

RYAN LEE

RYAN LEE GALLERY LLC
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RLWindow
Stephanie Syjuco
Block Out the Sun
January 14 – March 12, 2022

RYAN LEE is pleased to present *Block Out the Sun*, a presentation of Stephanie Syjuco's recent video work which will be viewable from the High Line. Exhibited at the gallery in tandem with *Latent Images*, this work highlights Syjuco's interest in how to meaningfully and responsibly engage with archives—which are tasked with the difficult and at times subjective charge of reflecting historical realities that are frequently at odds with contemporary sensibilities and values.

This 2021 video bases itself on 2019 research Syjuco conducted in conjunction to her solo exhibition *Rogue States*, at the Contemporary Art Museum in St. Louis, Missouri. Parsing through local archives, libraries, and historical societies, Syjuco searched for photographic documentation of a faux Filipino village created for the 1904 World's Fair. The Philippines was a newly-acquired colony of the United States at the time, and as such Filipino culture was showcased for the American public via a living "human zoo," filled with 1,200 imported "natives" performing dances and rituals. These displays served dual purposes: as entertainment and as an ethnographic pedagogical tool for justifying racial hierarchy and white supremacy.

Though the photographic evidence of this spectacle found and examined by Syjuco have their place in American archives (they are in fact a record of a historical reality), the effect of constantly viewing these staged ethnographic images could also serve to perpetuate racist stereotypes, despite attempts to frame them as outdated or a relic of their time. In an attempt to "talk back" to the archives and the message they reflect, Syjuco rephotographed the archival images whilst using her own hands to block certain aspects of the images she rephotographed—thus shielding the subject from the viewer's gaze. "By physically blocking the images with my hands, I attempted a direct way of intervening with an archive, and thwarting the viewer's ability to fully consume the people and faces on display," Syjuco explains. "Over a century after the original photos of the Filipino Village were taken, my own body, sitting in the archives, becomes both a temporary shield and a marker of defiance, while at the same time acknowledging that the images still remain."

Block Out the Sun loops fifty-some images from this body of work. Viewers experiencing the video on the gallery's website will hear with each image transition the click of 100 cameras evolving over the past century.

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Stephanie Syjuco received her MFA from Stanford University and her BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. A long-time arts educator, she taught at Stanford University, California College of the Arts, San Francisco Art Institute, Mills College, and Carnegie Mellon University before joining the faculty at University of California, Berkeley in 2014.

Syjuco's work has been included in international biennials and exhibitions, including the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; ASU Art Museum, Tempe; Illingworth Kerr Gallery, Calgary; New Britain Museum of American Art, New Britain; Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs; Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, Stanford; 2015 Asian Art Biennial, Taiwan; 12th Havana Biennale; 2014 Bucharest Biennial; La Triennale di Milano; ADN Platform, Barcelona; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; Heinz Nixdorf Museums Forum, Paderborn; Museum of Modern Art, New York; MoMA PS1, New York; Noguchi Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Verein fur Kunst and Kultur, Berlin; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco; Z33 Space for Contemporary Art, Belgium; and ZKM Center for Art and Technology, Germany; among others. Her work is held in the public collections of Berkeley Art Museum; Columbus Museum of Art; Contemporary Museum Honolulu; Henry Art Gallery, Seattle; Museum of Fine Arts Houston; Museum of Modern Art, New York; New Museum, New York; Portland Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; San Jose Museum of Art; and Whitney Museum of American Art, among others.

Syjuco received a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship in 2019, a Guggenheim Fellowship Award in 2014, and a Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Award in 2009. Syjuco lives and works in Oakland, CA