

“Survival of the Fittest” refers to a Darwinian term coined by English philosopher and sociologist Herbert Spencer. It alludes to the idea that those best adjusted to their environment will be the most successful in surviving and reproducing, thus continuing their lineage. By taking this concept and seeing it through a social lens, *Survival of the Fittest* discusses the idiosyncrasies of social status with an emphasis on the notion of social framing. Featuring artists **Augustine Chavez**, **Raina Rangou**, and **Youngil Joseph Kim**.

In social theory, framing is a schema of interpretation, a collection of anecdotes and stereotypes that individuals rely on to understand and respond to events (Goffman, 1974). Human beings are conditioned by their environment and individual experiences to perceive meaning in different manners. As such, framing is a powerful psychological tool through which influential individuals can deeply affect a community and the way in which they react to the world around them, creating what we call “status quo.” By understanding this, we can draw a parallel between the biological concept of survival of the fittest and the sociological concept that is framing. Both create a hierarchy of sorts in which the dominant members of a community are established, be it based on phenotypic and genotypic factors such as adaptive behavior in the case of the former, or social factors such as wealth and status in the case of the latter. This parallel becomes the starting point for this show, a show that at its rawest stands as a criticism on social stratification.

With an emphasis on racial discrimination, **Augustine Chavez’** work depicts the experiences of immigrant workers in the United States. Inspired by the realist of the 19th and 20th Century Gustave Courbet—whose work focused on depicting the lives of everyday workers and peasants, the

American artist seeks to bring attention to the essential workers who are ostracized by society, despite being contributing members of the same. The ostracization of blue-collar workers is a common occurrence in many communities, fact that is only heightened when the individuals are members of a culture other than the dominant one. These responses take shape as a result of social conditioning and negative biases, resulting in a prejudice deeply rooted in xenophobia. **Chavez** finds amusement in this fact, as these workers represent the legs of the United States and often take on the tasks that nobody else wants to perform. This problematic is a common occurrence within the country, a nation with a long history of chauvinistic behavior among its citizens. Furthermore, as a metaphor to the American society's dismissal of immigrant workers as unimportant individuals, **Chavez'** figures are presented faceless, a clever nuance of his work.

Rania Rangou's work presents the viewer with a playful take on the conundrum that is our reality. The Greek artist uses themes of history, philosophy, science, and fiction, to create work that is as ironic as it is clever. By blending past and present in a boustrophedon move, **Rangou** encourages the viewer to leave behind all their notions of reality and instead traverse the amalgam of metaphors that is present in most of her work. Her inclusion in *Survival of the Fittest* is self-referential and in itself acts as a metaphor on the reality-bending concept that are the social frames that affect our perception of the world around us. Similar to this concept, **Rangou** takes aspects of reality and twists them in a way that allows herself to create her own version of that reality, a referential reality that is itself a frame through which the artist introduces her vision to the viewer.

Korean artist **Youngil Joseph Kim** explores the effects of capitalism in the way people live their life in a modern society. His *Forgetting* series acts as a journal through which the artist keeps track of the everyday truth of a city that is ever plagued by capitalistic market economy. This capitalistic market economy shapes the city itself, which simultaneously serves as a shelter for humans to live in “harmony” with one another. **Kim** views this harmony as a metaphor for a lack of identity that is subjectively promoted by the media. In a world where marketing strategies seem to define every aspect of our lives, including what we should look, wear, and act like; the result is a society that follows the crowd against their own inner wishes, a society where dismissing the status quo is deprecated. **Kim** explores this idea while simultaneously self-reflecting on his own identity as an individual, questioning whether he has allowed himself to be influenced by what he so strongly criticizes.

Survival of the Fittest stands as an ironic take on the current affair of our society. By looking at the past and reflecting on the present we can observe how the evolution of humankind has brought with it a plethora of social challenges that are so rooted within our culture that they’ve become indubitable in the eyes of the many. However, framing is simultaneously the cause, as well as the cure for this problematic: social movements and individuals that challenge the status quo do so through their own frames that seek to influence others for a change to occur, this show included. Ultimately, we all reside within our own reality, and that has been intrinsically shaped by social frames, in a way or another.