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Contemporary Art  
Museum St. Louis

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

***Stephanie Syjuco: Rogue States* explores the complexities of American culture**



Stephanie Syjuco, *Neutral Calibration Studies (Ornament + Crime)*, 2016. Wooden platform, neutral grey seamless backdrop paper, digital adhesive prints on laser-cut wooden props, dye-sublimation digital prints on fabric, items purchased on eBay and craigslist, photographic prints, live plants, neutral calibrated gray paint, 10 x 20 x 8 feet. Courtesy the artist.

**July 3, 2019 (St. Louis, MO)** - The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM) presents *Stephanie Syjuco: Rogue States*, an exhibition of new and recent work by the mixed-media conceptual artist. Born in the Philippines and raised in the Bay Area, Syjuco explores the complexities of charged concepts such as citizenship, immigration, and nationality through a wide range of media, including installation, photography, sculpture, and textiles. Her CAM exhibition extends her practice of linking history to present-day political narratives, especially as they are connected to image-making and the distortions of empire. *Stephanie Syjuco: Rogue States* is on view at the museum from September 6 through December 29, 2019.

The title work, *Rogue States* (2018), is part of the artist's ongoing exploration into the power and meaning of flags and banners. *Rogue States* consists of 22 flags, their designs reproduced from American Hollywood and European movies that depict "enemy nations" through a Western lens. Whereas Syjuco constructs a gallery of fictional outlaw states, the validity of such designations comes into question. A country's flag supports ideas of nationhood and national identity, even as it may instill fear or threaten.

Within much of Syjuco's work lies critiques of 21st-century capitalism as she borrows images from the internet and from the American marketplace. In her photographic series *Cargo Cults* (2016), she depicts herself as a foreign and "exotic" other. However, the clothing, props, and artifacts used to suggest authenticity are purchased from American shopping malls—all items she later redeemed for full value. Such acts of stealth, combined with the insertion of photo calibration charts within the images, are consistent with the artist's concept of "disruptive patterning." The everyday goods found in a chain store serve as counterfeit ethnography; the black-and-white portrait of the authentic "native" woman is defaced by the calibration chart.

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The terms “calibration” and “neutral”—which relate to the correction of a photographic image—appear in Syjuco’s work literally and metaphorically. CAM presents her platform installation *Neutral Calibration Studies (Ornament + Crime)* (2016), along with selections from her photographic series *Neutral Orchids* (2016). In the former, Syjuco’s contemporary “still life,” an extraordinary array of images and objects—many of the images taken from stock photos and Google Image searches—create a visual friction. A 20-foot wide wooden platform—reminiscent of a stage set with access to its neutral-gray painted backside—contains a multiplicity of coded narratives of empire and colonialism told through art history, Modernism, and ethnography. Freud’s analyst couch, Man Ray’s photograph of a white woman model holding an African mask, and a reproduction of the rattan chair in which Black Panther Huey Newton famously posed—these are just a few of the images in Syjuco’s channel-surfing vision. A work of three-dimensional illusions, potent visual iconography, evocative patterns and textures, *Neutral Calibration Studies (Ornament + Crime)* presents multiple connective crosscurrents that are anything but neutral.



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The photographic series *Neutral Orchids* presents “exotic” flowers that have been sprayed with industrial gray primer paint set against a neutral gray background. Orchids have been effectively cloned for mass-market consumption to enliven domestic settings. Syjuco’s process of physically neutralizing the brightly colored flowers literally deadens them to articulate the burden of representation.

During Syjuco’s two-week residency in St. Louis over the summer of 2019, she researched local archives for information relating to the 1904 World’s Fair, particularly records of the exposition’s Filipino Village, one of the notorious “living exhibits” that were open to fairgoers. Informed by her local investigations, Syjuco will create a multifaceted site-specific installation that goes beyond the focus of her research to explore the power of photography and the medium’s remarkable ability to capture a moment in time that may create long-lasting historical, political, and social narratives.

**Stephanie Syjuco** (b. Manila, 1974, lives and works in Oakland, California) creates large-scale spectacles of collected cultural objects, cumulative archives, and temporary vending installations. Her projects leverage open-source systems, shareware logic, and flows of capital, in order to investigate issues of economies and empire. She is featured in Season 9 of the acclaimed PBS documentary series *Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century*. Recent exhibitions include *Being: New Photography* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; *This Site is Under Revolution* at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art; and *Disrupting Craft: The 2018 Renwick Invitational* at the Smithsonian Museum of American Art. Syjuco is the recipient of a 2014 Guggenheim Fellowship Award and her work has been exhibited widely, including at MoMA PS 1, Whitney Museum of American Art, ICA Boston, and the 2015 Asian Art Biennial (Taiwan), among others. A longtime educator, she is an Assistant Professor in Sculpture at the University of California at Berkeley. Syjuco received her MFA from Stanford University and BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute.

This exhibition is generously supported by Nion McEvoy; Janet Mohle-Boetani, MD; and Seth Ammerman. The Artist Talk is generously supported by the Robert Lehman Foundation.

*Stephanie Syjuco: Rogue States* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Wassan Al-Khudhairi, Chief Curator, with Misa Jeffereis, Assistant Curator.

## Related Events

### Press & Patron Preview

Friday, September 6, 10:00–11:00 am  
Join artists and curators for an exclusive introduction to the exhibitions. RSVP to Eddie Silva at 314.535.0770 x313 or [esilva@camstl.org](mailto:esilva@camstl.org)

### Opening Night

Friday, September 6  
Member Preview 6:00–7:00 pm  
Public Reception 7:00–9:00 pm

### Artist Talk: Stephanie Syjuco

Saturday, September 7, 11:00 am

### RE: Living History

Saturday, December 7, 11:00 am



Contemporary Art  
Museum St. Louis

**All programs, dates, and times are subject to change.**

### About the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis

The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis presents, supports, and celebrates the art of our time. It is the premier museum in St. Louis dedicated to contemporary art. Focused on a dynamic array of changing exhibitions, CAM provides a thought-provoking program that reflects and contributes to the global cultural landscape. Through the diverse perspectives offered in its exhibitions, public programs, and educational initiatives, CAM actively engages a range of audiences to challenge their perceptions. It is a site for discovery, a gathering place in which to experience and enjoy contemporary visual culture. CAM is located in the Grand Center Arts District.

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