

'The American Public Has No Love for a CEO': Stanya Kahn On Her Riveting Video of Social Posts About Luigi Mangione

BY BRIAN BOUCHER  September 10, 2026 1:32pm    

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Oh, he got jokes too?



Dec 7

MSNBC reports that the backpack found in Central Park, believed to be from the United Healthcare CEO killer, did not contain a gun.

Instead, they found Monopoly money and a jacket.



269

18K

354K

6M

Still image from Deny, Defend, Depose by Stanya Kahn. © 2026

It was one of the wildest assassination stories of recent times, when, on December 4, 2024, surveillance cameras captured a masked man as he gunned down United HealthCare CEO Brian Thompson outside the company's annual investor conference in New York.

The alleged shooter then fled on a Citi Bike, leaving behind in Central Park a backpack full of Monopoly money. He managed to escape to Pennsylvania, only to be turned in by a McDonald's employee (who earned the internet's wrath in the form of one-star reviews of the restaurant). Meanwhile, an outpouring of rage and scalding wit arose online as the American public's disgust with the healthcare industry combined with black humor. The alleged shooter, **Luigi Mangione**, with his distinctive bone structure and resentment at the company after years of severe pain from a broken back, became an unlikely folk hero.

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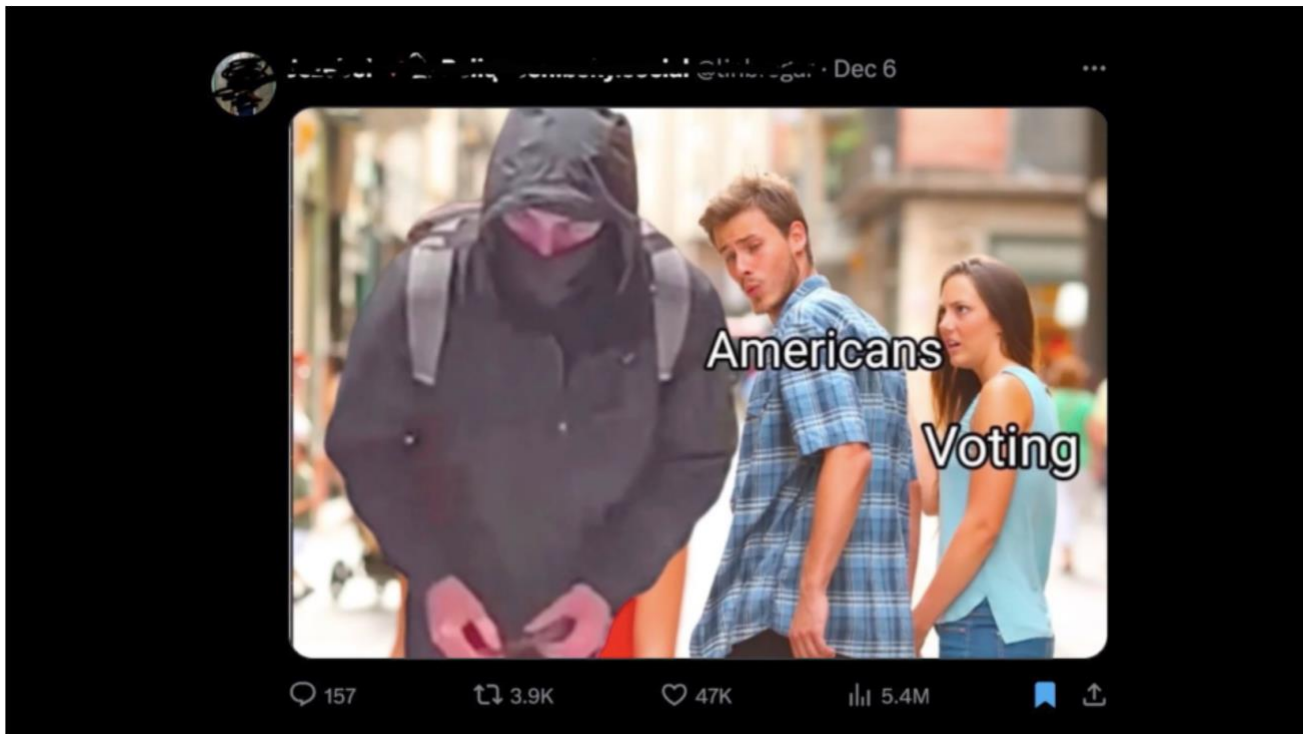
Los Angeles filmmaker and artist **Stanya Kahn** stared, riveted, at her screen in the first hours after news of the killing emerged, and immediately began screen-grabbing results, knowing something important was happening. Now she's debuting the result, *Deny, Defend, Depose* (2026), a 30-minute video named for a message the shooter scratched onto the bullet casings to echo health insurance providers' tactics to deny people care to ensure greater profitability.

After we see the actual surveillance video in which Thompson is shot, the video consists of social media posts (the artist refers to them as tweets, though Twitter was renamed X in 2023 by Elon Musk). The posts go by quickly, sometimes vanishing before you can even fully read them; to protect the posters, their names and avatars have been scratched out with a digital pen tool. They race by to a thumping acid/jungle soundtrack provided by

Acid Arab, Baseck, Caterina Barbieri, Cameron Outlaw, Unknown Origin, and the artist herself.

Kahn edited the piece up to the initial screening on September 6 at the LA artist-run nonprofit Human Resources, where she also sold T-shirts emblazoned with the piece's title. More screenings are scheduled for September 11, at cinema/bookstore Now Instant, and October 13 at the art gallery Leroy's. Kahn is also looking for a way to screen the project in New York. All proceeds from ticket and T shirt sales will go to GoFundMe drives set up to help with healthcare costs.

Primarily working in film and video, Kahn also works across other media; as she describes her work in a bio, "humor, pathos and the uncanny" are central, as is clear in the Luigi video. She's had solos at the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, MoMA PS1, and the New Museum in New York, and appeared in group shows at Minneapolis's Walker Art Center and the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, as well as the Whitney Biennial, among many other venues. Her work is in the collections of the Hammer, MoMA, the Walker, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.



Still image from *Deny, Defend, Depose* by Stanya Kahn. © 2026

As Tracy Jeanne Rosenthal wrote in 2015 for an “**In the Studio**” feature in *Art in America*, “I laughed my way into Stanya Kahn’s Los Angeles studio with some professional guilt about the kind of enchantment my laughter already revealed. Good jokes do this: hijack their context and make spectators complicit.” (The notion of complicity weighs especially heavy when watching *Deny, Defend, Depose*.) In 2020, Travis Diehl **wrote** in a review of her video *No Go Backs* in the same magazine that “Kahn has frequently portrayed contemporary civilization as a wasteland of images and objects... but *No Go Backs* may be her starkest, most atmospheric treatment of the theme to date.”

Mangione’s saga rolls on; he pleaded guilty on August 14 to two federal charges of stalking Thompson, saying, “I shot Mr. Thompson in Manhattan, and he died.” The federal trial is set for January 2027.

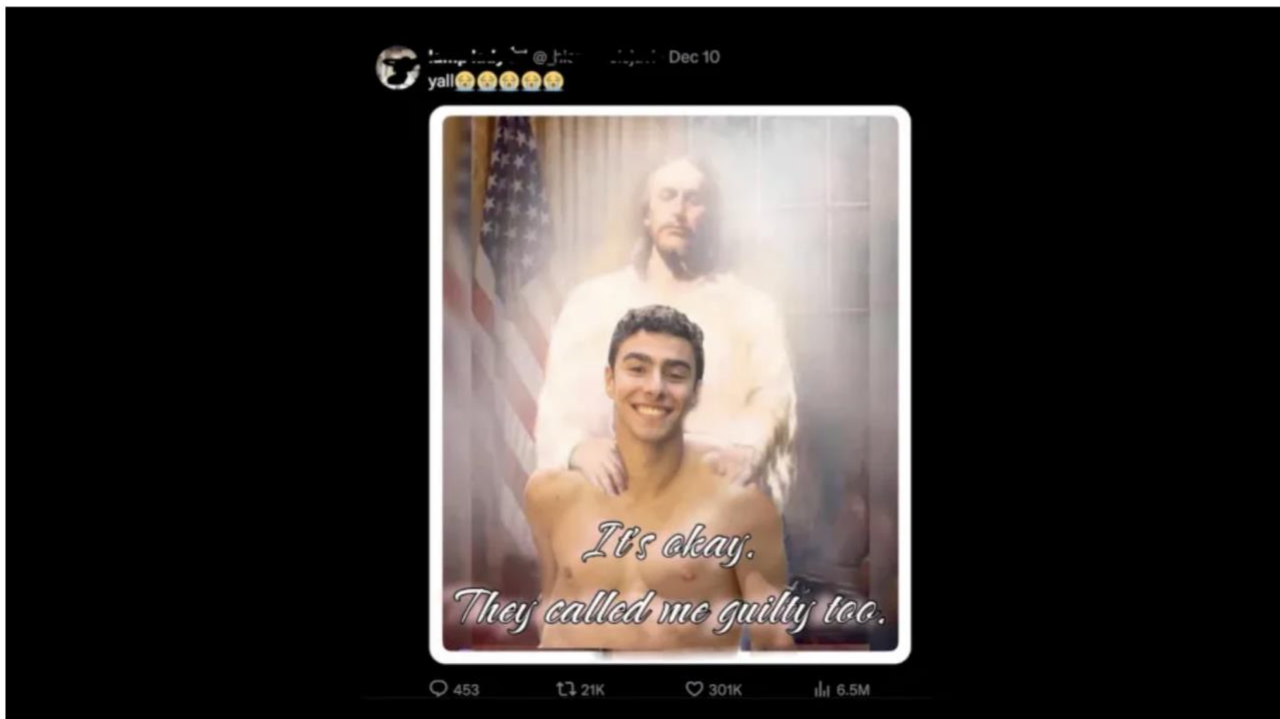
Kahn talked with *ARTnews* by phone about reactions to her piece at the initial screening, the surprising heroizing of an accused murderer, and what we learned from the Mangione saga. The conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity.

We all lived through an incredible moment of online reactions to an event that some deemed horrific and that others celebrated. Did you know that, in the moment, you wanted to do a project about this?

I didn’t know exactly what I was screengrabbing for, except that I do have an earlier practice of live-documenting current events through screen grabs. That impulse was still in me, to capture a moment that I knew might be fleeting, in part because the news cycle turns over so quickly and because I sensed that eventually those tweets would be suppressed, which they have been.

I saw these tweets unfolding and was astonished and started screengrabbing right away. At first it was just “That’s so funny, I have to send that to someone.” Then it was just reveal after reveal. A mysterious person was caught on surveillance camera, so we have this snuff footage, a hallmark of our times. The mainstream media scrambled to suppress that, and Twitter—I hate calling it X—started burying the footage, but there were keyboard warriors who had saved it to Reddit forums.

After a week of gathering these, the reveal came that he had pulled down his mask and people are like “Oh, he’s hot,” and of course that was political. If he had killed children, no one would have said “He’s got good bone structure.” He became an outlet for political frustration. People openly sexualized an alleged assassin, and what was sexy was not his cheekbones but that he took down a CEO. Then we learned about the writings on the shell casings, “deny, defend, depose,” and then the backpack full of Monopoly money, and then that the gun was a 3D-printed euthanasia pistol for putting down pigs.



Still image from *Deny, Defend, Depose* by Stanya Kahn. © 2026

What form did you think all this might take?

By a week later I thought, “I’m going to make a coffee table book of these tweets, because everyone’s going to want one for Christmas,” which was in two weeks. Humor, romance, and a class war at its center—my favorite kind of book!

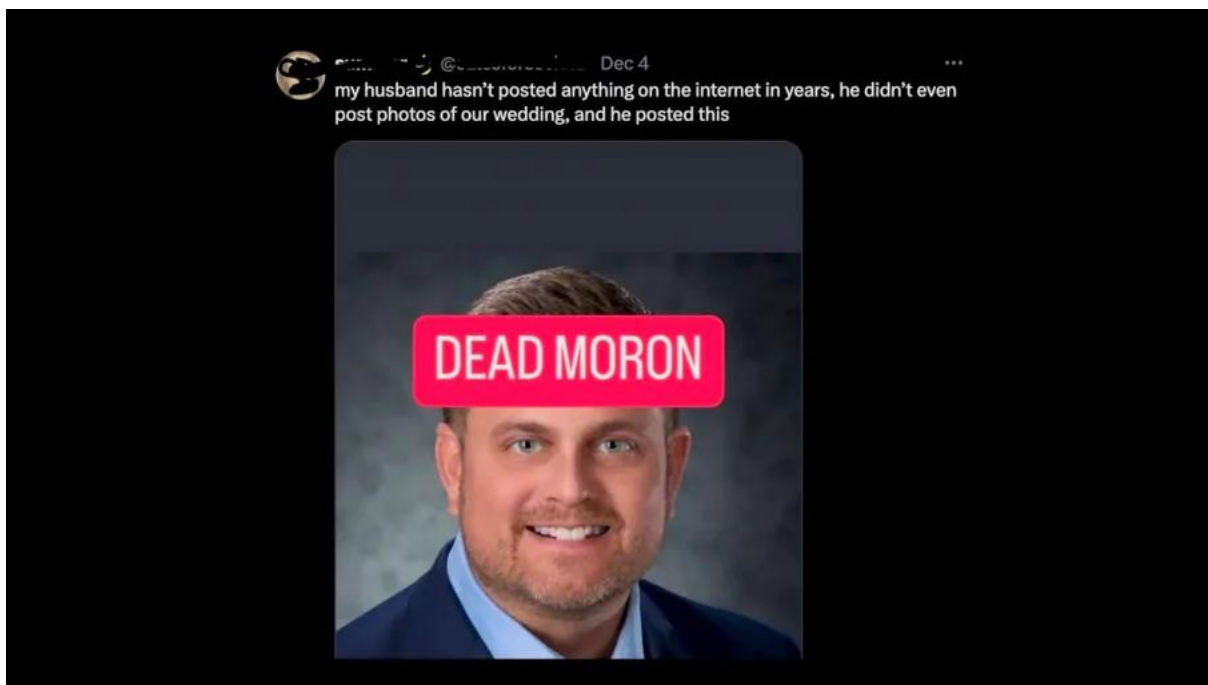
But I don’t have money to publish this and there was no time, so I thought I would make a zine. But the tedium of laying these tweets out in InDesign was getting a bit exhausting so I thought, this would be a good video. That’s when I started shifting gears. I continued capturing up until even a few weeks ago. I was laying them out on a timeline and trying to check every single date and then I started sorting them into folders, of jokes, really really good jokes, sad jokes, angry jokes, sad tweets, tweets with facts, tweets with graphs, so that I could shape the narrative path of the film to move through these stages of humor to grief to anger.

How many posts did you grab and how many made it into the piece, if you know those numbers?

I'm a terrible math person. I know that there are hundreds.

What do we learn from the reaction to the assassination?

I think there's a few things. Perhaps what amazed me the most was the breadth and the depth to which a general American public seemed to be at a tipping point around the exorbitant cost of health care and how cavernous the gap is between the one percent and the 99 percent. I was moved to see such a plain representation of the breadth of a disaffected public that so easily celebrated violent direct action. So one of the things we learned was that the American public has no love for a CEO, and seemed closer to accepting violent direct action than I knew.



Still image from *Deny, Defend, Depose* by Stanya Kahn. © 2026

You've had one screening so far. How did the audience react? Were there any surprising reactions?

People were laughing, and one friend I spoke to afterward was still laughing, and said "Thank you so much for bringing us back to such a special day." Another said, "I'm so angry. I'm just so angry." So it was a spread. People were moved. There were emotions. I got a message from a friend this morning, saying, "I can't stop thinking about it. I wore my 'deny, defend, depose' T shirt to work. It's the piece we need to see right now. I'm so frustrated." Humor goes hand in hand with trauma and is often a great way in to dropping down into what really hurts. And this country is hurting and this world is hurting and I think humor invites us to have a collective experience.