

ARAM HAN SIFUENTES

ARTWORK

We Are Never Never Other brings together three of Aram Han Sifuentes' projects for the first time: *Protest Banner Lending Library*, *U.S. Citizenship Test Sampler*, and *A Mend*. Rooted in her experiences as an immigrant from South Korea, the artist developed her community-based textile projects to confront social justice issues including racial equity, economic disparities, and political disenfranchisement. She writes, "Much of my communal work revolves around sharing skills as a point of connection. We share sewing techniques to create multiethnic and intergenerational sewing circles, which become a place for empowerment, subversion, and protest."



Aram Han Sifuentes, *Protest Banner Lending Library*. Photo credit: University Galleries of Illinois State University. Courtesy of the artist.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Aram Han Sifuentes is a fiber, social practice, and performance artist who works to claim spaces for immigrant and disenfranchised communities. Her work has been exhibited at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation (St. Louis, MO); Jane Addams Hull-House Museum (Chicago, IL); Hyde Park Art Center (Chicago, IL); Chicago Cultural Center (Chicago, IL); Asian Arts Initiative (Philadelphia, PA); Chung Young Yang Embroidery Museum (Seoul, South Korea); and the Design Museum (London, UK).

Sifuentes is a 2016 Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow, 2016 3Arts Awardee, and 2017 Sustainable Arts Foundation Awardee. She earned her BA in Art and Latin American Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, and her MFA in Fiber and Material Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is currently an Adjunct Associate Professor at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

ARTIST STATEMENT

As an immigrant and a daughter of a seamstress, I learned to sew at age six. It was not a choice but rather a necessity to help my mother earn a living. In this way, sewing has ever since been an important part of me, my body memory, and my politics. Sewing is my medium to investigate identity politics, immigration and immigrant labor, possession and dispossession, citizenship and belonging, dissent and protest, and race politics in the United States.

My art practice situates itself at the intersection of fiber, social practice, performance, and pedagogy. At the core of my practice, I create socially engaged and materially rich projects in an 'art world' environment that are available and accessible for those who are disenfranchised, particularly for dispossessed immigrants of color.

I confront social and racial injustices against the disenfranchised and riff off of official institutions and bureaucratic processes to reimagine new, inclusive, and humanized systems of civic engagement and belonging. I do this by creating participatory and active environments where safety, play, and skill-sharing are emphasized. And even though many of my projects are collaborative and communal in nature, they incite and highlight individual's experiences, politics, and voice.

cultural frame

- How does Sifuentes' use of text and materials speak to local and global sociopolitical climates?
- In *U.S. Citizenship Test Sampler*, how does the use of text and symbolism examine and/or challenge American values?
- In what ways does Sifuentes' work challenge the viewer to reflect on their own intrinsic biases or preconceived notions about individuals perceived as "other?"



Aram Han Sifuentes, *A Mend*, 2011-2013. Hemmed jean scraps contributed by the work of 23 seamstresses and tailors. Photo credit: University Galleries of Illinois State University. Courtesy of the artist.

VOCABULARY

COMPOSITION

The arrangement of visual elements in an artwork; the way in which something is put together or arranged

CONTEMPORARY

Something that belongs to the present or current time

SUBJECT MATTER

What is being depicted in an image or artwork

SUBJECTIVE

Something that is open to interpretation; up to the viewer to decide

FORMAL QUALITIES

Refers to elements and principles of design such as line, shape, color, balance, movement, contrast, and unity

SYMBOLISM

Expressing an idea or quality through an image or design

SOCIALLY ENGAGED ART

Art that aims to improve the conditions of a particular community or the world at large¹

DISENFRANCHISED

Deprived of rights and privileges

FIBER ARTS

Art made of materials consisting of natural or synthetic fibers with a focus on the manual labor of the artist as a component of the piece

¹ Frasz, A., Sidford, H. (2017). Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practice. *Helicon Collaborative*. Retrieved August 10, 2019, from http://artmakingchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Mapping_the_Landscape_of_Socially_Engaged_Artistic_Practice_Sept2017.pdf

subjective frame

- What are your immediate emotional responses to Sifuentes' work?

structural frame

- How has Sifuentes utilized formal elements to evoke such feelings?
- How do Sifuentes' media choices affect the communication of ideas and concepts within her work?

ART-MAKING ACTIVITIES

- Inspired by *A Mend*, encourage your students to individually consider questions: Who is my community? What jobs are in my community? Prompt your students to interview individuals that do a particular kind of work. Use the information gathered to develop a social justice artwork that challenges misconceptions and stereotypes placed upon these groups or individuals.
- Consider the needs of your school community and work collaboratively to create a library that is not comprised of books.
- Inspired by the *Protest Banner Lending Library*, encourage your students to individually make a list of what they stand for and stand against. Create fabric (or paper) flags that say what they each stand for (on one side) and stand against (on the other side). String up and hang in the classroom or the school halls.

EVENTS

- **Friday, September 13, from 5 to 7pm:** Artist reception at University Galleries
- **Saturday, September 14 at noon:** Artist talk and workshop at University Galleries
- Field trip program, curator-led tours, and workshops available by appointment. Contact Tanya Scott at 309.438.5488 or tmcot3@ilstu.edu to register.

*Field trip stipends are available thanks to a Town of Normal Harmon Arts Grant.

***ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC**