



BENJAMIN TIMPSON

Illuminated Lives

LISA SETTE GALLERY

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LisaSetteGallery.com

Hours: Tuesday-Friday: 10 am to 4 pm | Saturday: 11 to 4 pm | and by appointment

Juanita, 2022

cover: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 30" x 20" butterfly collage
38.25" x 26" x 2.75" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique

left: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15 (detail)

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Rita Smith's hair is pulled back in a coruscating flash of blue morpho and her expression is enigmatic—a velvety black gaze reaching us from a distant moment in time. A folded serape neatly wraps her shoulders, its intriguing surface composed of hundreds of variegated patterned pieces. In the artist Benjamin Timpson's 2021 rendition of this 1920's-era black and white portrait, Smith is both ephemeral and radiant with lived humanity. Timpson's use of deconstructed and intricately overlapped butterfly wings as a medium of portraiture presents his subjects as woven from the complex materials of memory, nature, metamorphosis, and survival.

above: 1920s photograph of Rita Smith (left) and Benjamin Timpson's Rita Smith (right)

Smith was murdered a century ago, in a series of brutal homicides that were premeditated as a means to transfer Osage people's valuable Oklahoma oil holdings to wealthy white men in the area. Women were the primary target in this scheme: Smith's mother and two of her sisters were also killed during the Osage Reign of Terror - leading to the launch of the FBI. Other victims of this purge have been discovered as recently as within the last decade. Says Timpson, "This has been going on for a long time, this pattern of destroying not just the woman herself, but the woman's power and strength in Indigenous societies."

Community groups estimate that as many as 80% of Indigenous women and girls are the victims of violence and sexual abuse. In 2017, after a DNA test confirmed his family's own generationally-concealed Puebloan ancestry, and a close relative was badly beaten by her boyfriend, Timpson began making portraits of such women—both identified and anonymous, past and contemporary—using responsibly-sourced butterfly wings, deconstructed and arranged against LED micro-controlled light boxes and in stunning large-format photographs of the original collages.

Timpson's light box portraits operate on 13 minute cycles of increasing illumination as the microscopic wing structures present dramatically shifting hues and iridescence throughout this cycle. In addition to persuading viewers to slow their examination of his work, or to return for a second look, Timpson believes "the illumination also acts as a candle—as you would light a candle for a loved one." Titled with the names of their subjects, the deeply personal nature of these portraits is juxtaposed with the universality of the butterfly as an object of human fascination, and as a connection between humans and the natural world.

"People from cultures all over the world recognize the butterfly as a symbol of metamorphosis. Its life cycle is like the physical manifestation of so much of our mythology, and its image is ubiquitous. But most people don't get that close to

butterfly wings. When people stand in front of a photograph with the pattern and structure of the wings blown up ten times, they're still mesmerized... if nothing else, I hope that people come away with an increased respect for nature, this incredible basis for life. As an artist I'm working to create a poetic loop, seeking a continuous cyclical interaction between the medium, the symbolism of the medium, and the composition."

One of Timpson's subjects and his frequent collaborator is Caroline Felicity Antone, an activist who has connected him to survivors and their families from Native communities throughout North America. Antone is a Tohono O'odham person and founder of a nonprofit dedicated to protecting Indigenous girls and locating survivors and family members. Timpson and Lisa Sette Gallery share the proceeds from his pieces with Antone's group.

"I met Juanita through Caroline Felicity Antone... in January of 2021 I went down to the Tohono O'odham reservation and met Caroline and Juanita in person. It was so good to have lunch with them and listen to them speak in their language. Juanita told me her story: her husband abused her for years and it culminated when he shot her—he pulled out a gun and she put her hand up to block it...the bullet went through the middle of her hand.

The first conversation can be hard. You have to acknowledge it—what happened will never be undone. But these survivors move forward through the pain to a rebirth, and serious strength and power come from that experience. My role in this process is a minor one: I see this strength in the spirits of the survivors I've met."

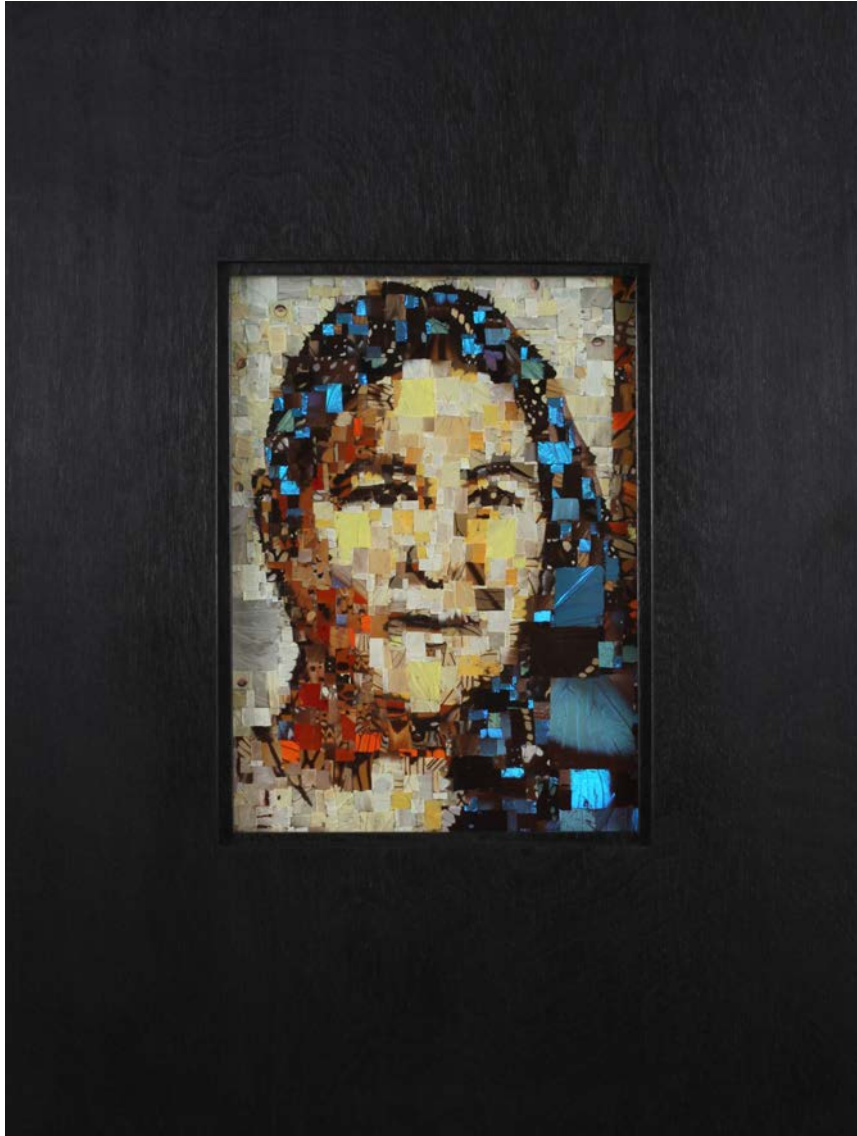
Similarly, Timpson worked with representatives of the Osage Nation in researching the colors of Rita Smith's luxuriant Pendleton serape, which was designed and woven by Native women. When he contacted Rosetta Peters of North Dakota about making her portrait, Peters immediately sent him an 1880's photograph of Tatanka

lyotanka (Sitting Bull), sitting for a portrait with a monarch butterfly prominently displayed in his hatband. It was an image that Timpson had never seen before: "When Rosetta sent me that, and connected it to the symbolism in my work, it felt as though this project had come full circle," remarks the artist. Exemplified in the life of a butterfly, cycles of connection and collaboration across generations and geographical space have become an essential part of Timpson's process.

"When I gave Rebecca Plentywounds a portrait of her sister she thanked me for this image and told me she was going to hang it up forever. I feel like that's what artwork is for—to carry this object forward with you on your journey, to be a marker of your culture and time."

Although these portraits are intended to bring attention to the results of cultural violence and exploitation, Timpson's works and the relationships he's forged along the way ultimately represent vivid connections between families, individuals, and cultures, and a ritual reclaiming of the symbolism of survival and rebirth.

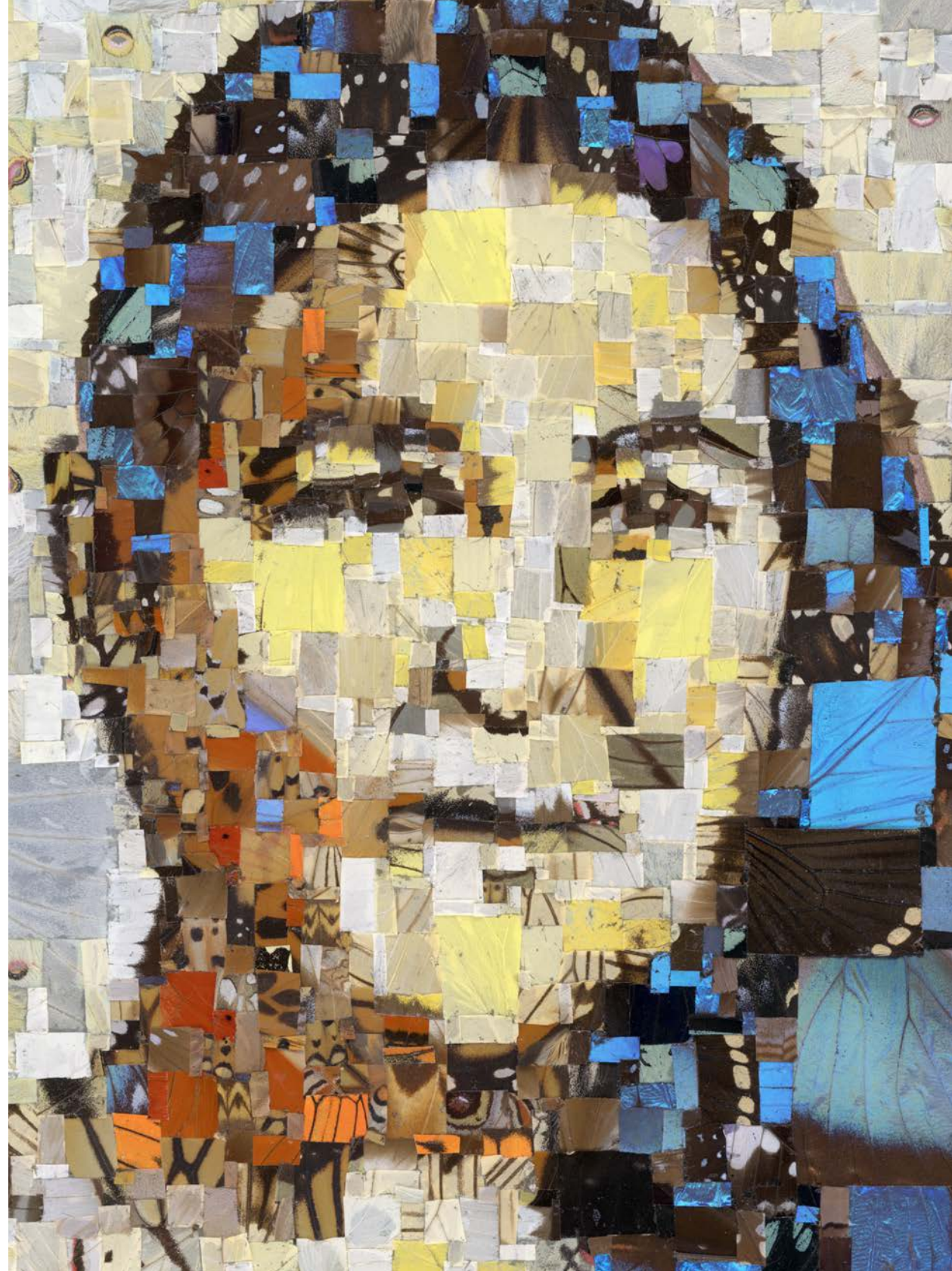




Rosetta Peters, 2021

above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 8" x 6" butterfly collage
18" x 15" x 3" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique

right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15 (detail)





Banff County Jane Doe, 2021

above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 6" x 4" butterfly collage
18" x 15" x 3" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique

right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15 (detail)

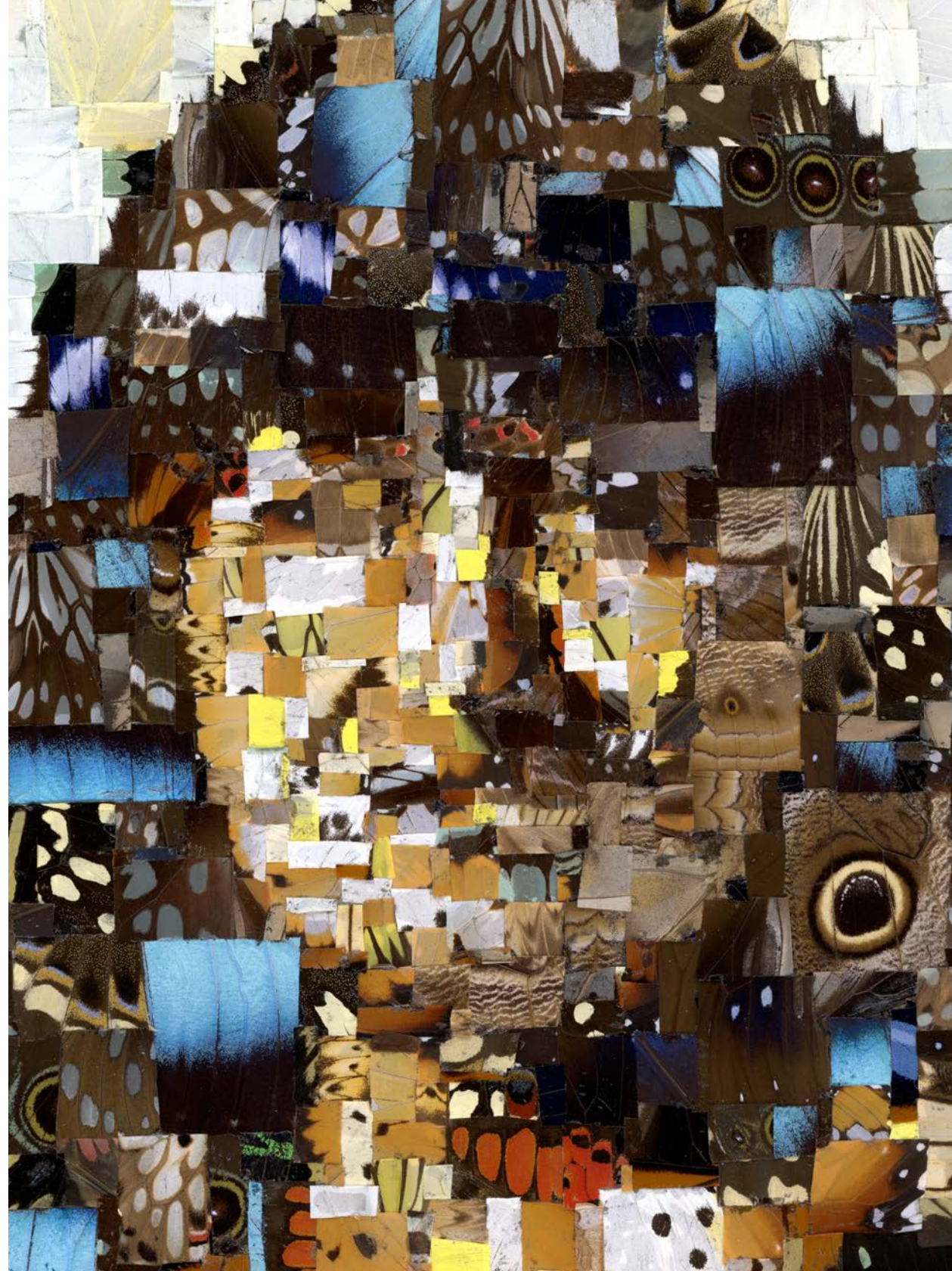


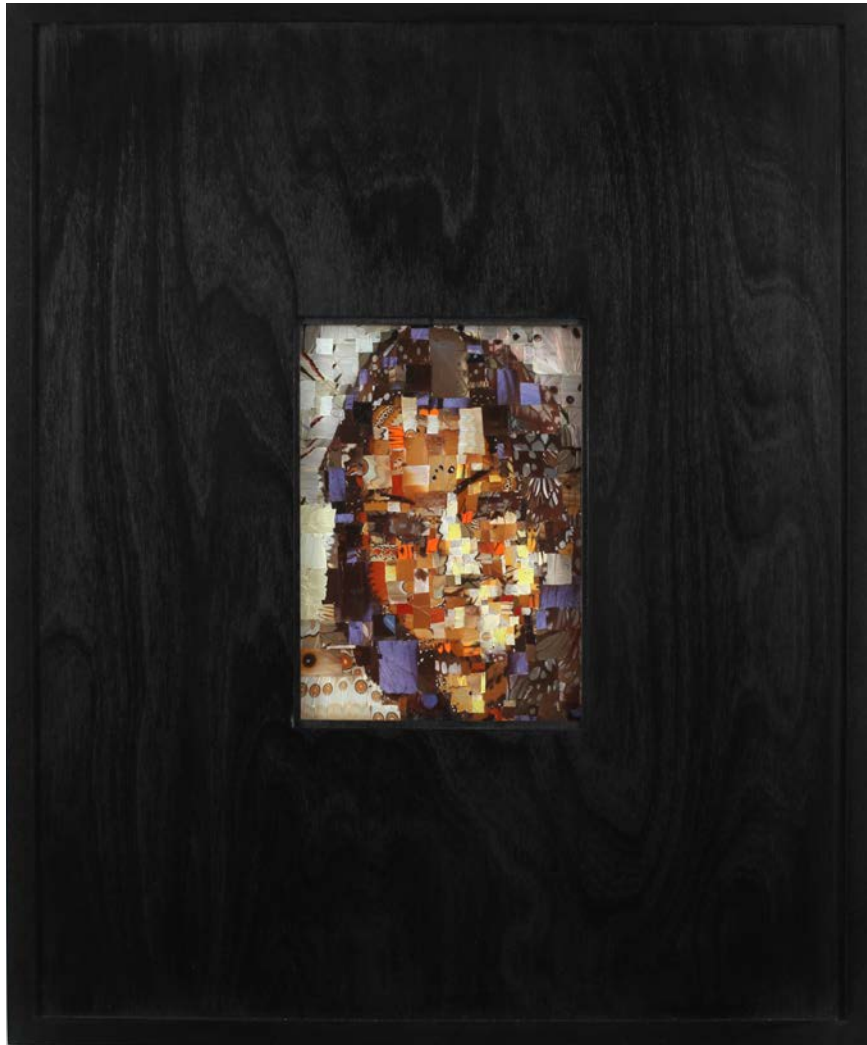


Caroline Felicity Antone, 2021

above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 7" x 5" butterfly collage
18" x 15" x 3" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique

right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15 (detail)





Rebecca Plentywounds, 2021

above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 7" x 5" butterfly collage
18" x 15" x 3" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique

right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15 (detail)

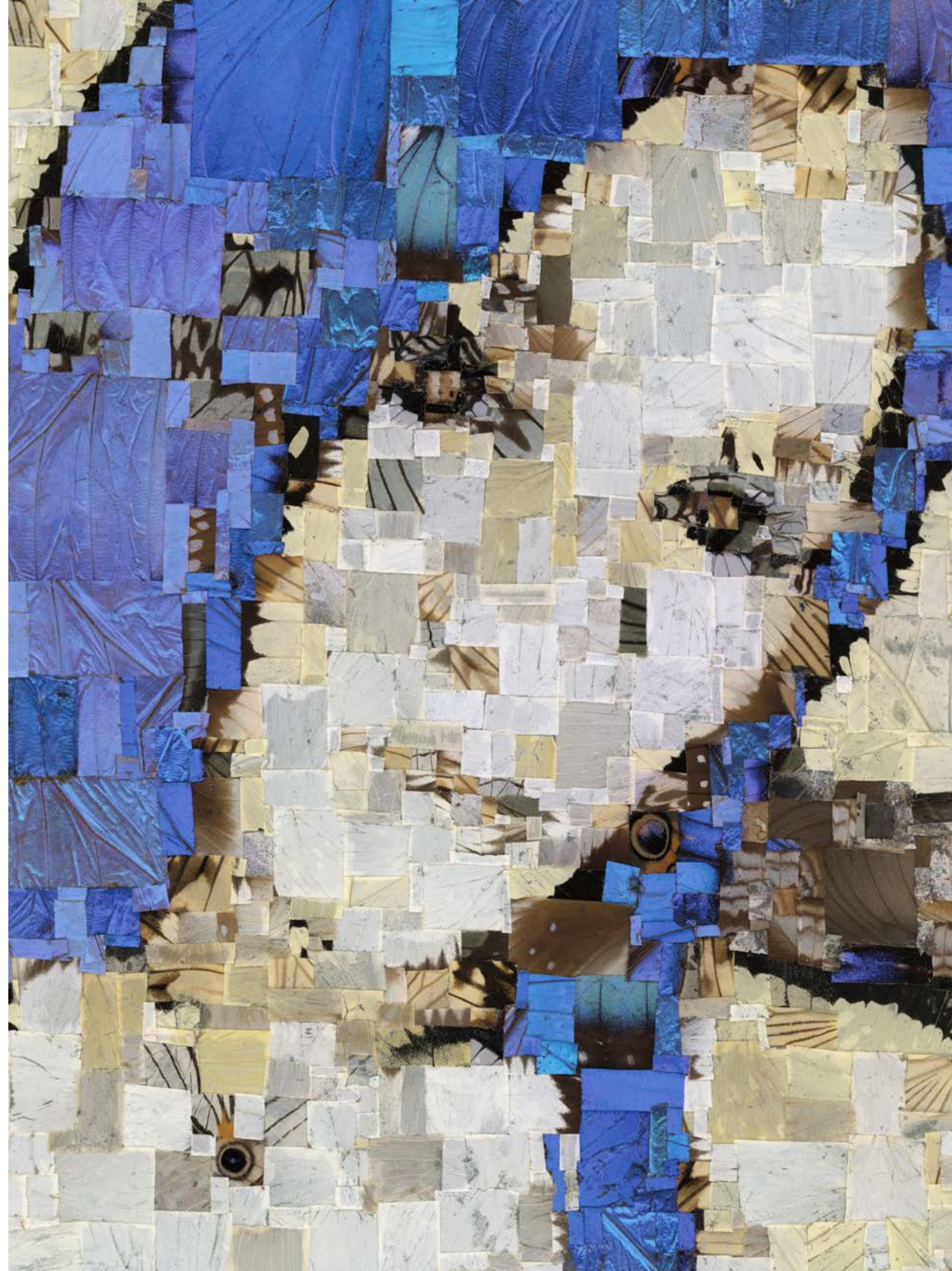


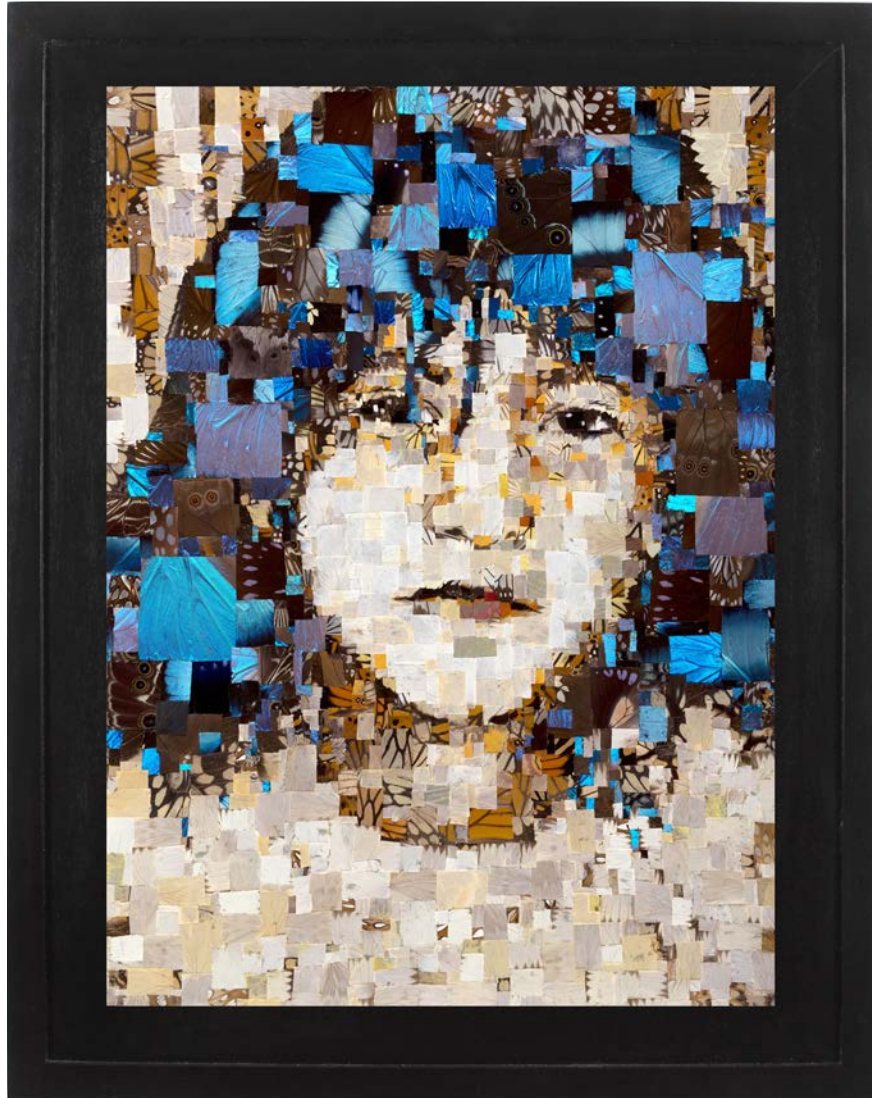


Shayna Gold, 2021

above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 8" x 6" butterfly collage
18" x 15" x 3" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique

right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15 (detail)





Rhia, 2022

above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 15.25" x 11.25" butterfly collage, 20.25" x 16" x 3" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique

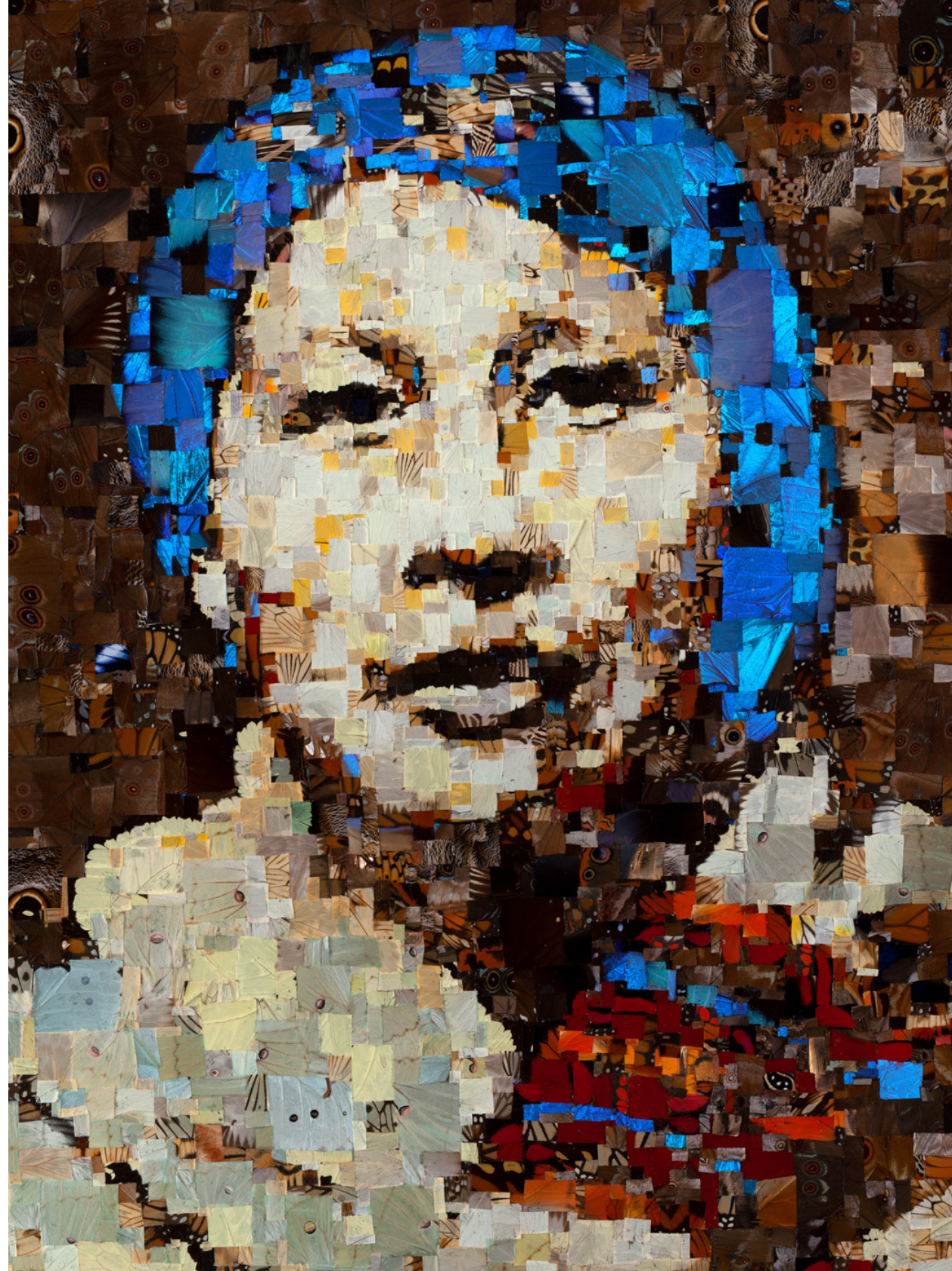
right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15 (detail)





Rita Smith, 2021

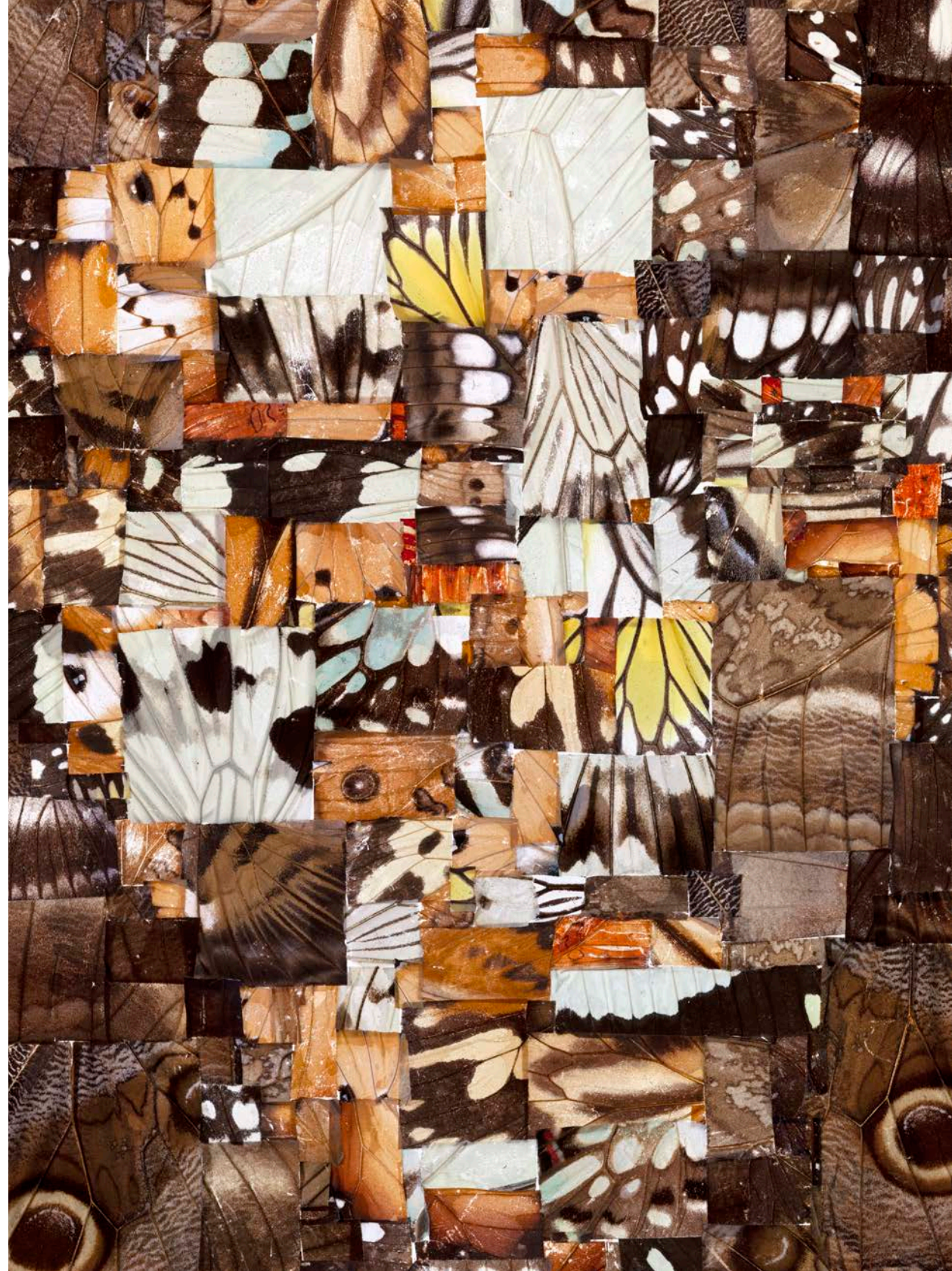
above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 36" x 24" butterfly collage
41.5" x 29.5" x 2.75" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique
right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15 (detail)





Pima County Jane Doe, 2021

above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 7" x 5" butterfly collage
18" x 15" x 3" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique
right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15

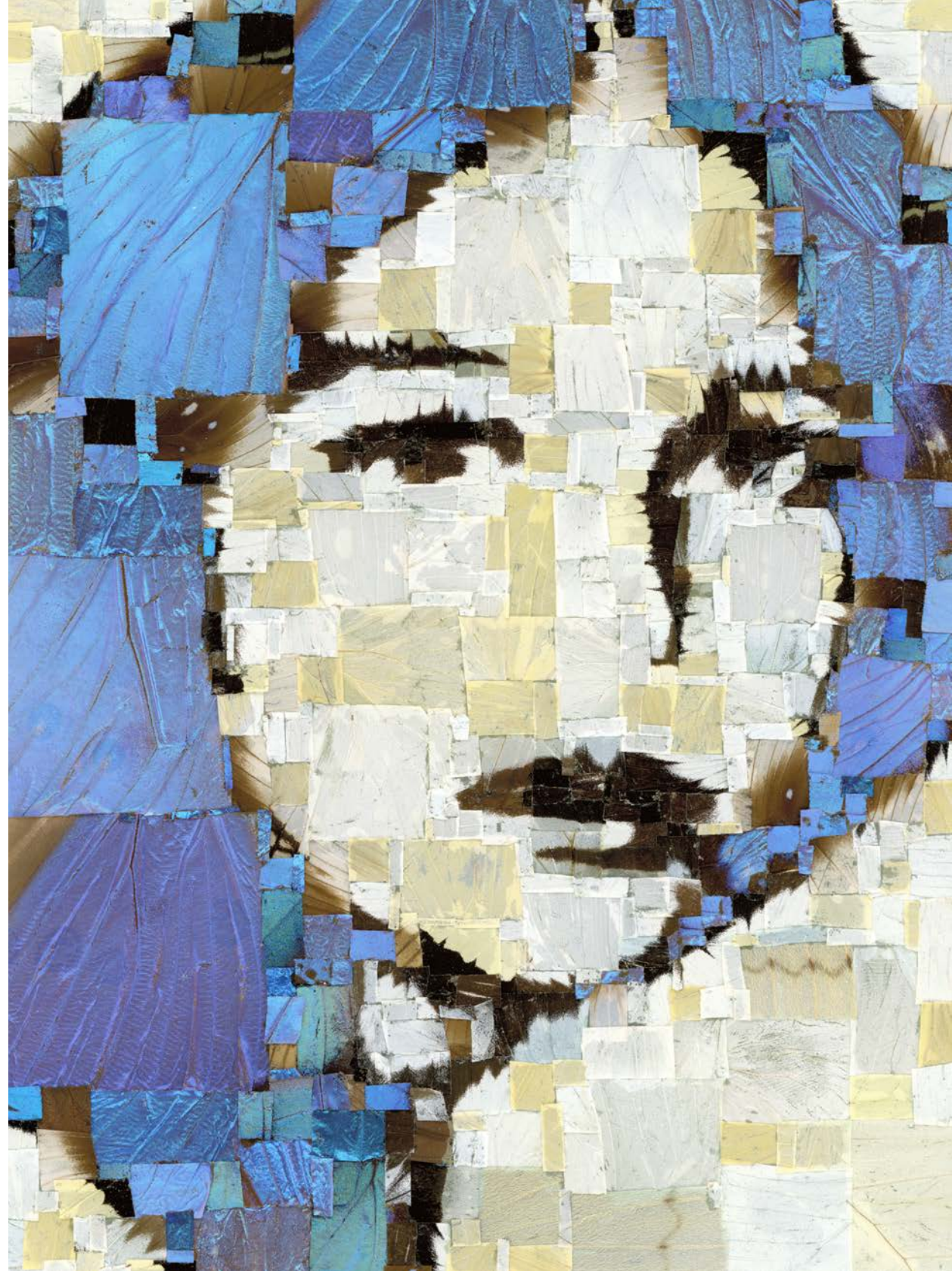




Aielah Saric-Auger, 2022

above: butterfly wings on glass, wood, electrical components, 7" x 5" butterfly collage
18" x 15" x 3" framed within custom programmable LED light panel, Unique

right: pigment inkjet print, 70.5" x 46" and 42" x 30" unframed, Edition of 15



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