

Tactical Frivolity

Jemima Wyman

Jemima Wyman is a contemporary artist who lives and works between Los Angeles and Brisbane, Australia. Wyman's individual practice spans various mediums and focuses on visual resistance and the politics of fabric. She has exhibited at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art (Japan), the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (Melbourne), Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney) and Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles). In 2012, for *The Unexpected Guest: Liverpool Biennial*, Wyman was commissioned by FACT to make a large-scale public engagement project. Her most recent solo exhibitions include *Effacing Power* at Steve Turner Contemporary in Los Angeles and *Pattern Bandits* at the Gallery of Modern Art in Australia. For the past nine years she has also collaborated with Anna Mayer as CamLab.

These collages developed out of witnessing various protest movements online. In early 2011, as part of an effort to be active, embodied, and empathetic in the interface with the computer screen, I started pulling, archiving, printing and hand-cutting images of protesters wearing Guy Fawkes masks. The archive has developed in tandem with the growing protest culture over the last few years. There was something compelling about this shared collective face that ignored geographical borders and divergent ideological perspectives. A mask is magic, especially when it multiplies to become a communal architecture and a social camouflage in a world of networked surveillance.

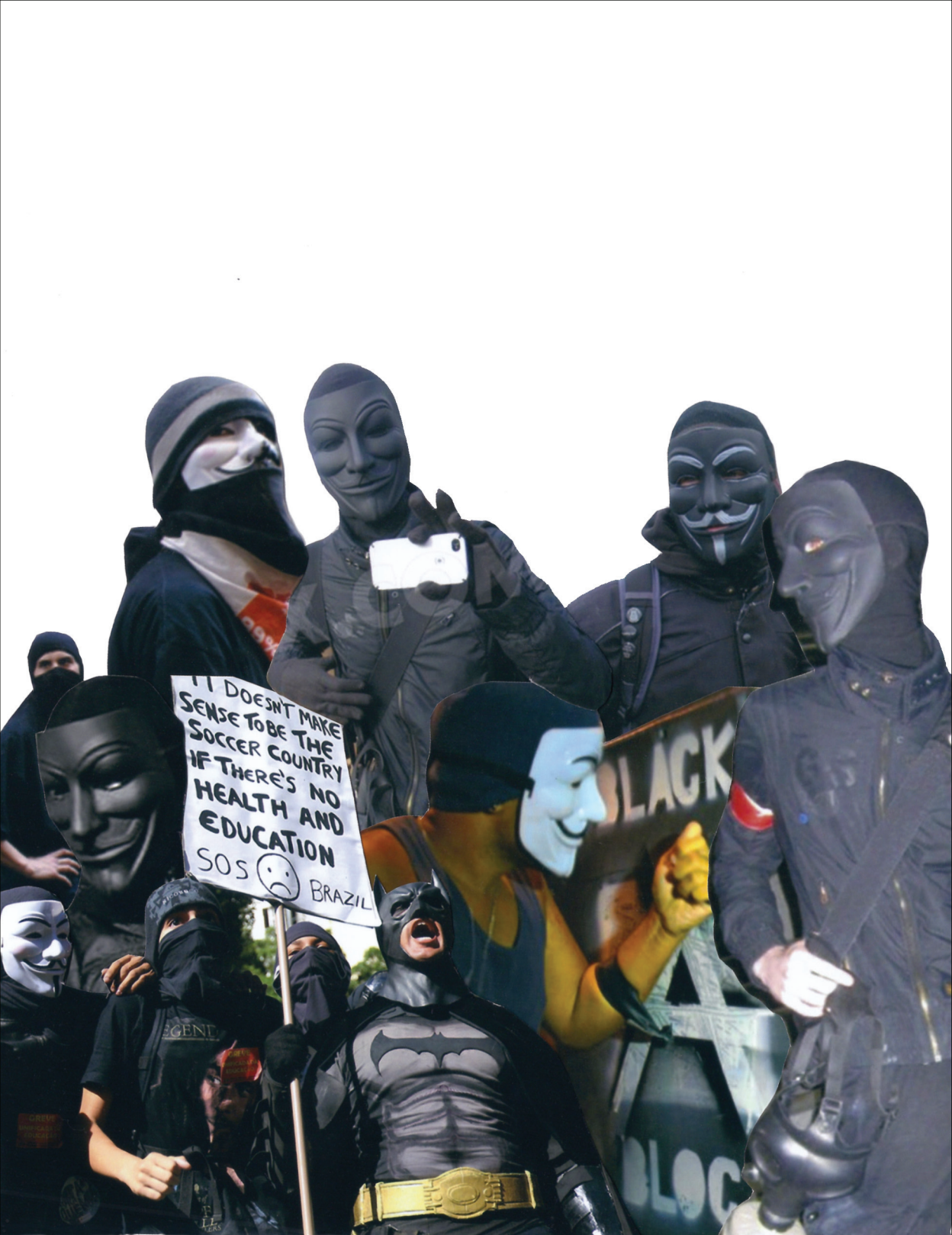
This iteration in *X-TRA* documents a selection from six different sub-categories of protesters who customize and accessorize the Guy Fawkes mask. These interventions range from appropriated Ukuku masks (a traditional Peruvian mask that appears to merge the colorful knitted balaclava of the Free Pussy Riot movement with the face of Guy Fawkes) to spray-painted masks by Black bloc and a decaled First Nations variation.

On the mask: Guy Fawkes (1570–1606) was a British revolutionary whose failed plot to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605 is still commemorated each year in the United Kingdom with bonfires and backyard fireworks. In the days leading up to November 5, children traditionally solicited donations to buy fireworks by displaying a “guy” on the sidewalk (a figure made of discarded clothing stuffed with rags or paper, often wearing a home-made mask).¹ Their cry—“Penny for the Guy!”—rang out in the cold November evenings, as passers-by hurried home from work or school. The uncanny effigy was then ceremoniously burned on the bonfire. While participation in Halloween rituals in the United Kingdom has increased since the late 1970s, the image of the “Guy” retains its ambivalent resonance.

Britons Alan Moore and David Lloyd re-functioned the Guy Fawkes mask as the hero's disguise in their comic book *V for Vendetta*, originally published in 1982 and made into a Warner Brothers movie in 2006.² In September 2006, the 4chan meme “Epic Fail Guy” found a Guy Fawkes mask in a trash can and put it on. In February 2008, the hacktivist group Anonymous deployed the mask in their protests outside Scientology headquarters in Los Angeles and elsewhere. Invoking rebellion and anonymity, the enigmatic mask adds a carnivalesque quality to any street protest, with a smile that is simultaneously benevolent, ironic, and sinister.

1. *Collins Dictionary* states the everyday word “guy” derives from effigies of Guy Fawkes.

2. Warner Brothers earns copyright royalties on the mass-produced mask, with over 100,000 masks typically sold annually.







Jemima Wyman, *Tactical Frivolity*, 2014. Hand-cut photo collages, approximately 7½ × 7 inches each.

References:

Ukuku: Green shirt: Pro-Abortion, January 4, 2013, Santiago, Chile; Red helmet: Anti-mining protest, July 13, 2013, Cajamarca, Peru; Madonna shirt: Free Pussy Riot, August 17, 2012, Russian Embassy, London, UK; Yellow faced duo: Free Pussy Riot, August 13, 2012, São Paulo, Brazil; Holding cup: Free Pussy Riot, August 17, 2012, Portland OR, USA; Hoodie: Protesting a shooting, December 12, 2010, Red Square, Moscow, Russia.

Black Bloc: 99% scarf: Anti-NATO, May 20, 2012, Chicago, IL, USA; Holding phone: OpBART protests police methods, August 22, 2011, San Francisco, CA, USA; Grey mustache: Anti-austerity, May 4, 2013, Trafalgar Square, London, UK. Gas mask: Occupy UC, November 10, 2011, Berkeley, CA, USA; Shield: Teachers' day protest, October 15, 2013, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Batman: World Cup demonstration, June 12, 2014, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Black mask: Occupy Oakland, November 8, 2011, Oakland, CA, USA.

Customized: Writing on face, Julian Assange supporter, August 22, 2012, Ecuadorean Embassy, London, UK; Eyelashes: Anti-war, September 2, 2014, Newport, Wales, UK; OPTB: Protesting murdered aboriginal women, April 6, 2013, Thunder Bay, Canada.

Marijuana leaf: Occupy Wall Street, November 23, 2011, Zuccotti Park, New York, NY, USA; Patterned Sharpie: Occupy Trafalgar Square, November 5, 2011, London, UK; Cubist-style mask: Occupy Wall Street, December 31, 2011, Zuccotti Park, New York, NY, USA; Red mask: Anti-Corruption, November 5, 2013, London, UK.

Keffiyeh: Phone: Occupy St Paul's, November 10, 2011, London, UK; Spray paint: First anniversary Egyptian uprising, January 25, 2012, Giza, Egypt; Headband: May Day rally, May 1, 2013, Tunis, Tunisia; Barbed wire: Anti-government, April 30, 2012, Abbasiya district, Cairo, Egypt; Carrying hoe: May Day rally, May 1, 2013, Sidon, Lebanon; Shove cuts: Bonfire of Austerity protest, November 5, 2013, London, UK; Peace sign: First anniversary Egyptian uprising, January 25, 2012, Shubra district, Cairo, Egypt; Glasses: Protesters from multiple parties, April 20, 2012, Cairo, Egypt; Green keffiyeh, white keffiyeh: Location unknown, April 5, 2011. Red lips: Million Mask March, November 5, 2013, Dublin, Ireland; Patterned blanket: Protesting military control, January 30, 2012, Cairo, Egypt; Double peace: Anti-ACTA, January 28, 2012, Saint-Martin, Paris, France.

Camo: Placard: Solidarity with Julian Assange, February 4, 2012, London, UK; Laptop: Occupy St Paul's, December 4, 2011, London, UK; Spiderman: Rape trial protest, March 13, 2013, Steubenville, OH,

USA; Skateboard: Occupy Oakland, October 26, 2011, Oakland CA, USA; Green keffiyeh: Rape trial protest, March 13, 2013, Steubenville, OH, USA; Throwing stone: Anti-government protest, January 19, 2014, Kiev, Ukraine; Digital camo: Protesting BART police shootings, August 22, 2011, San Francisco, CA, USA; Girl on shoulders: Million Mask March, November 5, 2013, Melbourne, Australia; White shirt: World pride event, July 7, 2012, Trafalgar Square, London, UK; Paper mask: Anti-ACTA, January 25, 2012, Warsaw, Poland.

Pink: Hoodie: Occupy Frankfurt, October 29, 2011, Commerzbank, Frankfurt, Germany. Checkered hat: protest unknown, November 2, 2013, Prague, Czech Republic; Yellow flier: Protesting Scientology, January 9, 2009, Powell Street Station, San Francisco CA, USA; Dissent: 10th anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan, October 6, 2011, Washington DC, USA; Pink masks: Pro-government demonstrators, June 3, 2013, Siam Station, Bangkok, Thailand.