of Korean artist Suh Jeong Min employs the timeless structures of geometry while simultaneously pursuing an idiosyncratic aesthetic that combines cultural references with unusual formal techniques. These elegant and somewhat imposing works are neither painting nor sculpture, yet have properties of both. The paper used by the artist is made out of Buddhist prayer paper from Korean hanji, from the inner bark of Mulberry trees.

Lines of Travel - 60, 2016
Hand-dyed hanji paper
43.3 x 43.3 in. - 110 x 110 cm





Lines of Travel - 61, 2016
Hand-dyed hanji paper
47.2 x 47.2 in. - 120 x 120 cm

CHRIS WOOD (B. 1954)

British artist Chris Wood graduated from Middlesex Polytechnic University in 1998 with a degree in Three Dimensional Design. For her “canvas is glass and her medium is light”. She went on to study Glass Design at the Royal College of Art. She has produced work for Great Ormond Street Hospital, Addenbrooke’s, London Bridge Hospital and the KAPSARC institution. Chris Wood has hosted solo shows in Ely, Bristol, Sunderland and London and exhibited at major art fairs as far as Singapore and New York.

Spyra 1500, 2015
Dichroic glass, fabricated aluminium panel
59.1 x 59.1 in. - 150 x 150 cm



ZHUANG HONG-YI (B. 1962)

Zhuang Hong-Yi can best be described as a Chinese contemporary artist who has impressed audiences in different countries by his unique style in his many pieces of modern art. His works represent beauty, sophistication and a high level of perfection with a clear presence of Chinese influence represented in his use of colors, themes, shapes and materials that touch the heart.

In his different pieces of art, several of which can be considered Three Dimensional, he brings elements from his Chinese background together with Western impressionist elements which has resulted in an impressive and beautiful collection created over the past 21 years.

A2016-079, 2016
Acrylic and rice paper
53.1 x 53.1 in. - 135 x 135 cm





NICK GENTRY (b. 1980)

Nick Gentry is a British graduate of Central St Martins, London and has exhibited in the UK, USA and Europe. As part of a generation that grew up surrounded by floppy disks, VHS tapes, Polaroid and cassettes, he is inspired by the sociological impact of the Internet and of new technologies. Through the assemblage of data and memories onto the canvas, the artist creates a unique identity. The paint he uses helps giving a human face to the characters he forges. He transforms the portraiture traditions just like

our society evolves.

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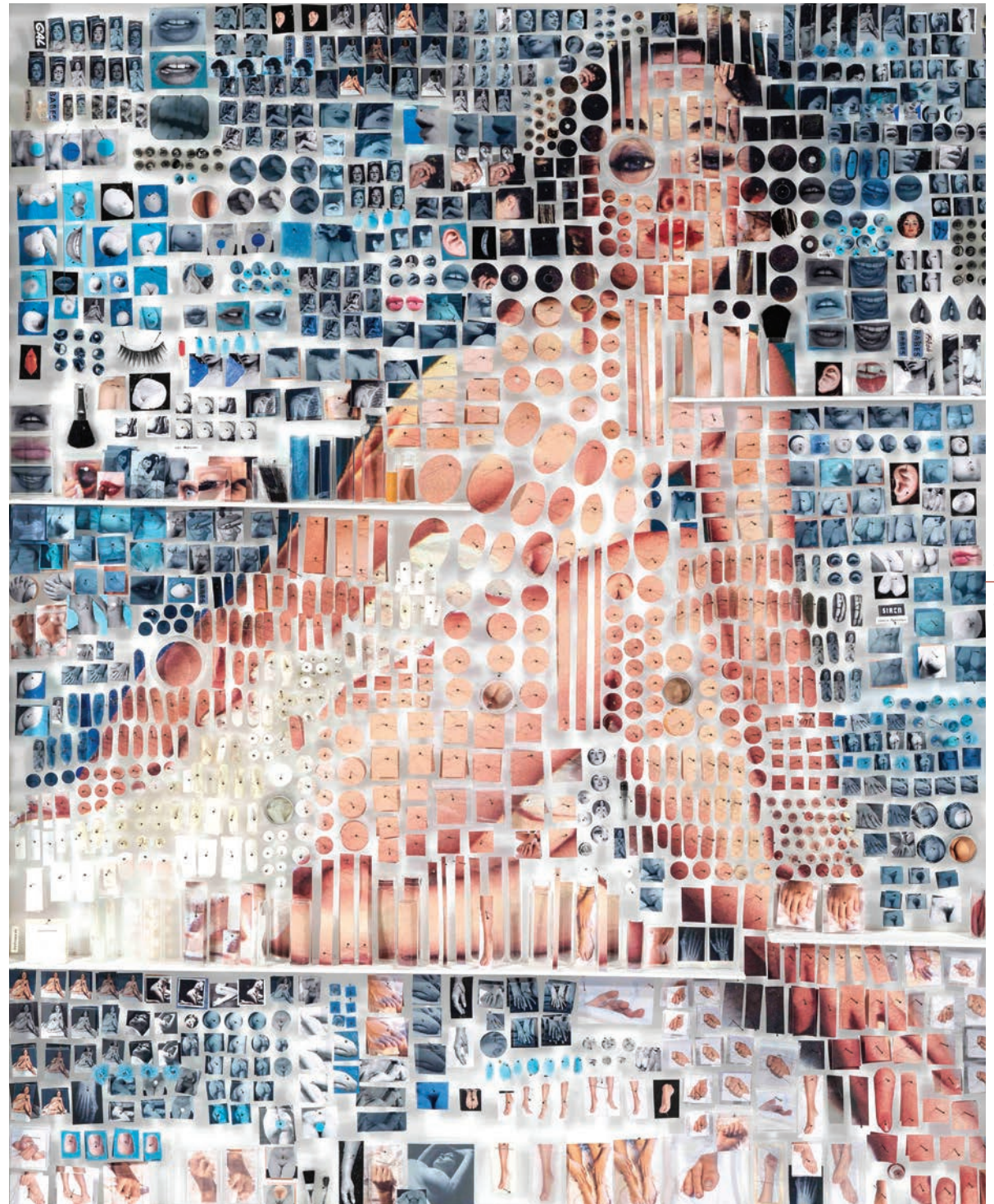
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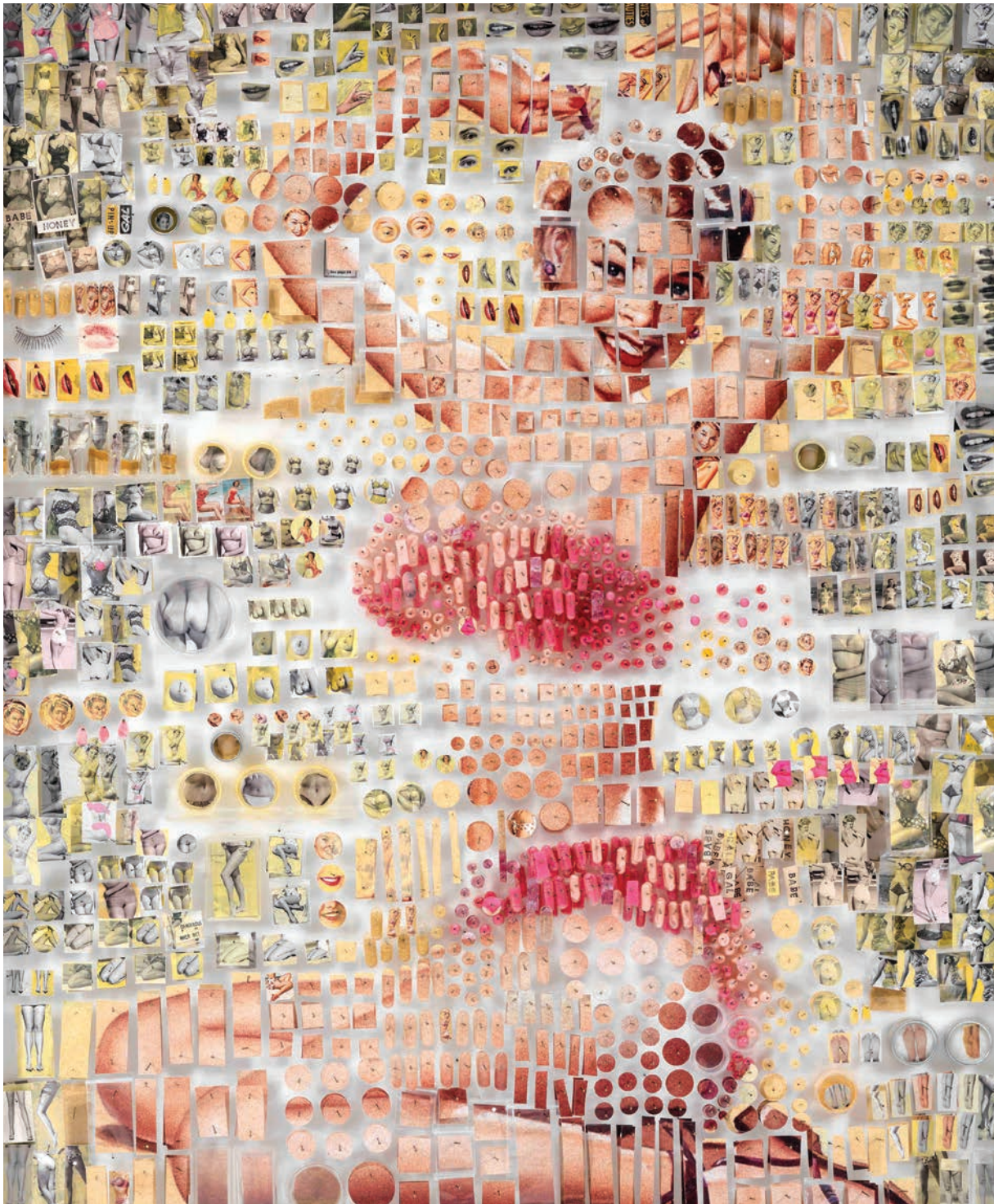
Autumn, 2015
Film negatives, acrylic paint and plywood in LED lightbox
59.1 x 59.1 in. - 150 x 150 cm

MICHAEL MAPES (b. 1962)

American artist Michael Mapes is known to resort to a visual metaphor suggesting a pseudoscientific method signifying entomological, biological and forensic science. Beyond taking and collecting hundreds of photographs, he thoughtfully gathers “biographical DNA” which can assume numerous forms: genealogical information, personal statistics, cosmetic samples, fingernail clippings, handwriting samples and hair strands, his method is to deconstruct the original subject, in both a figurative and literal sense by dissecting photos and organizing the “DNA” in consideration to how individual parts relate to the overall reconstruction. The resulting ‘collections’ are tediously layered compositions that challenge us to question how scientific information is assimilated into a culture. His unique appropriation of traditional ideas on portraiture and taxonomy convey the inherent tension between methodical objectivity and unavoidable psychological subjectivity.

Dark Haired Female, 2016
Mixed media
34 x 28 x 3.5 in. - 86.4 x 71.1 x 8.9 cm





Pinky, 2016
Mixed media
34 x 28 x 3.5 in. - 86.4 x 71.1 x 8.9 cm

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