

My Own Witness. Rupture and Repair

Following the 2016 presidential election, I initiated portrait collaborations between those who – through race, sexuality, gender identity, age, ethnicity, and/or disability – felt they had been deemed invisible and un-entitled to their place in this American moment. Through pose, gesture, gaze, and props, they turned themselves “inside out” to visually assert their identity and invite a visceral face-to-face encounter with their humanity. I asked them to write a statement about their experiences.

These are dark and broken times. In the future, mending will occur, but we will be marked and scarred by the injuries to our democracy, our planet, and our souls. We have and will continue to confront the inhumanity and injustice towards those who have been deemed invisible and unentitled to their subjectivity through race, sexuality, gender identity, age, ethnicity, and/or disability. We acknowledge and pay attention to our violent past in the future so we don't repeat it. These injuries are our losses to be witnessed, mourned, and transformed into change.

In this series, I tear archival pigment portraits to create wounds of our individual and collective suffering and subsequently heal them. I back the rips with golden rice paper and patch them up with stitches of golden thread.

Inspired by the Japanese practice of kintsugi, an ancient craft that repairs broken pottery with gold lacquer, the areas of damage are illuminated and not covered over. Metaphorically, kintsugi honors the acceptance of injury as part of the object's life and gives material form to the history of experience.

Through pose, gesture, gaze, and occasional props, my portrait sitters bear witness to themselves and invite others to experience them in their full humanity compassionately. While the American flag has become a complicated symbol, some sitters reclaimed and reimagined it to express their defiance and respectful hope for the return of democracy. As a series, the shared black velvet background and chiaroscuro lighting joins each individual in the collective.