

RE-ENACTING CRAFT IN TIMES OF WAR: ALLISON SMITH AND STEPHANIE
SYJUCO'S ACTIVIST ART

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree

Master of Art

In

Art: Art History

by

Jessie Lauren Zechnowitz

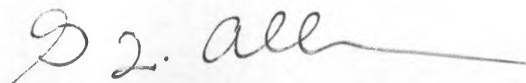
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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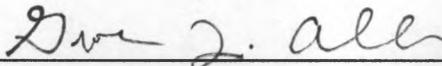
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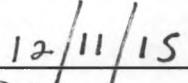
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San Francisco, California
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This thesis explores the artistic and political significance of the work of Allison Smith and Stephanie Syjuco, focusing on the manufacture of objects as a type of performance art, and allusions to historical conflict in postmodern performative practice. By looking at how these artists interface with craftivism, performance art, and re-enactment, I have highlighted how their work alters contemporary understandings of historical events. This recontextualization of historical events is a purposeful political mode of artistic activism.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this Thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Gwen Allen for her guidance through the graduate program and her time and energy helping me with many revisions. Also thank you to Lily Zechnowitz, Kingston Lim, and Michele Evets for your love and support. Janet Houk, my grandmother, deserves the most thanks. She always encourages me to seek knowledge, be disciplined, and look for the light.

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Introduction

Craftivism, Performance, and Re-Enactment

Allison Smith and Stephanie Syjuco are two contemporary artists who weave together factors that define the contemporary condition: military conflict and the production and dissemination of goods. The work of Syjuco and Smith illustrates the merging channels of craftivism, performance art, and re-enactment under the banner of contemporary art. This thesis explores the artistic and political significance of the work of these two artists, focusing on the manufacture of objects as a type of performance art, and allusions to historical conflict in postmodern performative practice.

The element that most heavily weighs on the master narratives of human history is war. War makes everything both possible and impossible, it destroys and creates social order, cultural expression, and economic circumstance. Allison Smith notes that craft can be a device to help negotiate the terrain of war and provide a mode of expression that plays a strong role in the definition of national identity.¹ Craft has been historically intertwined with war. Women have traditionally expressed their political opinions through quilting, flag and banner-making, and sewing clothing and supplies for troops. Warfare stimulates national industry and import embargoes have historically made it necessary to make the tools of daily life by hand. Allison Smith's *The Muster* and Stephanie Syjuco's *Afghanicraftistan* are two contemporary art projects that re-enact

¹ Allison Smith, "The Politics of Craft: A Roundtable" in *The Craft Reader*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic), 621.

specific craft functions of wartime. Both projects shed light on trade and identity-production during the cultural shifts that are sparked by war.

In Spring of 2004, Smith was commissioned by the Public Art Fund to create a project for *In the Public Realm*, a program for emerging artists. Smith's project, *The Muster*, was a "polyphonic marshalling of voices" wherein participants built encampments under the banner of nonviolent warfare and in the guise of a Civil War re-enactment. About a decade later, Stephanie Syjuco's *Afghanicraftistan* enacted another participant-based project where war and craft sowed the seeds for a site-specific workshop. Syjuco's participants traveled to a U.S. military base to weave textile panels based on designs gleaned from Afghan War Rugs.

During *The Muster*, Smith performs a re-enactment of a Civil War Muster, in which a large group of enlistees create encampments for the inspection of the Mustering Officer, as well as the general public [Fig. 1]. The idea of "inspection" is a thread that runs through Smith's entire project, where an examination of issues that were at the forefront of U.S. domestic policy during the Civil War are contextualized through a revival in the present moment. Smith calls her practice "trench art" and Rebecca Schneider describes it as "wartime-art dug out of the spaces between times, between fields of inquiry, and between media."² This definition can also apply to Stephanie

² Rebecca Schneider. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment*. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 12.

Syjuco's *Afghanicraftistan*. Syjuco's project re-enacts a domestic wartime activity that is still occurring in the present: the hand-weaving of weaponry motifs [Fig. 2].

What is altered in Syjuco's performance is time, but also spatial location. She is performing a traditional act in a location that is different (geographically and culturally) from its origination. Syjuco uses art practice to perform an act of solidarity by drawing attention to domestic textile workers in Afghanistan, an act of doubling by mirroring the making of their goods, and an act of inversion by using contemporary art practice to articulate a real socio-economic condition. The weaving itself is a metaphor for the channels of space and time that we all navigate by taking part in social life. These two projects are contemporary expressions of national diplomatic relations. Where *The Muster* focuses on inward-facing domestic issues in the U.S. such as racism and industrialization via reference to the Civil War, *Afghanicraftistan* uses the war on terrorism to take aim at international relationships and how they are negotiated through commerce and the territorial divisions that define human rights.

Although Smith's work may seem like a motley crew of pacifists spinning a utopian cocoon, *The Muster* actually activates political discourse and alters the public perspective of historical war. By re-conceptualizing the history of war, Smith highlights current gubernatorial debates and questions the finality of any war. She asks the audience to contemplate whether war creates solutions at all. Syjuco creates a space where the reality of warfare becomes glaringly apparent as it trickles into every aspect of social life.

By humanizing an “enemy,” she bridges a gap between geographic locations and disrupts the system of media dissemination that ignores the civilian plight. *Afghanicraftistan* engages with an American art world audience to defy and expose the Department of Defense’s use of craft as a weapon of war rather than a builder of community. Both artists employ craftivism as a technique to alleviate the meanness of conflict; they lament the decline of handmade goods, which has been hastened by a free trade market system that exacerbates international conflict and wounds domestic manufacture.

Craftivism: A History of Non-Violence

Craftivism is a hybrid term, used to highlight the connection between the ideas of *craft* and *activism*. Although the term was first coined by the Church of Craft Collective, Betsy Greer brought it to a wider audience and imbued it with the meaning and connotations that are now attached to it. Craftivism is politically purposeful crafting, and can take many forms. Craftivism does not exclusively refer to art, or war for that matter. The term is tied more closely to activism; however, many contemporary artists, including Smith and Syjuco use craftivism to make statements about war. From Marianne Jørgensen’s *Pink M.24 Chaffee* (2003), an army tank that the artist covered in a pink knitted blanket, to Ginger Brooks Takahashi’s *an army of lovers cannot fail* (2004-ongoing), a series quilting workshops – craftivist artwork is usually soft sculpture or textile work, and the causes that it champions are monumentally multiple.

Greer states that the word's usage came about because of the simultaneous occurrence of: "frustration at the rule of materialism, the continuing quest for the unique, and the rise of the Internet."³ Greer converted her frustration at mass-produced goods into a search for the handmade wherein the Internet provided her with a platform to find comrades in arms. Since her 2002 discovery, the term has exploded in art historical discourse, spawning texts like *Extraordinary Craft*, *The Craft Reader*, and *Handmade Nation*. But perhaps it has been lurking in a latent state since long before then.

Kirsty Roberston notes that,

Craft played an important role in numerous 1970's and 1980's political actions. Fast forward thirty years and textiles [are] again at the forefront of a politicized praxis, ranging from anarchist knitters braving the tear gas at mass protests to a widespread resurgence of knitting in public.⁴

In the 1970's and 1980's, second wave feminism incorporated craft as a tactic for protest. Knitters participating in an antinuclear protest created large banners and protest signs during the Greenham Women's blockade of Brawdy Airfiend in Pembrokeshire in 1982, which is one example of how craft played an implicit role in political actions.⁵

Meanwhile, feminist artists like Judy Chicago, Faith Ringgold, and Magdalena Abakanowicz have also used political craft in the context of their artistic practices.

³ Betsy Greer, "Craftivist History," in *Extraordinary/Craft and Contemporary Art*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 179.

⁴ Kirsty Robertson, "Rebellious Doilies and Subversive Stitches," in *Extraordinary/Craft and Contemporary Art*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 185.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

Chicago used soft sculpture to create elaborate installations, dealing with themes of gender, history, and identity. Ringgold's painted story quilts became well-known tapestries depicting racial conflicts in the United States. Abakanowicz produced large disembodied figural sculptures made from fibers that highlighted the human anonymity of the modern condition. Craftivism was not coined yet, but the feminist reclamation of craft was a steady current running through feminist art and political art of the time.

It could be argued that one can't fully engage in craftivism as an individual. Collective labor is one of the major tenants of craftivism. In American history, collective effort and conversation during quilting bees, the embroidering of suffragette banners, or the manufacture of state flags, has activated the handiwork of craft with political meaning. Quilting bees have been sites of subversive political discourse since at least the American Revolution. Patterns like Clay's Choice, Whig's Rose and Whig's defeat were proclamations of political affiliations during the American Revolution. During the Civil War, abolitionist quilt patterns emerged, like Log Cabin and Underground Railroad.⁶ The embroidery and banners created for the suffragette movement gave women a way to create visual messages that was portable and reusable (unlike paper signs). And likewise, artistic practices that engage craft frequently insist upon its collective dimension, enlisting multiple participants and thus questioning traditional modes of artistic production and originality.

⁶ Texas Tech University. "Listening to Herstory: A Short History of Quilting in the United States, 1620 Today." <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/museumttu/lll/Lubbock%20Lake/Quilting%20in%20America.pdf> (accessed September 9 2015).

Of course the role of craft in politics is not limited to the United States. Around the world people have enlisted the use of sewing and textiles to champion both resistance and patriotism: from patchwork *arpilleras* made during Pinochet's reign in Chile, to remembrance quilts created in post-apartheid South Africa, craftivist practice is a world-wide phenomena. Between 1931–1945, Japanese kimonos were decorated with a variety of striking propagandistic and patriotic themes. Afghani rug weavers fit into this tradition as well.

Contemporary craftivists are informed by the long history of political craft activism that came before them, and they carry the banner of peaceful protest proudly into the 21st century. The city of Calgary's well-known Revolutionary Knitting Circle writes about craftivism in their manifesto, advocating craft as the use of "constructive and non-violent tools for opposing the dominant corporate models of production."⁷ Craftivism provides a non-violent outlet for politically-minded people to express their frustration at current events, but also at the violent tactics that shape those events. In the article "Craft Hard, Die Free," Black and Burisch point to performativity, mindfulness, tacit knowledge, skill-sharing, DIY, Anti-Capitalism, and activism as a redefinitions rendered by craftivism on all the attendant connotations within the field of craft.⁸

⁷ Black, Anthea. "Craft Hard, Die Free: Radical Curatorial Strategies for Craftivism in Unruly Contexts." In *The Craft Reader*, edited by Glenn Adamson. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 612.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 618.

Syjuco and Smith's projects both fall into the space inhabited by craftivism where memory, community, material comfort, politics, and subversion live together. Smith uses the drag of traditional American war lore to provide an arena for collective making and community building. Syjuco suggests that through collective crafting, the bonds of solidarity can reach through space and time to form a symbolic embrace between the citizens of countries that have recently engaged in armed combat. Syjuco's brand of market subversion is sewn with the thread of anti-commercialist interest, emphasizing the anti-capitalist territory of craftivism. Rather than outwardly demonstrating through protest, or more direct political action, craftivism encourages the artist(s) and the audience to turn inward and think about the things that affect them on a personal level. Of course, *the personal is the political*, and the logic is that through personal introspection, clarity can be reached, alliances can be made, and action can be planned. As a result, the action does not have to involve the national government, but can be three people, playing dress up, camping out, and sewing together.

Performance: Objet d'Art

Smith and Syjuco engage with craftivism to create objects that reveal socio-economic realities. They also engage with craftivism in an explicitly performative capacity. In their practices, Smith and Syjuco invite participants to make objects with them in front of an audience. To watch the manufacture of these objects is to witness an

object coming into the world and taking form, and to watch is also to question and wonder, “*Why* is this object being made?” A concept is thus revealed through a performative manufacture. Both Smith and Syjuco employ this method of productive performance to draw attention to political conflict and social realities.

Performance art from the 1960’s evolved out of a widespread desire to challenge traditional visual arts. The dematerialization of the art object, through its non-reliance on conventional media, was one way to escape from modes of representation that no longer seemed meaningful. The artist’s body replaced the object as the medium of artistic expression that would be placed in front of the scrutiny of an audience. The body, and in extension, the identity of the artist, nullified the value of material art objects. This erasure is a purposeful denial of the art market and its trappings. The death of the object was seen as purifying and necessary in performance art theory.

But what if an object *can* somehow subvert the monetary system? After all, it could be argued that dematerialization did not achieve this goal. Documentation of performance pieces became a central and saleable part of many “ephemeral” practices. Two of the most well known works of performance art, Chris Burden’s *Shoot* (1971) and Yves Klein’s *Leap Into the Void* (1960), reached wide acclaim only through the immortal vehicle of video documentation.⁹ In the contemporary moment, performance is just as

⁹ Philip Auslander. “The Performativity of Performance Documentation.” *Project Muse*, no. 84 (2006): 1–10.

marketable as any object-based art. Rebecca Schneider notes that while Abramovic's early practice resisted commodification by not participating in object-based art, her current practice is presented as spectacle and is highly marketable within an "experience economy" that is symptomatic of the late-capitalist tendency to market reoccurring events as unique.¹⁰ Indeed, Abramovic did outsource the bodies that re-enacted the performances included in her own retrospective, *The Artist is Present* (2010), illustrating the extent to which performance art fails to subvert commodification.

Syjuco and Smith purposefully re-materialize the art object in their performances. Their conceptual, collaborative, productive performance style is like the younger cousin of process art. Art objects are crafted on site and are vital to the actual performance – the performance is the making of the objects. The objects manufactured onsite are physical traces of the performances in the way that material artifacts evidence history.

Rather than seeking to deny marketability through a rejection of object-making, Syjuco and Smith expose the ills of mass-production through collective, DIY performative manufacture. Through performing manufacture, Syjuco and Smith situate the object within the realm of communal ownership. The object becomes replete with meaning and memories for those who either had a hand in its production, or witnessed its manifestation. At the same time, the collectively made object is imperfect, and it may have been made by a collaborator who is not "the artist," thus diluting its potential selling

¹⁰ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains*. 89.

power. The object that remains post-performance is a remnant, a trace, and a thing that is both autonomous and evocative.

Re-Enactment: A Kind of Performance

Another element that is important in both Smith and Syjuco's work is re-enactment. The objects sewn during *The Muster* and *Afghanicraftistan* are revivals of other objects that have come before them, and the practice of making them is a re-enactment that recalls both the identities of past makers, and the circumstances that have provided context for their manufacture. Re-enactment does something that documentation does not, because it is live. Although re-enactment enables the reproduction and sale of performance pieces, the chemistry of the "liveness" is the essential factor that makes re-enactment preferable to photo or video documentation.

Re-enactment is a vital aspect of both Syjuco and Smith's practices, and I will go into each artist's discrete use of the medium in more detail later. First, I want to make clear that my use of the term *re-enactment* does not adhere to the strict definitions that historical battle re-enactors employ, or the structure used by artists who reproduce performance art (as in Marina Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces*).¹¹ Re-enactment is generally described in terms of a replay of specific events, wherein as much accuracy is

¹¹ Marina Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces* was a performance staged at the Guggenheim Museum in 2005 where Abramovic re-enacted seminal performance art pieces from the 1960's and 1970's.

maintained as possible. People who re-enact historical battles, such as Civil War re-enactors, use documentation in the form of diaries, photos, memoirs, government documents, etc. to create a scene that is as near to the original as possible.¹² They are attempting to “touch the actual past” by posturing themselves in as “true” a way as possible.

For example, the homepage for the 28th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry 4th Regiment reads, “Have you ever felt a desire to somehow travel back in time?”¹³ This Volunteer Infantry taps into the desire to travel back in time, and appeals to potential members by promising such an experience. This type of historical re-enactment uses performance to access what documentary evidence cannot – live experience. Through live experience, actors attempt to do a number of things: redefine the past, define the present, and (paradoxically) memorialize the past. In the case of historical battle re-enactment, the action is intended to be as specific and exact a copy of the original as possible. The aim is “authenticity” and creating a kind of experiential séance.

In some ways, the re-enactment of performance art is similar to historical battle re-enactment. Contemporary artists can create a second chance for audiences to view performance art pieces that have happened in the past. One example of this type of re-enactment is Marina Abramovic’s *Seven Easy Pieces* from 2005, where the artist re-

¹² Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains*. Forward 6.

¹³ “Civil War Reenacting.” 28th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry 4th Regiment Irish Brigade. <http://www.28thmass.org/reenacting.htm> (accessed March 17, 2015).

enacted seven iconic works of performance art including Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974), Vito Acconci's *Seedbed* (1972), Valie Export's *Action Pants: Genital Panic* (1969), Gina Pane's *The Conditioning* (1973), and Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965). A catalyst for this work was the idea that critical performance pieces from 1965 to 1975 were not thoroughly documented, and that they should be memorialized through re-enactment. This re-enactment serves an archival function, but also as a chance to "re-live" a specific performance and to explore the possibilities that arise from re-creation. In the press release for *Seven Easy Pieces*, the Guggenheim states,

The project is premised on the fact that little documentation exists for most performances from this critical early period... *Seven Easy Pieces* examines the possibility of redoing and preserving an art form that is, by nature, ephemeral.¹⁴

Abramovic aimed to interrogate the nature of documentation and re-performance by re-enacting several very well known performance art pieces. She used accounts given by attendees and photographs from the initial performances. Although the first performances were more succinct, Abramovic expanded each of them to seven-hour re-enactments. Since her own performance pieces usually require tests of endurance over several hours or even days, the stretching of time in *Seven Easy Pieces* was a way for Abramovic to situate the performances within the context of her own body of work. The extension of

¹⁴ Press Release Archive. "Marina Abramovic: *Seven Easy Pieces*." Guggenheim. <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/press-room/releases/press-release-archive/2005/613-august-1-marina-abramovi-seven-easy-pieces> (accessed August 21, 2015).

time was also an act of creating archival order: seven pieces, lasting seven hours each, performed over the course of seven consecutive days.

Although the field of performance art has not come to a general consensus regarding the value of re-enactment as live documentation, it is nonetheless becoming an increasingly tapped medium. In the art world, “re-enactment” generally refers to the re-enactment of specific performance pieces; however, the level to which the parameters of the initial performance are adhered to is up for interpretation. Sometimes artists attempt to re-create “perfectly” while other times artists alter the work to reflect their own ideas. Whitechapel Art Gallery’s production, *A Short History of Performance* staged relatively straight revivals of performance art pieces using contemporary artists. While the Performance Re-enactment Society (or PRS), a collective of artists, archivists and researchers, uses documents and primary memories to “revive past art experiences and create them anew.”¹⁵ The group’s performative re-enactments are self-described “acts of conservation” that seek to transform past works into new events, in the spirit revival, but also re-imagination.

However, re-enactment in the art world does not always refer to performances previously conducted. There are certainly contemporary artists other than Smith and Syjuco who use re-enactment in innovative ways to create performances that relate

¹⁵ Paul Clarke. “Performing the Archive: The Future of the Past.” In *Performing Archives / Archives of Performance*. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen, 2011).

directly to history and current events, as opposed to using it as a documentary device.

Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Oregrave* (2001), Rod Dickenson's *The Milgram Re-enactment* (2002), and Sharon Hayes's *My Fellow Americans 1981-88* (2004) draw from historical conflicts and social watersheds to articulate their artistic visions.

Thus far, in this paper "re-enactment" has been conceptualized as either historical battle re-enactment that is done from an experiential standpoint, or the re-enactment of performance art in a documentary capacity. Keeping these ideas in mind, I'd like to step back for a moment and point out something we all know, even if we know it subconsciously. *Everything we say, and most of what we do is re-enactment.* That may seem like a broad, sweeping statement, but this is a touchstone of semiotics. Language is re-enactment. Bodily practice (i.e. walking, moving, manipulating objects) is re-enactment. Gender is re-enactment. Performance is simply a more highly articulated and specialized –staged – form of the re-enactment that we carry out every day. If one broad definition of re-enactment encompasses our everyday language and bodily practice, another broad definition would assume that nothing is re-enactment. Gertrude Stein writes,

Expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis.

Stein considers that each moment, no matter how meticulously it strives to re-enact, is a singular confluence of time, space, identity, and emotion.¹⁶ A practice that is both everything and nothing hints at what I am pointing to with this paper: the liminal zones of time/space, war/domesticity, and art/life – the bleed space where one thing turns into another, where it is both and neither.

In what follows, I will provide a detailed description of *The Muster* and *Afghanicraftistan* and tease out the ways that Smith and Syjuco expand traditional frameworks for making art. I will discuss the way each artist incorporates the object into her performance, the role that collaboration plays, and the ways the re-enactment can invoke current social issues. I will give a description of *The Muster* and *Afghanicraftistan* and then reflect on the implications and efficacy that their projects have in spheres of contemporary art and politics.

¹⁶ Gertrude Stein quoted by John Taggart, “Sound and Vision.” In *Intricate Thicket: Reading Late Modernist Poetries*, edited by Mark Scroggins, 226–27. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), 225.

Chapter 1

Allison Smith, *The Muster*

Allison Smith is a purveyor of tactility and a lover of Americana. Her body of work incorporates installation, assemblage, sculpture, and performance and her favorite materials include wood, fabric, pewter, ceramic, paper, and beeswax. This variety of media requires Smith to learn different methods of traditional craft practice, from woodwork to crewelwork. However, she juxtaposes such traditional media with radical ideas in order to critically comment on the contemporary American condition. Smith situates herself within the realm of craftivism by incorporating handmade objects and endangered techniques; her work defiantly questions and challenges our perception of history and current events. Nicole Archer writes of Smith,

By indulging in history's material inconsistencies, Smith allows us to... examine and experience the aesthetic possibilities of our surroundings and the complicated amalgamation of temporal and cultural matrices from which they are forged."¹⁷

The Muster is exemplary of Smith's projects, which tend to invoke political conflict, including such projects as: *Stockpile*, *Stack Arms*, *Armory*, *Victory Hall*, *Public Address*, *Field Desk*, and *Notion Nanny*. The thread of war runs prominently through her work because that is the thread with which the brocade of history is sewn.

¹⁷ Allison Smith. "A B O U T." Allison Smith Studio.
<http://www.allisonsmithstudio.com/a-b-o-u-t> (accessed March 13, 2015).

The Muster was a public art project sparked by a question that Allison Smith posed to the public: “What are you fighting for?” The project was realized in two incarnations, one in 2004 (*The Pennsylvania Muster*, as it is now referred to by the artist) and one in 2005 (*The Muster*). *The Pennsylvania Muster* occurred on a rural private property owned by artists Mark Dion and J. Morgan Puett, the attendees were part of Smith’s social circle, and the emphasis on costume was greater than that on cause (as we will see *The Muster* of 2005 was cause-driven). As Tom Eccles points out in his article “History in the Making,” the first project served as a sounding board that defined the elements that would take center stage in *The Muster* of the following year: elaborate artist installations doubling as campsites, historical costume drag, a festival tent in which causes were proclaimed, a communal dinner party, and the presence of Smith as mustering officer. I will focus on the second embodiment of the event, as I think of it as the opening night to the former’s dress rehearsal.

In spring of 2004, Smith was commissioned by the Public Art Fund to create a project for *In the Public Realm*, a program for emerging artists. She had already planned the collective event, *The Pennsylvania Muster* (2004), and saw its potential to work on a larger scale. She proposed a muster that would occur on Governor’s Island, a small strip of land off the coast of Manhattan, only reachable by ferry. The island has a long history, it was first known as *Paggank* (“nut island”) to the Native Americans in the area, then during the colonial period it served as an exclusive retreat for New York’s royal

governors (its namesake). A few years after the American Revolution, it was repurposed as a harbor fortification, decades later, during the Civil War it served as a POW holding area for captured confederate soldiers. In the early 20th century it was a US army base, and then a home base for U.S. Coast Guard employees before the U.S. finally sold the island to the state of New York to be used as public space in 2003.

Governor's Island is a holding cell for history that lives alongside the bustle of one of the most complex, cosmopolitan places in the modern world. The lack of bodies present in this 150-acre space, where you can see the Manhattan skyline at a close distance, creates an uncanny juxtaposition between one of the most densely populated places in the world, and one of the least – between history and presentness. Governor's Island is many things at once: a military fortification, a jail, and a public space; and all of these embodiments have left their residue on the land. Although there are ferries to the island available to the public on a regular basis, it is not a top tourist destination, and no one lives there. This sordid history features prominently in Smith's decision to conduct *The Muster* on its fields.

Smith revives the ruin by piecing together aspects of its past: battle, militia, folk culture, border patrol, and weaving those aspects into a contemporary, utopian, public art context. The outcome is a collision of temporal and spatial realities that mirror both society's and the individual's relationships with ancestors, experienced events, ethnicity, nationality, political opinions, sexuality, and gender performance. This is a grey zone, a

messy place where everything and anything are allowed access. The geography of the island can be thought of as a metaphor for *The Muster*: separate but collective – a break from the mainland. While using the structure of a military corps, Smith encourages musterers to celebrate their individualism; she creates a culture that repudiates the mainstream to embrace the paradox of the collective individual.

In order to engage the public in the goings on of *The Muster*, Smith enlisted reenactors and then invited the general public to a weekend of mustering festivities. For her “Call to Arms,” she collaborated with designer Jorge Colombo to craft a broadsheet, which was distributed through mail, by hand, and online [Fig. 3].¹⁸ The broadsheet was the first domino to fall in a series of events that lead to the culmination of a time-traveling performance. The rhetoric and aesthetics employed in the design of the broadsheet were the first devolution back in time, into Civil-War-era culture. The broadsheet reads:

The Muster is a public art event in which artist Allison Smith invokes the aesthetic vernacular of the American Civil War battle reenactment as a stage set for a polyphonic marshaling of voices in her artistic and intellectual communities. The Muster takes form in a creative encampment... in which fifty enlisted participants fashion uniforms, build campsites, and declare their causes publicly to an audience of spectators. Smith creates a literal platform, complete with banners and flags, to identify the creative minds in her midst and to celebrate what they are fighting for.

¹⁸ “The Muster, Homepage.” The Muster. <http://www.themuster.com> (accessed March 13, 2015).

The top of the broadsheet is emblazoned with the slogan “WHAT ARE YOU FIGHTING FOR?” and although it brings to mind calls to arms like Uncle Sam’s “I want YOU for the US Army,” Smith’s slogan is decidedly open-ended. There can be no single answer to this question, and its ambiguity echoes the blend of causes that would answer her call. Although fighting “for ones country” also usually entails myriad causes, they are usually zipped into a tidy category, like “the war on terrorism” or “the war on fascism.” Smith’s question is an inward-facing question that challenges individuals to ask themselves what is important, rather than using national interests as a moral compass. Smith tellingly uses an interrogative as a call to arms instead of an imperative.

The question-format invitation to join a militia in drag gains further significance within the historical context of 2005. Bush had just been elected for the second time, and many people felt jilted, or duped, by the U.S. government. Many people were shocked. In some ways, an invitation to play at a utopian performance (which could be interpreted as mocking U.S. military aggression) is a denial of current events. Yet, there is a certain power in denying a political landscape that one does not agree with, and an active creation of a place where “the causes of Everyone” are respected is a way to cope with the trauma that comes with feeling powerless.¹⁹

¹⁹ Allison Smith. *The Muster*. Ed. Anne Wehr. (New York: Public Art Fund, 2006), 46.

Re-enacting The Muster

Smith's *Muster* is not a re-enactment aimed at experiencing the past, thus it does not take the meticulous approach to history that historical battle re-enactors take. Rather, she is using their theater as a template for grafting an old "Civil War" onto the present moment. Her Civil War is at once its own event (*The Muster*) and at the same time it is touching and pulling from both the original musters that occurred during the Civil War of the 1860's, as well as the many re-enactments of Civil War battles played out through the 20th and 21st centuries.

Smith uses the *idea* of the Civil War muster to confound the boundaries between liberal/conservative, local/global, male/female, gay/straight, individual/collective, confederacy/union, handmade/factory-made, mainstream/counterculture. The project redefines the past, rather than trying to experience it directly, and in so doing it defines the present moment in a way that embraces past hardship and past triumph. *The Muster* radically alters the purpose of the US Confederacy by setting up a bold paradox wherein the army that fought for provincialism and slavery is opened up in a fight to "respect the opinions of Everyone," as Smith writes in her book *The Muster*. This "fight" is also not really a fight, but actually a proclamation, a celebration, and a spectacle of the past. Neutering the violent aspect of a wartime re-enactment is symbolic in itself of a peaceful mode of expression. Historical battle re-enactors play out an actual "fight" where actors are killed and "die," but there are no such acts of aggression during *The Muster*. The

“fight” that occurs during *The Muster* á la the recruitment cry, “What are you fighting for?” is symbolic of internal struggle as opposed to a literal battle between armies.

It should be noted that *The Muster*’s claim to respect the opinions of Everyone is not entirely a 180 degree flip from the original confederate cause. The Confederacy was highly Libertarian and wanted the opinions of all (white men) to be respected by the government. In essence, Smith goes back in time to remove the *white male* clause of the confederate mission, and brings the fight for individual rights into the present. Each encampment of The Muster highlights the differences between individuals, while illustrating that everyone can work together under one banner. While this may appear to be a utopian dream world, it is actually a temporal break that directs attention towards the relevance of issues that the United States has struggled with for nearly two centuries.

enCAMPments

A central part of *The Muster* was the many “encampments” that were set up by participants, and which played a key role in the collaborative structure of the event. Participants produced costumes, uniforms, campsites, banners, and mementos in a show of objects made to represent a variety of causes. *The Muster* physically plays out an idea that Adamson brings up in *The Craft Reader*, and that idea is the popular 1970’s trope, *the personal is the political*, which boils down to the idea that personal decisions have

political consequences.²⁰ The encampments built onsite during *The Muster* are literal embodiments of individualized opinions that are expressed under a political banner. The encampments ranged from whimsical to regimented, hilarious to sincere. Some of the causes proclaimed were: “The Freedom to Express Your Inner Self: A.K.A. Wigs and Disco,” “The Right to be Scared,” “Turning AIDS Frustration Into Power,” “Pandas,” “Inner Peace in a Warring Nation,” “Free Reading,” “The Power of Pink,” “Women’s Work,” “Universal Aesthetic Suffrage,” and “Art Education Through Folk Art.”²¹ The motley crew of causes works together to define the zeitgeist of that specific moment in 2005 when *The Muster* occurs.

One of the encampments at *The Muster* was Liz Collins’ *Knitting Nation*. Collins was a professor at the Rhode Island School of Design at the time, and she used the opportunity presented by *The Muster* to do a class project on the social history of American knitting. She brings up that fact that during every historic American war a knitting trend has been ignited. Knitting circles are one of the primary examples from the 1970’s that aimed to exemplify the idea of *personal is political*. These wartime knitting circles focused on politics and conceptual awareness rather than stressing the fine works(wo)manship that many assume is the goal of knitting.

²⁰ Glenn Adamson, *The Craft Reader*. 7.

²¹ Allison Smith, *The Muster*. 49.

The *Knitting Nation* encampment stretched across 40ft of land where a fish net canopy of lace and silk served as a tent under which its 15 participants were lined up,

evoking both an army drill formation and a production line, with their portable knitting machines firing away. Each participant wore a white uniform of coveralls with a bullhorn and knitting needle screen-printed onto it. Like frenetic battlefield nurses they cranked out yards of red, white and blue that were stitched together to form a huge abstracted American flag.

The 19th/20th century call for women's needlework also worked as a metaphor for stitching together a divided country, an allegory that deliberately comes untied by the members of Knitting Nation. Their flag had gaping holes and snags, providing a ghastly and honest visualization of the untruth of the American Dream – an ailing body held together by threads. Collins writes, “I wanted people to think about the American flag and to see it defaced on the ground, walked on, as a way to express my pain surrounding the contemporaneous war in Iraq and to consider the ramifications and meaning of patriotism gone awry.”²²

While the theater of bodies moving and machines humming unfolded, Julia Bryan-Wilson, art critic and at the time Collins' fellow RISD professor, narrated the scene, reading excerpts from books such as Anne Macdonald's *No Idle Hands: The Social History of American Knitting*. Bryan-Wilson was clad in another abstracted

²² Ibid., 48.

American flag, a gown fashioned by Collins and fashion designer Gary Graham from American flag scraps found by artist E.V. Day at a recycling center [Fig. 4]. Bryan-

Wilson spurred the knitters to “Knit! Knit! Knit! For our Northern boys brave! / Knit! Knit! Knit! While the Stars and Stripes they wave!” comporting them back to a time when the collective labor of women on the wartime home-front was relied upon to keep clothing on the backs of soldiers.²³

On another side of the battlefield, Jeffrey Jenkins’ E Pluribus Unum encampment celebrated the motto found on the Great Seal of the United States, “from many, one.” Jenkins used his vast collection of paintbrushes to produce and installation of bundles, tied together to create a formal double of the bundles of arrows and the olive branch held by the eagle on the US seal. The seal itself has a symbolic history, with 13 arrows and 13 leaves on the olive branch representing the 13 colonies. The eagle holds the olive branch in one talon and the bundle of arrows in another. Jenkins restages the bundle of arrows as a bundle of paintbrushes, which brings to mind the expression, *the pen is mightier than the sword*. His cause poetically captures the sentiment of *The Muster*, where many worked to become one.

Immemorial

²³ Ibid., 49.

If, as Walter Benjamin says, “history is written by the victors,” then history clearly has a subjective point of view. Smith explores the untold histories and herstories of the past so that we might re-think the sequences of events that are often taken as unbendable truth. Benjamin’s victors are party to the conflicts that shape history, and in order to alter the narrative Smith absorbs the rhetoric of the fight and spits it back out like ammo. Much like Marianne Jørgensen’s famous *Pink M.24* project, where an army tank was yarn-bombed, Smith’s *Muster* calls attention to war in general and re-contextualizes the way people interact with the memory (or memorial) of the Civil War. Smith disarms the United States’ war with itself by creating an inclusionary, dramatic, and nonviolent battle encampment, similar to the way that Jørgensen disarmed an emblem of war. Black and Burisch note that Jørgensen’s *Pink M.24*, “links remembrance of war with our collective ability to re-interpret and affect it through public action, dissent, and dialogue,” and *The Muster* makes the same links. Her public action sets off a chain of dissent and dialogue that are rolled into the batter of the historical framework. Jacquelyn Gleisner of Art 21 writes,

Smith forges ties between American history, social activism, and craft...As a feminist, Smith views history as contestable. History should be revised, retold, and reinterpreted.²⁴

²⁴ Allison Smith. “A B O U T.” Allison Smith Studio.
<http://www.allisonsmithstudio.com/a-b-o-u-t> (accessed March 13, 2015).

Smith's presentation of history as contestable provides the torque that propels her practice into the realm of real life, where lessons are learned and battles are fought.

Smith's unique blend of craft, performance, and historical re-enactment generates a

potent contemporary practice that articulates the feeling of loss and gain pervading life in the 21st century.

Chapter 2

Stephanie Syjuco, *Afghanicraftistan*

Stephanie Syjuco is another contemporary American artist who braids together strands of craft and collaboration to address late-capitalist socio-economic realities.

Syjuco works primarily in sculpture and installation, and her practice often includes a cooperative element. She writes in her artist statement,

...Exploring the ways in which artists are navigating the production, consumption, and dissemination of their work... her projects leverage open-source systems, shareware logic, and flows of capital, in order to investigate issues of economies and empire.²⁵

Syjuco's work often uses the Internet as a platform to invite public participation into her channels of production. Elements of her projects remain online post-production as faux commodities, thereby infiltrating established trade routes, such as eBay, with forgeries.²⁶

I will talk more about the nature of forgeries later, but for now, suffice it to say that

²⁵ Stephanie Syjuco. "Statement." Bio. <http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/statement.html> (accessed February 21, 2015).

²⁶ eBay is an online marketplace where items are bought and sold.

Syjuco cleverly inverts the usual mode of resistance to commercial enterprise. Rather than employing performance to erase object-making from her practice, or avoiding the production of saleable things, Syjuco purposefully enters the flow of commerce.

Syjuco's project *Afghanicraftistan* will be my main concentration in this chapter, and it is a piece that is exemplary of Syjuco's concern with cultural commodification. *Afghanicraftistan* was a series of workshops and discussions set up by Syjuco in 2013 on the Shangri-La military base in Joshua Tree, California. The artist invited participants to take part in a collective weaving project where patterns gleaned from Afghan War Rugs were re-created as individual knitted panels. While participants knitted, Syjuco led group discussions "about issues of empire, cross-cultural "infection," and the residues of global conflict embedded in craft traditions."²⁷ *Afghanicraftistan* is one project in a chain of work done by Syjuco that takes aim at the brutality of infiltration, colonialism, and the destruction of native cultures. Before I go into a full analysis of *Afghanicraftistan*, I will introduce some of Syjuco's other works, because they connect *Afghanicraftistan* to a series of histories that Syjuco has used her art practice to revise in order to highlight the stories of those who have been written out of collective memory and denied a fare share of economic opportunity.

²⁷ "Afghanicraftistan." Project Index.
http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/p_afghanicraftistan.html (accessed February 21, 2015).

Camouflage is a theme that Syjuco regularly deploys in her projects to confuse the signifiers connecting entities to one side or the other in battle. Camouflage in this instance can be thought of as a form of performative re-enactment where masking or shrouding becomes a way to signify two things at once. The following projects illustrate

how camouflage can be an effective tool for the creation of dialogue and all use aspects of disguise to explore themes of clandestine socio-economic activity: *Dazzle Camouflage Productions at Workshop Residence* (2014), *Ultimate Vision (Dazzle Camouflage)*(2013), *Ornament and Crime (Villa Savoye)* (2013), *Neutral Displays/Small Dilemmas* (2013), *Cargo Cults: Object Agents* (2013), *Pattern Migration* (2011), and *Counterfeit Crochet* (2008).

Other Works

Syjuco's *Ornament and Crime (Villa Savoye)* falls within a series of propositions that fall under the umbrella of *Dazzle Camouflage Propositions (Effed-Up EYE HURT)*. Syjuco proposes covering Corbusier's Villa Savoye in an invented hybrid pattern culled from traditional Vietnamese and Algerian textiles. This act of vandalism would serve as a reverse attack in retribution of France's occupation of Vietnam and Algeria. The identity of the architect Le Corbusier is a strong symbol of French ingenuity, and his stark white buildings have provided an aesthetic legacy in which whiteness functions as an

authoritative component of the environment, where culture is most properly displayed (incarnate as the museum or gallery). Syjuco's action of marring this whiteness and invading it with black and white ethnic patterns provides a counter attack on an aesthetic scale and a symbolic reverse-colonization. Syjuco writes,

By augmenting the graphic imagery with stark black and white renderings of traditional ethnic patterns, the resulting 21st Century dazzle camouflage hints at a globalized vision that reflects the complexities of migrations and colonizations.²⁸

Syjuco's projects incorporate *Dazzle Camouflage* to conceal and confuse. The practice of dazzle camouflage is "a WWI era tactic of wrapping battleships with a graphic black and white pattern to confuse enemy aim."²⁹ Syjuco's projects use the practice as a launching point to rocket into an examination of contemporary modes of disguise and identification.

Camouflage is a method used by Syjuco in order to infiltrate the flow of commercial objects in the free trade market system. An example of Syjuco's interest in commerce and labor is embodied by her project *Shadowshop* (2011) at SFMOMA. Syjuco set up a retail space installation where the public could purchase affordable, local art. *Shadowshop* tested the museum's retail infrastructure by ensuring that all participating artists would receive 100% of revenue from sales of their work (as opposed to the standard 50%), by paying cashiers and workers a living wage (and participating as

²⁸ Stephanie Syjuco, "Dazzle Camouflage." Project Index.

²⁹ Ibid.,

a worker herself), and by providing affordable artwork to the consumer. Syjuco “performed” the role of small-business owner, engaging in all the necessary tasks of restocking, communicating with artists, and balancing the till. Much of Syjuco’s work aims to expose the unsavory points of commercial systems through parasitic takeover. She embeds her work in the capitalist system so that she can critique it from within.

Syjuco re-enacts the processes that govern our contemporary system of trade, and through this performative strategy, parody emerges. For her project RAIDERS (2011), she created flat wooden facsimiles of antique ceramic pieces from the San Francisco Asian Art Museum’s online archive of their permanent collection, which are available for public download. From one angle, the installation appears to be an artful display of fine vessels, but if you circle around the objects, you will see that they are flat wooden cutouts, propped up to face front. Syjuco writes, “The works in RAIDERS delve into issues of acquisition, appropriation, and the accumulation of cultural capital through international “booty.”³⁰ Syjuco denies the ability of the vessels to contain anything by flattening them, and removes their status as culturally venerated museum objects by displaying them outside of the museum context. Processes of repetition and displacement are central to Syjuco’s work, and bring to mind metaphysical concepts relating to identity, time, and space.

³⁰ Stephanie Syjuco, “RAIDERS.” Project Index.

Syjuco's entire practice belies a preoccupation with the national forces that shape identity, which are themselves defined by the armed conflicts that build national borders. An example of the collision of nation-states is the subject of her project *This is Not the Berlin Wall* (2014), where she fabricates souvenirs of the Berlin wall from Soviet-era rubble that she finds in Poland and then sells them online. Syjuco slips these falsified artifacts into the tourist market, where there is a demand for objects that memorialize the

triumph of Western Capitalism over Soviet Communism. She thinks of these fake bits of wall as, "interruptions in this smooth narrative of capitalism, showing the fabrication of both myth and reality."³¹ By doing this, Syjuco elucidates the actuality of socially constructed national narratives. All of these projects tread on the territory of an enemy that is hidden in plain sight: empire. Themes of displacement, cultural appropriation, popular fashion, covering, shadowing, and layering are simultaneously relevant in Syjuco's project incarnations. In a talk given at CCA on the concept of Lossy (low quality images online), Syjuco notes that much of her work aims to disrupt "official" (monitored, controlled) modes of history-making, taxonomy, and demographics.

The Afghanicraftistan Re-enactment

Re-enactment in the sense that I have discussed it thus far has focused on the warping and doubling of time. However, I would like to propose that re-enactment is not

³¹ Stephanie Syjuco, "This is not the Berlin Wall." Project Index.

bound by the limiting factors of time alone, but that space, or location, can provide the opportunity to repeat, or fold. Gilles Deleuze writes,

The event is a vibration with an infinity of harmonics or submultiples, such as an audible wave, a luminous wave, or even an increasingly smaller part of space over the course of an increasingly shorter duration. For space and time are not limits but abstract coordinates of all series...³²

Deleuze's melodic articulation of the event in time is an example of his occupation with metaphysics, where an emphasis on multiplicity and synthesis characterize his theories.³³ Syjuco and Smith's re-enactments illustrate his understanding of temporality as manifold. Like a wave, as opposed to a geyser, simultaneity defines both space *and* time, and the wave of experiential art produces a sensation of familiarity and harmony. Their work conjures time and place to mark events as unfinished.

Civil War re-enactors travel to the approximate locations of the battles they are recreating and use these battle sites as thresholds through which they stage an entrance to the past. Stephanie Syjuco enters the past *and* a removed present by performing an act of weaving in one location that is occurring simultaneously in another location half way around the world. The practice of weaving War Rugs in Afghanistan is a continuous

³² Deleuze, Gilles. *Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. 1st ed. (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1992), 77.

³³ Smith, Daniel. "Gilles Deleuze." Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/deleuze/> (accessed October 10, 2015).

event that has occurred in the past, is occurring in the present, and will most likely occur again in the future. Consider the re-enactment of a reoccurring event at a spatial remove, halfway around the world. Americans can't get into Afghanistan without a press pass or military status, but Syjuco channels the craft workers in the country by weaving along with them at the same time, in a different place.

Syjuco takes up this form of re-enactment in her continuing project, *Afghanicraftistan*, which is a series of workshops, discussions, and calls to craft. As a participating artist at Camp CARPA (an offshoot of an activist organization and online forum), Syjuco invited participants to attend on-site workshops where she taught a crochet technique commonly known as the "Afghan stitch." She provided participants with supplies for crocheting their own panels, and the patterns provided were gleaned from Afghani war rug designs [Fig. 5]. Syjuco explains on her website,

This involved teaching participants how to crochet a textile panel using what has been popularly dubbed the "Afghan stitch," and subsequently "invading" it with imagery of Soviet-era tanks and implements of war. The resulting panel is a hybrid textile that confuses the boundaries of culture and tradition, and attempts to bring closer to home a series of events that happened decades ago and a world away.

Although the Soviet invasion happened decades ago, rug weavers are still incorporating Soviet imagery into their rugs. Currently, motifs of American weaponry and battles have also entered the floor (such as U.S. tanks and scenes of the destruction of the American World Trade Center). The déjà-vu of Syjuco's work occurs both in time and space: war

was then and it is now; it is happening here and there. The craftivist re-enactment of the invasion of the Soviet Kalashnikov motif into the Afghan Stitch is an act that alters the connotations of both historical and contemporary war.

Afghanicraftistan was actualized in Joshua Tree, California, during Camp CARPA 2013. Seventeen artists (including Syjuco) were recruited to participate in a “deployment” to Shangri La military base in October 2013. The base is located in

viewing distance of Ertebat Shar, a faux Afghan village built to scale, for military training practices. Attendees of Camp CARPA were able to see Ertebat Shar through a telescope set up on the premises at Shangri La. The re-enactment performed by Syjuco and the members of her workshops occurred in proximity to this specific village, which was constructed as a universal coordinate to stand in for every Afghan village that sees and has seen U.S. firepower.

Afghanicraftistan is part of a larger project called Camp CARPA, which is an activist organization with the mission of critiquing the actual military organization called CARPA. The relationships between CARPA, CARPAleaks, and Camp CARPA are complex; I will parse them here for clarity. CARPA (The Craft Advanced Research Projects Agency) is a state agency of the U.S. Department of Defense that was founded in 1958, “to prevent strategic surprise from negatively impacting U.S. national security and create strategic surprise for U.S. adversaries by maintaining the technological superiority

of U.S. artisans.”³⁴ It is a tactical military organization that uses the traditional crafts made by other countries as means to enable U.S. military aggression (I will give an example below). CARPAleaks.org, on the other hand, is a website that leaks classified information relating to the military organization CARPA. The website CARPAleaks.org aims to expose the Military-Industrial-Complex’s practices of turning “peaceful and

constructive hobbies into weapons of mass destruction.”³⁵ A post from CARPAleaks in 2013 brings to light CARPA’s use of quilt making as a tool to facture coded maps, which guide “liquidations of adversaries” (i.e. kill missions) in Afghanistan by U.S. Navy SEAL teams. The post reads,

Human Terrain and Relational Infiltration Teams (HuTRITs) use social craft techniques to infiltrate, classify and trace local loyalties and tribe constellations which are otherwise hard for military commanders to decipher... With the help of an established coded quilt system, maps of clan networks and links to insurgents are smuggled out to the NATO forces... the secret quilts help unveil the enemy constellations for more surgical strikes.³⁶

At the end of the post, CARPAleaks offers a link to the quilt codes used by the military organization CARPA as an official leaked document. Camp CARPA 2013 is an outgrowth of CARPAleaks that aimed to provide a place for the constituents of CARPAleaks to participate in a collaborative practice of craftivism, where participants could question the role of craft in modern military tactics. *Afghanicraftistan* occurs

³⁴ CARPAleaks.org. <http://craftresearchagency.com/camp-carpa-2013/> (accessed May 3, 2015).

³⁵ Ibid.,.

³⁶ Ibid.,.

within the whirlwind context of a military force that uses craft to actually kill people, and the cultural force of an artworld elite that appropriates craft in order to commodify the practice. Camp CARPA attacks the real CARPA by appropriating its name, and confuses its mission by exposing its covert operations.

Take the War on Terrorism Lying Down

The War Rugs from which Syjuco gleans motifs for *Afghanicraftistan* have been commodified in way similar to the detritus of the Berlin Wall. War Rugs are a literalized record of a foreign invasion into the traditional landscape of another country. These contemporary artifacts are now available on eBay for as cheap as 50 dollars. By introducing her American-made textile panels into the flow of material objects dating from the contemporary time period, Syjuco again fabricates a reality that subverts the expectations of the market of material culture that she infiltrates. Before I discuss exactly what a War Rug is, I will describe the tradition of rug weaving that lead to the eventual production of War Rugs in the second half of the 20th century. Afghanistan has a millennia-old tradition of rug weaving, and the shamanistic designs that have become popular motifs have evolved out of an Afghan cultural heritage that encompasses multiple ethnic tribes and centuries of day-to-day life.

Carpet production in Afghanistan began in the pre-Islamic era, when Central Asian nomadic tribes sheered their flocks of sheep and used the wool to create a trade commodity. Different tribes evolved their own designs that reflected their cultural identities. Rugs have always been an integral part of Afghan culture and they were/are not just used to cover the floor. They are hung on the walls of the home tapestry-style, they cover beds and tables, and they provide the bulk of a bride's dowry. They are also signifiers of status, skill and wealth. After the Islamic conversion, rug motifs began to shift; the tenants of Islam forbid the representation of humans or animals. Accordingly, most rugs woven from 600 CE to the present eschew figural representation and instead employ geometric or floral patterns, much like you would find in the mosaics of mosques. The ethnic backgrounds of rug weavers in Afghanistan include: native Afghans (Pashtuns), Turkmen tribes (Ersari, Tekke, Yomud, and Sariq), Uzbeks, and Baluchi people. Ethnicity and geographic location play prominent roles in the production techniques employed and the imagery incorporated in rug manufacture. Color usage is often dictated by local vegetation, as pigment dyes are used to color the wool. Many ethnic groups in the area are semi-nomadic, or have been displaced during enemy invasions; therefore small, portable looms are traditionally used. However, since the 1990's, the demand for Afghan rugs has drastically increased and many weavers have begun to use stationary looms. The use of stationary looms allows for faster weaving and

the War Rugs have become a popular souvenir for Westerners (including, and especially U.S. Army members).

What is a War Rug?

In 1979 the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. It followed that the weavers began to incorporate the imagery that they encountered in everyday life, which included: Kalashnikov rifles, grenades, helicopters, tanks, and bullets [Fig. 6]. Rugs that use this type of imagery are called “War Rugs.” War Rugs expand the palette of geometric

shapes and floral imagery to include other non-human, non-animal forms. The motifs of weaponry are a saavy way to invoke a figural mode of imagery without overtly portraying people or animals, which would violate Islamic doctrine. The absence of human bodies becomes conspicuous and their presence is felt through their obvious omission. The use of weapons as a motif also provides a visual timeline wherein rugs can be dated according to the weaponry they display.

Through the collaborative re-enactment of *Afghanicraftistan*, where the same violent motifs are woven, Syjuco apologizes to the domestic civilians of Afghanistan by recognizing their reality. Syjuco’s project engages the practice of these weavers in an act of solidarity, which connects two geographic regions that are currently engaged in armed conflict. *Afghanicraftistan* is a gesture of empathy and humility realized through contemporary art practice. All of the crochet patterns used for *Afghanicraftistan* are

available on Syjuco's website, as well as photos of finished panels for reference, as an open invitation for public collaboration.

Afghanicraftistan embodies the surreal state of being both. The act of knitting involves the weaving of threads of yarn through a grid panel in a repetitive meditation that has been echoed by both domestic and industrial weavers through the centuries. The particular knitting done by Syjuco's workshop uses this traditional method to bring to life an image of a highly technical assault weapon, providing an unlikely juxtaposition between comfort and pain. The fact the knitting patterns for these motifs have been made

continuously available to the public through the Internet presents a model of collective authorship as well as connecting domestic craft to global threads of awareness.

Afghanicraftistan mirrors the practice of weaving and drawing together. By bringing attention to a group that is not the native culture of the artist, Syjuco brings the local practice of another culture and folds it into the locality of the very global superpower that has imposed armed conflict. She uses craft to duck and weave the established channels of communication and awareness. *Afghanicraftistan* provides a salve for international conflict by furnishing space for the things that international conflict threatens: safety, community, and local traditions. By producing forgeries, infiltrating markets, and exercising positive labor practices, Syjuco shines a light on industrial production methods, market manipulation, and unfair labor practices. In a benevolent

type of reverse psychology, Syjuco toys with the public perception of economic realities, and through her dramatizations, lesser-known histories are brought to light.

Chapter 3

Analysis and Implications

What do these reenactments say about the urge to re-create, to re-live, to be present, or to bear witness? There are many answers to the question of *why* people feel the need to re-do. Improving on past efforts may be the most obvious answer, but there are other compelling reasons for re-enactment. Civil War re-enactors do it to “touch the past” (experiential), Smith does it to spark dialogue and foster community (cooperative), Syjuco does it to infiltrate and disrupt history (revisionary). Should we consider Syjuco and Smith’s re-enactments acts of cultural solidarity, political statements, historical revisions, theatrical acts, contemporary art, craftivism, community events, and/or workshops? Clearly, they are all of these things, which is what makes them so compelling as artistic and political interventions. Art History has become increasingly contemporary and interdisciplinary, which is evidence of the spiral of time swirling faster and tighter.

To understand how these two practices operate and to account for their effectiveness, it is necessary to think about the relationship between art and politics more generally. In her article 'What is Political Art', Susan Buck-Morss uses the historical

definition of the *avant-garde* to discuss the spatial temporal location of political art: "the time of the avant-garde as interruption. The space of the avant-garde as displacement."³⁷ Certainly Smith and Syjuco use their re-enactments as interruptions in historical memory. By crossing over the boundaries of medium specificity and singular authorship, the artists also appropriate space. Buck-Morss frames political art is a means to an end, where art is a continuation of politics and a component that provides an arena for critical contemplation. She remarks that if art is impotent, maybe politics should be a little more like art: contemplative, reflexive, critical, and impotent – yet powerful.

³⁷ Buck-Morss, 'What is Political Art?' pp 54. In *Design beyond Design* Buck-Morss is quoting from Christopher Knight, 'New Border Customs', in *Los Angeles Times*, October 1994), f1,f8.

Like a premonition, Buck-Morss pre-answers Allison Smith's question, "What are you fighting for?" by proclaiming the fact that art, itself, is always fighting for the right to exist.³⁸ Smith and Syjuco's styles of political art making are powerful in their reclamations of domestic craft, their inclusion of little-known histories, and their subversion of singular authorship and originality. In closing, I will discuss the patriarchies that the artists divert, the amplification they achieve through multiplicity, and the way their work changes history.

The Way Things Have Been Done: Beyond Patriarchal Histories

Scholars of art history who examine the roles that gender and socio-economic identity play in the way value is assigned to artworks cite the trope of the "modernist masculine myth" as a defining factor. As Griselda Pollock puts it, canonical artwork is qualified by gender and status, and the history of art (and history in general) has been situated within a framework of "patrilineal genealogies of father-son succession and... patriarchal mythologies of exclusively masculine creativity."³⁹ In *Differencing the Canon* (1999), Pollock discusses the "inherited authority" of an artistic canon that prioritizes the male perspective and the idea of auratic singularity over *other* perspectives

³⁸ Ibid., 59.

³⁹ Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*. xiv.

and *multiple realities*. Smith and Syjuco diffuse the “modernist masculine myth” by espousing fluid interpretations and the collective facture of artwork.

In *Performing the Body: Performing the Text* (1999), Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson point out that formalist art theory “veils the interpreter’s stake” in the validation of artwork, and that the supposed objectivity of the art critic/historian serves to suppress interpretations that do not arise from a white/male/heterosexual perspective, creating a cycle of authoritarian authentication.⁴⁰ Jones and Stephenson point out that,

By performing particularized bodies (often highly marked in terms of race, gender, sexuality, nation, and/or class), artists may dramatically unveil the processes by which non-normative subjects are conventionally excluded from the canonical narratives of art history.⁴¹

The Muster and *Afghanicraftistan* fill a lacuna of art practice that is NOT white/western/male/heterosexual.

Through *Afghanicraftistan*, Syjuco draws attention to a group of people that are female, Afghan, and who provide commodities for both a western tourist market and a local domestic market. By re-enacting the performance of traditional craft practice, Syjuco insists on the historical relevance of an art form and a demographic, both of which have been all but absent from canonical art history. On the other hand, Smith's *Muster* serves to highlight the aspirations of a non-heterosexual (and heterosexual), non-cis gender (and cis gender) populous through the monument-making of encampments under

⁴⁰ Jones and Stephenson *Performing the Body: Performing the Text* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

a banner of historical American domestic conflict. *The Muster's* war cry of inclusion is radical in its acceptance of Everyone. In this way, Smith uses historical conflict to reference contemporary conflict regarding race, gender, industrialization, and sexuality. Although these projects are examples of contemporary practices that are beginning to fill the void created by exclusionary norms, critical strategies for addressing art must also be broadened to include more sensitive and multifarious means of discourse. New strategies are in the process of being created right now; queer theory and feminism are among these prescient methods, which can and should be part of art history's analytical toolbox.

Animating by Imitating: A Model for Collaboration

Smith and Syjuco evade classification and challenge modernism. Their work exemplifies a new type of artistic practice that lauds collective practice and uses historical reference to perform the meaningful manufacture of art objects. Modernist art practice was strongly rooted in the alleged virtues of originality and singular authorship, but Smith and Syjuco confront these ideas by experimenting with cooperative undertakings that displace the celebrity of the solo artist and champion multiplicity. Smith and Syjuco use craftivism to combat these modernist and patriarchal notions of originality and history. Domestic crafts are intertwined with femininity and collaborative manufacture. By putting craft to work in the field of politics, the artists make a powerful statement about cooperation and politics.

As Griselda Pollock noted in 1980, the production of artistic authorship “takes the fundamental form of the bourgeois subject; ‘creative, autonomous, proprietorial’.” The performative re-enactments of *Afghanicraftistan* and *The Muster* displace the “bourgeois subject” by delegating the authorship of both the objects and the performance through a cooperative effort. The autonomy of the artist is thus broken down. The value of an “original” piece of artwork, made with the hands of a particular artist is questioned. The oppositional idea is that a piece of artwork made by many hands, all or some of which may remain anonymous, may be more potent, since multiple identities are implicated rather than just one.

Multiplicity is actually a great way to reach a broad audience and extend influence. Rebecca Schneider ponders the idea that enlisting the copy would “get something right in writing about postmodern art...” in that it would reject the prestige of singularity and authorship.⁴² She points to her own citation of other writers as an echo that allows an idea to persist, rather than a “copy” of an “original” that would dilute the potency of an argument. Schneider touches on copying as a form of “queering.” Queer theory of the 1990’s brought to the surface notions of liminality, medium slippage, re-appropriation, and the destabilization of static identities wherein copies can serve to

⁴² Rebecca Schneider. “Solo, Solo, Solo.” In *After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance*. (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 25.

infiltrate an institutional worship of uniqueness. The theory takes aim at “originality” by positioning itself as a moving target that is panoptic in its embrace of multiplicity.

As L.J. Roberts writes in “Put Your Thing Down, Flip It, And Reverse It,” “*Queer* expresses a noncomplicity with systems that create and proliferate those stereotypes, which themselves establish and regulate power structures.”⁴³ The notion of an “original” and the insistence of the forward march of time are seemingly indisputable regulators of power. However, by doubling, multiplying, copying, re-enacting, and queering, artists are both democratizing and destabilizing canonical art. By re-enacting,

artists can re-contextualize historical events that shape and structure contemporary realities. What is gained in the process is an art practice that is not just self-referential to an art world, but self-referential to the lived world, and to multiple lived experiences.

In a paper Antionette LaFarge presented at the College Art Association in 1999, she argued that the duplicate “both illuminates and deeply informs current art practice,” just as re-enactment illuminates and deeply informs the performance of history-making.⁴⁴

As one Warhol in a series contributes to the definition of a group, a duplication of an act in time alters the connotation of the first event. This is not to say that the re-enactment is

⁴³ LJ Roberts. “Re-imagining Craft Identities Using Tactics of Queer Theory.” In *Extra-Ordinary Craft and Contemporary Art*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 246.

⁴⁴ Antoinette LaFarge. “The Memetic Museum.” Panel Discussion *The World Wide Web and the New Art Marketplace* at College Art Association, 1999.

not valuable in its own right as a singular performance, because certainly even if an audience member was unaware of the history being played upon, they would still assign meaning to the work that is relevant through their own library of experience. But if you are aware of the references being made, the copy, re-enactment, or forgery heightens your memory of the referenced event and each copy changes your perception of the referenced event, to the point that a group of copies, a pair of forgeries, or a series of re-enactments become a singular bodies of work dealing with a particular subject. In this way, the “original” act or object is queered, its author becomes plural, and its meaning becomes more fluid.

While critics have called out the falsities of modernist formalism, mainstream art criticism is far from fully accepting the value of queer theory. There is still a prevailing undercurrent of disapproval concerning copies, perhaps because they evade traditional modes of classification. As LaFarge notes,

However much it [the forgery] may resemble art, it is absolutely excluded from being art. The forger's object is to pass these absolutely excluded objects into the field of art under the flag of the signature. This effort can never wholly succeed because forgeries have only two ontological statuses: valueless-because-known-as-forgery, and valuable-because-not-yet-exposed. The missing third category is valuable-even-though-exposed; and it is with this category that Duchamp made great play.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid, .

Both forgery and re-enactment reject the idea of authorship as the central paradigm of “good” art. Both practices aim to confuse originality and draw attention to history. The small differences between a forgery and an original, and the larger differences between an act and a re-enactment are purposeful, and they magnify truths or falsities that the artist wishes to enunciate.

The performative re-enactments of Smith and Syjuco reference a “mother event” and by deciding to re-do the event, they are renaming the event, and to use modern marketing terminology, re-branding it. LaFarge uses the term “nominalism” to refer to, “artworks in which the primary activity is attaching a new name to something.” She brings up how this renaming crosses the wires of the signals we use to decipher our

reality: “In semiotic terms, this art of renaming always disrupts an understood link between signifier and signified.” The disruption of this link is how *Afghanicraftistan* and *The Muster* function to alter contemporary understandings of historical events.

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Figure 1.

Allison Smith leading uniformed enlistees in a pre-muster drill at Fort Jay.

Source: Smith, Allison. *The Muster*. Edited by Anne Wehr. (New York: Public Art Fund, 2006), 8.



Figure 2.

Patterns, a finished panel motif depicting a grenade, and knitting materials.

Source: Stephanie Syjuco's website,

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

THE MUSTER.

"WHAT ARE YOU FIGHTING FOR?"

Allison Smith | Vol. 1, No. 2 GOVERNORS ISLAND, NEW YORK — MAY 14, 2005. A Project of Public Art Fund.

THE MUSTER 2005. A POLYPHONIC MARCHING MUSIC OF VOICES

This is a project of voices, an event in which we discover the voices of the past and the voices of the present. The Musters are a series of performances that take place on Governors Island, New York, in the heart of the city. The Musters are a series of performances that take place on Governors Island, New York, in the heart of the city. The Musters are a series of performances that take place on Governors Island, New York, in the heart of the city.

FIRST O SONGS FOR A PRELUDE.

First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude. First o songs for a prelude.

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ADDRESS.

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PRE-MUSTER ACTIVITIES.

Activities leading up to the Musters event.

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Activities leading up to the Musters event.

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Activities leading up to the Musters event.

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PRE-MUSTER ACTIVITIES.

Activities leading up to the Musters event.

THE PUBLIC ART FUND.

Information about the Public Art Fund.

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Information about the Public Art Fund.

Public Art Fund logo and contact information.

Figure 3. The Muster broadsheet, which was used by an advertisement to entice enlistees.

Source: Allison Smith's website: <http://www.allisonsmithstudio.com/p-r-o-j-e-c-t-s/the-muster-2005/> (accessed November 11, 2015).



Figure 4.

The Knitting Nation encampment, where Julia Bryan Wilson read aloud to knitters while they worked while wearing her American flag gown.

Source: Allison Smith's website: <http://www.allisonsmithstudio.com/p-r-o-j-e-c-t-s/the-muster-2005/1> (accessed November 11, 2015).

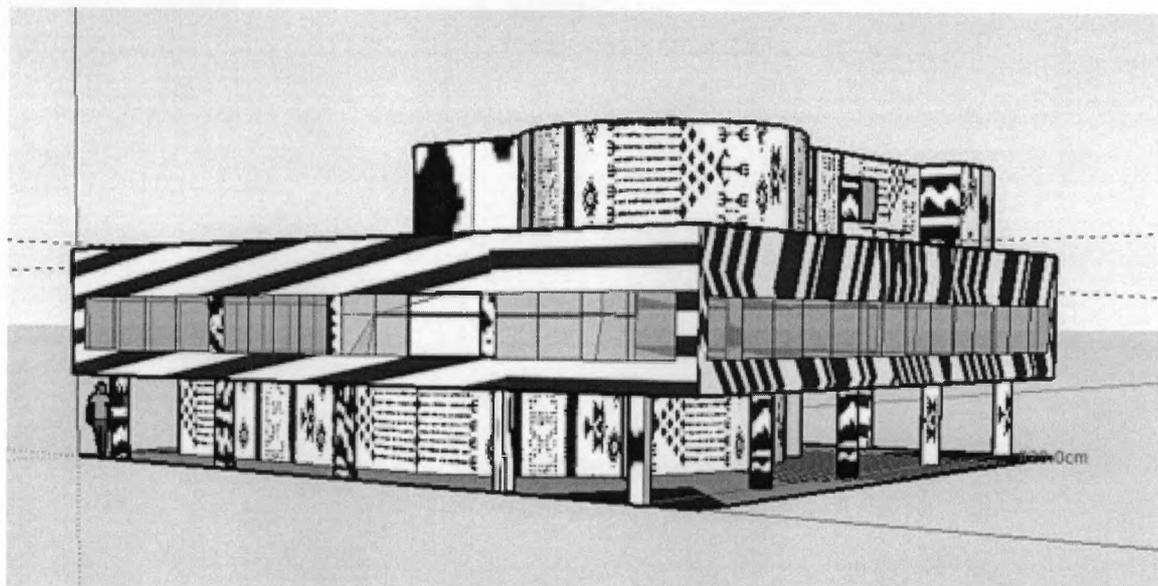


Figure 5.

Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye covered in traditional Vietnamese and Algerian ethnic patterns to create a visual reverse colonization effect.

Source: Stephanie Syjuco's Project Index,

http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/p_dazzlecamo.html (accessed November 12, 2015).



Figure 6.

Project participants knitting panels while using motif patterns culled from Afghan war rugs.

Source: Stephanie Syjuco's Project Index,

http://www.stephaniesyjuco.com/p_dazzlecamo.html (accessed November 12, 2015).

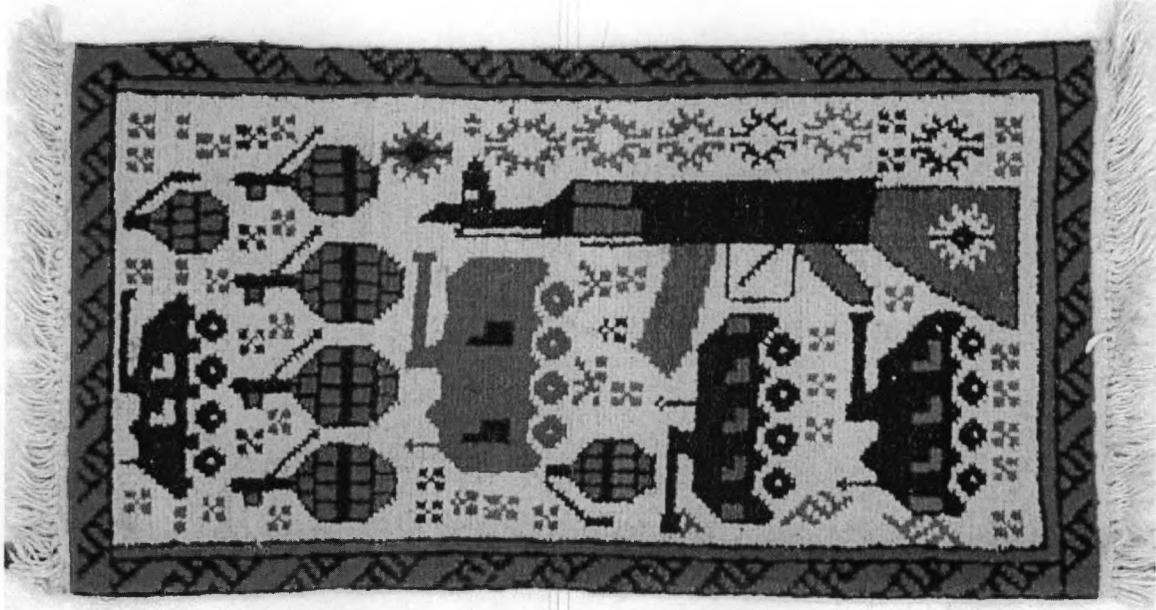


Figure 6.

An example of the war rugs woven in Afghanistan in the 21st century that are now for sale on eBay. This example depicts the grenades used by Syjuco as a motif during *Afghanicraftistan*.

Source: <http://thetrimandbleed.com/war-rugs-of-afghanistan/> (accessed November 12, 2015).