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CRAVE

ART EXHIBITION LAUNCHED IN RESPONSE TO HATEFUL POLITICAL RHETORIC

The group exhibition "And Who is My Neighbor" addresses injustice, racism.

By [Erica Rivera](#) Oct 9th, 2016



Artwork: Patrick Martinez "Justice For All" (2015). Courtesy of the artist and Charlie James Gallery, LA. Photo by Jeff Rau.

There's no shortage of ways to respond to hateful rhetoric. You could shout back. Throw a punch. Ignore it. Or you could launch an art exhibition. Professor and curator **Jeff Rau** went the art route, pulling together what would become [And Who is My Neighbor](#), a group exhibition on view now through Oct. 28 at the [Green Art Gallery](#) on the Biola University campus in La Mirada, Calif.

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Many of the participants in the show were born in, or have ties to, the campus's closest metropolis: Los Angeles. The exhibition is both tender and unsettling in its depiction of life on the margins: in "Untitled Cardboard Series" by Ramiro Gomez, four paintings show solitary Latino men tending to gardens in California's elite neighborhoods (at top). In "Carpoolers #23" (left), Mexican photographer Alejandro Cartagena captures a prostrate laborer surrounded by tools, hard hats, and debris in the bed of a pick-up truck. Three additional photographs by Cartagena show similar scenes. Patrick Martinez (who [Crave profiled](#) earlier this year) contributed one of his police brutality depictions painted in Pee Chee folder style, plus a neon sign that reads "...And justice for all" (below).

Additional art is provided by include Isabel Avila, Diedrick Brackens, Kent Anderson Butler, Lauren Halsey, Nery Gabriel Lemus, Amitis Motevalli, Cheryl Pope, Tali Weinberg, Dana Weiser, and Kehinde Wiley.

The impetus for this exhibition occurred in the spring, long before anyone knew how nasty the political climate would get. At that time, Rau was "struck by the prevalence of the racist, xenophobic, misogynist rhetoric that really seemed to be far too present in the current political debate happening in the public sphere." Because Biola is a conservative Christian university, he was particularly offended by the way presidential candidate Donald Trump tried to court Christian leaders and align himself with Christian ethics. "It just felt like we have an opportunity to respond and talk about those that are on the margins of society, those that are struggling with very serious issues of social justice and equality," Rau says.

Rau invited Nery Gabriel Lemus, whose work examines racial stereotypes and tensions between Latino and African American communities, to co-curate the exhibition. Lemus connected the themes of the artists' work to the biblical story of the Good Samaritan, referenced in the show's title.

For those who aren't familiar with the parable, Rau paraphrased it like this: Jesus is confronted by a religious scholar who is trying to define the commandment "Love thy neighbor" in a narrow fashion. The scholar wonders, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus responds by telling the tale of a Jewish man who had been beaten and robbed and left for dead on the side of the road. The man kept getting passed over by people who should have offered to help him. The one who finally does stop, seeks medical attention, and finds the man a place to stay is a Samaritan, considered the "other" in that culture. Ultimately, it was the outsider, the least expected to lend a hand, that acted in a neighborly way. Thus, Jesus says, "Go and do likewise. Show mercy and love to all those in need."



Installation view of works by Ramiro Gomez, The Green Art Gallery at Biola University.

The moral of the Good Samaritan story is that people should be responsive and attentive to those around us, regardless of cultural background. This reminder comes at a crucial time when the country seems to be painfully divided and misguided stereotypes about minorities abound.

"It could be easy to do a strongly political show," Rau says, "and while the idea for the show was spurred by politics, our hope is really not to do something that could be easily cornered or dismissed as being overtly political. It's very easy in our public debate these days for everyone to isolate in their camps and we look for markers to identify what camp people are in and immediately shut down and stop listening to one another if they're outside our camp. Our goal for this show is to encourage a posture of listening to the experience of people who have a non-mainstream experience."

No matter what one's religious beliefs, political leanings, or ethnic background, this eye-opening exhibition will hopefully open viewers' minds and ears as well.