

Stephanie Syjuco

‘I’m Interested in How Objects Reflect Cultural Moments’: Watch Artist Stephanie Syjuco Challenge the Hierarchies of Art and Fashion

As part of a collaboration with Art21, hear news-making artists describe their inspirations in their own words.

By artnet News
November 8, 2018



Production still from the "San Francisco Bay Area" episode of "Art in the Twenty-First Century," Season 9. © Art21, Inc. 2018.

Less than a week after the US midterm elections, the Smithsonian’s Renwick Gallery in Washington, DC will unveil its annual “Invitational” exhibition, which features the work of artists who mix traditional design and artistic practices with timely political commentary.

One of the four participants is the San Francisco-based “craftivist” Stephanie Syjuco. Born in the Philippines, Syjuco creates work that touches on a number of Big Issues:

immigration, capitalism, mass production, and ultimately, how authenticity is defined in a commodity-based culture.



Production still from the "San Francisco Bay Area" episode of "Art in the Twenty-First Century," Season 9. © Art21, Inc. 2018

In an exclusive interview for an episode on Bay Area artists in Art21's new season, Syjuco explained how all of these issues come together in *Counterfeit Crochet Project* (2007). For the project, Syjuco invited artists from around the world to select a luxury designer handbag—one that they wanted but couldn't afford, thanks to the five- and six-figure price tags—download a picture, and then make a bootleg version entirely out of yarn.

What sounds like a quirky, niche activity turned into a large-scale interactive art project that touched on socioeconomic disparity and the gulf of circumstance that separates those who produce luxury goods from those who consume them. "I'm interested in how objects reflect cultural moments," Syjuco told Art21, "and I think I'm trying to figure out why we value what we value."

Syjuco's recent projects address the intersection of the analog and the digital; she often uses hand-sewn textiles to approximate digital motifs. A recent series of portraits set individuals against a backdrop familiar to anyone who's used Photoshop: that gray-and-white checkerboard pattern that serves as a generic placeholder during photo editing.

While most people see the pattern as empty space, Syjuco—who hand-sewed a large textile version—is not most people. For her, it symbolizes "the idea that digital culture is not neutral... simply because there's a computer involved doesn't mean there isn't human labor."

Watch the full segment, which originally appeared as part of the "Art in the Twenty-First Century" television series on PBS, below. The Smithsonian's "Disrupting Craft: Renwick Invitational 2018" is on view from November 9–May 5, 2019.