



# *Preserve & Protect*

Anangookwe  
Wolf

Paul  
Rucker

Winnie  
van der Rijn

Michael Sylvan  
Robinson

Stephanie  
Syjuco

co-curators Erika Diamond / Michael Dickins

## **GALLERY GUIDE**



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***The New Gallery acknowledges the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Yuchi, Shawnee, and Cherokee First Nations on which we are exhibiting, teaching and learning.***

## ***Preserve & Protect***

by Erika Diamond

Textiles serve to protect us, to tell our stories, and to display our privilege. This exhibition of conceptual garment work looks at the complex ways in which textiles, particularly garments, tell the stories of the past, present, and future. More than just armor for the body, they relay the resilience of a culture - worn for protection but also as a way to assert one's identity.

The works of **Michael Sylvan Robinson**, **Paul Rucker**, **Stephanie Syjuco**, **Winnie van der Rijn**, and **Anangookwe Wolf** bear witness to and challenge our shared American history. They question whose histories have had the privilege of being heard and ask for a more inclusive authorship of our shared history.

The notion of a shared history is alluring, but our stories are penned by authors from different perspectives with varying degrees of access to the stage, the pulpit, the megaphone, or perhaps most importantly, the school. Some histories have been historically muted and are only beginning to be heard by a wider audience.

Honoring their ancestors, the dresses of **Anangookwe Wolf** tell the story of their two great grandmothers, the Matriarchs, Mary Wolf of Ojibwe and German descent and Phillipenna McClanny of Assiniboine descent. *Phillipenna* is constructed in a typical Victorian fashion as a recreation of Anangookwe's great grandmother's Indian boarding school uniform, while the reverse side is colorfully embellished in their traditional Assiniboine style using dentalium shells. Entirely reversible, the garment is a reflection of who is inside and what is resiliently passed down through generations. It reveals the parts of Phillipenna's heritage that were kept hidden but held close and still preserved, celebrated now by her descendant Anangookwe. Wolf's smaller dresses pay homage to the undocumented but staggering number of young indigenous lives lost in similar boarding schools. The objective of these schools was not just to remove Native American children from their homes, but to force the child's assimilation by erasing cultural connections like their language, dress, and hair. By embellishing these dresses with cultural signifiers from traditional indigenous clothing, these garments act as a way to preserve and protect Wolf's heritage.

Clothing conceals our bodies, but it also reveals many aspects of who we are. Certain embellishments provide clues as to our cultural background, while uniforms mark our trades and allegiances. At a glance, T-shirts and hats bear slogans, bandanas in various colors share queer secrets, and certain prints or patterns reveal everything from a person's heritage to their recent travel history. These wearable markers offer quick glimpses into our identities and ideologies. Our bodies are a canvas for propaganda.

Garments, as uniforms, have the ability to reveal our social networks and signal our allegiances. They connect us to each other while separating us from other groups of people. They simultaneously offer

belonging for some and alienation for the other. One of the most destructive examples of this power of the cloth are the white hooded robes worn since the 1860's by the white supremacist terrorist group the Ku Klux Klan, both as a method of intimidation and a way to evade accountability.

**Paul Rucker** subverts the power of this symbol with his series of 80 hooded robes in "Storm in the Time of Shelter", reclaiming the 1920's design of the Ku Klux Klan robe through the use of different fabrics, including camouflage, polka dots, and Kente cloth. The power to change the meaning of this symbol resides within the skillful act of fabrication by the hands of Rucker, a Black artist, and his willingness to bring the subject to light. The wide range of fabrics within the series is meant to illustrate the ever-shifting and persistent presence of systemic and structural racism. Rucker aims to take away the power of this symbol of white supremacy while pointing to the normalization of systemic racism. Especially through the use of camouflage fabric, Rucker's robes allude to the stealth aspect of racism, but they are indeed meant to provoke. Dress it up any way you want, racism is a contemporary American issue, and not a thing of the past. Rucker believes that once we acknowledge and confront the legacy of slavery, only then we will have the collective power to dismantle it.

Great symbolism is woven into the recognizable forms of our garment history. **Winnie van der Rijn** strips, unweaves, dyes, and in other ways dismantles the mundane collared shirts that are meant to represent the American Patriarchy. She is "interested in finding vestiges of power in menswear, extracting it and reimagining, reforming, and redistributing it". Her series "How to dismantle the Patriarchy", with over 100 shirts and counting, is comprised of a seemingly endless exercise in the sort of perseverance it takes to do just that. Her interventions upon menswear are both gestural and methodical, subtle and audacious, as if to suggest that all methods of resistance are welcome in the revolution. It's hard to shoot a moving target, and van der Rijn's methods remain agile – shredding here, dissolving there - reinforcing the message while undermining the fabric of the collared shirt. Van der Rijn's embellishments are acts of defiance against these shirts, happenings recorded by the threads that are left in their wake.

Clothing initially functioned to aid in our survival – a thicker skin against the perils of life on earth. It separates us from the elements and other dangers, but perhaps our greatest threats are the weapons of oppression forged by people. These artists implicate the garment as a representation of multi-layered systems of oppression, but what we find between the folds are the hardened resolve of cultural survival.

Textiles are meant to comfort and protect our bodies, but when the body fails to be protected, the garment can also be a vehicle for commemoration. Using a language of labor-intensive stitching and embellished queer symbolism, the work of **Michael Sylvan Robinson** asks us to care for each other. With "In Remembrance: We Honor the Lives of Those Lost in 2020 to Gun Violence" it does so by memorializing a small representation of the people we have lost to gun violence in the United States through the loving hand-embroidery of their names. Sylvan has worn his coat during GAG protests and memorial vigils. Citing upwards of 34,000 gun-related deaths in this country during 2021, Sylvan pleads with us in both thread and action to stop the cycle. As an active member of Gays Against Guns (GAG), Sylvan does the real work needed for change by protesting gun violence and publicly honoring the people who have been victimized.

Collectively, the disembodied forms in this exhibition remind us of the vastly different experiences of the people in this country. They question notions of sovereignty and authenticity, safety and representation. They ask whose histories have had the privilege of being accepted and widely distributed?

As if history were an adaptable representation of what really happened, **Stephanie Syjuco** uses

chroma key green backdrop fabric (more commonly known as “green screen) in her multi-media works. In the *Visible Invisible*, she deftly manipulates this fabric to recreate women’s dresses meant to represent specific eras from commonly understood moments in American History – Plymouth Pilgrim, Antebellum South, and the Colonial Revolution. However, these garments are more precisely costume patterns inspired by historical dress. The work suggests that we might super-impose our own personal understanding of history upon these passive garments, questioning the accuracy of these historical narratives.

In the film industry, Chroma key green is a color that you’re not meant to see. It is easy to superimpose upon it, say, Scarlet O’Hara - the iconic Southern Belle character from the movie *Gone with the Wind*, a romanticized depiction of the Antebellum South. What is important here is what we cannot see – the stories of the lives that surrounded this privileged character in her colonized setting. The styles of these dresses are so familiar to many of us that we barely think to question what they imply about womanhood, western expansion, or even righteousness.

Through recognizable structures in historical fashion and strategic embellishments, the textiles in this exhibition recontextualize and assert shrouded histories. They affirm the value of lives lost due to persistent ideals of colonialism, bigotry, and unequal power structures. They reveal concurrent histories and ask for better futures. They show that garments have the power to express and reclaim our personal and cultural histories.

This exhibition makes room for the stories and cultures of people of color, women, and queer folks who reject the historical violence of a white heteronormative patriarchy and celebrate their own power and narratives. These garments act as history books, peeling away the whitewashed veil of our collective American history and adding new chapters of hope. These garments are acts of resistance. Together, they represent an army of truths. Will we take up this call to arms and begin to protect each other, listen to each other’s stories, and share our abundance of resources?

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**Erika Diamond** is German-born and the daughter of two ballet dancers, Erika Diamond is a textile-focused visual artist, curator, and educator. She received a BFA in Sculpture from Rhode Island School of Design and an MFA in Fiber from Virginia Commonwealth University.

She has exhibited nationally and internationally and her costumes have been commissioned by Charlotte Ballet. Residencies include McColl Center for Visual Art (NC); STARworks Center for Creative Enterprise (NC); Black Iris Gallery (VA); ABK Weaving Center (WI); Platte Forum (CO); and STEAM studio at UNC Asheville (NC).

She received a Regional Artist Project Grant in 2015 from the Arts & Science Council of NC and an Adjunct Faculty Grant from VCU Arts to create new work using bulletproof Kevlar fabric. Diamond has taught at Virginia Commonwealth University (VA) in the Craft/Material Studies Department and Rocky Mountain College of Art & Design (CO).

She spends her summers as Assistant Director of Galleries at Chautauqua Institution (NY).

## Artist Information

**Winnie van der Rijn** is a multi-disciplinary artist of opportunity—collecting materials, experimenting with techniques and pursuing her curiosities. Her art practice includes textiles, sculpture, collage and collaboration (which she considers its own art form). She plays well with others. Winnie actively exhibits her work throughout the United States.

A life long learner, Winnie graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 1989 with a BA in Sociology. She has studied printmaking, sculpture, metalsmithing and Marxist theory. In addition, Winnie has explored weaving, machine knitting, bookmaking, altars, exploding picture boxes, automata, shoe making, millinery, sewing, fusing, stamping, metal weaving, resin, riveting, precious metal clay and mixed media. She is wildly curious about how things are made.

Winnie, a seventh generation Californian, is currently based in New York City.

[www.winnievanderrijn.com](http://www.winnievanderrijn.com)

5	51	16	2	42	4
40	18	22	7	13	52

- 5. *Dissolve*
- 51. *Armor #10 / What Are You Looking At?*
- 16. *Soft Armor*
- 2. *Armor #2*
- 42. *Washed Boy*
- 4. *Rewoven*
- 40. *Armor #7/Visionary*
- 18. *Edges of Power (shirt skeleton)*
- 22. *Corporate Camouflage*
- 7. *How to Dismantle the Patriarchy*
- 13. *Neutered*
- 52. *Armor #9 (breast plate)*

**Anangookwe Wolf** is an interdisciplinary artist who interweaves narratives of familial history in relation to cultural inheritance and present-day afflictions. By utilizing traditional and contemporary forms of craft, connecting the past and present, their main focus is to create a visual story of the interpersonal lives of those they've known and have never met for the future generation.

Blood history is what connects us to those who came before us and to those we've never met. Our relatives and elders share with us our culture, our language, and our unique family dynamics. This history has fascinated me since sentience. One aspect of my lineage became more prominent as I entered adulthood and it is that of the Indian boarding school era and its effects on cultural loss and preservation on the matrilineal side of my family.

This story is predominately told through uniforms worn by the two matriarchs, Phillippena McClammy and Mary Wolf. While the outside symbolized the western world's forced assimilation and homogenization of indigenous cultures, conversely traditional adornment and cultural heritage lie within the lining, close to the skin.

Matriarchs symbolizes the resiliency and the toil that not only my great-grandmothers fought through, but what other indigenous families fought for. Our blood history may contain loss and trauma; however, it is also interlaced with the strength of our ancestors. What they withstood and resisted, so that we may proudly stand here today, is vital for us to remember.

The smaller works model the clothing patterns associated with reservation boarding schools of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. The purpose of Indian boarding schools was to culturally assimilate Indigenous children by forcibly relocating them from their families and communities to distant residential facilities where their American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian identities, languages, and beliefs were to be forcibly suppressed. For over 150 years, hundreds of thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their communities. Anangookwe dedicates this work 'to our relatives who survived, and our relatives who did not make it home, during the boarding school era.'

[www.anangookwewolf.com](http://www.anangookwewolf.com)

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**Stephanie Syjuco** works in photography, sculpture, and installation, moving from handmade and craft-inspired mediums to digital editing and archive excavations. Using critical wit and collaborative co-creation, her projects leverage open-source systems, shareware logic, and flows of capital, in order to investigate issues of economies and empire. Recently, she has focused on how photography and image-based processes are implicated in the construction of racialized, exclusionary narratives of history and citizenship. She was a Smithsonian Artist Research Fellow at the National Museum of American History in Washington DC in 2019/2020. She is featured in Season 9 of the acclaimed PBS documentary series *Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century*. Recent exhibitions include "Being: New Photography" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; "Public Knowledge," at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; "Stephanie Syjuco: Rogue States," at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; and "Disrupting Craft: the 2018 Renwick Invitational" at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Born in the Philippines in 1974, Syjuco received her MFA from Stanford University and BFA from the San Francisco Art Institute. She is the recipient of a 2014 Guggenheim Fellowship Award, a 2009 Joan Mitchell Painters and Sculptors Award, and a 2020 Tiffany Foundation Award. Her work has been exhibited widely, including at MoMA/P.S.1, the Whitney Museum of American Art, The San

Francisco Museum of Modern Art, ZKM Center for Art and Technology, the California Biennial at the Orange County Museum of Art, The 12th Havana Bienal, The 2015 Asian Art Biennial (Taiwan), among others. A long-time educator, she is an Associate Professor in Sculpture at the University of California, Berkeley. She lives in Oakland, California.

*The Visible Invisible: Plymouth Pilgrim (Simplicity)*, 2018

*The Visible Invisible: Antebellum South (Simplicity)*, 2018

*The Visible Invisible: Colonial Revolution (McCall's)*, 2018

Hand-sewn chroma key backdrop fabric (cotton muslin), silk, polyester, ribbon, hand crocheted lace, commercial lace, and dress forms.

These sculptural garments represent commonly understood moments in American history but are fabricated entirely out of green “chroma key” backdrop fabric. Chroma key is a visual effects technique commonly used in digital postproduction, allowing a video or image editor to superimpose new backgrounds behind a subject. By calling attention to the removable background/backdrop and using it as a material to recreate historical costumes, this work questions how American history itself has been fabricated, manipulated, and constructed — in essence, functioning as a projection screen for convenient (and inaccurate) narratives.

The mythology of the country’s founding via the Plymouth Pilgrim (at the expense of native peoples and their sovereignty), the democratic ideals of the American Revolution of 1776 (which granted citizenship to only free white men) and the idyllic romanticism of the Antebellum South (the seat of Confederacy and an economy based on slavery and white supremacy), is explored via total hand-made construction. Far from being “authentic,” the garments have been produced using commercial sewing patterns used in theatrical plays, re-enactments, and Halloween festivities, further highlighting the distance between an authentic past and convenient American narrative.

[www.stephaniesjuco.com](http://www.stephaniesjuco.com)

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**Paul Rucker** is a multimedia visual artist, composer, and musician. His practice often integrates live performance, original musical compositions, and visual art installation. For nearly two decades, Rucker has used his own brand of art making as a social practice, which illuminates the legacy of enslavement in America and its relationship to the current socio-political moment.

Rucker has received numerous grants, awards and residencies for visual art and music. He is a 2012 Creative Capital Grantee in visual art as well as Three MAP (Multi-Arts Production) Fund Grants for performance. In 2015 he received a prestigious Joan Mitchell Painters & Sculptors Grant as well as the Mary Sawyer Baker Award. In 2016 Paul received the Rauschenberg Artist as Activist fellowship and the Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship, for which he is the first artist in residence at the new National Museum of African American Culture.

Residencies include MacDowell Colony, Blue Mountain Center, Ucross Foundation, Art OMI, Banff Centre, Pilchuck Glass School, Rauschenberg Residency, Joan Mitchell Residency, Loghave, Montalvo, Hermitage, Hemera Artist Retreat, Air Serembe, Creative Alliance and the Rockefeller Foundation Study Center in Bellagio, Italy. He will be a Master Teacher at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in 2021. In 2013-2015, he was the Robert W. Deutsch Foundation Artist in Residence and Research Fellow at the Maryland Institute College of Art. He was awarded a 2017 John Simon

Guggenheim Fellowship, a 2018 TED Fellowship, a 2020 TED Senior Fellowship and the 2018 Arts Innovator Award from the Dale and Leslie Chihuly Foundation and Artist Trust. His most recent award is a 2020 Art for Justice Fund Fellowship.

Rucker is an iCubed Arts Research Fellow and Assistant Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia and Curator for Creative Collaboration for VCUarts.

In 2014, Paul Rucker began producing Ku Klux Klan robes in nontraditional materials. Recently, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts purchased 44 robes for their permanent collection. For the The New Gallery, Rucker has loaned five robes from his collection, extending his ongoing series Storm in the Time of Shelter. They are arranged in a crescent-moon shape formation, displayed on slightly larger-than-life mannequins, and accompanied by a stack of newspapers.

Rucker created the in-depth newspaper that provides further historical background and context to the overall project, which is available for visitors to take from the gallery. The installation evokes repeating patterns of history, building on Rucker's research into historical and current manifestations of systemic racism in the United States.

Paul Rucker will visit APSU for an artist talk on November 9 at 6:00 p.m. in room 106E A/B in the Sunquist Building. This talk will also be live-streamed via zoom. You can register for the talk at [www.bitly.com/PaulRucker](http://www.bitly.com/PaulRucker).

[www.paulrucker.com](http://www.paulrucker.com)

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**Michael Sylvan Robinson** is an internationally-exhibited Queer fiber artist, activist, and leader in arts education. Robinson earned an M.F.A in Interdisciplinary Arts from Goddard College (2008) and a B.A. from Bennington College (1989) with an emphasis in dance and drama.

He is the Head of Arts at the Poly Prep School in Brooklyn. Originally a costume designer and performance artist, their 2D and 3D contemporary fiber art has been shown in galleries and exhibitions including Rome Art Week 2019 and 2021, the National Queer Arts Festival in San Francisco, and as a semi-finalist for the prestigious Sondheim Prize in Baltimore. Eight of Michael Sylvan Robinson's recent works were included in "Remnants" at the Wisconsin Museum of Quilts and Fiber Arts (Spring, 2021), and their "Priestessing the Work of Healing" wearable art gown was featured in Vogue Germany (April, 2021).

#### #URBANFEY: PROTECTIVE WEAR FOR URBAN FAERIES

The sculptural garments and wearable art pieces from my #urbanfey series are created as interventions of healing and activism amidst these challenging times. Each garment is constructed from a textile collage layered with imagery that is Queer, and of the wild, but also inspired by the urban settings of my home landscape; hand-stenciled text fragments printed on each piece name intentions, offer reminders of the fragility of our world, and provoke a call to healing, to action, to remembrance. Each piece is then over-worked with machine and hand-stitching, beading.

Some of the wearable art pieces have been worn in the art-activism of protests and vigils; other smaller works were created as street art - small, bright, and patterned costume-like garments installed



up in the twisting circles of the barbed wire fencing of the industrial setting, blowing in the breeze and creating melodic sounds as the bells and charms chime in the movement of the winds.

*Composting Our Fears + Committing to Action*, 2018  
*In Remembrance*, 2021

[www.michaelsylvanrobinson.com](http://www.michaelsylvanrobinson.com)

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## Event Schedule

- **Nov. 1 - Curator's Talk w/ Erika Diamond.** 6:00 p.m. in Sundquist E106 A/B. Also live-streamed at [www.bitly.com/ErikaDiamond](http://www.bitly.com/ErikaDiamond)
- **Nov. 2 - Gallery Talk w/ Erika Diamond / Michael Dickins.** 12:15 p.m. in The New Gallery
- **Nov. 4 - First Thursday Art Walk.** The New Gallery open until 7:30 p.m.
- **Nov. 9 - Artist Talk w/ Paul Rucker.** 6:00 p.m. in Sundquist E106 A/B. Also live-streamed at [www.bitly.com/PaulRucker](http://www.bitly.com/PaulRucker)
- **Dec. 2 - First Thursday Art Walk.** The New Gallery open until 7:30 p.m.

