



"Unapologetically Asian"

Date

c. 2020

Primary Maker

Julia Kwon

Medium

Korean silk, cotton canvas, muslin, elastic

Description

Multicolored pink and blue block design face mask. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated racial and economic inequities in the United States. Mortality rates are

disproportionately high among people of color and violence and discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans has risen precipitously since the first reported COVID-19 cases in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. In response to this violence, artist Julia Kwon created her Unapologetically Asian series of face masks done in the style of Korean bojagi, or patchwork. Kwon taps into a traditional Korean art form to initiate an awareness-raising campaign, combat prejudice, and disrupt stereotypes. She does so by converting the protective mask from a polarized symbol into an agent of activism. She writes, "The work is in response to the fact that preventative masks worn especially by Asian people have largely been perceived as an unnecessary overreaction, a proof of illness, or an open invitation to commit hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic. . . . [My] work unapologetically embraces [my] ethnic identity to confront COVID-19 related anti-Asian racism that is prevalent today. Supporters of the project become active participants as they wear the masks in solidarity, discuss the project with others, and bring awareness to the experiences of Asian people as well as other marginalized communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic" (from exhibition label text).