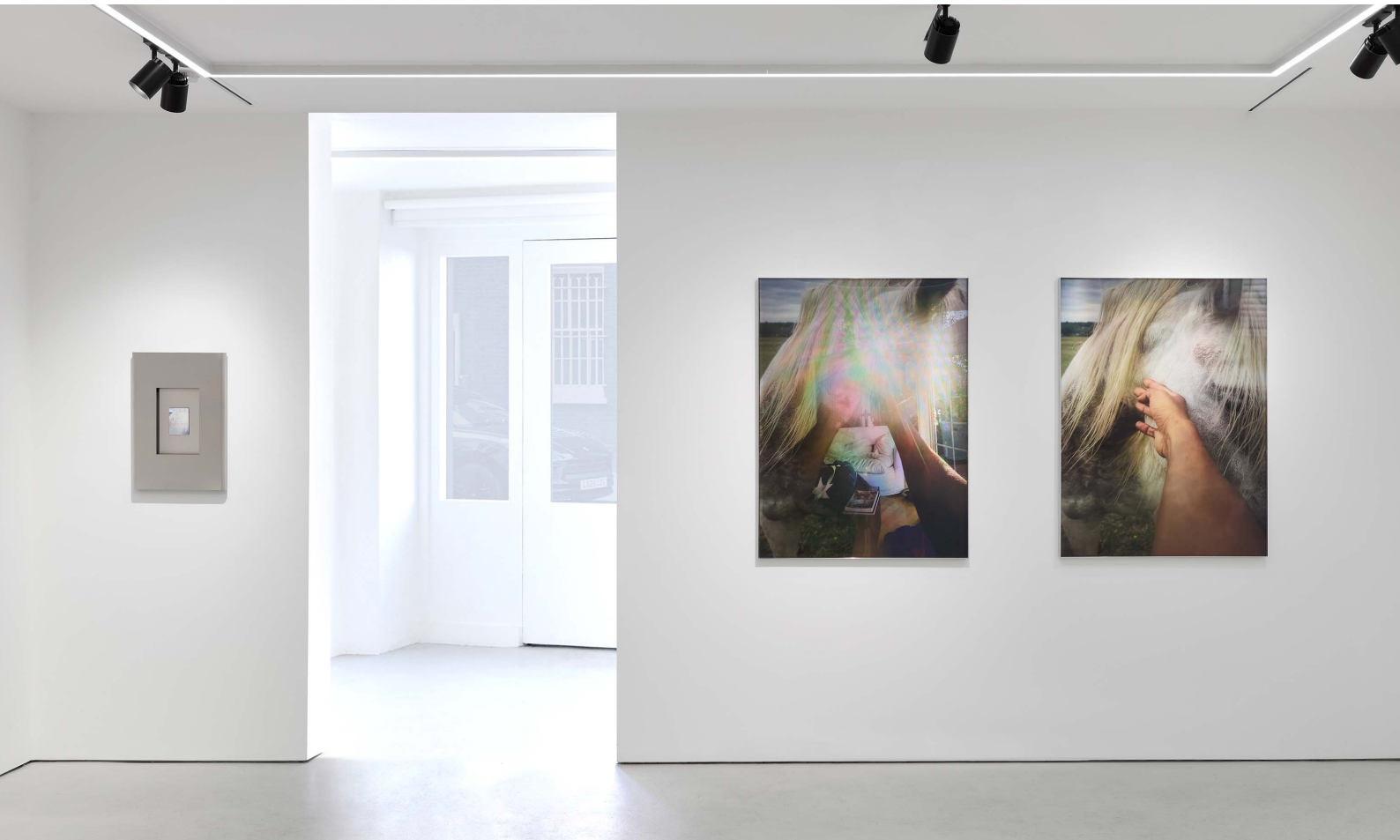


SETAREH



Brent McKeever

LOOK

17. JULY – 5. SEPTEMBER 2026

"No tree can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell." — Carl Jung

SETAREH presents *LOOK*, the debut solo exhibition of Los Angeles-based artist Brent McKeever.

Known for his hyperreal photographic practice, McKeever's distinctive visual language combines glamour, unease, fantasy, and performance to examine the role of image-making in contemporary culture. Working across lenticular photography, lightbox, sculpture, installation, and self-portraiture, *LOOK* considers how images manufacture, disrupt, and fracture identity. Beneath this inquiry lies a quieter proposition: that the images we desire, repress, fear, and idealize are often the very places through which we come to know ourselves.

Lined with lenticular works, the gallery's main room reimagines the act of digital consumption: images shift, dissolve, and reappear as the viewer moves through the space. Echoing the mechanics of scrolling, the works unfold through duration rather than in a single static encounter, reflecting the accelerated rhythms of contemporary life. Drawing upon Henri Bergson's conception of duration, in which experience unfolds as a

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continuous flow rather than a sequence of distinct moments, the exhibition proposes that identity is not fixed but continuously formed. Cultural ephemera is absorbed, accumulated and performed, stunting the organic growth of the primal self. In this landscape, identity is increasingly assembled through imagery before it is understood through experience.

In McKeever's hands, fashion-derived imagery, phone screens, devotional references, internet text, staged bodies, personal artifacts, and graphic interference become unstable optical objects whose meaning is never fully fixed. As images flicker between states, identity itself emerges as something continually performed, revised, and re-constructed under the pressures of visibility. Rather than resolving these contradictions, the exhibition allows them to remain active, suggesting that selfhood is less a stable condition than an ongoing negotiation between opposing psychological forces.

At the center of the exhibition is *Mechanical Reproduction*, a 6-by-5-ft transparency presented in a lightbox, featuring a constructed image of intimacy staged and photographed by the artist. The work marks a decisive shift in McKeever's practice from the photographic print toward the photographic object. Its meaning is produced not only by the image itself but also by scale, illumination, material support, and the viewer's physical encounter. Neither documentary nor fiction, the work occupies a space between photography, cinema, advertising, and sculpture, treating the image as something to be experienced rather than simply viewed.

Polished and pristine, the image presents an idealised, heteronormative vision of intimacy, one endlessly reinforced through advertising, pornography, cinema, and social media. The intertwined bodies function less as individuals than as vessels for collective aspiration, embodying a model of perfection that invites identification as much as observation. In pursuing such images, we inevitably begin to reenact what we consume, internalising the act of looking until we come to observe our own lives from a psychological distance. *Mechanical Reproduction* ultimately asks whether contemporary desire originates within the individual or is first encountered as an image waiting to be inhabited.

We are seduced by McKeever's visual world, where symbols of desire continually permeate the exhibition. Flesh, wetness, fetishistic motifs, religious imagery, and consumer aesthetics recur throughout, echoing the visual language of a generation formed by fashion, popular culture, and networked media. Yet this eroticism is repeatedly interrupted by dread. Bare flesh is doused in blood. Anonymous bodies collapse into contorted forms. Devotional imagery appears beside pornography. Beauty is placed in continual proximity to its opposite. These juxtapositions do not function solely as spectacle; they suggest that desire, fear, and longing occupy the same psychological terrain. Throughout *LOOK*, images become sites where opposing states remain unresolved rather than overcome.

Utilising his own body as an avatar, McKeever approaches self-portraiture fluidly. A passport photograph reduces the face to administrative code, while a dual-collaged triple self-portrait digitally reshapes the artist's body according to ideals of femininity circulated through contemporary image culture. Rather than documenting a fixed identity, these works record the psychological negotiations that precede one. Moving continuously between images, as viewers themselves must pace from side to side in order to activate the lenticulars, the works suggest that identity emerges through oscillation rather than certainty, through projection as much as recognition.

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In the exhibition's final room, the artist inhabits a hybrid sculptural form composed of a ceramic bust and stuffed body. Transformed into a claustrophobic reimagining of the American teenage bedroom, every surface is saturated with magazines, celebrity imagery, advertisements, devotional fragments, and aspirational icons. These contemporary idols become figures of worship, as we strive to embody the idealisation that we have encountered. Materialised within physical space, the visual excess of everyday life becomes impossible to escape. At the center lies the sculpture, exhausted in its continual suspension between self-construction and self-erasure.

Rather than dismissing fantasy as mere illusion, *LOOK* demonstrates how myth constructs reality. The work can be read as 'hyperreal', echoing Jean Baudrillard's theory that in the technological age, representations of reality become more „real“ than physical reality itself. McKeever's portraits immortalise their models, capturing a single moment which is then shared, circulated, printed, and reproduced. Through this multiplicity, the image gathers so much weight that it becomes more concrete than the individual, as the portrait usurps the subject. In response to these images, the viewer enacts their own self construction. We envy a body, desire an air of confidence, and begin to build our aspirations. Through the act of looking, we are able to try on different personas, and through appropriation and revision, decide what fits.

LOOK is both an imperative and a diagnosis. It names an act of spectatorship, a condition of contemporary culture, and the artist's own method. In a world increasingly content to mistake appearance for knowledge, McKeever insists that looking is only the beginning. The exhibition proposes that the image is no longer simply a window into the self; it is one of the principal sites through which the self is formed. To continue looking, beyond beauty, beyond fear, beyond certainty, is not merely an aesthetic act, but a psychological one.

Born in Los Angeles in 2001, Brent McKeever began his photographic practice in 2016 before graduating from New York University with a BA in 2024. While still a student, he produced editorial, album, and commissioned imagery for leading figures across music, fashion, and contemporary culture. His work has previously been presented in group exhibitions at Arthur Roger Gallery, New Orleans (2018, 2021), and Kristy Stubbs Gallery, Dallas (2018).