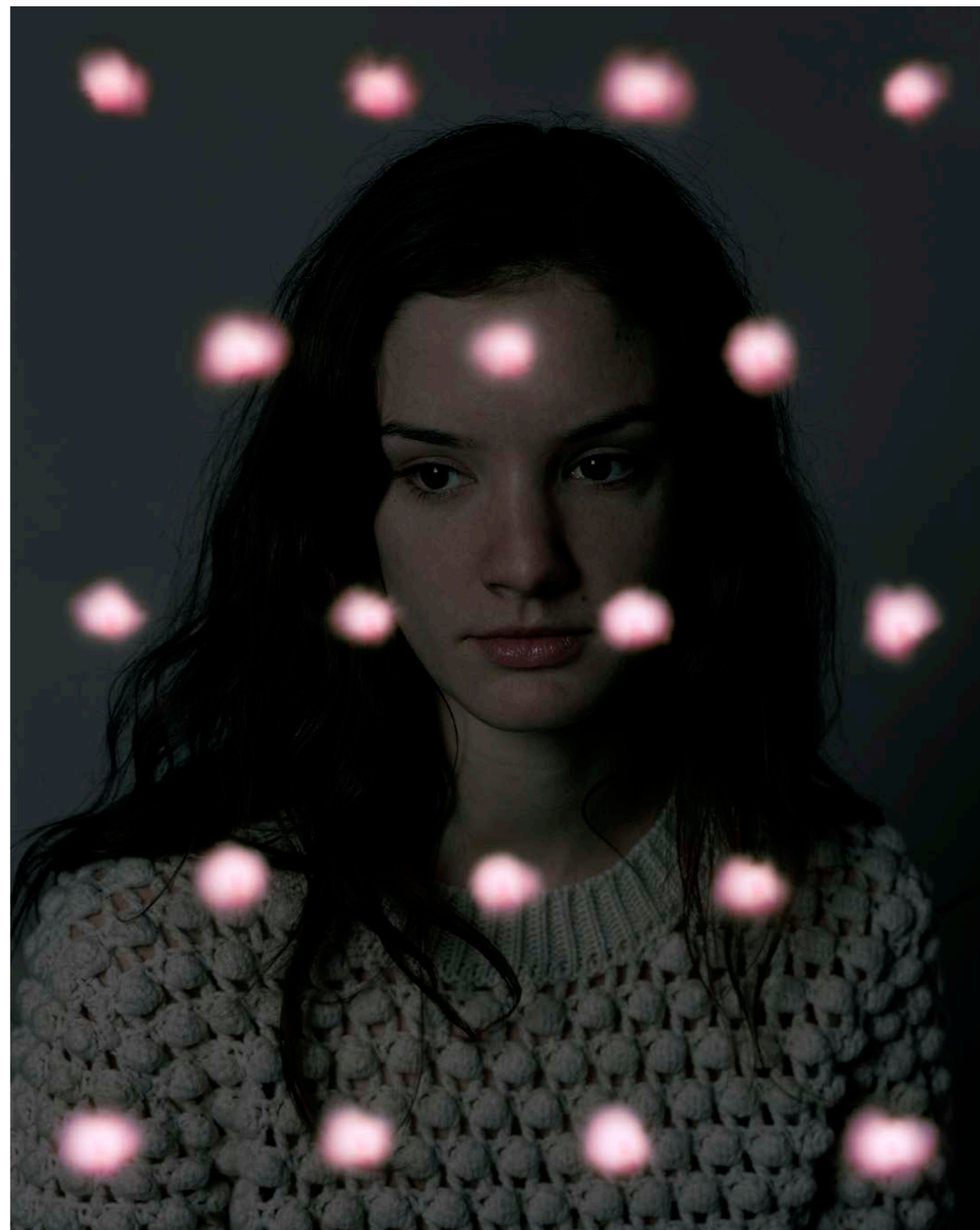


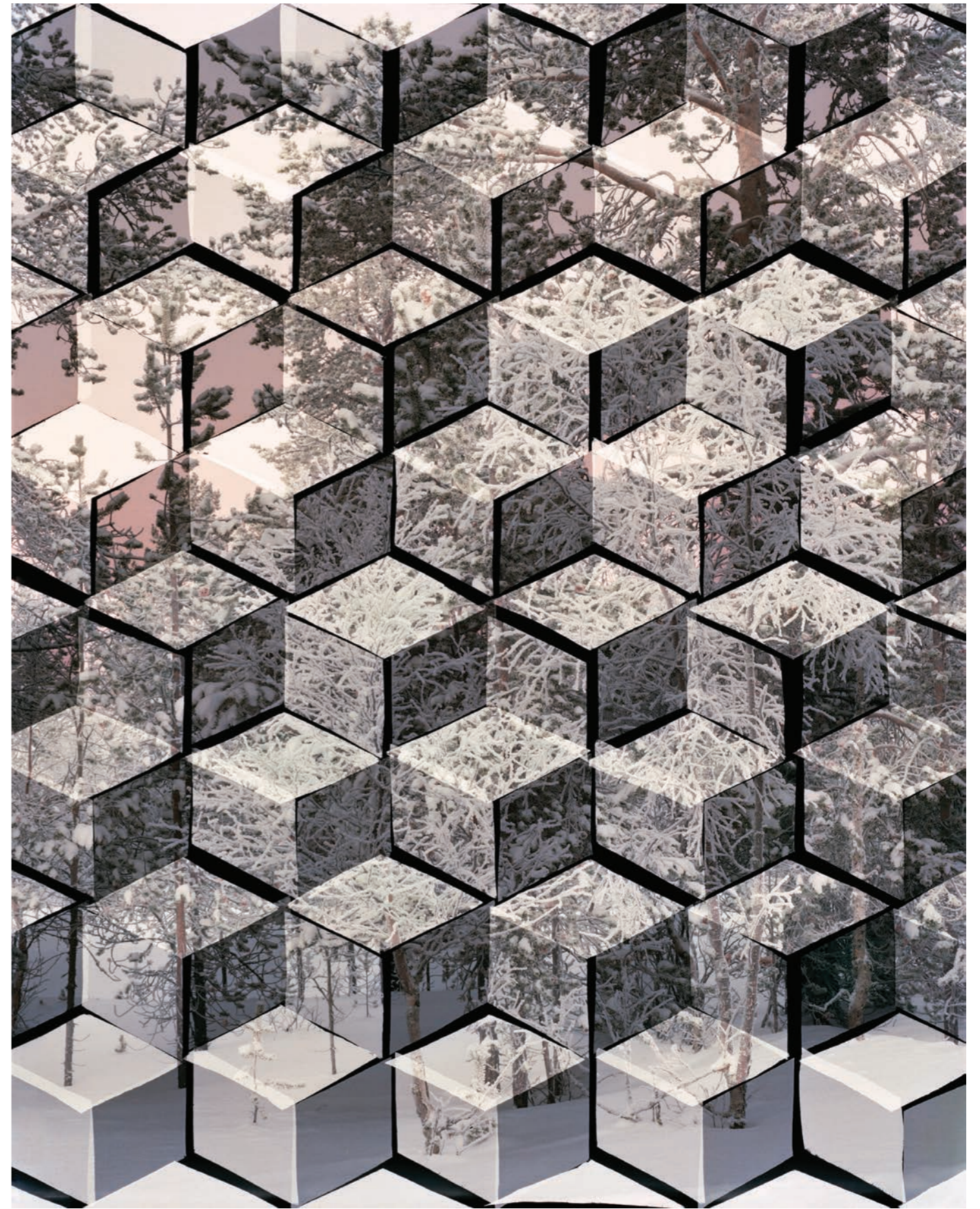
**COLD  
WAVE**  
HANNAH  
WHITAKER

All images © Hannah Whitaker (Curtsey M+B Gallery).  
Portrait with Sweater (Pink)

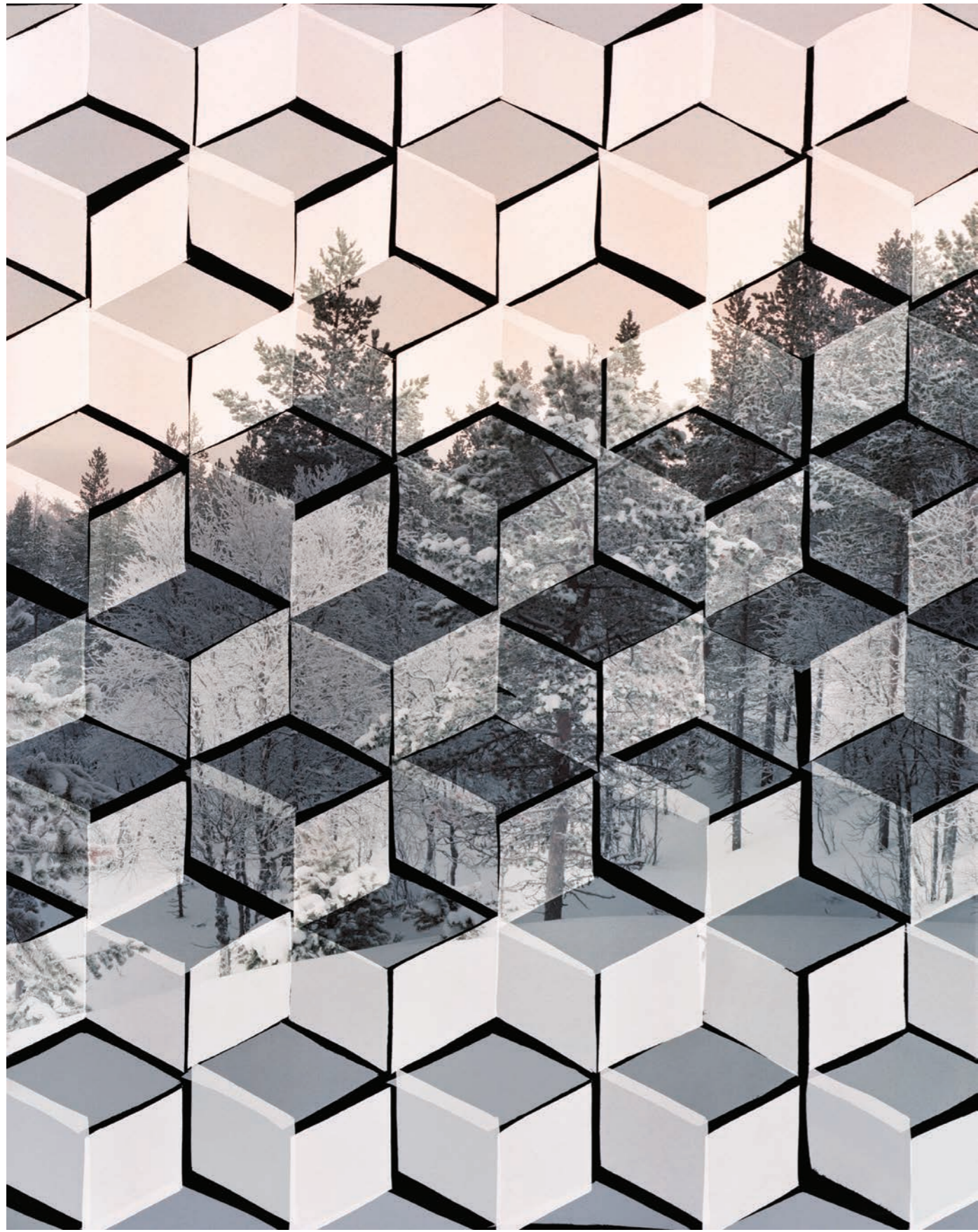




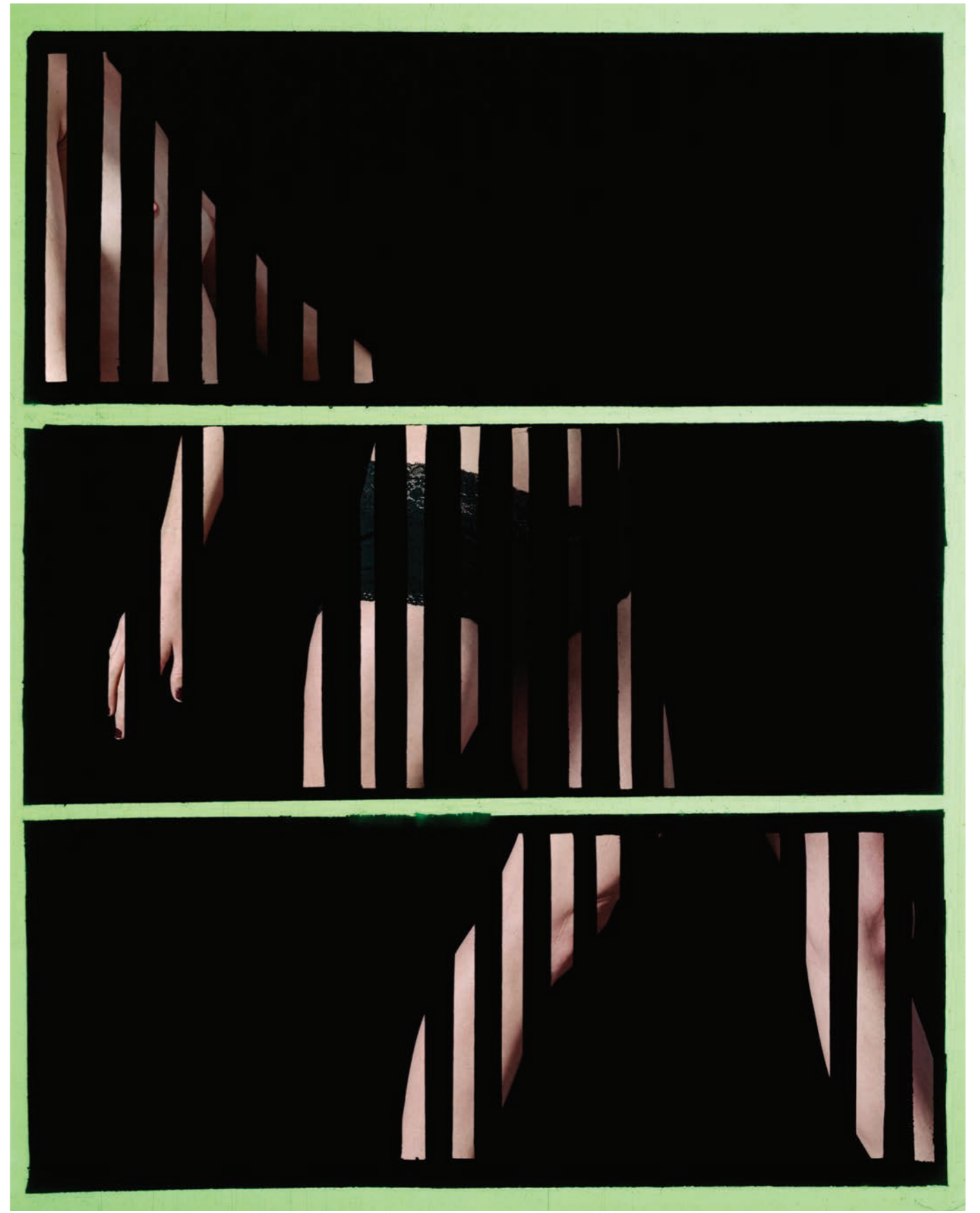
Portrait with sweater (Orange)



Arctic Landscape (Trees)



Arctic Landscape (Pink Sky)



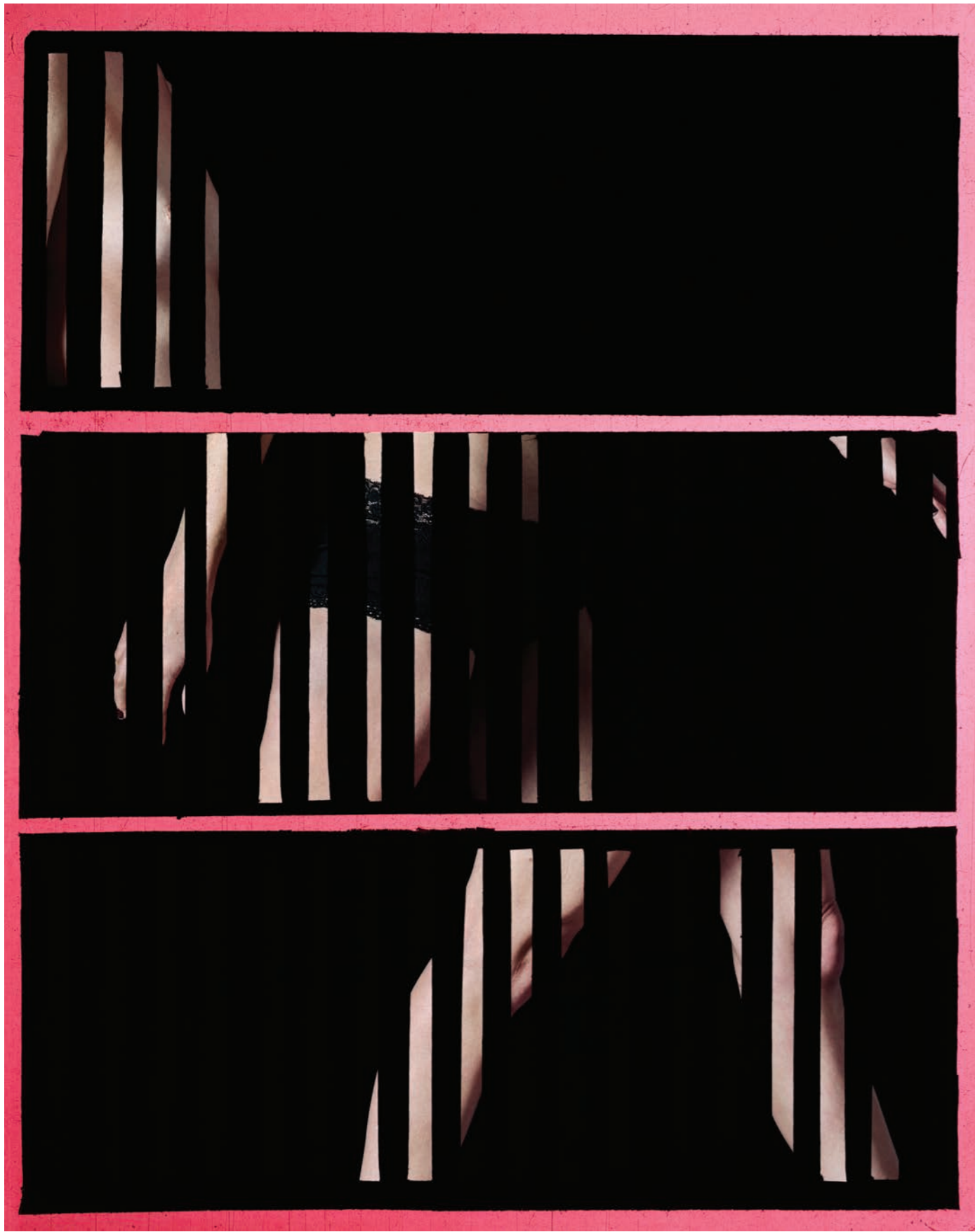
Waiting (Green)



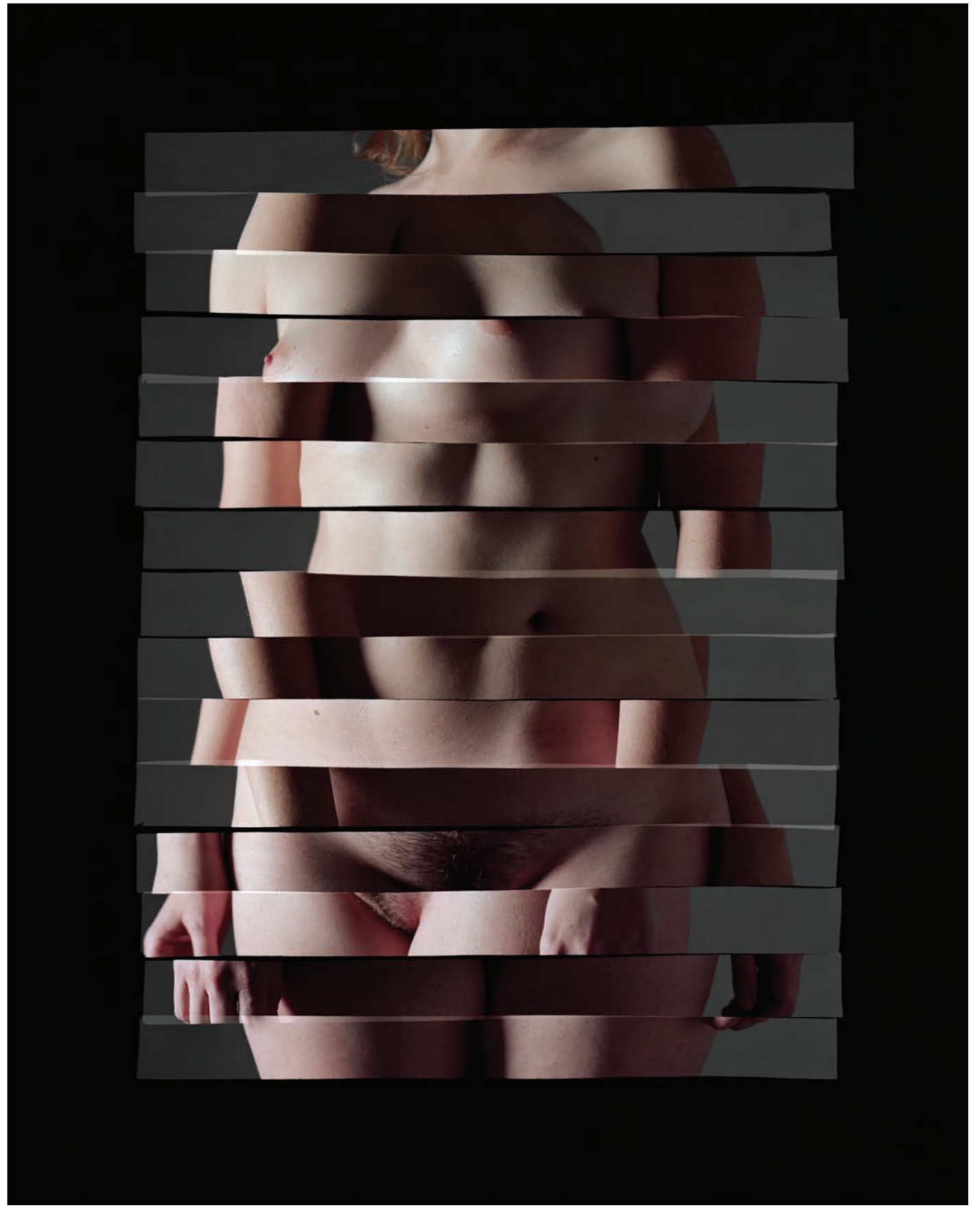
Three Winter Landscapes



Portrait with Sweater (green)



Working (pink)



Torso.

"EVERYTHING  
THAT YOU PHOTOGRAPH  
IS AT LEAST  
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PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS  
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OUR LIVES."

Cold Wave, Hannah Whitaker's new body of work, combines different image systems to produce optical puzzles; layered, manipulated images that merge the photographic representation of real referents in the world ...

... the nude, the portrait, trees, water — with in-camera mechanical interventions — bars, light leaks, matts, masks of geometric shapes. The images are all contained within the rectangle in a 4 to 5 ratio proscribed by the view camera, the literal boundary that provides the conceptual framework for Whitaker's explorations.

Whitaker calls the images shown together in *Cold Wave* a set, not a series. They belong to a closed system in which every element links and comments on every other — pictorially and materially. The use of the term "set" may be in homage to Kurt Gödel, the celebrated Austrian logician Whitaker cites as a key influence. *Cold Wave* could be seen as an artist's response, with "pseudo-

mathematical manipulations", as Whitaker jokingly puts it, to Gödel's theory of a constructible universe as a model of set theory in which the only sets that exist are those than can be constructed from simpler sets. Gödel was responsible for introducing the notion of unknowability to mathematics — a proposition doubtless appealing to an artist interrogating the dialectics of the medium of photography.

*Walking (Green) 2014* — is an image containing a female nude who appears to be in motion in the act of descending — like a paused lenticular. The ground is acid green; the figure is interrupted by vertical and horizontal black bars. Whitaker creates the image by inserting hand made paper

screens into the film holder placed in the camera, shooting multiple screens and multiple exposures that expose only part of the film at a time and always on the same sheet of film. The black parts of the photograph correspond to the light being blocked by paper with the photograph accordingly revealed — a process with some parallels to silk screen printing and lithography.

*Portrait with sweater (Green) 2014* is of a woman with long hair wearing a bobble-stitch top, apparently overlaid with regularly spaced, bright spots of green light. These are produced by small, controlled light leaks, made with pin-pricks in the film holder. "I held the film holder against the paper that the cutout still life is on. The paper casts its glow and accounts for the colour. So, the process destroys parts of the image but creates something else — an imprint of a colour. I hope the repetition of her face, with its slight shifts in her facial position, echo the movement that, in other pictures, is contained in a single image."

These images contain, within a single sheet of film, many moments in time — and an imprint of motion.

"I think so much more about the conditions for making a picture than I do about what the effect of it is in the end," says Whitaker. "I think about the film plane as a formal system, really focusing on these few inches — the interest not in what the picture is of, but in the grid itself — these few inches of material.

"I feel more of an affinity with artists who are task-oriented, rule-based, and repetitive, and who establish a rapport between a mechanised hand and creative output and or analytical thought." In fact, Whitaker takes many of the screens from patterns in the work of other artists such as David Bomberg and Anni Albers, and quilt-makers like Annie Bendolph.

*In Three Winter Landscapes 2014* and *Barcroft (Taeuber-Arp) 2014*, photographs taken by Whitaker of a vista, of bare branched trees, of the reflections of the setting sun in lake water, provide components of the final pictures. The black bar screens are the interruptions in the first picture, and the circle pattern borrowed from Sophie Taeuber-Arp, the masks in Barcroft. The images are about the imposition of a hand-crafted graphic system, a geometric logic, on the familiar images and subjects of representational photography.

But *Cold Wave* includes other pictures that have no real-world referents at all. *Cutouts (Pink) 2014* and *Cutouts (Green) 2014* are images of scattered geometric black paper forms on coloured papers. They are the re-purposed surrounds of the cut-outs Whitaker has used to make her screens. "For me geometric shapes invoke a lot of things — modernism and the history of geometric abstraction, industrialism and the standardisation of the shapes of things; consumerism and the exquisite geometry of all the crappy products in our lives (that's partly what this project was about); mathematics and the abstraction from the world that this way of thinking offers; patterning and its relationship to decoration (and its historical opposition to conceptualism); minimalism and its emphasis on gridding things out — for me all of these things stand in stark contrast to the deadpan mimetic representation that photographic depiction presents."

The "cut-outs" pictures are one of the staging posts in Whitaker's closed system — referencing other works in

the set, and existing literally as parts of them. They present to the viewer the materiality of paper on paper made by exposing light that results in an image on paper — the alpha and omega of the physical process of photography.

Hannah Whitaker's intellectual framework is rigorous, but there's a playful side. "I like to foster confusion," she says, confounding the viewer with "How did she do that?" questions. *Purple Paper 2014* has no real referent to the world. The abstract shapes on the paper ground are produced entirely through optical means. There is nothing in the image that exists in real life — all the forms are created through masking and light. It is, in a literal sense, an image of an abstraction.

*Cold Wave* does everything possible to re-focus our perceptions; to re-wire the pathways of how we read and relate to images. Yet, Whitaker completely owns that the toe-holds she provides by way of the imagery not only read as reality, but are the habitual subject-matter of the medium, and will be the tethering rope by which many find their way across the contours of her world. She refutes, however, all representational attributes to the screens, pin-pricks or other manufactured interventions she makes. Nor does she ascribe to her colour palette (here black & white and acids) any psychologically inflected function. Her choices may be described as purposeful but not prescriptive. The bars are not intended to be read as "prison bars"; circles are not symbolic of something else; blue is not calm; pink is not shorthand for flesh. Even the way the bars appear to frame nipple and crotch are not intended to comment on, nor induce a sexually inflected reading of the female nude.

"I am very interested in how human beings make meaning out of photographs — how a photograph mythologises its subject," explains Whitaker. "I love how everything that you photograph is at least semi-arbitrary; meaning, we photograph the people, places, and things that we happen to have access to in our lives." To this extent her image bank is very personal. "Despite my own emphasis on the conditions for making the photographs, it is what they are of that is really going to connect with people — the tiny bit of flesh or tree or what have you. This is partly why I decided to call the show *Cold Wave*, to acknowledge what the photographs are of, which is clearly something cold and wintery."

Whitaker's work is visual counter-point; a fugue. It delights in systems and patterns and sequencing, which throw up occasionally unexpected variants and provoke unpredictable responses, and where chance plays a randomising role.

SOPHIE BALHETCHET

Hanna Whitaker's work will be included in *Fixed Unknowns* a group exhibition curated by Molly Kleiman and Ava Ansari at Taymour Grahne Gallery in NYC, which opens in July 2014.