

Los Angeles Times

Review: Jemima Wyman explores the colorful aesthetics of public protest

By SHARON MIZOTA
OCT 23, 2018



Jemima Wyman, "Deepsurface and Cautionary signs," 2018. (Ruben Diaz)

In an engaging installation at Commonwealth & Council, Jemima Wyman explores the aesthetics of public protest. Her fabric works, sculptures and wall-spanning collages are covered in graphic patterns and images from various progressive causes and popular movements. From stars associated

with Anonymous, to bee costumes donned by activists speaking out against biochemical agribusiness Monsanto, they form a visual vocabulary of resistance.

The most striking works are paintings on Zeltbahns, or shelter-halves. These triangular pieces of fabric were developed by the military to be worn as ponchos or combined to form temporary shelters. They were sometimes printed with a camouflage pattern, but Wyman has replaced it on both sides with protest imagery. With their upper corners folded down to reveal the painting on the back, they look like robes or perhaps flags draped around shoulders.

One features a striking motif of skulls, stars and bombs gleaned from a 2017 anti-Trump demonstration in the Philippines, backed with a similar pattern of skulls and stripes from a 2014 protest after the killing of Michael Brown. Another Zeltbahn features a repeating letter “A” used by protesters at the 2012 Republican National Convention, interspersed with bullet holes displayed in the “We Will Not Go Back” demonstration after the killing of Eric Garner in 2014. On the folded corners are paint bomb marks from a 2016 anti-government protest in Macedonia. These “flags” make strange but exhilarating connections.



Jemima Wyman, "Coated Shelter-quarter (Women's March, Pittsburgh, Jan. 21, 2017 (Vagina Eye) and Anti-Prisoner Release protest banner, Israel, Aug. 13, 2013 (Hands)" 2018. (Ruben Diaz)

In the center of the room is a large sculpture whose silhouette suggests a protester draped in such a flag. It's constructed like a carapace out of silvery, quilted panels, each bearing a photographic image of a protester wearing a mask. The panels form a soft armor, echoing the way a mask protects one's identity.

Less powerful are two large wall collages of painted fabric, paper and photographs. Although their range of references is impressive, they're not as moving as the pieces that operate on a bodily scale. Protests are all about putting one's body on the line, after all.

Although Wyman is careful to document the source of each motif, she remixes them to suggest a global interconnectedness. Those who fight for justice, the environment and human rights all over the world might be a motley crew, but we're all in the same fight. Wyman has given us our colors.



Jemima Wyman, "Coated Shelter-quarter (Anti-Trump protesters, Manila, Philippines, Nov. 14, 2017 (Bombs) and Protester against the death of Michael Brown, Missouri, Aug. 17, 2014 (Skulls and stripes)," 2018. (Ruben Diaz)