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From Hollywood Nanny to "Non-Confrontational" Protest Artist



WASHINGTON, D.C., FEBRUARY 12, 2013: Protest artist Ramiro Gomez from Los Angeles arrives with his art work at the White House. (Astrid Reiken/Getty Images)

Last month, Ramiro Gomez, 26, approached the White House gates to prop up a cardboard cutout of a life-sized Latino family peering in on the American Dream. After allowing the cut out to stand for nearly 25 minutes, a Secret Service agent warned Gomez that he'd have to take it down, or risk being arrested.

True to his "non-confrontational" form of protest art (which could surely be considered an oxymoron) Gomez took down the cardboard cutouts and thanked the Secret Service agent, who in turn complimented Gomez's work.

It wasn't quite the scene that a Washington Post reporter had hoped for, Gomez said.

"I think the reporter I was with was a little disappointed that I didn't get arrested," he said. "But if I would have been arrested, that would have been the only story and people would stop listening. No one would think about my art, they'd only care about my arrest."

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By CRISTINA COSTANTINI (@xtinatini)
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With his work, Gomez hopes to interrupt spaces of the "white and affluent," but in a "pacifistic" way. While Gomez still sees himself as part of a growing family of immigration-minded artists, his own work is surely a distant cousin from [the bold posters of artists](#) like Melanie Cervantes, Cesar Maxit, Jesus Barraza, Ernesto Yerena, Julio Salgado and Favianna Rodriguez.

You won't find Ramiro screenprinting [bold phrases like "Undocumented and Unafraid" or "Brown and Proud" onto rally signs](#), like other artists in the movement. Rather, most of Gomez's art involves placing the figures of Latino housekeepers, gardeners, and pool-cleaners in lavish settings, to serve as a constant reminder of the individuals who maintain America's spaces.

Gomez says he's drawn to telling the story of the people behind the scenes, in part because of his own background -- his mother, a school janitor, his father, a truck driver, and he himself a former a nanny for children in the Hollywood Hills. At his first job as a nanny, Gomez started collecting architectural and interior design magazines that the family threw away, and painting in figures of caretakers over the images.


At first Gomez "found irony and humor" in the act of inserting, for example, a maid into an elaborate living room setting. But after friends and family members praised his work, Gomez realized his art also carried an important message. Although that message doesn't take aim at specific policy points, or explicitly call for change, his works serve as a subtler reminder of constant and on-going racial and economic inequalities.


Inspired in large part by Banksy, Gomez also began to create public art in the last two years. With scraps of cardboard, Gomez constructed life-size cutouts of landscapers trimming hedges and gardeners pulling weeds. After real-life workers have left a location, he often places their likenesses in form of cardboard cutouts .


"It's a hard job maintaining these tall hedges, but once the gardener is done trimming them all you see is this huge hedge, and not the person," Gomez said. "So I'm trying to capture that moment and make it last."

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Gomez says he's trying to disrupt the daily life of the privileged by calling attention to the simple images they see all the time.

"I'm hitting them when they don't expect it, with an image they know well," he said.



"No Splash", Ramiro Gomez

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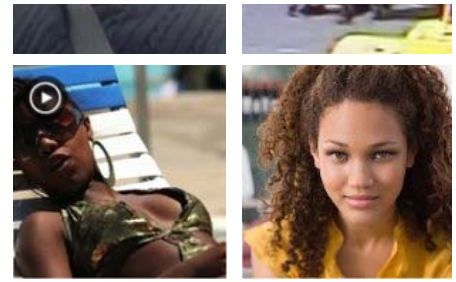


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