



# CONTENTS

SIX **WE ARE NEVER NEVER OTHER**  
Aram Han Sifuentes

TEN **ARAM HAN SIFUENTES:  
THE GENIUS OF THE COLLECTIVE**  
Grace Kyungwon Hong

TEN  
+  
SIX **FORGET GREATNESS,  
WORK FOR PEACE**  
Kendra Paitz

TWENTY  
+  
FOUR **A MEND**  
A Collection of Scraps from Local  
Seamstresses and Tailors

THIRTY  
+  
TWO **U.S. CITIZENSHIP  
TEST SAMPLER**

FORTY  
+  
SIX **PROTEST BANNER  
LENDING LIBRARY**

SIXTY  
+  
SIX **OFFICIAL UNOFFICIAL  
VOTING STATION**  
Voting for All Who Legally Can't

EIGHTY  
+  
TWO **EXHIBITION VIEWS**  
University Galleries of  
Illinois State University

EIGHTY  
+  
NINE **ARTIST C.V.**

NINETY  
+  
FOUR **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**  
Kendra Paitz

NINETY  
+  
FIVE **CREDITS**

WE  
ARE  
NEVER  
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OTHER

ARAM  
HAN  
SIFUENTES



# ARAM HAN SIFUENTES

The Genius of the Collective

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# FORGET GREATNESS, WORK FOR PEACE

**Kendra Paitz**  
Director and Chief Curator,  
University Galleries of  
Illinois State University





# A MEND

## A Collection of Scraps from Local Seamstresses and Tailors (Chicago)

2011-present

The politics of immigrant sweated labor in the United States inform my project, *A Mend: A Collection of Scraps from Local Seamstresses and Tailors (Chicago)*. Because many immigrants do not speak English well and their credentials do not carry over to the United States, their employment options are usually limited. Many of them end up getting jobs that offer low wages, require repetitive manual labor, and are sometimes hazardous with no unions or collective bargaining protections. Inspired by my mother being a seamstress, I am interested in people who do sweated labor. Sweated laborers often work long and tedious hours for low wages, and often take extra work home or to places where work is unregulated.

I have been visiting tailors and seamstresses in the Chicago area. I have been using their services, talking to them about my project, asking them to donate their jeans remnants, and asking them:

- From where did you immigrate?
- How long have you been in the U.S.?
- How long have you worked as a seamstress or tailor?
- What type of work did you do before?
- How much do you charge to hem a pair of jeans?
- Do you enjoy this type of work?

While answering these questions, their stories slip out. I continue to visit many seamstresses and tailors in the area. Many of them have continued collecting jeans remnants for my project. From this collection of oral histories, I am interested in seeing the similarities among the immigrant workers' stories in order to understand a collective identity and hear about their hand labor.



# CIT

# US IZENSHIP

## A Community of Non-Citizens: Proving Worth of Citizenship Through Stitching Samplers

2012-present

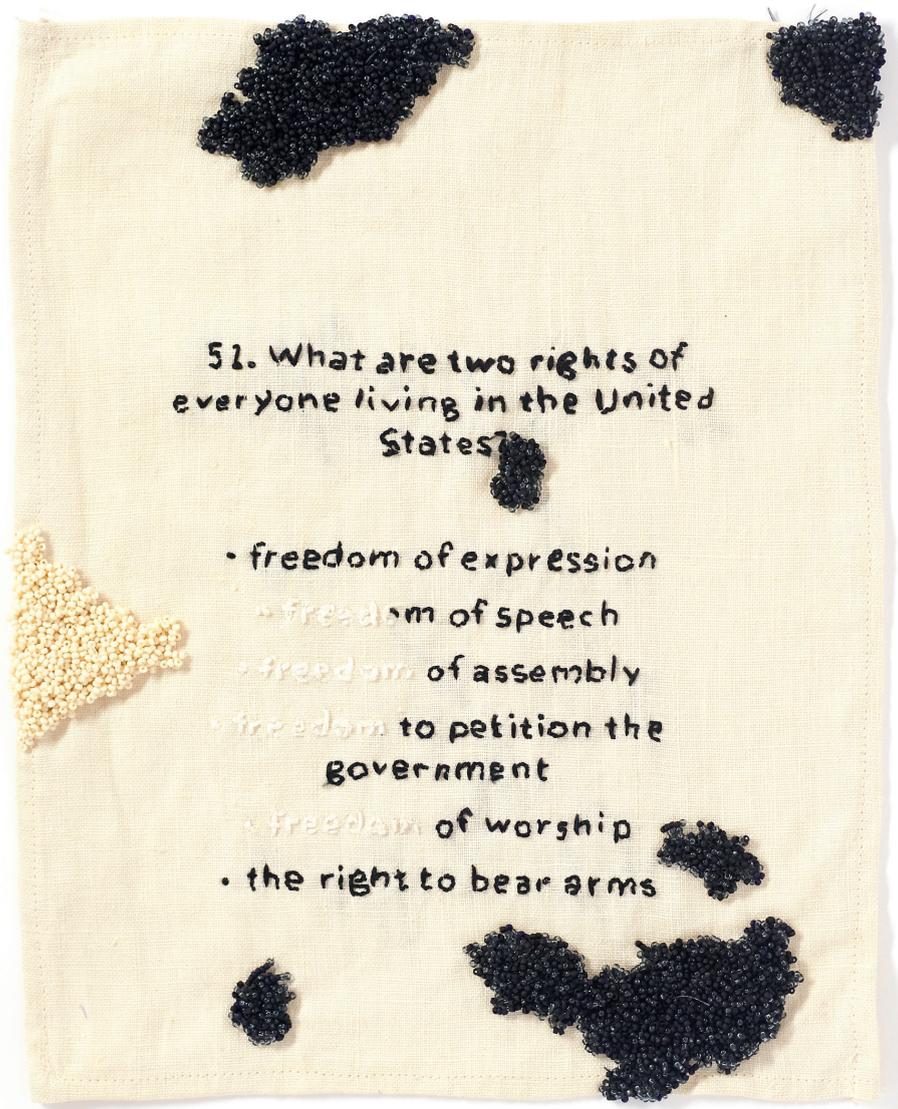
**U.S. Citizenship Test Sampler** addresses the social and collective nature of needlework's history, the socio-historic role of women, and the value of non-citizen communities. Sewn samplers were used in Colonial America to teach needlework and the alphabet to young children, and in 2012, I began hand-sewing the 100 civic study questions and answers for the U.S. Naturalization Test. In December 2016, I sold the completed work for \$680, then the cost of applying for naturalization. This action was motivated by the additional history of educated adolescent women embroidering decorative pictorial samplers that functioned as signifiers of worth to potential suitors. My citizenship was contingent on the sale of the work, and following that sale, I became a naturalized citizen in 2018. Through workshops, other non-U.S. citizens have contributed, and continue to

contribute, to the pool of samplers, both augmenting the project and building a community. Each of their works can be purchased for \$725, the current cost of applying for citizenship. If sold, the full amount goes to the maker of the sampler.

From start to finish, this project is about reclaiming the historical act of making samplers. The Colonial samplers were about assessing value – the value of the skills of the woman making them. In this industrial age, when embroidery and hand crafts are made by so-called invisible laborers, that assessment of hand work has been lost. This project reclaims this tradition, especially for the racialized immigrant working class.

PAGE 32 Aram Han Sifuentes  
working on U.S. Citizenship  
Test Sampler: 100 Questions  
and Answers, 2012.

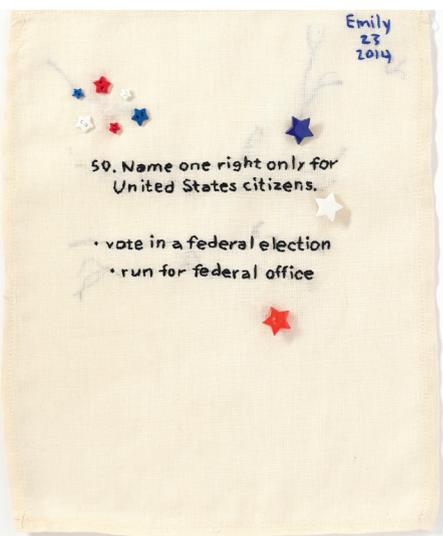
# TEST SAMPLER



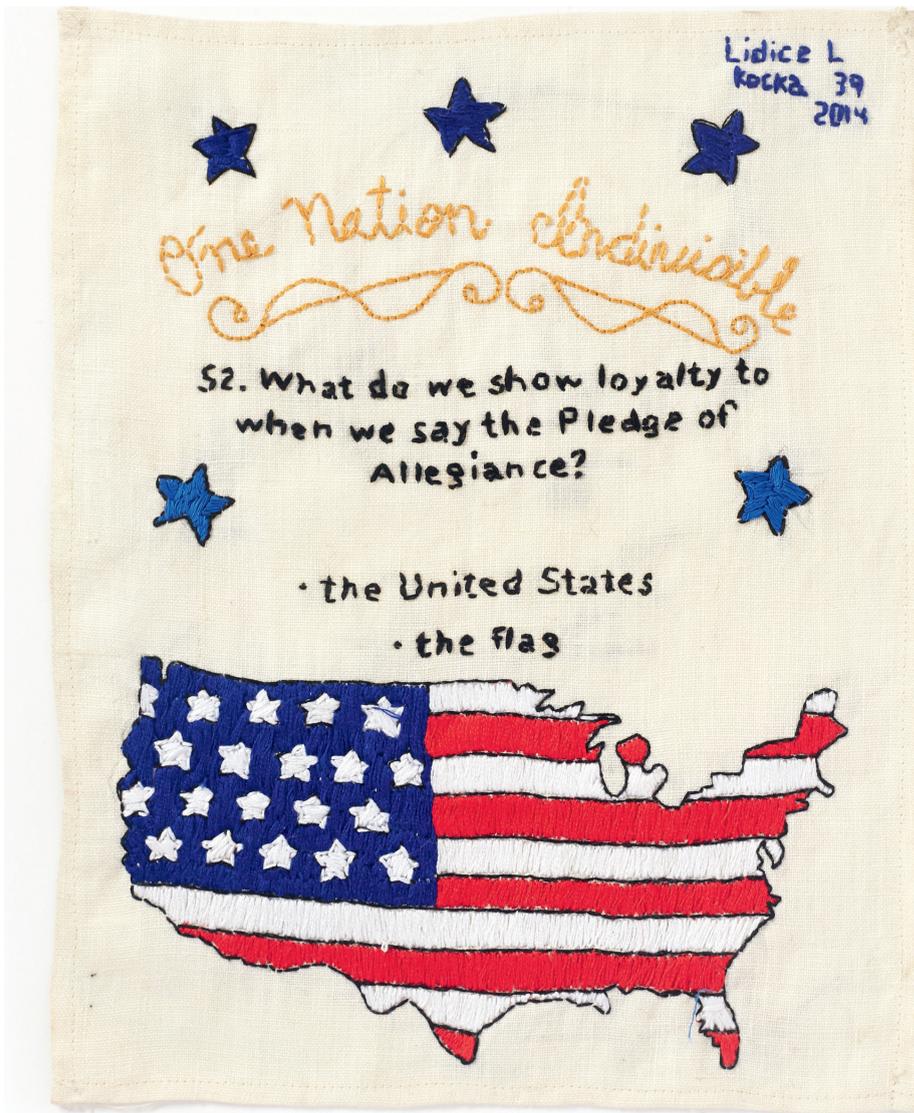
51 Veronica, 2014, Spain.



45.2 Chelsea, 2015, Ecuador.



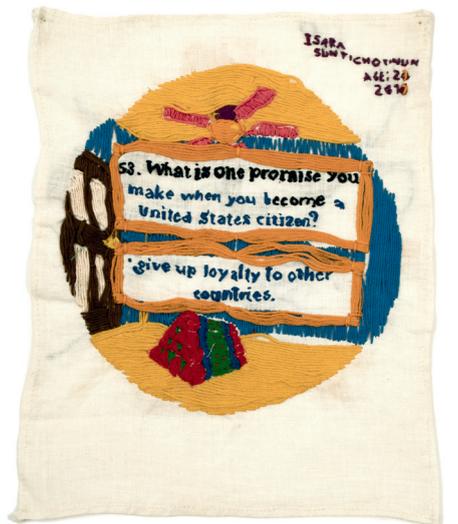
50 Emily, 2014, South Korea.



52 Lidice, 2014, Mexico.



53 Karina, 2014, Mexico.



53.2 Isara Suntichotimun, 2017, Thailand.



**Protest Banner Lending Libraries**

Aram Han Sifuentes' studio, Chicago, Illinois

University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal, Illinois

Tufts University Library, Boston, Massachusetts

Ithaca College Library, Ithaca, New York

Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca, New York

Yeyo Arts Collective, St. Louis, Missouri (from banners created for a temporary site at Pulitzer Arts Foundation, St. Louis)

Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, Toronto, Canada

Leather Archives and Museum, Chicago, Illinois

**Temporary sites banners gifted to organizations after the exhibition**

Tarble Arts Center, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, Illinois

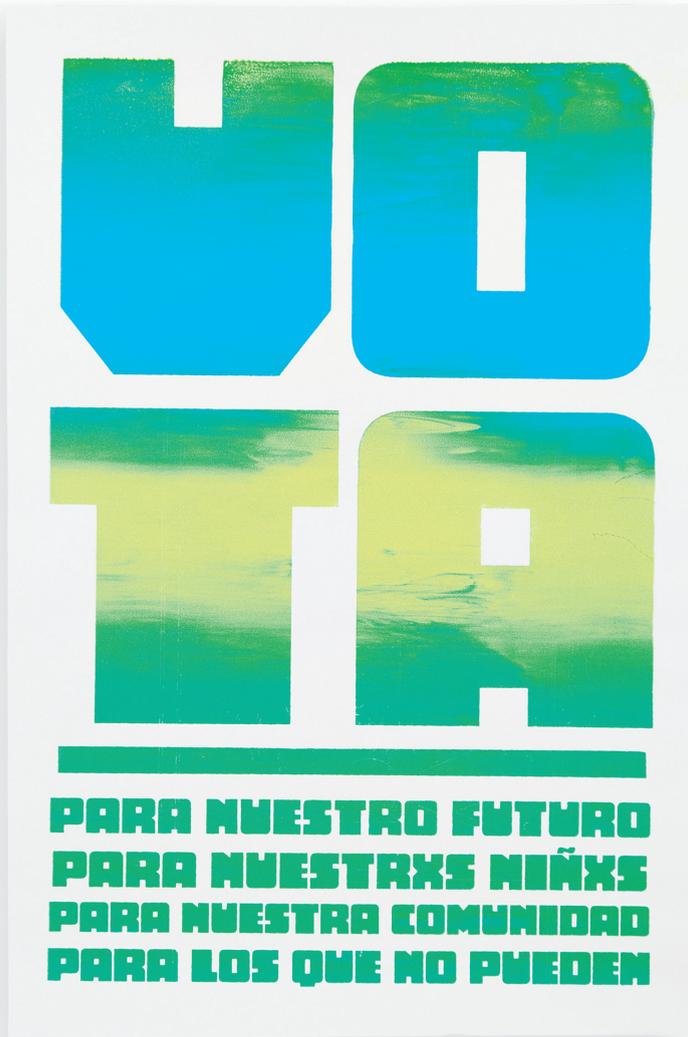
Asian Arts Initiative, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Cardinal Space, Baltimore, Maryland

**Upcoming**

Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles, California

5 Protest Banner Lending Library, installation view at Chicago Cultural Center, 2017. Photo: eedahm.



22-26 Objects included in the 50 Voting Kits for the Disenfranchised, a kit for people to activate their own Official Unofficial Voting Stations, 2020.

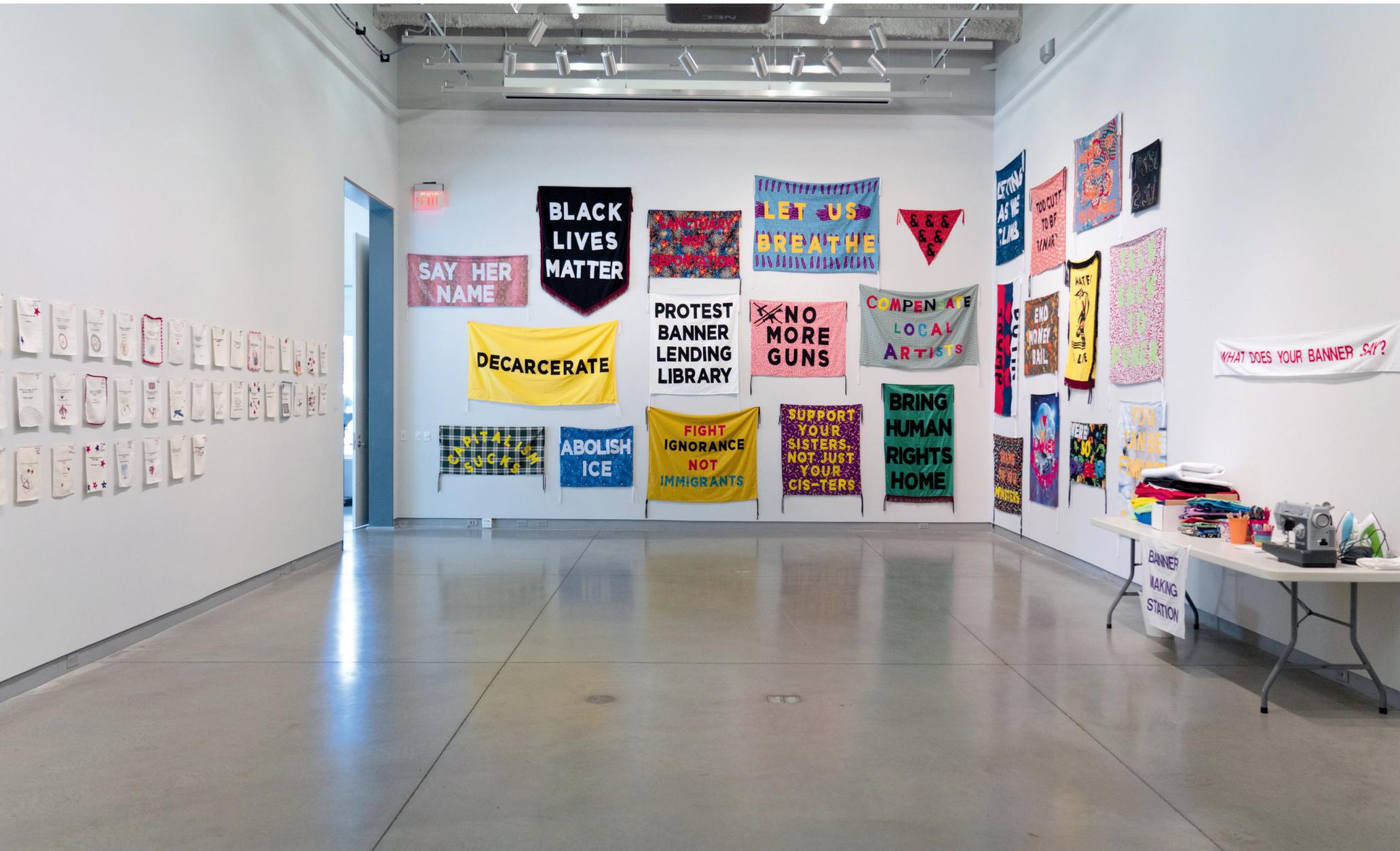


22 William Estrada, Vote for Our Future, For Our Children, For Our Community, For Those Who Can't, screen printed posters available in eight different languages, 18 x 12 inches. Photos: Thaib Wahab.

OFFICIAL UNOFFICIAL VOTING STATION



23 Official Unofficial Voting Station ballot box, 100 candidate ballots, and 100 issues ballots. Photo: Thaib Wahab.



1 PAGE 82 Aram Han Sifuentes, U.S. Citizenship Test Sampler: 100 Questions and Answers (detail), 2012–present. Cotton thread on linen, 25 feet x 8.5 inches. Installation view at University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal, 2019. Photo: Jessica Bingham.

2 Installation view of Aram Han Sifuentes: We Are Never Never Other at University Galleries of Illinois State University, 2019. Photo: Jessica Bingham.

EXHIBITION VIEWS

3 Protest Banner Lending Library donation and check-out station at University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal, 2019.

4 Brainstorming before creating banners at University Galleries of Illinois State University, Normal, 2019.

5 Installation view at University Galleries of Illinois State University, 2019.