

**Stephanie Syjuco**

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## ‘Art Is a Recording Device’: Watch Artist Stephanie Syjuco Rearrange Images to Create New Perspectives on History

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

**Caroline Goldstein**, January 13, 2022



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

What is authenticity, really? That question is at the heart of California-based artist Stephanie Syjuco's practice, which spans photography, installation, sculpture, and other crafts.

In 2019, the artist delved into the massive archives of the Smithsonian to photograph documents that help tell the story of America. Syjuco wants the viewer to reconsider the authenticity of the archive, a system in which certain images depicting American exceptionalism and power are touted, while images of its oppressive past are squirreled away.

After taking her photos of the archive, Syjuco enlarged them and reassembled them to create new compositions, which are on view now at Ryan Lee Gallery in New York as part of the exhibition "Stephanie Syjuco: Latent Images."



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

In an interview filmed as part of Art21's Art in the Twenty-First Century series, Syjuco described a years-long practice investigating the value of certain images and objects.

"I'm interested in how objects reflect cultural moments, and I think I'm trying to figure out why we value what we value," she said.

Through investigations of counterfeit fashion designs, historical ethnographic images, and the history of protest in America, Syjuco's work probes the history that led to our current moment.

"One really important possibility for art is that it is a recording device," Syjuco said. "It's a subjective one, but it's a device that

somehow, through an individual or a group of individuals, processes a situation in the world, and then creates a subjective viewpoint of that as evidence.”



Stephanie Syjuco, *Reverse View: KKK* (from *Warshaw Collection of Business Americana Subject Categories: Ku-Klux-Klan, circa 1950s, National Museum of American History, Archives Center, NMAH.AC.0060.S01.01.KKK*), (2021). Courtesy of Ryan Lee Gallery

In a work titled *KKK Reverse* (2021), the artist pored through individual documents and images from a file related to the Ku Klux Klan, and then

photographed the back of them so that viewers wouldn't see the shameful images.

“That was my way of acknowledging that these things exist in the archive, just as they exist in American history, while simultaneously attempting to re-narrate or consider a new way of looking at it—which is to really remove the power structure under which an organization like that thrived.”

“I do not think at all that my work, in and of itself, is actually gonna change the system,” Syjuco told Art21. “What I’m interested in though is somehow reflecting a possibility. If what I’m doing is kind of like absorbing and processing the world around me, and it’s becoming political, I don’t think I have a choice anymore. It’s just my reality.”

*Watch the video, which originally appeared as part of Art21’s Art in the Twenty-First Century series, below. “Stephanie Syjuco : Latent Images” is on view at Ryan Lee Gallery through February 26, 2022.*

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