

EDUCATOR GUIDE

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Discipline: Visual Art

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Stephanie Syjuco with a piece from her *Counterfeit Crochet Project*.
Still image from SPARK story, 2008.

SECTION I - OVERVIEW

SUBJECT

Stephanie Syjuco

GRADE RANGES

K-12 & Post-secondary

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Visual Arts

OBJECTIVE

Understand the development of Stephanie Syjuco's artwork and its relationship to broader social themes. Develop visual, written, listening and speaking skills through looking at, creating and talking about visual artworks. Develop an expressive visual vocabulary with which to address personal and/or social themes and ideas. Develop observational and representational skills by looking at and reproducing images accurately and thoughtfully.

STORY SYNOPSIS

Dealing with issues of globalization and outsourcing, Stephanie Syjuco's work intersects with some of the most heated debates of the 21st Century, but does so in a ways that are often surprising and playful. Sparks checks in on Syjuco as she exhibits her *Counterfeit Crochet Project* at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Group oral discussion, review and analysis, including peer review and aesthetic valuing as a group
Teacher-guided instruction, including demonstration and guidance
Hands-on individual projects in which students work independently
Critical reflection on personal expressions and how they are seen and received by others

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to the work of Stephanie Syjuco and the idea of conceptual art
- To provide context for the understanding of globalization, capitalism, labor outsourcing, and artwork with socially conscious themes
- To inspire students to create their own conceptual art pieces and learn about global societies and the history of capitalism

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

SPARK story on Stephanie Syjuco on DVD or VHS and related equipment or a computer with Internet access, navigation software, video projector, speakers and a sound card.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Access to libraries with up-to-date collections of periodicals, books, and research papers
- Pencils, pens, and paper
- Found objects, paper, cardboard, magazines, glue, scissors, colored pencils or markers.

INTELLIGENCES ADDRESSED

Interpersonal - awareness of others' feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
Intrapersonal - awareness of one's own feelings, emotions, goals, motivations
Spatial - ability to manipulate and create mental images in order to solve problems
Logical-Mathematical - ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, think logically



See more information on [Multiple Intelligences](http://www.kqed.org/spark/education) at www.kqed.org/spark/education.

SECTION II – CONTENT/CONTEXT

CONTENT OVERVIEW

San Francisco-based conceptual artist Stephanie Syjuco believes that politically engaged art can also be fun. Often dealing with issues of globalization and outsourcing, Syjuco's work intersects with some of the most heated debates of the 21st century but does so in a ways that are often surprising and playful. Spark checks in on Syjuco as she exhibits the "Counterfeit Crochet Project (Critique of a Political Economy)" at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

Much of Syjuco's work deals with what she likes to call "improper ways of interfacing with capitalism" -- bootlegs, knockoffs, and otherwise reworked commodities, taking high-tech or luxury items and remaking them as low-tech and debased. She has used simple, cheap materials like foam core, contact paper, scrap wood, and glue to make cheap, non-functional replicas of expensive consumer goods like digital cameras, cell phones, and mp3 players.

Playing on the booming black market trade of designer handbags and accessories, the "Counterfeit Crochet Project" assembles copies of these luxury items ironically -- and often beautifully -- rendered in the medium of crochet, a technique more closely associated with homespun creations. Syjuco began the project by creating a Web site to reach out to the crafting community and soon was able to enlist makers from all over the world to participate in her project.

Organizing and collecting the resulting works, Syjuco has presented the exhibition of the collection and associated workshops across the globe. Before the show in San Francisco, Syjuco exhibited the collection in locations across Europe and Asia, including Turkey, China, and the Philippines.

Syjuco's process loosely mirrors that of outsourced labor, by enlisting the work of producers abroad. But while corporations outsource manufacturing in order to take advantage of cheaper means of production,

the works that Syjuco elicits from her manufacturers is never offered for sale but remains the property of the people who make them. Syjuco's exhibitions underline this aspect of the project and the workshops allow the participants to get together to work, exchange ideas, and learn to crochet these unique versions of luxury goods.



Suzie's Chanel, 2007

<http://www.counterfeitcrochet.org/galleria-1.0b/demo/makergallery.htm>

Stephanie Syjuco earned a B.F.A. from the San Francisco Art Institute and an M.F.A. from Stanford University. She has shown nationally and internationally at P.S.1 Contemporary Arts Center, the Whitney Museum of American Art, The New Museum, SFMOMA, The San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art, and The Contemporary Museum Honolulu. Her work was included in the California Biennial at the Orange County Museum of Art. She has held residencies The Atlantic Center for the Arts, Headlands Center for the Arts, KALA Art Center, Skowhegan, and the Center for Metamedia, Czech Republic.

THE BIG PICTURE

Many theorists of contemporary culture have noted that in advanced capitalist societies the commodity performs multiple roles, functioning not only as the base unit of our economy but beyond that, as a privileged means of communication and identification. This means that, for better or worse, the commodity has come to express what we want to say about ourselves and the world we live in. We express and define ourselves through the commodities we consume.



Andy Warhol, *Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962.
http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79809

Far from being exempt from this condition, the art object is also a commodity, and some of the more savvy artists of the last century have addressed this issue through their work. In the 1960s, Andy Warhol transformed his artist's studio into what he called The Factory, where he enlisted others to make his work. He replaced his signature, considered the prime evidence of the artist's hand, with a rubber stamp of his name set in a common cursive typeface. Donald Judd, an artist associated with Minimalism who was also working in the 1960s, would design his objects, then "outsource" the production of his objects to professional manufacturers. In enlisting the help of an international community of knitters for her project, Syjuco is doing something similar, albeit more directly referencing the current conditions of labor outsourcing and globalization.



Donald Judd, *Untitled*, 1968
http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=81787

Conceptual artists have also addressed the commodity and means of production in their work. The artist Allan McCollum, for example, has spent much of his career investigating the question of how commodities take on personal and public valences. His *Surrogate Paintings* from the early 1980s are a series of objects that upon first glance appear to be simple black-painted canvases in frames. In fact, they are plaster objects that, though similar to one another, are all individually numbered, dated, and signed by the artist. They are, in a sense, the opposite of Warhol's objects: where Warhol used mass-production techniques to create art objects, McCollum's *Surrogates* are individual handmade works that mime the look of mass production.



Allan McCollum, *Collection of Forty Plaster Surrogates*, 1982-84
http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79653

TEXT RESOURCES

Benvides, Alice. *Pretty in Punk: 25 Punk, Rock, and Goth Knitting Projects*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2007.

Finkelstein, Nat, et al. *Andy Warhol: The Factory Years, 1964-1967*. Powerhouse Books, 2000.

Johnstone, Mark and Leslie Aboud. *Epicenter: Bay Area Art Now*. Chronicle Books, 2002.

Jones, Caroline. *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist*. University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Ross, Share and Bam Ross. *Punk Knits: 26 Hot New Designs fro Anarchist Souls*. Stewart, Tabori, and Chang, 2007.

Watson, Steven. *Factory Made: Warhol and the Sixties*, Pantheon, 2003.

RESOURCES – WEB SITES

Stephanie Syjuco's Web site
<http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com>

Counterfeit Crochet Project website
<http://www.counterfeitcrochet.org>

Crochet Me – A Web site with patterns, technique and everything you need to know to start crocheting
<http://crochetme.com>

Wikipedia entry on Stephanie Syjuco
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephanie_Syjuco

Wikipedia entry on Allan McCollum
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allan_mccollum

Wikipedia entry on Donald Judd
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Judd

VIDEO RESOURCES

The Life and Times of Andy Warhol – Superstar. Dir. Chuck Workman, 87 mins.

Andy Warhol, A Documentary Film
Available for purchase at <http://www.pbs.org>
Dir. Ric Burns, 4 hours.

Craft in America, a PBS Television Series.
Educator Guides and video resources available at
<http://www.pbs.org/craftinamerica/>

SPARK story about a group exhibition including Stephanie Syjuco's work in 2004 at local arts organization, Southern Exposure.
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/places/spark/profile.jsp?id=9680>

More Artists working with Textiles and Fiber Arts featured on **SPARK**:

Michael Swaine
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=5030>

Consuelo Jimenez Underwood
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=4302>

Adela Akers
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=15846>

Ann Von Mertens
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/people/spark/profile.jsp?id=4163>

Southern Exposure, a local arts organization that featured a group exhibition including Stephanie Syjuco's artwork in 2004.
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/places/spark/profile.jsp?id=9680>

BAY AREA FIELD TRIPS

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
701 Mission Street @ 3rd
Hours:
Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat & Sun: noon – 5 pm
Thu: noon – 8 pm
Closed Mondays and major holidays.
Admission:
\$7 regular/\$5 seniors, students & teachers
Free for YBCA Members

Imagiknit Yarn and Knitting Store
3897 18th St. (18th and Sanchez)
San Francisco, CA 94114
(415) 621-6642

Hours:
Monday-Saturday 11-6:30, Sunday 11-4

SPARK Textile and Fiber Art Walking Tour
<http://www.kqed.org/arts/spark/page.jsp?id=18>

SECTION III – VOCABULARY

DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY AND WORDS AND CONCEPTS IN THE SPARK STORY

Aesthetic

Appreciation of beauty

Black market

Illegal “underground” market which often develops when economies are in difficulty and consumer goods are scarce

Bootleg

To make, sell, or transport goods for sale illegally, for example an unauthorized audio or video recording. Historically the term was used in relation to alcohol sold or smuggled illegally during the Prohibition era in the 1920s.

Collaborative

To work together

Conceptual Art

Artwork in which the idea is primary rather than the object produced. The best medium is chosen to achieve the desired effect. The term is derived from an art movement beginning in the 1960s and 70s in which artists deliberately sought to avoid using fine art traditional materials and approaches to art making.

Counterfeit

Copy in order to deceive or defraud; forge

Corporate

A business set up as a corporation; of the business world

Craft

Handiwork requiring specific skills; also, an occupation, trade or pursuit requiring manual dexterity and the application of artistic skill.

Dialogue

Discussion or exchange of views between two or more people

Didactic

Intended to instruct or teach

Empower

To develop a sense of authority or confidence

Exclusivity

The preserve of the few; shutting people out

Globalization

The process whereby businesses, technologies, or markets become interdependent across the world

Interface

Come between; point of interaction between two systems

Metaphor

A picture painted by words - that is a word or phrase used to describe something to which it is not literally applicable.

Outsource

An arrangement whereby a company provides services for another company, services that could have been provided in-house, and have generally been so in the past.

Replica

Copy

Sanctioned

Agreed to, given support or approval

Smoke screen

Used to hide behind

Sweatshop

A working environment with very difficult or dangerous conditions, usually where the workers have few rights or ways to address their situation

SECTION IV – ENGAGING WITH SPARK

STANDARDS-BASED ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION POINTS

Engaging with Conceptual Art

In the **SPARK** segment Stephanie Syjuco is described as a Conceptual artist. Ask students to explain what they understand by the term and to give examples of Conceptual artists if they can.

Introduce the ideas underpinning the Conceptual Art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, for example that art should be mainly about ideas instead of objects. Explain that Conceptual artists usually set aside the traditional processes of art like painting or carving, and their work can confuse because it does not necessarily fit conventional definitions of “art”, nor is it always exhibited in the spaces we associate with viewing art, such as galleries or museums. The term can be applied to many artists and approaches and can be understood more as an attitude toward making art than a movement defined by a single style.

Play the **SPARK** story about Stephanie Syjuco and ask students to consider in what ways she is a Conceptual artist. Discuss the following questions with the class.

- What ideas are central to her work?
- What values does her work celebrate? Describe her approach to artwork as presented in the segment.
- Does the work belong in an art gallery? Where else is/could the Counterfeit Crochet Project be exhibited?
- Syjuco’s work engages with political ideas – what political ideas underpin her work?

Explore the playfulness and fun in Syjuco’s artwork. Do students find the work witty? Challenging? Thought provoking? Disturbing? How would they describe their responses? Encourage them to avoid evaluating the work in terms of *good* or *bad*, but to

explore the use of medium, the spirit and creativity in the work. Ask students to write a paragraph summarizing their responses.

For further analysis, ask students to write an in-depth description of one piece of work that they find particularly interesting, referencing the **SPARK** segment or Syjuco’s Web site:

http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/p_counterfeit_crochet.html.

Ask students to describe the piece and comment on the ideas explored or generated.

RELATED STANDARDS - VISUAL ARTS

Grade 4

1.5 Describe and analyze the elements of art (color, shape/form, line, texture, space and value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

Grade 8

4.1 Students analyze, assess, and derive meaning from works of art, including their own, according to the elements of art, the principles of design, and aesthetic qualities.

4.2 Develop a theory about the artist's intent in a series of works of art, using reasoned statements to support personal opinions.

4.3 Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.

Grades 9-12 Proficient

3.3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

Grades 9-12, Advanced

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing

4.2 Identify the intentions of artists creating contemporary works of art and explore the implications of those intentions.

5.0 Connection, Relations & Applications

5.2 Compare and contrast works of art, probing beyond the obvious and identifying psychological content found in the symbols and images.

SPARKLERS

Topics for further discussion and exploration:

- ❖ Suggest students research the Yerba Buena exhibit "[The Way That We Rhyme: Women, Art, Politics,](#)" Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco, CA. The exhibition ended in May of 2008, but images can still be found online www.ybca.org
- ❖ View work by other Conceptual artists by visiting a local gallery or museum. Ask students to give a short report to the class about their visit.

Counterfeiting

Replicate Syjuco's Counterfeit Crochet Project by asking students to search the internet for designers whose work they like or have heard of. Write the names on the board. Students could also draw on designers chosen by Syjuco, such as Fendi, Gucci, Chanel, Prada, etc.

Explain that they are going to "make low-tech replicas of high end products out of pictures, cardboard and glue" (from the **SPARK** segment on Syjuco) or from other found objects and materials.

Direct them to choose a product to copy such as a t-shirt, household item, mobile phone, electronic device, etc. There is a wealth of designer product images to be found on the internet, but advise students to be mindful that they are going to attempt to replicate the product, so they should start with something challenging but reasonable to recreate.

Encourage students to reference the design, but to rework the object in any way that they see fit, using the materials at hand. Remind them of Stephanie Syjuco's quote from the Spark segment, "The final results may or may not bear resemblance to the originals, which is an interesting part of the translation."

Review the results in the whole group. What have students fabricated? What materials have they used? What skills have they demonstrated? How does their work reference the original? How does it *translate*?

Reflect on the project.

- How did students feel taking "liberties with their translations, changing colors, adding

materials (cardboard, hot glue, etc.) to suit their needs"? (Syjuco)

- How did they feel about copying a designer's work – counterfeiting a product?
- Does it impact their view of exclusivity?

SPARKLER:

Direct student to the *Counterfeit Crochet Project* templates for crocheting knockoff logos:

http://www.counterfeitcrochet.org/jpgs/knockoff_logos.pdf

Suggest that students create their own logo design patterns for their product.

Exploring Stephanie Syjuco's Ideas

Divide the class into groups and ask each group to research one of the following concepts, focusing on one product, service or artist to illustrate the idea.

Allow 20 minutes for the research.

- Globalization
- Outsourcing
- Socially conscious art

Ask each group to report back and then initiate a discussion of each concept and the way the product, service or artist illustrates it. Explore the relevance and significance of the issue in today's world.

Ask each student to write a short article, blog or op-ed piece on the issue they have researched and its relevance today.

Conclude by referring back to Stephanie Syjuco's work and artistic process. How effectively does her artwork explore, reflect on or challenge these issues?

Globalization Mixed Media Collage

To explore globalization as a concept through art, explain to students that they will create a mixed-media collage to represent the idea of globalization. They will be representing different cultures and how these cultures are coming together in today's world.

Prepare for the project by setting it up in advance so that students have time to assemble materials for the collage before the class.

Organize students into small work groups and give them time to look through their images, newsprint, symbols, fabric, labels, products etc. and discuss how they want to represent their ideas.

Provide materials such as glue sticks, scissors, paper, colored pencils and markers and challenge students to assemble a mixed media collage to illustrate or symbolize the concept of globalization using their selected materials.

Ask each group to present their collage to the class, encouraging members of the group to describe the rationale for their choices. Invite discussion from the class.

- How does the collage address the theme?
- Does it make its point effectively?
- Do the objects work together?
- Does it invite response?

Talking about Art & Politics

Ask students to examine Syjuco's Counterfeit Crochet Project as a critique of a capitalist political economy. In what ways is she querying and offering a different model of production and consumption?

"Today, the factory as a means of production in the era of late-capitalism and transnational globalization, where almost all consumer goods are fabricated overseas by anonymous laborers, raises for me the issue of what it now means to individually hand-make that which was previously made by a factory or machine." (Syjuco)

Syjuco's artist statement can be found here:

<http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/statement.html>

For more information about SPARK and its educational content, including the Visual & Performing Arts Standards, visit the Web site at <http://www.kqed.org/spark/education>.



For more information about the California State Content Standards, visit the CA Dept. of Education at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>

Ask students to respond to the questions Syjuco is asking:

- Does her notion of individually-made products constitute a political act?
- Does it make a difference that producers keep their work?
- Is it important that they are not working for someone else?
- Does it matter that they are not seeking to profit from someone else's labor?

Initiate a discussion on these questions and encourage students to think about a time when production was organized differently.

SPARKLER:

For more in-depth ideas about capitalism, direct students to research Karl Marx's Theory of Alienation, formulated in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx believed that workers experienced feelings of alienation as a direct result of contributing to a capitalist society. Ask students to discuss whether or not they agree with his theory.

RELATED STANDARDS - VISUAL ARTS

Grades 9-12, Proficient

1.0 Artistic Perception Impact of Media Choice
1.5 Analyze the material used by a given artist and describe how its use influences the meaning of the work.

1.0 Artistic Perception

Analyze Art Elements and Principles of Design
1.3 Research and analyze the work of an artist and write about the artist's distinctive style and its contribution to the meaning of the work.