

Latino Street Artist Sparks Conversation About Labor in Beverly Hills

Jorge Rivas

by **Jorge Rivas**, Wednesday, May 9 2012, 10:45 AM EST

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The scenes are familiar to Angelenos driving through Beverly Hills. Latina domestic workers of every age group waiting at bus stops and men attending gardens. Artist Ramiro Gomez says he wants people to stop and think about the labor force that takes care of the things we value the most: our families and our homes.

The 25-year-old artist who makes a living as a male nanny* by day has been placing hand-painted cardboard cut outs of workers in and around Beverly Hills. He's left cardboard figures of housekeepers waiting at bus stops, men watering gardens, trimming hedges and even cut outs of a man with a leaf blower.

"I like that when people see my cardboard cut outs of real humans they stop and say 'what is that' and realize that what their seeing is a cardboard version of a housekeeper or gardener that they've just been driving past," Gomez told Colorlines.com.

Gomez paints on cardboard he sources from a Best Buy and Target store dumpster at the edge of West Hollywood. He grew up about 65-miles east in a county called San Bernardino. He attended community college before transferring to the art school CalArts but says he was dissatisfied with his program and left before graduating.

The mostly female and immigrant domestic workforce in Los Angeles **is particularly vulnerable due** [\[http://www.domesticworkers.org/ca-bill-of-rights\]](http://www.domesticworkers.org/ca-bill-of-rights) to the isolated nature of the industry, where women labor behind closed doors and out of the public eye.

"Often these sectors of the labor force become invisible—we're used to them attending our gardens, taking care of our kids, cleaning our homes and they almost become invisible," says Lizette Guerra, archivist and librarian at the **UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center** [\[http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/library/default.asp\]](http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/library/default.asp) that began archiving Gomez's work recently.

A recent UCLA study found nearly 75% of child care workers and 35% of maids and housekeepers in Los Angeles County were paid at an hourly rate lower than the minimum wage. Many home health care workers (97%) and child care workers, maids, and housekeepers (87%) also reported being required to work when they were not on the clock - that is, they did not get paid for all of the work they did, according to a **Research & Policy Brief from the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment**.



A cardboard cutout of a gardener sits on Sunset Blvd. in Beverly Hills. (Photo: Jorge Rivas)

[<http://www.domesticworkers.org/component/jdownloads/finish/3/12/0>]

For more on Gomez's work visit [Ramirogomezjr.blogspot.com](http://ramirogomezjr.blogspot.com). [<http://ramirogomezjr.blogspot.com/>]

[Update: 5/9/12 12:58pm EST: The story refers to Gomez as he identified his work in our interview and his [bio](http://ramirogomezjr.blogspot.com) [[Ramirogomezjr.blogspot.com](http://ramirogomezjr.blogspot.com)] .]

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