A collection of brightly colored flags hangs from the ceiling of this space—each one with a distinct design. On the flag at the front and center of this installation is what appears to be a human silhouette in white, flanked by two yellow crescent moons on a background of two bold black stripes with a light blue stripe between the two. To the right of this flag is a red flag with a central motif of a white circle, rimmed with black, encircling a star and two overlapping swords. As you see the flags towards the back, you may notice more colors—white, blue, green, red, yellow, orange—and glimpses of stripes, triangles, and other design motifs.

These flags were created by artist Stephanie Syjuco, who has mined film and television for flags that represent fictional countries. Attached to this resource is a key to each flag—its source and the name of the fictional country to which it belongs. For example, the red flag hanging right of center in the photograph is from the film Iron Eagle (USA, 1986) and is supposed to represent a Muslim country engaged in abuse of a member of the United States Air Force.

By bringing these flags together, Syjuco asks us to consider how the creation of the flag designs shapes our view of who is supposedly represented by them. In the context of the films and television programs in which they were featured, they all represented some kind of threatening “other.” Through her work, the artist asks us to re-examine the narratives that define some countries as civilized and moral, and some countries as uncivilized, unstable, and dangerous.

**CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:**

Divide students into groups of four and have them discuss the following questions: What is the purpose of a flag? What is a flag intended to communicate to the citizens of its own country? What about to people around the world? Have students share their answers with the entire class. Ask students to look closely at the flags in Rogue States and describe what they see. What are the colors, shapes, and motifs they see on the flags? How would they interpret what kind of country is represented by some of the flags they can see? As the discussion progresses, share relevant information on Rogue States. In the next stage of the activity, form student pairs. Ask each student to decide on a “place” in their lives that could be represented by a flag—that could be anything from their family to their state. Then have each student interview their partner about the place they selected. Each student will then design and draw a flag for their partner’s “place” in collaboration with the partner to ensure that it represents this “place” in the way their partner wishes.
Rogue States, Stephanie Syjuco
Key to Rogue States, Stephanie Syjuco
Stephanie Syjuco. Key to Rogue States, 2018. Courtesy of the artist