

Stephanie Syjuco

# ART PRACTICE

## Stephanie Syjuco's "Native Resolution"

Published March 9, 2021



Syjuco, Stephanie: "Block Out the Sun," 2021, still from HD video, 5:00 looped.

Congratulations to Prof. [Stephanie Syjuco](#) on her solo show, which opened last week at [Catharine Clark Gallery](#). The cohesive, compelling exhibit focuses on representation as a

strategy for creating an ethnic 'Other'. Specifically, the artist's research into the problematic construction of an American history of the colonization of the Philippines at the turn of the last century. Concurrent histories of photography, race, ethnicity and nationality inform deeply biased structures foregrounding whiteness as a normative subject.

Borrowing from the visual language of photography, anthropology, and museum archives, *Native Resolution* examines how these disciplines go hand-in-hand with producing and proliferating images and documents of exclusion, generating a skewed collection that mirrors an American imagination built on ethnographic record and cultural Othering.

Contrary to the emancipatory hopes that Frederick Douglass held for photography, the medium in this show turns out to be objectifying the national other. In works like *Block out the Sun* the artists hands tend to the privacy of photographed persons by covering up their faces. Assembled as a video, the relentless rhythm of her respect-restoring ritual opposes the relentless rhythm of classification that provides the foundation for racial bias. Photography can be a tool both for emancipation and oppression, it all depends on whose project the tool serves.

Although not directly related to the colonial theme, a scientific image of a solar eclipse taken at the turn of the century and inverted by the artist as a negative (*Inverted Eclipse*), leverages other works in the show to a philosophical level: Occlusion has its own way of revealing realities we are otherwise blinded by.

The concerns Syjuco addresses in her work also manifest in her teaching and service: Prof. Syjuco promotes structural equity in all aspects of the Art Program at UC Berkeley. Most directly, in her role as the Director of the Undergraduate Program, she ensures that all students get access to the materials, safe spaces, and knowledge they need to create their unique and novel works.

The rich material is a result of Syjuco's creative research at the Smithsonian Institute during her Sabbatical last year as well as her life-long interest in how visual cultures produce meaning, both positive and negative.

The show will remain open until April 10, 2021. To see the show, book a COVID-conscious visit [here](#).

<https://art.berkeley.edu/news/2021/3/9/syjuco-native-resolution>