



TALKING TO THE SKY | JULIA SINELNIKOVA

Written by Mary Hurt





At the steel door of Julia Sinelnikova's warehouse studio, I half-expected to meet the artist in her distinctive guise as "The Oracle," an appropriate alias and handle for the self-styled fairy guide who—clad in an armor of reflective mylar, bejeweled with twinkling, LEDs—welcomes visitors to her vast, iridescent light forests. As an art director and sculptor, set designer, performer, and programmer, Sinelnikova thoroughly commands and transforms white-cube gallery spaces into fully immersive, responsive light-and- audio fields. Cascading, projection-mapped lights are gently refracted through the prevailing mist, reflected over hand-cut surfaces of mylar and vinyl. The translucent, willowy skins of suspended "fairy organs" sway with a temperate, oceanic rhythm, while soft, ethereal music echoes through the chamber like drops of enchanted water.

Instead, Sinelnikova appeared in plain, loose slacks and platform shoes, her hair pulled in a limp, graceful bun. She greeted me graciously but hastily, calling over her shoulder as she hurried to microwave her dinner. It had been more than

a year since I attended her open studio performance—a highly productive if not harried year.

After a 5-year tenure both co-directing and acting as lead organizer for the Bushwick Open Studios, Sinelnikova absented from the 2016 festival, citing the gradual annexation of artist' spaces by corporate brands, the rezoning of original participants outside of the festival lines, and the consistent abuse of artists' creativity by marketing companies to gain access to their audience.

Undaunted, Sinelnikova continued to foster collaboration in recent projects like *RESONATE X CHASM*. The four-day showcase was dedicated to public engagement, as a symposium with scheduled demonstrations, lectures, and group discussions, as well as—with DJ sets, animation, and coded light shows—a community rave. All ticket sales were donated to the Callen-Lorde Community Health Center—a New York medical and psychiatric care facility, as well as community outreach center for LGBTQ individuals—and The New

York Immigration Coalition. In a related interview with *The New York Times*, Sinelnikova promoted the importance of cooperation among emerging artists.

In our discussion that evening I would learn how Sinelnikova—while supporting herself with production and design gigs, most recently with Brooklyn's House of Yes; exhibitions with the creative think-tank Wallplay Gallery on Bowery; and sales of fairy organs, high-relief resin panels, and handmade jewelry—Sinelnikova has independently embarked on a critical and applied investigation of surveillance and data collection in residencies with the Museum of Human Achievement in Austin, TX, the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, the Holographic Arts Center in New York, New York Creative Technology Week, and now La Napoule Art Foundation in Cannes, France.

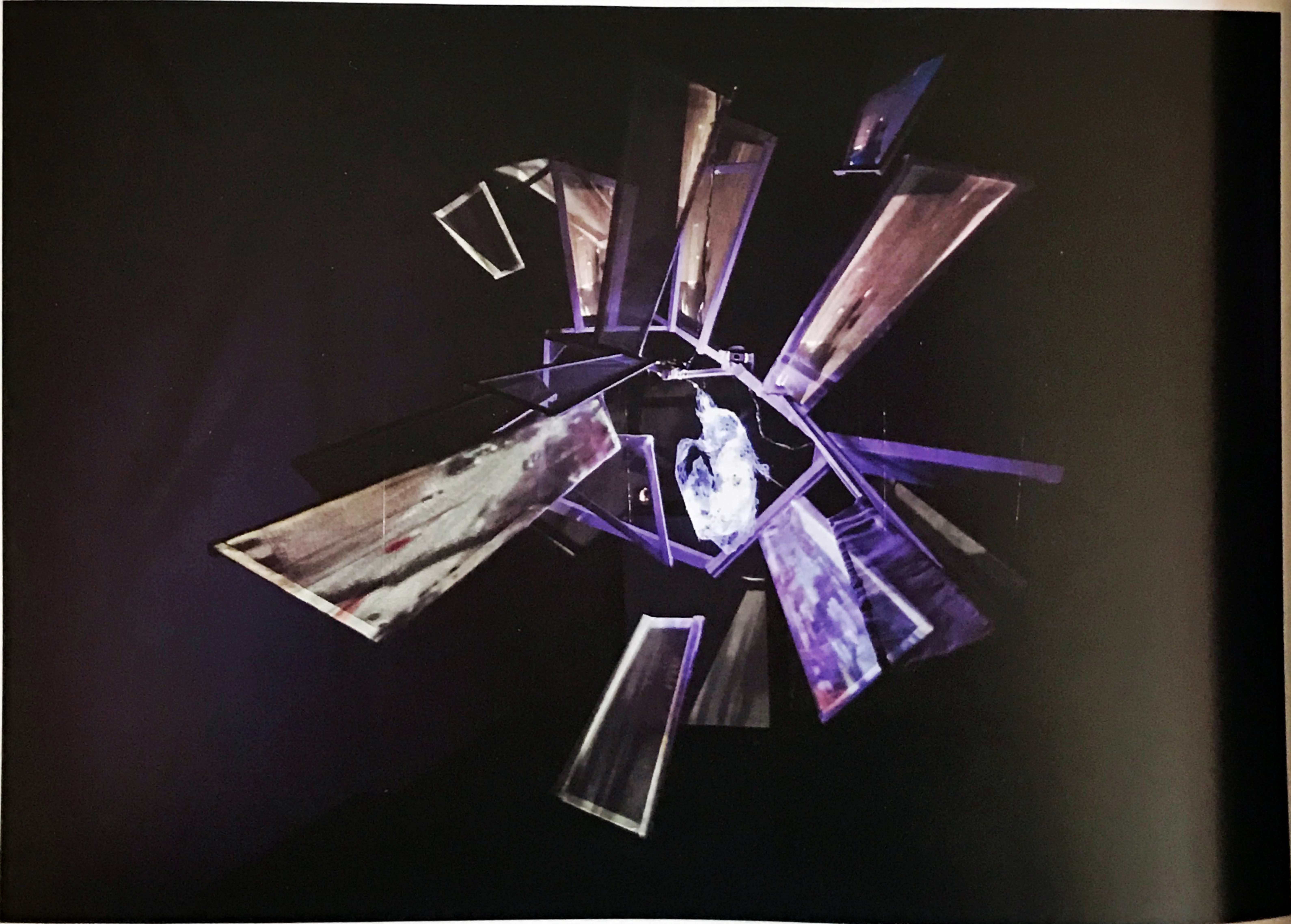
"The issue of surveillance and data collection is not being taken seriously by mainstream culture," Sinelnikova explains, "We are desensitized to being censored and desensitized to being sur-

veiled."

Datalog (Banff Center), and *Sentinel: Temple of Self-Awareness* (Museum of Human Achievement) incorporated cameras, and a complicated network of projection mapping, to project live footage onto fragmented, fiberglass screens. Whereas *Sentinel* captured spectators with an implanted camera and projector, Datalog tapped live security footage from *Instacam.org*, allowing exhibition visitors to observe strangers on the street, in doctors' offices, and other public spaces. "The project is the code," Sinelnikova said, "I'm less interested in building and construction than its purposes to map my code ideas."

As Sinelnikova continues to earn residencies and grants, she is allowed time to learn programming languages like Java and C++, hoping to advance the complexity of her designs. "Right now I'm [able to ask] questions based on my experience as an interface user—you, me, and those people walking down the street," referring to the online footage, "I want to be able to ask those questions from the perspective of the creators of





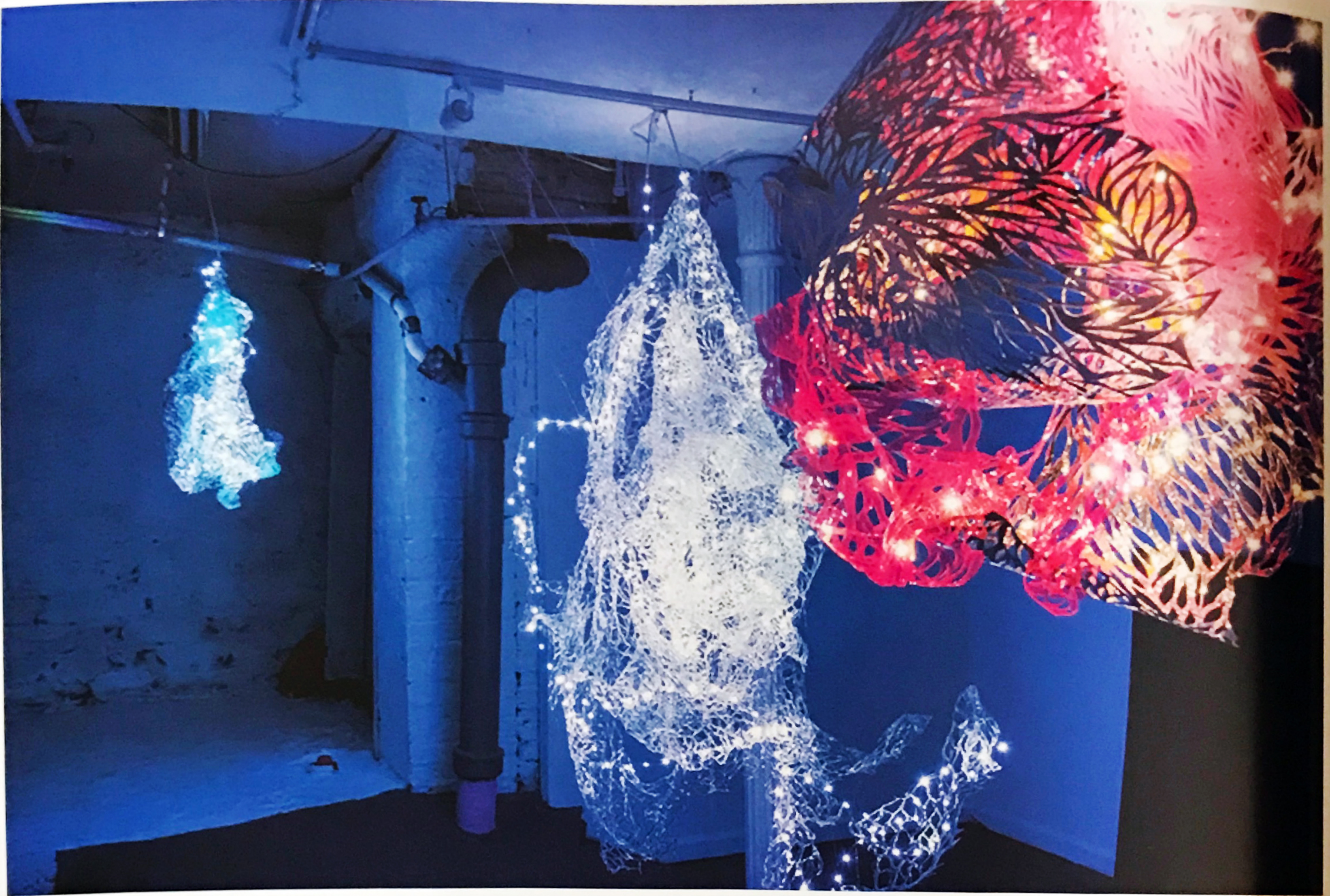
*Datalog Coded Surveillance Light Sculpture*

*opposite: Black Fairy Nest Egg*

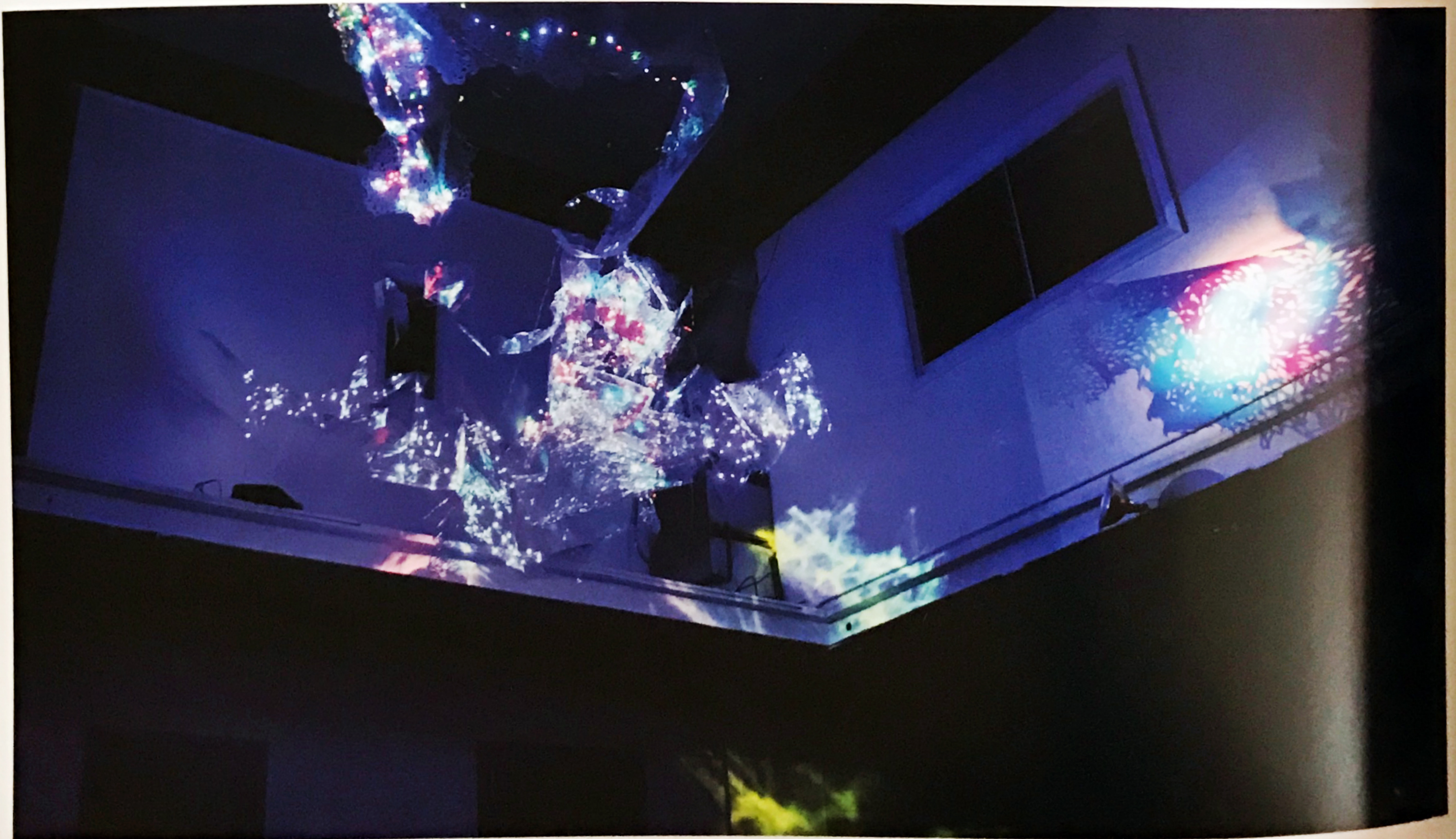








*Fairy Organs at Rox Garden, NYC*



*Chalcedony solo show, Brooklyn*



*Angel Organ*



interfaces, one who's building the architecture which our minds are plugged into, therefore shaping sociological experience... I think it's an important thing to do—to use codes and simulation for art instead of advertising or information collection.”

While community organizers and emerging artists like Sinelnikova depend increasingly on social media for communications, and as consumer information becomes increasingly visible to hackers, Sinelnikova hopes to test her power as an interface user while developing interactive installations that challenge one to consider their vulnerability. “We are desensitized to being censored [by] the code of the world that's being thrown at us through the apps and operating sys-

tems, laws and the free market, and it's purposeful. In the work that I've been building for the past year, I want to continue to bring people into my disembodied world, but cast a bright light on these issues in a way that's suggestive to people and really drives the point.”

Follow Julia Sinelnikova on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Tumblr, and her website, where you can find information regarding upcoming performances, installations, and parties.

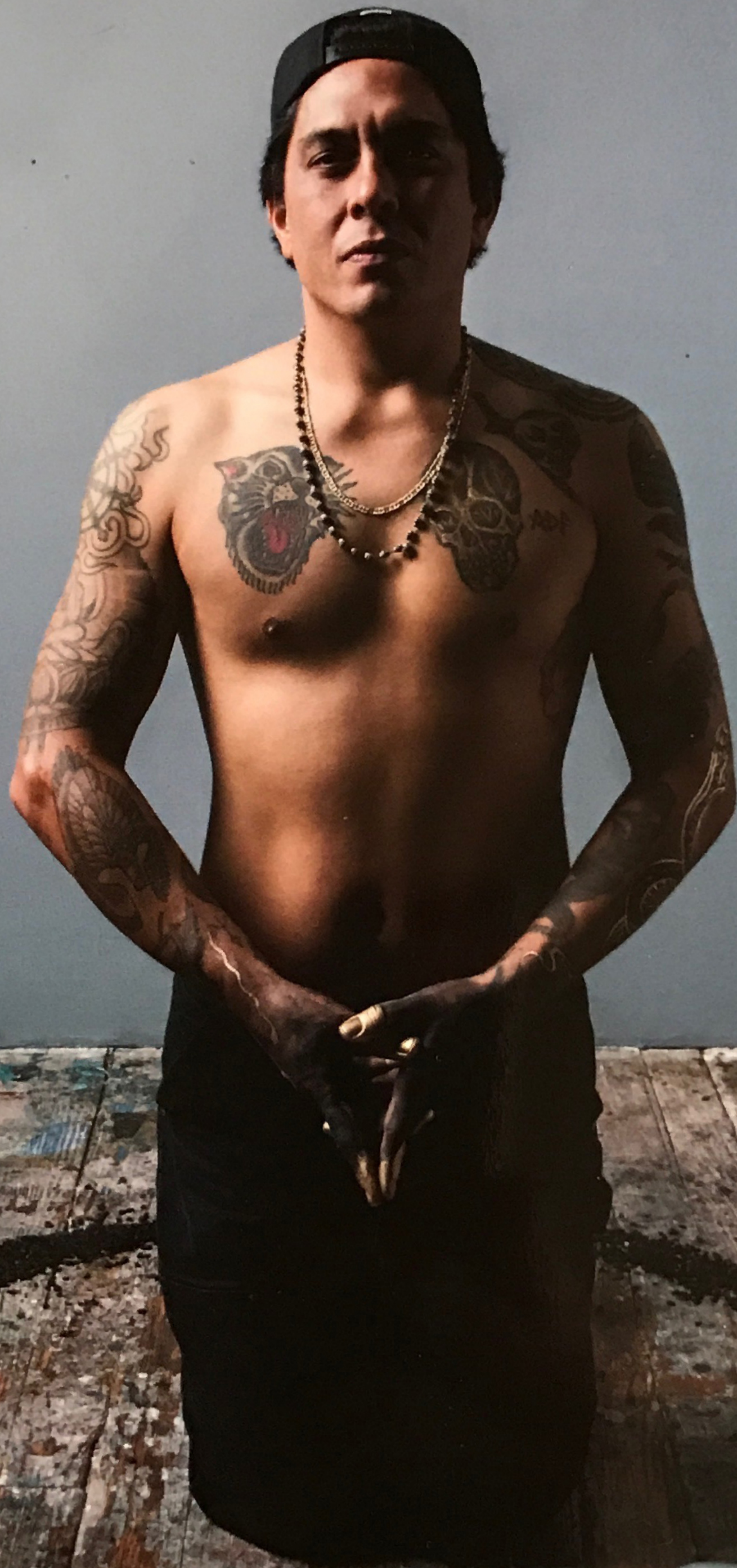
*Angel Organ (Detail)*





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