
Asian American Art Oral History Project

Asian American Art Oral History Project

2-24-2016

Aram Han-Sifuentes Interview

Yanessa Rodriguez
DePaul University

Follow this and additional works at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/oral_his_series



Part of the [Art Practice Commons](#), [Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts Commons](#), and the [Fine Arts Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rodriguez, Yanessa. (2016) Aram Han-Sifuentes Interview.
https://via.library.depaul.edu/oral_his_series/70

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Asian American Art Oral History Project at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Asian American Art Oral History Project by an authorized administrator of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

Interviewer: Yanessa Rodriguez
Artist: Aram Han-Sifuentes
Location: Telephone, both in Chicago homes
Date: February 16, 2016



-Image courtesy of the artist

Note: the following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in ART 200: Art & Artists in Contemporary Culture during the 2016 Winter Quarter as a part of the Asian American Art Oral History Research Project conducted by Laura Kina, Professor Art, and Media & Design.

Bio: Aram Han Sifuentes learned how to sew when she was 6 years old from her seamstress mother. Han Sifuentes was born in Seoul, South Korea and immigrated to Modesto, California as a child. She mines from her family's immigration experience to address issues of labor and explores identity as a first generation immigrant.

Han Sifuentes's work has been shown in national and international exhibitions. Her work has been included in exhibitions at the Chung Young Yang Embroidery Museum in Seoul, South Korea; Wing Luke Museum of Asian Pacific American Experience in Seattle, WA; Center for Craft, Creativity and Design in Asheville, NC; and Elmhurst Art Museum in Elmhurst, IL.

Han earned her BA in Art and Latin American Studies from the University of California, Berkeley in 2008 and her MFA in Fiber and Material Studies from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2013. –Bio courtesy of the artist

Interview Transcript:

Yanessa Rodriguez: Can you tell me a little bit about yourself- your birthdate, where you grew up, what your family dynamic was like?

Aram Han-Sifuentes: Let's see. Going all the way back to the past, I was born in Seoul, South Korea on October 12, 1986. My mom studied traditional ink painting, so a lot of the stuff that she does is flowers or landscapes, and then my dad was working at a bank. My mom was running her own art center inside of our apartment. I have an older sister; she's four and a half years older than me. And then in 1992, when I was five years old, we moved to the United States. We moved to Turlock, California but it's in the Central Valley because my mom's sister lived there. But actually, my parents applied to move to the United States. You know, they applied for the lottery to move to the United States legally and they applied for that a year before I was born, and then when we got chosen for the lottery and I was five, so that was six years later. So then we had to quickly get up and leave.

YR: So did you start school in California or were you already going to school in South Korea?

AHS: Yeah, I actually wasn't going to school in Korea, but my sister was because she was like ten at the time. Yeah, I was supposed to start but then my mom was telling me that she waited and in Korea, students go to school super early. And it's not just school; it's those after-school programs and stuff like that. And so my mom was doing a lot of tutoring me by herself. So yeah, I hadn't started school in Korea, but then I started school once I got to California.

YR: Okay, and then you just continued obviously going there.

AHS: Yeah, yeah. But you know, there are funny stories about it because I was such a small kid that when we got to the United States, and you know, I couldn't speak any English or anything. And then it was such a stark contrast because Seoul is like so bustling and it's such a metropolis city. And then we moved to the Central Valley, which is then like farmland and in the middle of nowhere. My aunt had a dog, she actually had a lot of animals - she was a veterinarian. And so the first day I saw this little dog, she had a Pomeranian, and it freaked me out because I had never even seen a dog before. So then my mom said she let me play in the backyard and then she came out and found me on top of their outside freezer because I was so scared of the dog. And then the next day she looked out and saw the dog running away from me, because I was chasing it down.

YR: Wow! I love that, especially a Pomeranian.

AHS: I know! And then also the Central Valley, especially Turlock, is very conservative and very white, but there are also a lot of Latinos because it's the farmland and there are a lot of migrant workers and undocumented workers and all of that. But I was always one of the only Asian kids in school or stuff. But anyways, I was so small that they didn't

believe that I was five years old because I looked like I was three years old. And then, I remember my parents telling me that they kept trying to hold me back in school because I was so small and that was like institutional racism from the beginning. And they would have to give me tests, right, to see and if I would pass each test to continue on and one of the tests I failed. And then my aunt went on to argue with them and they said, "Yeah, we asked her what's bigger, a dog or a cat, and she said a cat" and then my aunt told them that they were so dumb and that the question was so stupid.

YR: What? That is such a vague question.

AHS: Yeah, and my aunt told them, "I have a Pomeranian and it is much smaller than my cat." And that's why I said that a dog is smaller than a cat!

YR: That is such a dumb question, especially to ask a small child! That's all very interesting. So- when, how, and why did you first get involved in art?

AHS: So, long story there is that as I told you, my mom is an artist. And she was running this art center in our house and people were coming in and out, children were coming in and out all the time, but then she never wanted to teach me or my sister to do art. Because she was like, "this isn't the blood, I don't want my daughters to become artists." Because life as an artist is pretty difficult and her having gone through it herself thought that this is something I don't want my daughters to go through. I know, karma. So then she never taught us to paint or draw or any of that. But then after moving to the United States, my parents started working at a dry cleaner because we got rid of everything and uprooted ourselves and I mean, my mom's a really fierce lady and the reason why she wanted to move to the United States was, I mean, kind of complicated family dynamic, but one of the main reasons was she was unhappy with how women were being treated at that time in Korean society. I mean its very different now, but it was very sexist. But that was the main reason she wanted us to move to the United States.

So then we uprooted ourselves and in this place where there are like no Koreans around, we found a small Korean community through the Korean church, and the only people that were willing to help us get started by training us, my parents, and having them work in their store were these people that owned a dry cleaners. And that's how my parents got started in that business. And you know, my mom being an artist and having made her clothes and stuff when she was younger, she became a seamstress. And at like age six I remember sewing with her and she would teach me how to sew because that's not art and that's practical and it could help her with her job. Because I remember I would tear out the broken zippers for her and sew on buttons for her- just for fun, once in a while. But so she taught me to sew, and then from then I remember when I was a little kid doing all of these elaborate cross-stiches... And my mom threw them all away but like... I can't believe she did that.

YR: You're still gonna hold a grudge!

AHS: Yeah, a little bit... But you know being immigrants my parents totally have that kind of dynamic where they don't find anything sentimental, they just throw everything

away all the time. So... whatever. But anyways, so I did that, and I remember just in my free time all the time making my own jewelry, and I would embroider things on my clothes all the time just for fun. And this is like all of my life. And then how I came to art was in college. I was studying Latin American Studies with a concentration on immigration policy and then I was at UC Berkeley, and I started taking some art classes just to see what it was about. And then I loved them so much. And then I started taking a bunch of ceramics classes under my professors, Richard Shaw and Eric Tool, and they just could see I'm super enthusiastic and like I worked really hard, and would invite me to lunch every week to hang out with them and their friends. Later on I found out that these people I had lunch with were like, really mega famous ceramicists to be like "Oh my god I had no idea at the time."

YR: That's such a great experience.

AHS: Yeah, it was awesome. They were just so welcoming and so supportive and then I kept doing more and more art and then finally, a month before graduating from college, I was like, "I'm gonna pursue art" - because actually up until then, I had wanted to become a veterinarian. So end of college and I'm graduating I'm like, "Oh, I want to pursue art" and that was a little bit of a difficult decision because my parents at first weren't so supportive. But then I developed my portfolio, worked on that really hard, went to grad school, and never looked back really.

YR: Wow, that's awesome. So how do you label yourself and your artwork?

AHS: It's super complicated right, because there are these terms that the art world uses that I don't necessarily find myself in. But maybe it's the best thing that describes what I do at the moment and that's kind of how I feel. But the main words that I use in my practice... I definitely call myself a 'fiber artist', because not all of my projects involve sewing but like ninety percent of them do. And I think at the core of everything I come back to hand sewing, and that becomes a way of thinking for me; that repetition, that movement, that gesture, the accumulation. This is the way that I think. And being in conversation with history through the act of sewing, being in conversation with the community, through this act. It all comes back to that for me always and that is why I call myself a 'fiber artist' a hundred percent of the time. But like 'social practice,' I use that one once in a while. I'm not convinced that I'm a social practice artist, but that's kind of like a label that's easy to put onto my work at the current moment because I do work with different type of communities within my artwork and it is community engaged. So I sometimes use social practice artist, but I don't feel so strongly about it. And sometimes people will call my work immigrant artwork, which is fine, and some people say I'm a Korean artist but definitely I'm a Korean American artist. And so the labels kind of get a little messy, but definitely I'll go with 'Korean American fiber artist that makes socially engaged work'... Something like that.

YR: Speaking of accumulation and history through the act of sewing, what motivated you to create your project, '*US Citizenship Test Sampler*'?

AHS: Becoming more and more of a fiber artist, because actually when I first started school, like I told you, I started out doing ceramics. I started getting into drawing and painting and then all of a sudden I started sewing. And I was like, “wait, where did this come from?” and the more and more I thought about sewing, I was like “oh, this comes from a very specific context.” It’s the context of my family’s immigrant experience. So then that plays a key role in everything I do, like it isn’t just about me hand sewing, it’s about me hand sewing as an immigrant and engaging in this discourse, right? So then the more and more I researched about sewing history, I find a lot of inspiration in that and also problems with it. So one thing that I was reading about was needlework samplers in colonial America. So needlework samplers started out in Europe, really all of Eastern-kind of- Eastern Europe. So it started in Europe and they had a lot of practices with samplers, especially like the UK has a lot of sampler questions and all of that stuff. And that practice also came to the United States. So then they have these multiple functions, where schoolteachers would teach their students how to sew these samplers and they would have the alphabet and numbers on it so they would have these multiple functions of teaching them how to sew and it was kids as young as six years old - just both girls and boys. So, then they would teach them how to sew and then it was also teaching them the alphabet and numbers by teaching them how to sew these things. And then later on, adolescent girls of wealthier families would create another sampler that was pictorial and like super decked out and super decorative and like super laborious. And so this was supposed to be a signifier of their work to their potential suitors. So like, “look at what a good embroiderer I am, I’m gonna be such a good wife.” So I was reading this history, and thinking it’s pretty funny and pretty... fucked up. So, I mean like, embroidery functions in that way a lot of times in history as like a woman showing her worth through how good we embroider. Because then it’s like... Then it shows the time to do something so laborious and like, so decorative.

So anyways, I was reading about that and I was thinking about how I’m not a citizen and I have to study for these test materials. And I just don’t want to study for it and I don’t have the time for it. This was like a side thought-it wasn’t ever together for me? But I told you I studied immigration policy in undergrad and being a legal resident is really precarious because the laws can change so quick, and my path to citizenship can go away so fast or it could get so much more expensive and these things can change so quickly and affect my life so drastically. But like, I always think about that and it’s always kind of a point of stress in my life. And plus, I’m a super political person and I have so much things to say and I’m really outspoken and stuff. And I get scared to go to protests because I’m scared I’ll get arrested and then my status as a legal resident will be in jeopardy, because those things happen. Because one of the things that being a citizen is like... to getting your citizenship is like you have to be in good, moral standing. What does even mean? And that’s vague for a reason... So anyways, this is a point of stress for me and I’ve always thought about like, “I really need to take this test; I really need to become a citizen.” And so these two ideas kind of came together at some point where it was like, “Oh, I’m gonna make this an artwork.” I have to study this test material, why don’t I just sew it and make it a sampler? So then over time I was like developing the project more and more and framing it more and developing it more. And I put these all guidelines onto the work where it starts to speak to we’re breaking off of these traditional colonial samplers. So I’m sewing the 100 questions and answers of the citizenship test to

learn the material, like the colonial samplers. I'm selling it for 680 dollars, which is the cost of applying for citizenship. The other thing is I'm calculating the hours I'm working on it and my stitches are tiny, tiny, tiny. I've been working on this since 2012 and I'm on number 53 right now! Not that I work on it everyday but you know... it's been a long time and I've spent a lot of hours on this thing.

So then I'm calculating how many hours I'm working on it and I'm projecting I'm gonna make a little less than a dollar an hour. So that speaks to the value of hand labor; that speaks to the value of immigrant labor. I'll only get my citizenship if it sells, so then it's like me showing my work and letting other people decide if I'm worthy. And then I've also been working with other non-citizens, either one-on-one or in bigger workshops at public schools or non-profit organizations where people-- other non-citizens take one of the questions and answers they wanna stitch and I teach them how to sew if they already don't know; and these are multiple days of workshops so you know really creating this environment, this community, where we sew, we go through the test materials together while we're sewing- and also it just becomes a place where we talk and where we share our frustrations and our status; our immigration to the United States; a place where we can really have this dialogue.

One other thing is that these samplers that then they create, that other non-citizens create, are also on sale for 680 each and if it sells that full amount goes back to the maker as a gesture to help them pay for their citizenship.

YR: That's great, I love that. One of my things was that you're saying that you and the people that come to these workshops go through the test materials. Do you think that sewing these samplers and going through the test materials with them- do you think that it really helps them study for the test—to pass it?

AHS: Yeah, I think it does because so many of the people that come to the workshops that I work with are so intimidated by the test, and they have a reason to be. Because it's ridiculous - the test is ridiculous, the wording is ridiculous. It's like - you see all these studies that say the majority of citizen's cant even pass the test because they ask these crazy questions! First of all, it's an oral test so it's not even multiple choice. And the wording is so weird on a lot of these questions, like for example one of them is like, 'what is the rule of law?'... What is the rule of law... If somebody asked you that, you'd be like "uuhhh"... Can it be multiple choice please? But it's that everyone has to follow the law. So like some of the questions are just really hard in general. Some of the questions are so vague and off. Some of the other things the test says is like, 'who was President during World War I? ... It's Woodrow Wilson, but like why do we have to know this in order to become citizens? So a lot of people are really intimidated by the test and the process of getting their citizenship. So I feel like for some people, they kind of lock into these workshops being like, "Oh, my friends are here", or they're like "Oh, I love sewing, I want to sew." And so through this, it becomes more approachable and more manageable and they're just fun workshops. We're just a community of people sewing, talking to each other, having fun - I make sure there's food, I also make sure there's music - stuff like that. So it just creates a comfortable safe space. Then if there are citizens there that went through the process, then they talk about their experiences and share their stories of the test and stuff like that, and so it just becomes a place... and then

a lot of people actually come with their questions to me about the test and about the process and I've helped some people through the process. So it just becomes this place where they have a place to go to ask these questions and learn the material together; where it isn't so intimidating.

So definitely I've had people that come to the workshops and are like "I wasn't even gonna take the test because I just didn't wanna go through it or thought it'd be so hard, but after studying this together, I'm gonna do it because I know that I can pass it now." I mean not everyone says that, but there's a few!

YR: I know that you have, I feel that this is a theme in a sense, but do you ever address Asian or Asian American identities, themes, or histories in your artwork?

AHS: Definitely. And I mean, I think it's in everything that I do. But obviously this project is a little bit more broad in terms of like, immigration and just being an immigrant. But for example my project, *A Mend*, my collection of straps from local seamstresses and tailors is really specifically like Asian American, and more specifically a Korean American history that I'm dealing with because, you know, I collected these scraps... jean scraps from 23 different seamstresses and I think only two or three of them are from somewhere else and then everyone else is South Korean. And so that is really important for me and that is something that... So something that I was starting to talk about earlier was the way that fiber history or textile history is talked about, and that sewing history is talked about is so much about... sometimes it's so much about the industrial revolution or this past of like colonial America with women sewing and then the other dialogue becomes about sewing in sweatshops in like, Cambodia and China and those are really far away places- they have terrible working conditions and things like that. But we forget to talk about people who are still doing that type of work here, in the United States, right now. And that discourse is immigrants; immigrants are doing this work. And like 23 of those 23 people I collected jean cuts from are all immigrants. And I didn't plan it - I like literally walked outside and I yelped the closest seamstresses and tailors. So like I went to 23 randomly and all 23 people were immigrants. And it's not a coincidence because... there's a whole thing that I talk about in that project is like you know to come to a United States, you have to have a certain type of privilege in the place you're from in order to even come here legally. So like, you have to be at least middle class, you have to be pretty well educated in order to come to the United States legally. Like for example, my cousin in Korea, he's like very working class and didn't go to college. They will never give him even a visa to come visit the United States. So to apply to live here, you have to be of... you have a certain type of background and education. But then once you're here... of course it's different in certain cases, for example if you have an education or background in nursing then that carries over into the country. Or if you're in the tech business, those credentials, that education carries over here. But with the majority of the jobs you have in the country you're from, it doesn't carry over here. Like no one gives a shit about your education, no one cares about your work experience and then most of the times you don't even speak English that well.

So then, the opportunities that you get in that situation then are these super working class... these jobs where you're totally working class, like, physical labor. And so in that project I was asking people what jobs they had prior to moving to the United

States cause I'm just tapping into that history to be like... because the ways that immigrants are talked about, and the experiences of immigrants are talked about like "what happens as soon as you come here?" We don't really talk about 'who were you', and what you were doing before you got here. And so like that's what I was really curious with and that's what I would try and engage with in that project.

But going back to the Asian American thing again, it's a bit broader about the flaws of immigration and immigration policy and how institutionally we've made it this way where people can't continue their professions here in most instances but a lot of that was specifically towards Asian Americans with 20 of those people being South Korean. And then I've been working on a project now that's not on my website or anything but I've been engaging... well, it's really complicated actually and I don't know how to talk about it... but it's not so much Asian American but like I've been riffing off of... so I have an exhibition in May at the Chung Young Yang Embroidery Museum in Seoul, Korea and they have a beautiful collection of these ancient Chinese and Korean embroidery, and they asked me to respond to their collection. So then I've been responding by translating some of the textile embroidery onto fashionable garments and completely turning it into fashion. So I would say that's kind of Asian American, but not entirely specifically about it, but I think that part of that is definitely there.

Oh, yeah! And then I just thought about the other project that's totally about Asian Americans is *Kim Jong-Un Americans*. So like where I give people Kim Jong-Un haircuts or hairstyles and get their photos taken in the style of the Supreme Leader. That's totally about how North Korea gets talked about and how we look at Kim Jong-Un in America and how we make him into this crazy clown character; and we make up all of this news around him that's totally fake. We're just gonna place where we don't know what news is fake or real, or how crazy this guy is, or whatever because America is so obsessed with demonizing him. So then the haircut thing happened because in the news it said that he passed a mandate where all men in North Korea had to get his haircut. That was a totally false story made up by somebody. So then I decided to enact it here, in America... But I guess that's Asian American, but I'm sure it's like in all of my work, it's just like... you know I wouldn't say that I've made something that's *just* about the Asian American experience... But it's everywhere in my work.... Sorry, that's like such a long answer for you!

YR: No, I love it! So, have you ever been included in an exhibition that was contextualized as Asian or Asian American, or have you ever been labeled as an Asian or Asian American artist?

AHS: So... I'm trying to think of any other ones... But, last year me and Jacqueline Chao curated a show of Asian American artists called *Work Werq* and it was in conjunction with the Association for Asian American Studies conference. So we curated the show about Asian American artists in Chicago, and it was visual artists so we also had performances happening; and during the whole process we just came to find out how complicated it is to call something Asian American. Because like first of all... what the fuck is Asia? Right? I mean, having studied Latin American studies, it's so much more complicated than even Latin American studies, which has more countries because at least there's shared languages within Latin America. But then in Asia, we have so many

different languages - we don't even share that. And then, there's this special complex history of us colonizing each other and fighting each other and there isn't even an affinity there sometimes. So then it became really complicated there for us like, "what is Asia?" and then equally the same question is, "Wait, what is American?" Like at one point are you American? Because we had artists who had lived here for over like, five years who were like, "No, I'm Korean," or we'd asked them, "Are you American?" and they'd say, "No, I'm not." And it's like, you've been here five years, you're here legally, does that make you American? And then there's people that are like, "No, I'm Asian American" who came here last year and have an artist's visa or something. So at one point can we call someone American or not? And then we had one artist who's an adopted Korean into a white Anglo family and he called himself an Asian American artist. So we're like, are you Asian because of the way you look or are you Asian because of the way that society treats you... So it became super complicated and we just decided to really expand that and just accept all of it and really... challenge these definitions to be like, "you know what? Asian American is really like... You're Asian American if you call yourself Asian American." And that's totally legitimate even if you came to the United States yesterday, or if you're adopted, or whatever.

YR: Was that something that was important to you not in a community sense, but personally as well?

AHS: Yeah, because also I get really frustrated because... I feel like it's really hard to find an Asian American community and that's still something I think about all the time, is that there's such like a black community presence in the art world, there's such a Latino community presence in the art world, and then it's like, "wait, where are the Asians?" We're there, it's just that for some reason we're not mobilizing together and being a strong force by working together. And I think it is the thing I talked about, like we all speak different languages, like our histories are super complicated and the histories between the countries in Asia are super complicated. So for me... And then I get frustrated at times because certain people will... I don't know, like they place certain things onto you and your work because of who you are and some people are just always like, "Oh, you just made work about being Asian American" or whatever, and "Oh, doesn't this regard certain themes and ideas" because they're just like "oh, this about you being Asian American." It's like, why is that a problem and why are you disregarding it? And then, at the same time I feel like there's so much backlash against that amongst artists in my community who are like, "I don't want to be called Asian American artists. What I do is not about being Asian American and that needs to be clear." I get frustrated that that's even a response; that it should really be like an embracing of ourselves and our identity and being like, we're complicated people and we can make work not just about Asian American experience, we can make work about anything we want to... So then I feel like it was really important to have that exhibition to show our presence in in the Chicago community and to also have super varied artwork. So it's like, we are capable of doing all of this and we do it well and we're all Asian American.

YR: What type of exhibition opportunities have changed or stayed the same for you over the years?

AHS: ...So I graduated with my MFA at SAIC... two and a half years ago?... and since then, I've just been showing more and more and gaining a lot more momentum. And so... yeah, I think... so exhibition wise, in the beginning a lot of them were me applying to exhibitions, so like calls for entry and stuff like that. And then I also do a lot of - I wouldn't say a lot of... but I also write about my own work and contextualize it my self and stuff, so I presented a paper on my work like two years ago at the College Art Association and I just presented another paper on my work like a couple weeks ago at the College Art Association in D.C., so I've had opportunities to publish some of my writings. Like last year, I had a beautiful spread in a Montreal-based art magazine called, *Espace*, and you know... I've just been showing a lot; I've been showing at the Chicago Artists Coalition on the BOLT Residency. I had a solo show in October and I'll have another solo show in July. Like you know, in the past year really, I've got a lot of momentum and been asked to do a lot of shows so like I... Yeah, it's been crazy for me... I think in like the past six months I've had like eight exhibitions or like eight things and the next six months, I have like six more.... Yeah... But you know like if you just keep working, more things just come to you, you know you don't have to do things and but in the beginning its really hard you have to like really apply to things, you have to be really present, you have to be... Because also, just making artwork isn't good enough. You have to talk to people about it, show people your artwork, apply for things; so it's just a balance between being able to continue to make and make and make your work and then to also at the same time make that work very visible so that people know that you're making work and they ask you to be in exhibitions. And they just know that you're around making good work.

YR: Definitely. So you're still currently working on the sampler, correct?

AHS: Yeah... I don't know when it will end and that's okay with me and it's just something... yeah, I've been doing a bit less workshops than I did last year because like last year, I tried to do a workshop like every month, but now I'm taking a little break from that. I'm still setting some workshops up, but I've picked up a lot of new work this year so I'm trying to produce a lot more new work.

YR: What else are you currently working on then, besides the one you told me about-with the embroidery?

AHS: That's a big project, too. I mean none of my projects are small. And all of my projects took years to make, so that's just part of it I think. And because I work this way, I feel a lot of work in progress is cool or fine... Because it's about work, it's about the process, it's about making so then it seems silly... And also with how long my projects take it seems silly to try to finish one thing and show it finished. So I show the samplers all the time even though I'm only on number 53, because it's just about the process of it all.

So then this embroidery project I've been doing is about like... a bigger project. I just did a residency in November and December in San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, Mexico. I did residency with *Trenza Negras* with my husband; I was working with a

group of embroiderers - indigenous women, embroiderers - from six different communities within Chiapas. So these are like, master embroiderers and they're awesome. They're work is in the... so I was working with a museum there, the Centro del Textiles de Mundo Maya and their work is in that museum's collection and they also teach a lot of classes at the museum. So then I asked them to pick one of these Korean traditional textiles and to translate that to create new work, so they did these translation projects for me and they're fucking awesome. And then I also am doing my own translation, as I told you, by decking out... I'm decking out this G-Star jumpsuit with these embroideries done on emperors' robes. So it's like, super intricate embroidery and I kind of want to die right now because it's just something that I forget that embroidery always takes longer than expected. So I'm trying to finish this by the end of February and I'm like, "Oh my god, what did I just get myself into." And I have a friend, my friend Veronica, a woman from Spain who's an amazing embroiderer who has been helping me do it but even with her help... it's just such delicate, beautiful embroidery that to replicate it, I don't even know what I was doing, it's crazy. But anyway, so then I'm decking out this jumpsuit in this traditional Korean embroidery.

So I'm working on that, and then I'm working on... So I'm participating in... this is a really weird venue for me, but in the Constitution Center In Philly, I'm working with a team of immigration lawyers and law students from Tyler who are creating a simulation for the public to go through to go through the process that refugees go through. So like it's the whole process of applying - there's like ten different forms you have to fill out and ten different stages you have to go through like medical clearances, you have to do interviews. And most of the time you're just waiting and waiting and waiting. And we're gonna start out with a hundred people and only such a small fraction of them come to the US, and only a small fraction of them get their citizenship. So I'm participating in that, where I'm doing a session in the refuge camp area where I'm doing stitch project. So, I'm stitching... So, I'll have this stitched already, but they're gonna be three feet by five feet... I'm gonna turn it into a flag or banner. But it's it the first form you fill out as a refugee. So it's just such a crazy process because if you're a refugee, you're at risk; your life is at danger. You have to fill out all of these forms and pay money and do so much waiting; that's really so much of the whole process is just waiting and waiting and waiting. Because they said on average, it takes like 18 months for a refugee - when they register, when they fill out that first form - to then actually come to the United States takes like 18 months. So that's just crazy... So then the simulation is so much about waiting, so I'm gonna teach the people - I'll have the forms all stitched out already without any names or anything filled out, so they'll be blank - a blank form. And then I'm gonna have people with red thread doing the running stitch, its just like the simplest straight stitch. So while they're waiting, they'll fill this form out with running stitches, like obscuring the form.

But that's something I'm working on, and then... oh my god, there's so much stuff... My husband is a performance artist, his name is Roberto Sifuentes and he started a performance group called, 'La Pocha Nostra', with Guillermo Gómez-Peña. So me and him have been starting to work together... like really, our work, like talking about intersectionality - not just talking about the Latino experience like he's been doing and me talking about the Asian American experience, but then like coming together in a space where we talk about these issues together. So like we started to make performances

and works together that we're still work shopping. What else am I doing... I don't know, I think that's plenty.

YR: That is all my questions, thank you so much!

END.