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by [Ed Fuentes \(http://www.kcet.org/user/profile/efuentes\)](http://www.kcet.org/user/profile/efuentes)

on May 10, 2012 6:00 PM

There is a simple elegant statement in the cardboard illustrations by 25-year-old street artist Ramiro Gomez Jr., the day worker and former art student who installs painted images of Latino laborers in the same neighborhoods that hire them.

The series, called "Happy Hills," is about documenting the undocumented.

The cardboard cutouts that have hit the street include a man selling maps to the stars homes on a street corner, a gardener with a leaf blower, a housekeeper with a mop, and a parking lot worker waiting for the next car. It's an ongoing installation that he wants to become a reminder of "the predominantly Hispanic workforce, who work tirelessly behind the scenes."

That's [according to his blog \(http://ramirogomezjr.blogspot.com/\)](http://ramirogomezjr.blogspot.com/), where he documents himself as a day nanny in "West Hollywood, Beverly Hills and Laurel Canyon."

The artist is working hard at getting his message out. He introduced the work to during its early stages to [L.A. Taco, \(http://www.lataco.com/taco/street-working-ramiro-gomez-jr\)](http://www.lataco.com/taco/street-working-ramiro-gomez-jr), who in turn began following Gomez in September 2011 after the artist sent him photos of his earliest installations. "He emailed me that he was inspired by street art," said L.A. Taco.

"It's true!" said Gomez from his home, who was using Thursday morning to adapt pieces to be installed along the route where President Barack Obama is scheduled to travel. It was street art and murals in the Eastside that inspired him to look for ways to bring a message to the Westside.

[UPDATED 6:00pm 5/10: Gomez sent us the below photo of his works installed during the President's visit to L.A.]



Cut outs for President Obama's visit to L.A. are in a 'designated public area' (aka protesters area) in front of Wilacre Park.

Being an artist who is diagnosed with hemophilia, a genetic disease, he empathized with a Latino work force unable to secure healthcare. "When I turned to the gardeners, I don't just sympathize with them" said Gomez. "I identify with the workforce, and the struggle of working sporadically."

Proposition 8 and healthcare are themes the artist hopes to explore and take to the streets because, as he said, "it doesn't translate well in a gallery."

The street is what makes the work authentic, as is the lack of resources. Gomez raids commercial trash bins for cardboard. "There is a Best Buy near me, and someone is always buying a big T.V.,' he said, with a chuckle. "I source it from the street to keep the process of my art going without being limited by (no) money"

Other early installations can also be seen at [Melrose and Fairfax \(http://melroseandfairfax.blogspot.com/search/label/Ramiro%20Gomez%20Jr\)](http://melroseandfairfax.blogspot.com/search/label/Ramiro%20Gomez%20Jr), another

blog with which the artist has been in contact. The work has not only led to street art blogs, but also as a subject of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, who is now archiving digital documentation of his work.

"I like that when people see my cardboard cut-outs of real humans, they stop and say 'what is that' and realize that what they are seeing is a cardboard version of a housekeeper or gardener that they've just been driving past," said Gomez to [Colorlines.com](http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/05/latino_street_artist_sparks_conversation_about_labor_in_beverly_hills.html) (http://colorlines.com/archives/2012/05/latino_street_artist_sparks_conversation_about_labor_in_beverly_hills.html), who followed him as he installed a new piece in Beverly Hills. "It's not about destroying anything," said Gomez in the clip (see below). "It's about bringing awareness."

As he installs a piece, a Latina worker walking dogs tells him "It's a very good message."

The pieces usually stay up for 24 hours before someone nabs them, and writes his contact information on the back so people can let him know where the art winds up. "The valet man lasted for four days," says Gomez. "But so far, no one has emailed me on any of pieces."

The powerful message is a change from most pieces with comparable themes that rely on being a protest with a subtext of anger or urgency, and its temporary state defies the work being defined as vandalism. In fact, when the art is placed near bus stops, where some workers arrive, it's becomes a hello.

Gomez himself deflects the notion that his work carries social criticism. In an interview at [Huffington Post](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/29/gardeners-housekeepers-an_n_1310384.html), (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/29/gardeners-housekeepers-an_n_1310384.html) the artist said: "It's not my intention to say, 'you're doing something wrong [to employers]' because at the same time, they aren't, they are providing an economy for a whole community that doesn't have anything else, or can't turn to anything else."

With found cardboard and paints, the former Cal-Arts attendee, originally from San Bernardino, has created a poetic interpretation of what street art can be.

One can compare his work to murals placed on portable panels, to be installed in site-specific locations. It is not large-scale, but the impact is greater, being closer to life-size representations.

With the lack of angst, the affectionate look at a workforce -- of which he is part -- the street art by Gomez quietly works as hard as the people it portrays.

Video by colorlines.com.

Top: 'Valet' by Ramiro Gomez Jr. Courtesy of LA Taco

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