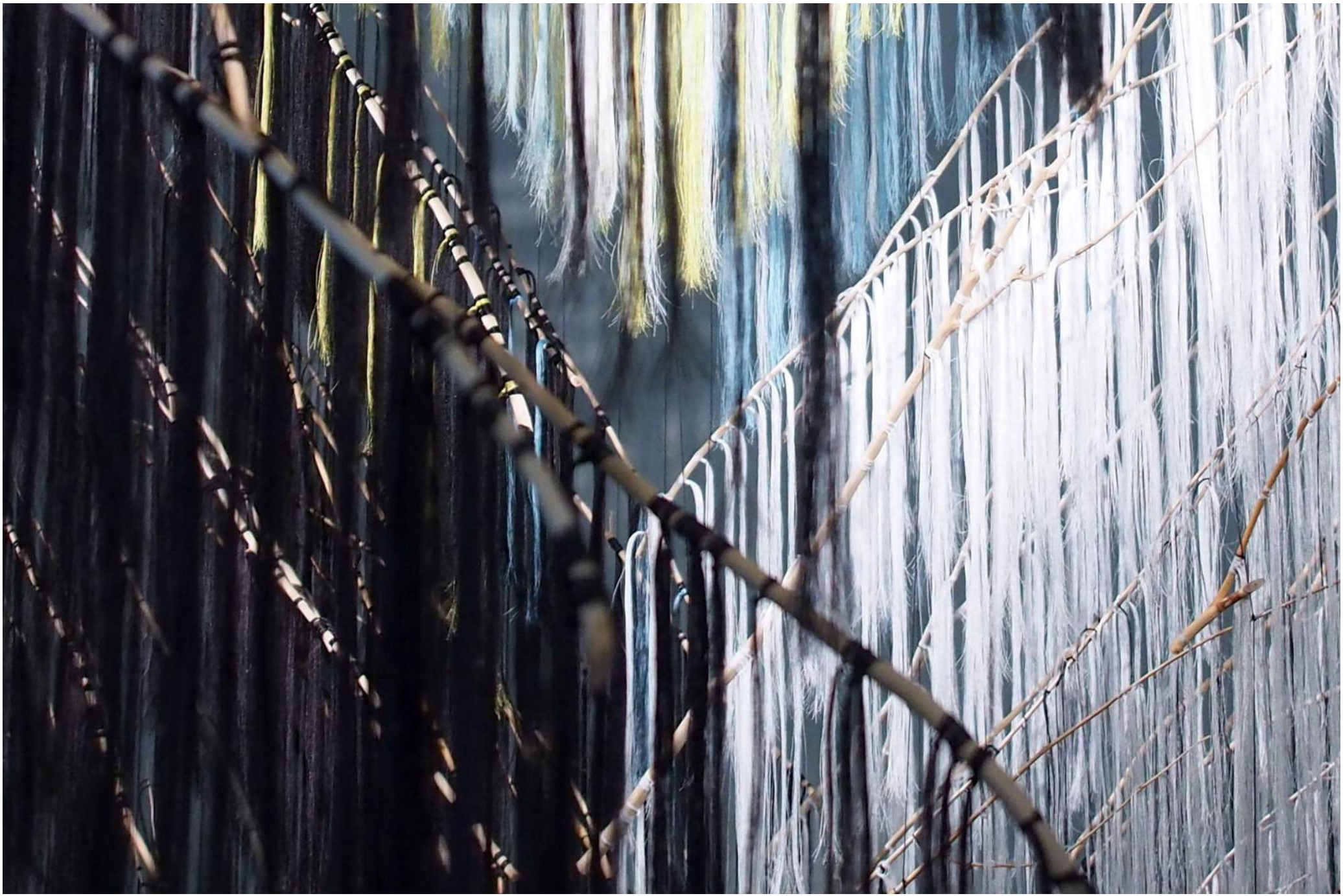


Mimicry

KH

Kristin Hiellegjerde

Mimicry

Our pasts are powerfully tied to our present, the lives of all our ancestors before us leading to where we are today. Imagine that past now. Imagine herds of wild bison, the broad flat plains of America; imagine the smell of a new forest, the unbroken view of the great Atlantic Ocean marking the end of the world as you know it. Now let us refocus, zoom out of this great continent and shift our gaze east, further, further across the water, up through Europe and the Baltic Sea until we reach the Arctic Circle. There, under the crown of the world, see snowy storms and endless tundra. Elk and reindeer travel across great frozen lakes under the electric dance of the Northern Lights. Both histories are home to two indigenous peoples, children of the dawn of the world who still remain, vibrant and alive, even when modern life and endless colonisation have changed the face of the globe. So it is that *Mimicry* (21 November – 20 December) draws on the two very different yet compellingly complementary heritages of Native American artist Monica Canilao and Laplander Outi Pieski.

Canilao is the great granddaughter of a Chinook Native American princess while Pieski is a Lapp, or more accurately, a Sami, as the indigenous people who inhabit Northern Scandinavia (stretching across Norway, Sweden, Finland and Western Russia) are called. The two women are united by complex historical contexts of cultural repression and denial of their people, beauty in craft, and existing as something of an enigma, struggling to retain aspects of their histories amongst an increasingly modernised world. This interest in their own heritage has led them to seek to 'mimic' the past – not to copy, but, in the words of Canilao, "to preserve these beautiful histories in the things that we make as a celebration of the old ways of doing things by hand and the passing down of tradition." What we have here is an exploration of personal and cultural stories that are delved into, mined, researched and then reconstituted to forge new histories as a way of not losing what the past has to teach us.

The rust-coloured, feathered and collage work of Canilao often draws on the traditional colours and materials of the Native American cultures. In *Mimicry*, she presents us with a series of new works, created from old pin up posters. She imbues these nearly disintegrating relics with new life by weaving, sewing and using collage in different elements such as old paper, tea bags and lace. Her practice often transforms recognisable creatures and people into forms: by painting and using collage over existing images she is able to give them fresh stories and life. "The only constant in my life has been that I've always wanted to be creating, building, drawing, altering," she has said. "My art practice is a way to generate a personal and living history. My community and collaborators, my roots and their nearly lost traditions, my neighborhood and its trash piles are all integral, necessary parts of my life and art." It is this exploration of human beauty throughout time, and its subsequent abandonment and decay that, coupled with an exploration of "abandoned spaces and collecting pieces of cities and carrying them with me" has come to characterise Canilao's life. This archiving of past moments and their subsequent transformation allows her to rebuild "narratives of forgotten lives, now enshrined with paint, graphite, metal, bone, cloth and other found remnants." In doing so she explores the space that exists between not just past and present, but between the everyday and the sacred – the forgotten and the personal are transformed and re-appropriated to create a "newborn mythology."

Meanwhile, Pieski's painting, collage and sculptural works, which often hark to the icy hues and bare landscapes of the North, incorporate textiles from Sami clothing, such as the colourful ruffles that adorn the hems of dresses and the thick, long tassels found in shawls. Her paintings create a fascinating dialogue between the natural landscape and the people who have lived for millennia, and the textiles serve as an homage to the people who have lived – and still live – in the locations she paints. Delicate, feathery brush strokes create works that evoke the hoar of nighttime frost, blossoming across a window pane; or the morning dew on a springtime landscape, soft yellows and greens enveloped with the fluffy white of frost-tipped stems. Others still bring with them the brooding heaviness of winter clouds, pregnant with the promise of snow, that strange unearthly hue that heralds icy blasts. The eye travels across the surface of the work, squinting slightly, as if trying to see through snow-covered glasses, then is suddenly drawn down to a bright red or green ruffle, or pastel tassels, a fun and coy flourish to offset the natural landscape, much as the iconic blue and red costume of the Sami people must appear when traversing against the backdrop of an endless winter landscape.

These paintings interpret Pieski's own relationship to her environment, each place's histories, myths and legends and her experiences within them. The paintings also have an energy to them – much as one may feel the forest is looking back at them, so too these paintings are aware of the viewer, and one cannot ignore the life force running through them. Meanwhile, her installation, *Risteävät Polut (Crossing Paths)*, brings to an immersive peak this sensation of landscape. Suspended from a wooden frame hung from the ceiling are swathes of Sami tassels in a spectrum of colours reminiscent of an autumn landscape. Like icicles, they are draped, allowing viewers to walk into this forest of colour and highlighting the labour-intensive assembly of the work that harks to the joy of simple repetition and ritual.

This installation perhaps sums up the spirit of *Mimicry*. "Imagine: you enter a forest, and would like to see, to meet, an animal, perhaps," explains Pieski. "As you continue along your way, you observe the landscape around you – the scenery changes, yet still you see no signs of life. Then, quite suddenly, you see an opening through the trees, like a portal into the deepest depths of the forest. There, you see an animal walking unobserved along its own path. It stops for a second, and looks your way. Perhaps, for an instant, your gazes meet. Then you each continue along your own separate paths, perhaps changing your step ever so slightly because of this meeting. Elsewhere in the forest you often see the footprints of people, other people, walking from somewhere else than you and going to a different destination." Here, within *Risteävät Polut*, the viewer can perhaps experience a transcendental encounter, or perhaps simply cross paths with another traveler. For this is what both Canilao and Pieski seek to do. Their journeys are long, stretching far back to their forebears, but they also continue into the present day – they reveal lives and histories that are vibrant, vivid and alive. Perhaps, they tell us, the past is never truly gone, but rather, like the dappled hide of a forest deer as it blends into the shadows of trees or the white fur of an Arctic fox, visible against the snow drifts only by the tips of its ears, it is there, living and breathing, right in front of your eyes, if only you knew where to look.

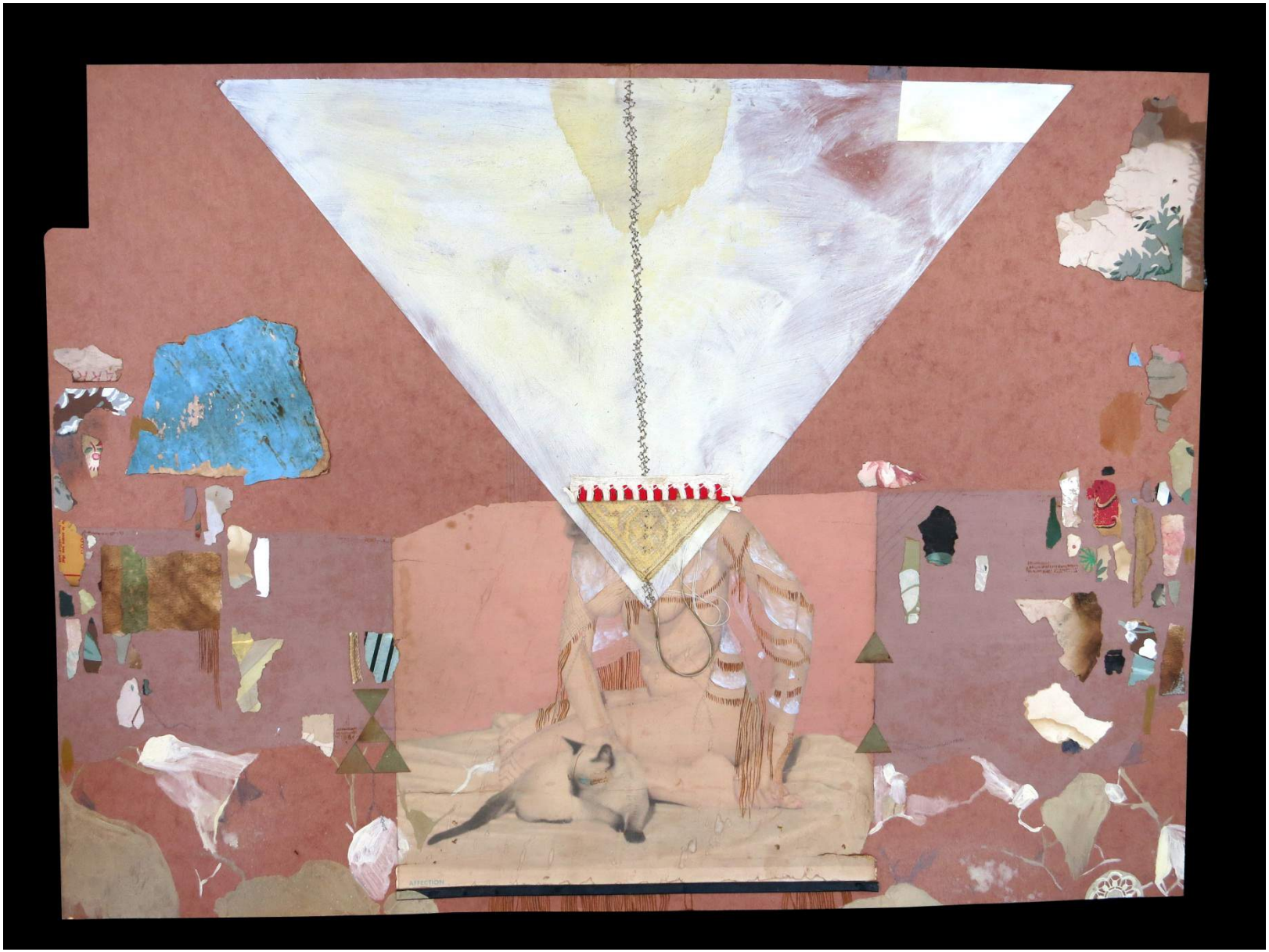
Monica Canilao

In the heart of Oakland, California, Monica Canilao spends her days stitching, painting, printing, and breathing life into the refuse that dominates our time and place. Moving across media, sometimes with friends and sometimes alone, Canilao makes a delicate visual record of the personal and communal. She received a BFA from California College of Arts and Crafts and has shown in galleries, community spaces, and abandoned places worldwide. Recent projects include the solo show *Born from Ruins*, Subliminal Projects, Los Angeles, CA, USA; building a new piece and installation, *Tomb*, for The Resonance Show at The Headscapes Warehouse, NYC; *The Provocateurs*, an exhibition showing new works as well as an editioned print at the Arts Alliance, Chicago, IL, USA; building and painting a food stand in collaboration with the artist Doodles as part of the Painted Desert Project on the Navajo Nations reservation, Arizona, USA; and painting murals for the *Djerba Hood* project in Tunisia (all 2014). Ongoing projects include a Shibari-inspired collaborative photographic project involving elaborate sets and costumes and The Seafoam Palace Museum of Curiosities in Detroit, MI, USA, to which Canilao travelled this summer to build and hang the museum's front sign. Canilao has just released a new monographic book of works, entitled *PAPER BIRDS//LOST FACES.*

Outi Pieski

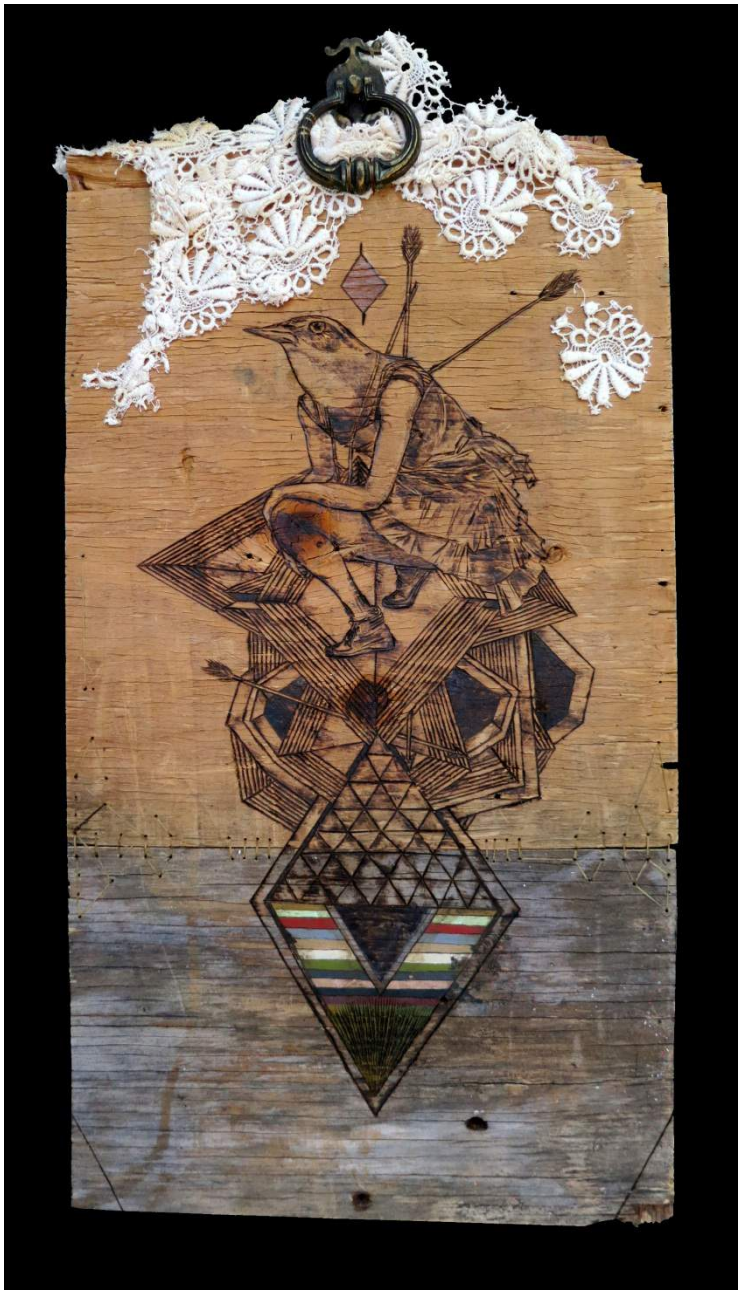
Outi Pieski lives and works in Utsjoki and Helsinki, the Sami area in Finland, and this Northern nature comes up often in her works. Pieski´s art includes paintings, collages and installations, realism widening into personal feelings and a sense of timelessness. In Pieski´s work, nature, culture and art seem to be anchored to specific places, yet are at the same time completely universal. Pieski grew up in the exterior of the Sami area and moved back to her family roots as an adult. The landscapes in her paintings are interpretations of experiences from her home area – once lost and then found. This landscape continues beyond the picture plane – from in front of to behind the eye, into collective memories and shared awareness. Receiving her MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts, Department of Painting, Helsinki (2000), recent exhibitions include Gallery Korjaamo, Helsink (2014) and group shows including Dálá Sámi dáidda/Sami Contemporary, Norrbottens Museum, Luleå, Sweden (also 2014).

Monica Canilao



Affection, 2014
mixed media, vintage trim, hand printed found wallpaper
and thread on found file folder and vintage pin up
65.5 x 48 cm

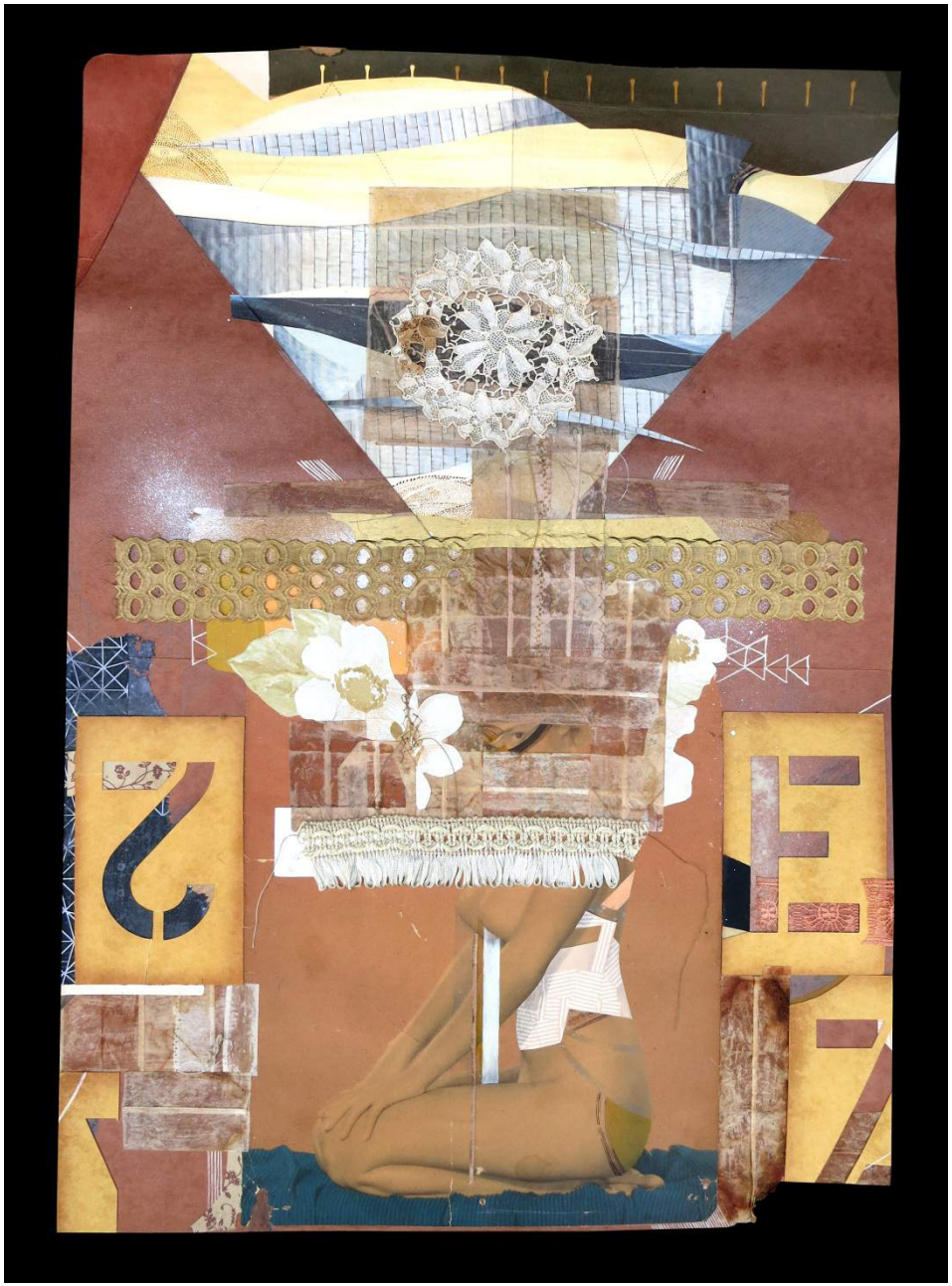
Age Found Him, 2011
felt, wood, brass, lace, thread and
mixed media on found parlour portrait
62 x 47 cm



Birds Eye, 2013
lace, brass drawer handle, acrylic, sinew and burning on wood panel
67 x 35.5 cm

All Seeing, 2014
mixed media, collaged and hand printed vintage wallpaper
and thread on found file folder and vintage pin up
31cm x 24cm

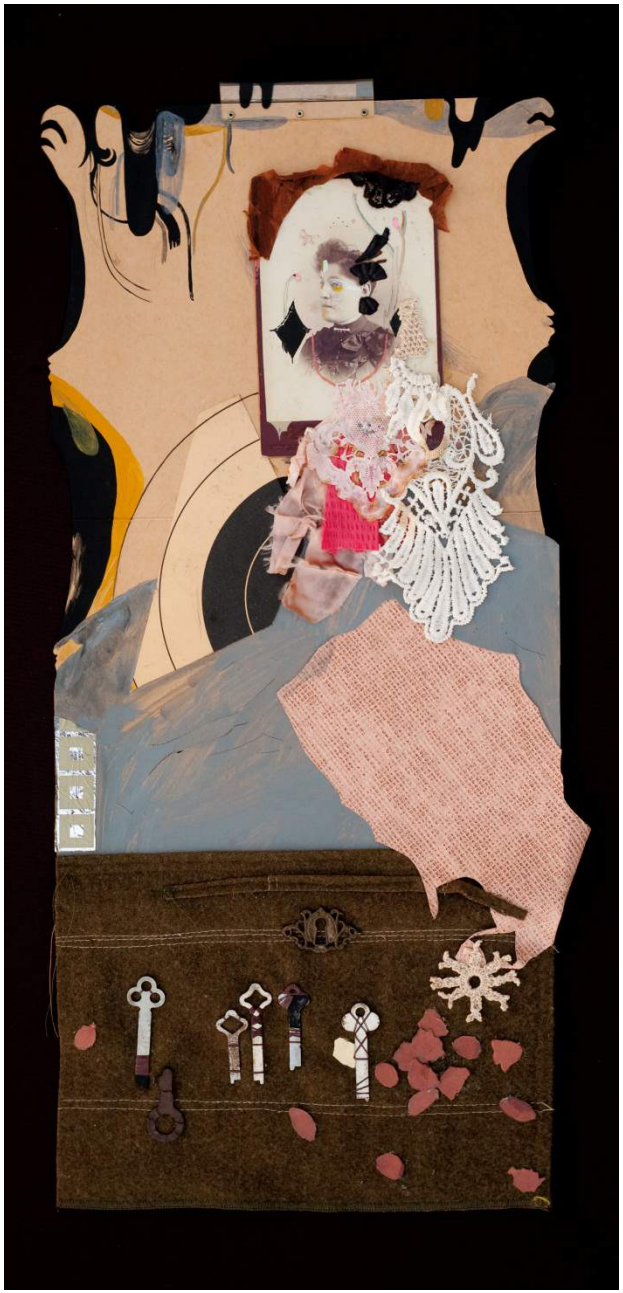
Dream Weaver, 2014
mixed media, tea bags, trim, collaged paper and
thread on found file folder and vintage pin up
33 x 48 cm



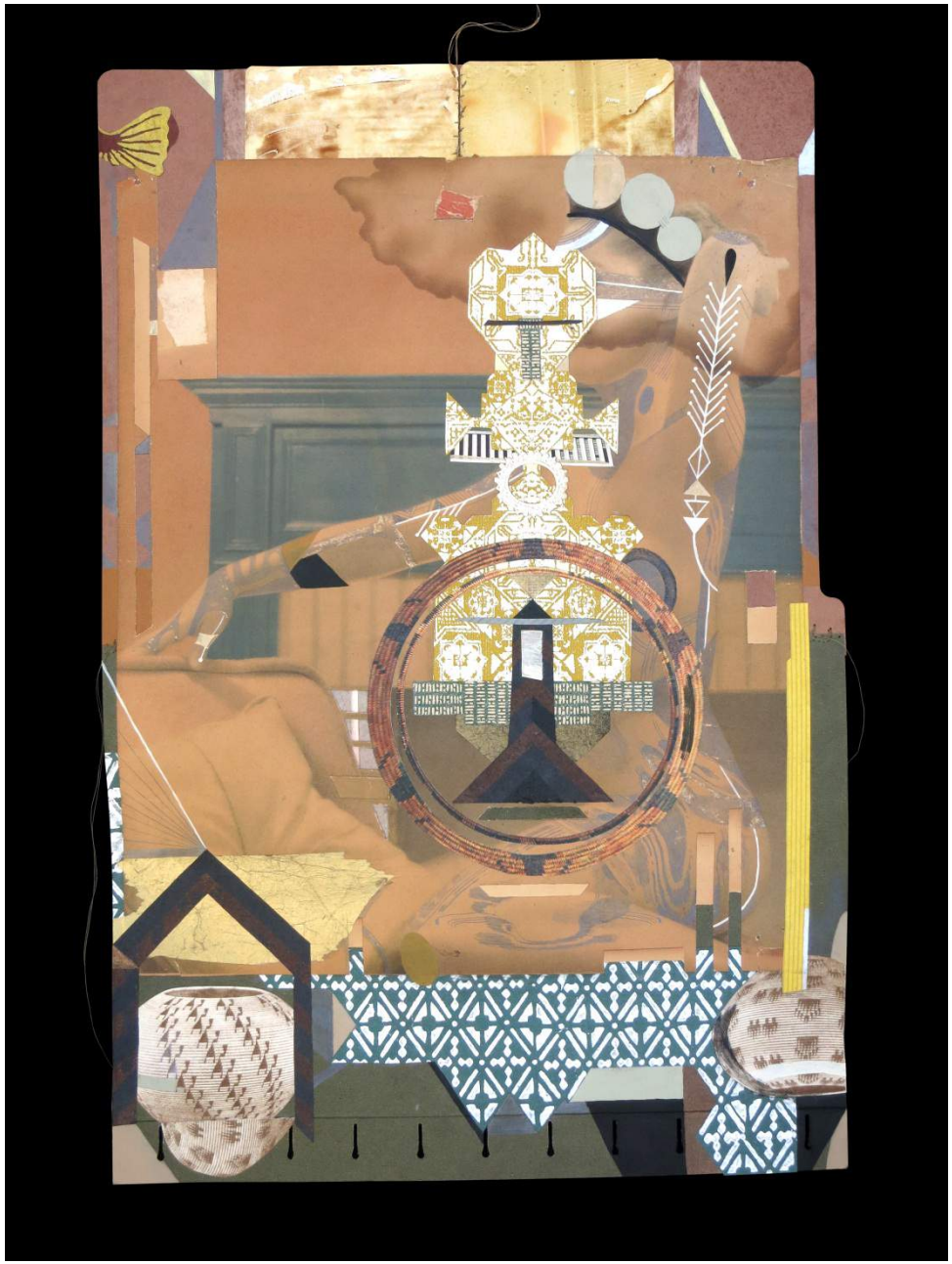
Chemisette, 2014
mixed media, lace, tea bags, trim, collaged paper, vintage wallpaper and thread on found file folder and vintage pin up
68.5 x 48 cm

Fauna, 2010
mixed media, stockings, silk flowers and thread
on masonite panels and found parlour portrait
137 x 25.5 cm

Dust, 2010
lace, fabric, thread, stuffed stocking and
mixed media on found parlour portrait
61 x 117 cm



Hilda, 2010
mixed media, old keys, thread and fabric
on found paper and parlour portrait
31.5 x 66 cm



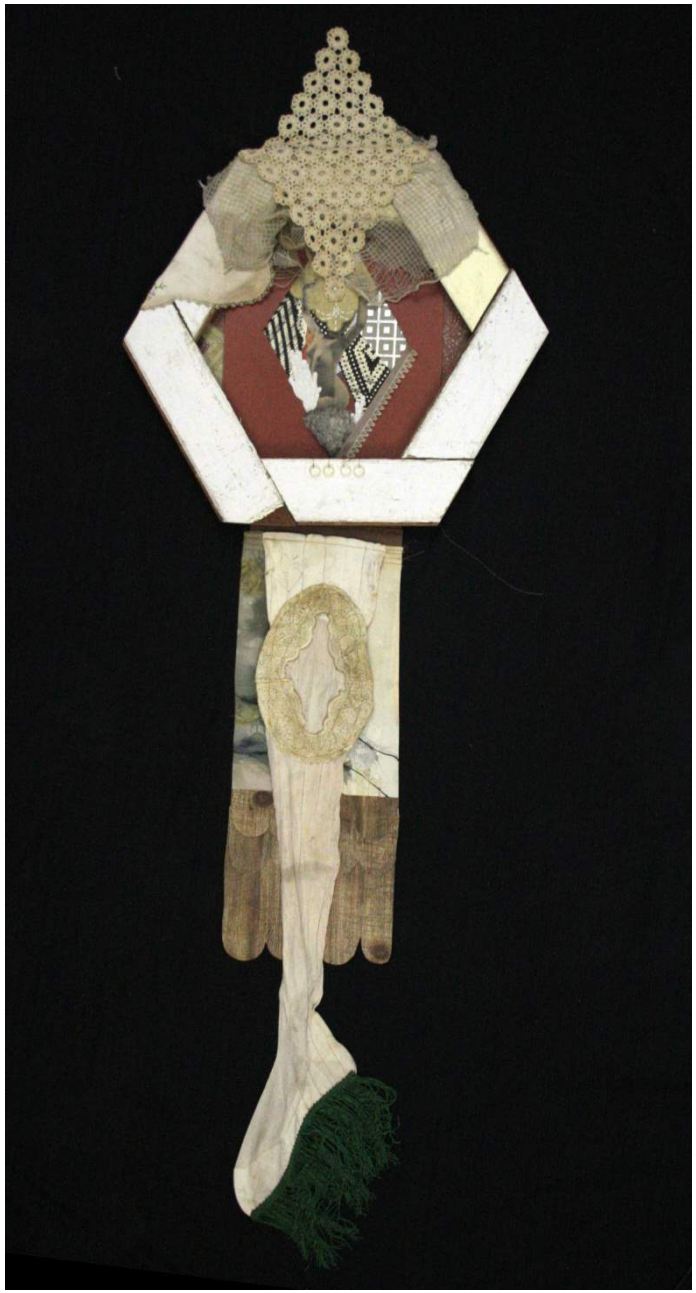
Hold Fast, 2014
mixed media, found polaroid, collaged vintage wallpaper
and thread on found file folder and vintage pin up
29.5 x 45 cm

Mimicry, 2014
mixed media, vintage doilies, collaged paper and
thread on found file folder and vintage pin up
65.5 x 48 cm

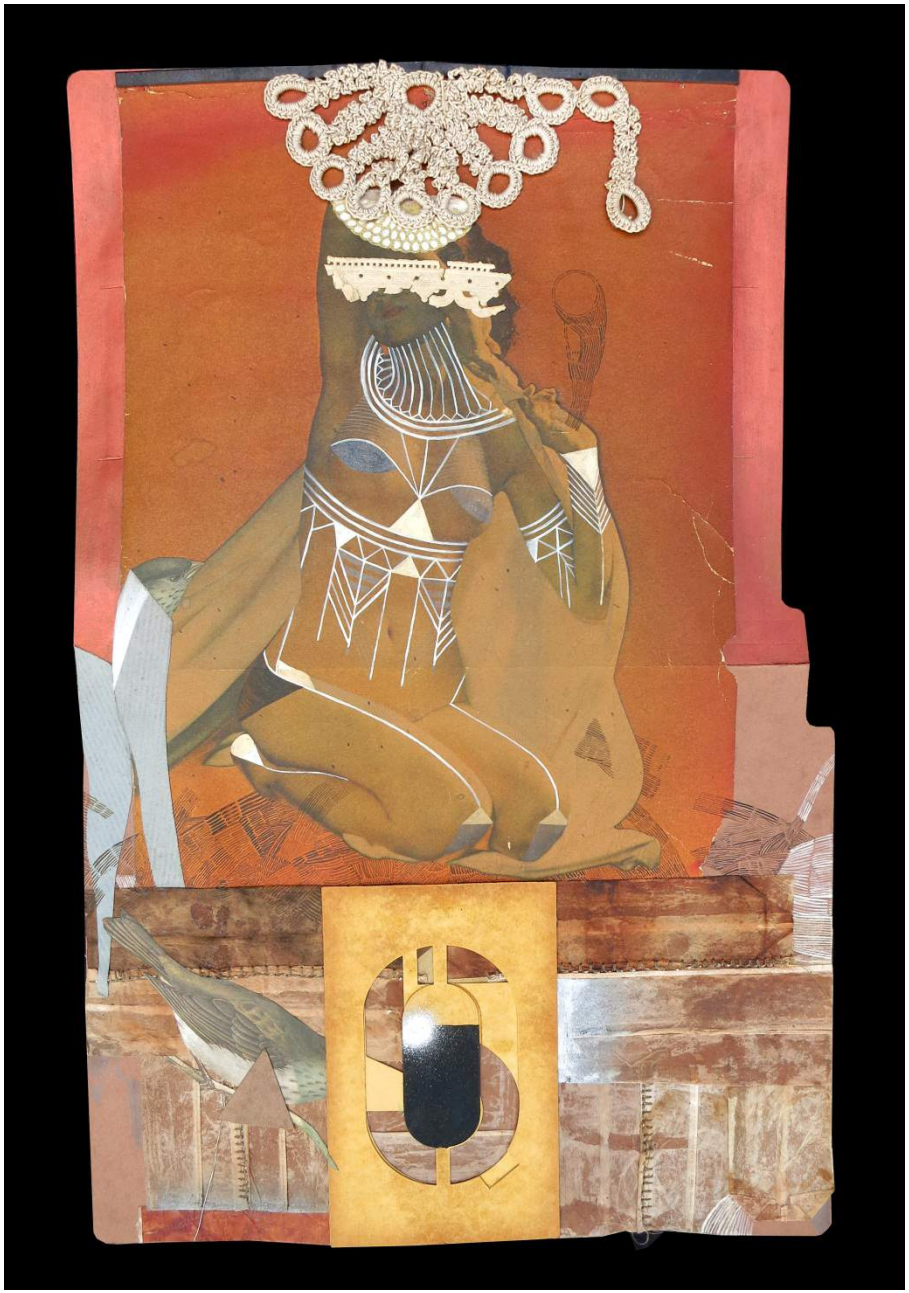
Never Leave Me, 2013
mixed media on paper with collage, thread, rabbit fur, lace,
found vintage hair curlers and tea bags
39 x 79 cm

Overgrowth, 2014
mixed media, collaged paper and thread on found file folder and hand printed wallpaper on vintage pin up
31 x 48 cm

Winter Coat, 2010
vintage stockings, lace, wood burn and mixed media
on found parlour portrait and wood panel
38 x 56 cm



Powder Room, 2011
mixed media with lace, thread, stocking, fringe and
collaged paper in hand built found wood frame
56 x 160 cm



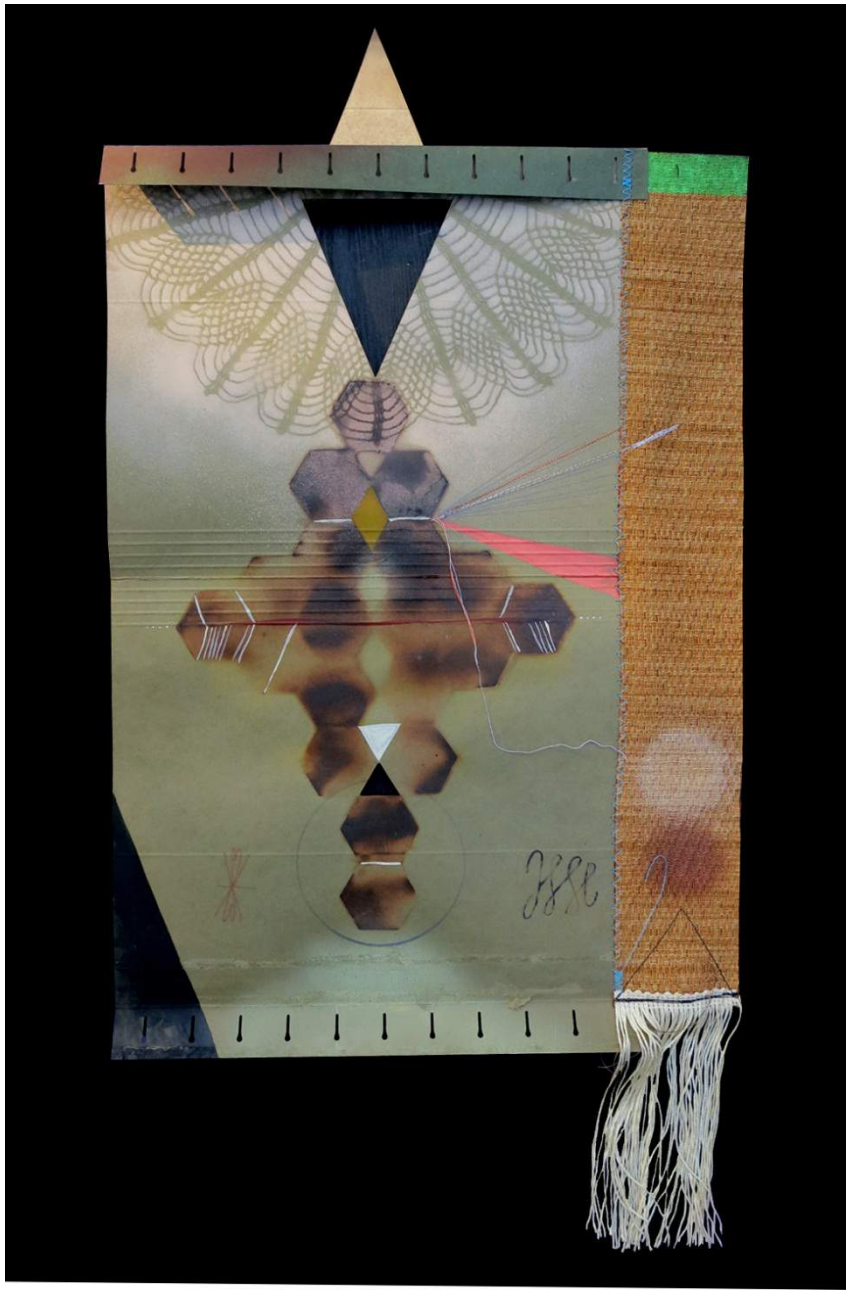
Siren, 2014
mixed media, collaged paper and thread on found file folder and hand printed wallpaper on vintage pin up
21.5 x 31 cm

Sun Dials, 2014
woven wall hanging with marks made with acrylic paint
and burn tool hung on painted wood
35 x 106 cm each

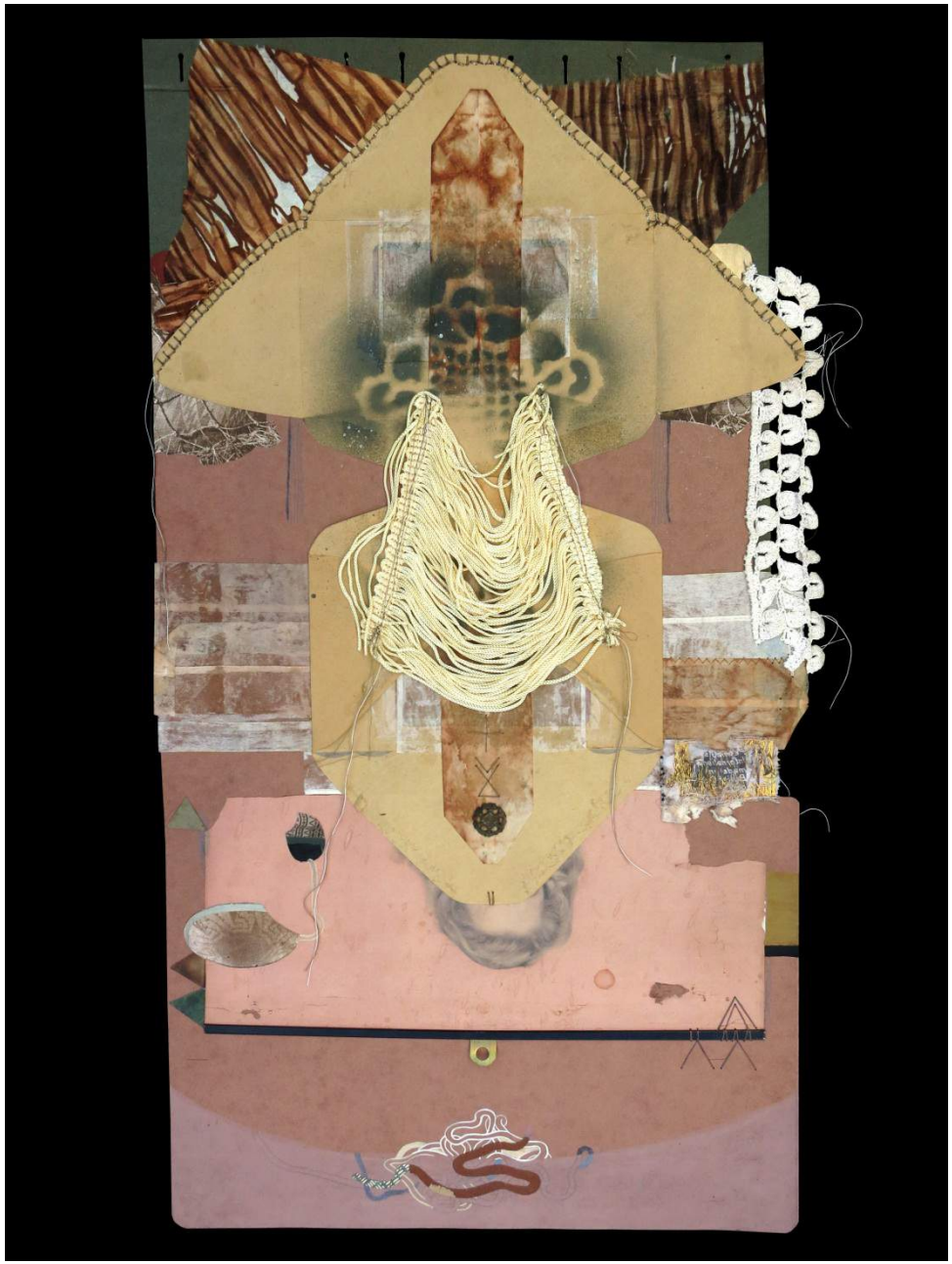
Swan Children 1 & *Swan Children 2*, 2009
mixed media, collaged paper, thread and tea bags on
found board from an abandoned train station
59 x 153 cm each

Twins Take Care, 2014
mixed media, tea bags, collaged paper, thread and
vintage wall paper on found file folder and vintage pin up
48 x 31 cm

The Harpy, 2011
mixed media with bird wing, lace, thread on found
parlour portrait in hand built found wood frame
65 x 68 cm



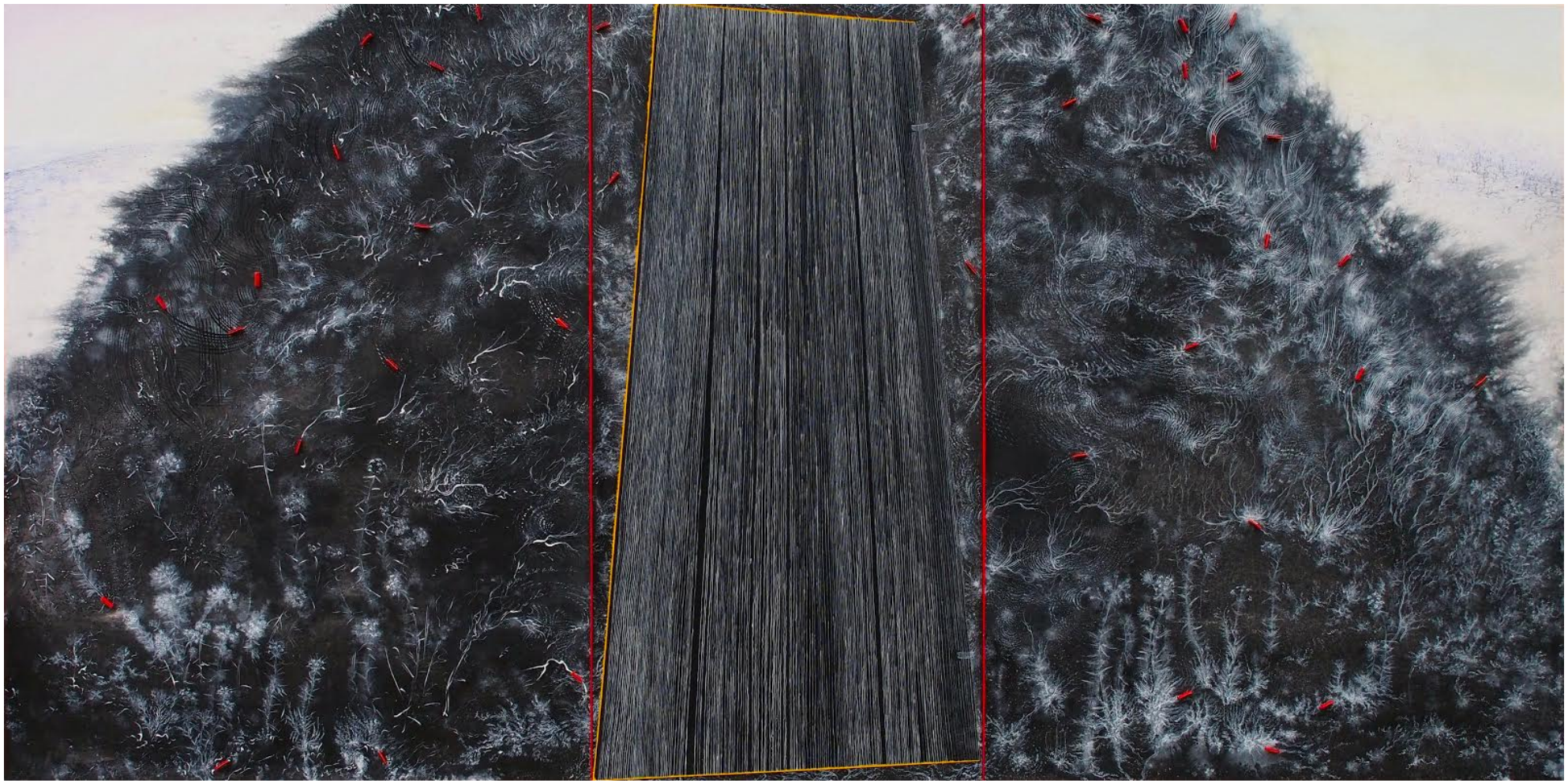
This Moment Crystalized, 2013
mixed media with thread, glow in the dark paint, fabric,
fringe and hand welded metal brand on found folder
67 x 35.5 cm



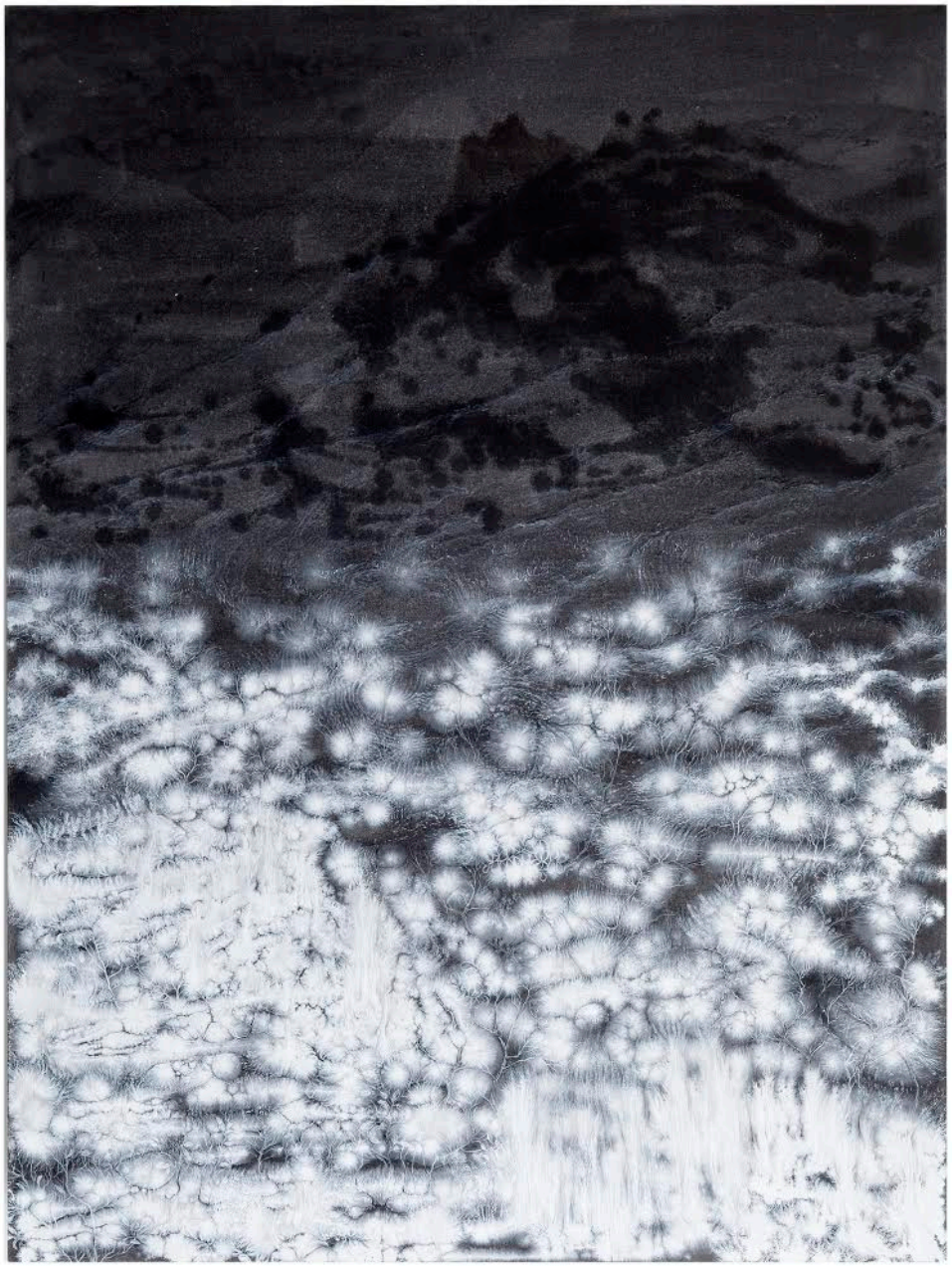
Underneath, 2014
mixed media, tea bags, fabric, lace, fringe and thread
on found file folder and vintage pin up
32 x 31 cm

White Poppy Eater, 2011
silk flowers, copper chain, feathers, thread, lace
and mixed media with burn tool used on found
parlour portrait
74 x 30.5 cm

Outi Pieski



Gámmi | Turf Hut, 2014
acrylic and baize on canvas
160 x 320 cm



Gurra / Gorge, 2014
acrylic on canvas
160 x 120 cm

Fjeld Unseen, 2013
acrylic on canvas with thread
85 x 60 cm

Silbajohka | Silver River, 2014
acrylic on canvas with thread
85 x 60 cm

Gámasvárri Fjeld, 2014
acrylic on canvas with thread
85 x 60 cm

Gollejohka | River of Gold, 2014
acrylic on canvas with thread
85 x 60 cm

Bovdna / Tussock, 2014
acrylic on canvas with thread
85 x 60 cm

Goddess Juksáhkka at Liŋkin Marsh, 2014
acrylic on canvas with textile
130 x 76 cm

Goddess Saráhkká at Liŋkin Marsh, 2014
acrylic on canvas with textile
130 x 76 cm

Goddess Uksáhkká at Liŋkin Marsh, 2014
acrylic on canvas with textile
130 x 76 cm

Ruossalas Bálágat | Crossing Paths, 2014
installation
wood and thread
240 x 160 x 240 cm

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