

Stephanie Syjuco

KQED

With Fabric Banners, Stephanie Syjuco Shares Patterns for Protest

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The day after Donald Trump won the electoral college, artist and UC Berkeley professor Stephanie Syjuco arrived on campus and realized that though the world felt irrevocably different, everything looked the same.

“It happened so quickly,” Syjuco says of Trump’s unexpected victory. “I realized there was no visual evidence of the anger and fear and the feelings of resistance.”

Before a campus rally on Nov. 10, Syjuco quickly designed and printed hundreds of 8.5-by-11-inch flyers reading “Equity, Diversity, Inclusion,” the watchwords of UC Berkeley’s Division of Equity and Inclusion.



Catherine Ceniza Choy, professor in the Department of Ethnic Studies holds the microphone; professor Stephanie Syjuco on the right. (Photo: Hulda Nelson | © UC Regents)

It was a simple way to create a sense of visual cohesion as faculty addressed the crowd of students, faculty and staff in Sproul Plaza, reassuring those assembled of the school's commitment to its ideals. But the flyers were flimsy and temporary; thinking of the inevitable number of marches and rallies to come, Syjuco wanted to create something with more heft.

She delved into the history of fabric banners, looking at the women's suffrage movement, AIDS activists ACT UP and Gran Fury, as well as the visuals of the Occupy demonstrations. Syjuco found the images of fabric banners bearing powerful slogans at protests throughout history to be durable, easily transported and quickly compressed.



Making banners for a Women's Social & Political Union rally, 1910. (Photo: Courtesy of The Women's Library)

“There’s something about making something to last,” the artist says. “It becomes visual evidence that holds history much longer.” Plus, Syjuco says, people do double-takes when they realize you put a significant amount of time and labor into creating a tangible statement of your convictions.

Much of Syjuco’s own artwork addresses authorship issues and the subversive benefits of freely sharing information online. Her FREE TEXTS project provides tear-off URLs for the dissemination of often radical texts. For the 2009 exhibition *Unsolicited Fabrications: Shareware Sculptures*, she fabricated 15 sculptures based on 3-D designs uploaded to Google SketchUp’s open source database.



Stephanie Syjuco's completed fabric banners. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

As she designed and tested out different methods of making banners, Syjuco didn't want the skills she gained to stay with her alone. In the spirit of disseminating her own learned and gathered information, Syjuco created a 41-page how-to on Google Docs. "I wanted to show how easy it can be," she writes in the introduction. What follows is a step-by-step guide to making 11 different felt and fabric banners, all designed with simple clip art silhouettes, vibrant colors and catchy slogans.

"No bigotry, no racism, no hatred, no business as usual!" reads one. "Once divided, always conquered," reads another.

"I really want these ideas to spread and be open-source and not be authored," Syjuco says of her templates and instructions. "This is not my idea," she adds, pointing back to the long history of artists' involvement in protest movements.

Beyond the online sharing, Syjuco led banner-making workshops at Oakland's Royal NoneSuch Gallery, San Francisco nonprofit Southern Exposure and the Oakland Museum of California in the days leading up to Trump's inauguration. "For a lot of the folks in attendance, it was the first time

they felt they could come together in productivity,” Syjuco says. “It became oddly festive, but also full of concern and anxiety.”



A giant scrap fabric pile, collectively donated by visitors and participants to the Reap What You Sew protest signage workshop at Southern Exposure. (Photo: Courtesy of the artist)

With the large-scale protesting efforts of Inauguration Day and the Women’s March now over, Syjuco says she will alter her tactics going forward to embrace mass production and distribution, with the intention of spreading messages of resistance across the landscape in a markedly physical way. “You walk out on the streets and you see nothing,” she says. “We need bumper stickers, we need flags hanging out of windows and patches on backpacks.”

For now, Syjuco worries about protests becoming commonplace. Will they blend into the background? Will outrage succumb to normalization? “At some point there will be fatigue,” she says. “What I’m most concerned about is how to create an interruption in the idea of a protest as business as usual.”

“As artists, we are going to need to keep waking people up,” Syjuco says. “We’re going to have to work very hard.”