

Kirn Kim

Gregory Sale

"Future IDs": A New Art Exhibition Reimagines a Talisman of Institutional Power

BEIGE LUCIANO-ADAMS | JUNE 28, 2018 | 1:43PM

As an embedded artist with the [Anti-Recidivism Coalition](#), [Gregory Sale](#) was looking for a way to translate the L.A.-based group's criminal justice reform efforts into a visual language with cultural impact: an artistic production capable of challenging social ideation around rehabilitation and re-entry for ex-offenders. The result – "[Future IDs at Alcatraz](#)," a yearlong show going up in October that will occupy an entire building on the infamous island prison, a ruin of 20th-century justice that is now a national park – was a fortuitous twist in a years-long, experimental endeavor.

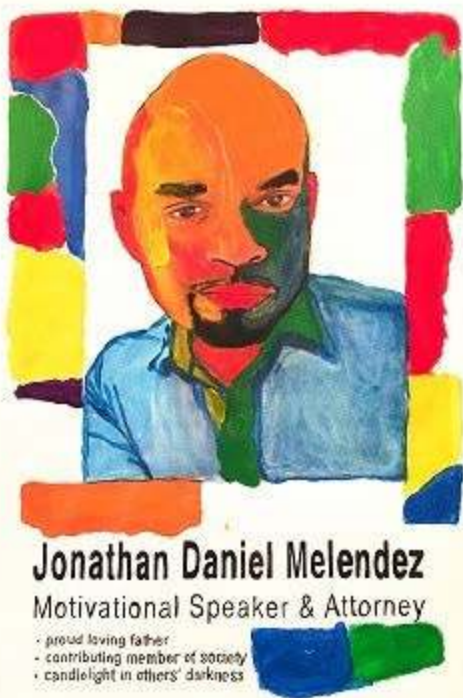
"We were really looking at the way cultural and artistic production could play out in an advocacy space," Sale said at a recent preview for the show with local ARC members held at downtown's [Skid Row History Museum and Archive](#). "One of the things [ARC] members have gotten very effective at is telling their stories of rehabilitation or transformation to an elected official to convince them that rehabilitation is possible." He described one encounter in 2016 in which a member made an impression on a busy senator. "He pulled out his old inmate ID, then he pulled out his new student ID. That was a moment where we had an everyday object we could start using as a platform."



J.D. Melendez

Gregory Sale

Sale began holding workshops, in and outside of prisons, with inmates and ex-offenders and other participants across California to create personal, aspirational artworks formatted as large-scale ID cards. Photos and text paired with small icons, not unlike like government seals and symbolism, reference their lives, hopes, accomplishments. “The workshops were playing with the notion of, how do you represent yourself?” Sale said. “Alongside people with conviction histories ... and people without ... that notion of otherness really softens in those types of spaces.”



Future ID by J.D. Melendez

Gregory Sale

He hopes that phenomenon will take off at Alcatraz, which averages around 1.5 million visitors annually. Around 50 IDs, each blown up to 50 x 80 inches – from smaller formats that participants worked within, in part, to facilitate sending out of prison mailrooms – will hang from the ceiling of the New Industries Building, inviting visitors to challenge conventional boundaries and strictures around incarceration, identity and community. Video installations will add a more intimate element.

For ARC member Kirn Kim, 42, the project crystalizes years of struggle, as well as opportunities as legislation and discourse around criminal justice reform are beginning to shift the landscape in tangible ways.

“It’s great to think about, wow, we can actually debut this at one of the most infamous prisons in the world ... to be able to help especially guys inside who are thinking ... for too long it’s been, ‘Look, you’re just going to die in prison, why even try?’ Now people are coming home, people are getting chances to work – that wasn’t happening before.”

Kim was sentenced to life at age 16 and paroled 20 years later; when he got out, still young and eager to work in advocacy, ARC didn't exist yet, and he hit a series of walls as he attempted to re-acclimate and find employment. Now, he says, nonprofits are actually hiring people like him (he works for the California Endowment), and recognizing the need for a radical shift in thinking around criminal justice and rehabilitation.

“But if you don't have a goal to strive for, then where's your focus? You are going to go home eventually. What do you want to be when you get out? That's what it is. For too long the inmate ID is what defined us,” Kim said. “You are here to write your future, what you're going to build your legacy toward. So what ID do you want?”

On his own, Kim challenged the notion of the Asian community as the “model minority,” hoping to upset taboos and ignite conversation. “One thing that's the most taboo is the conversation on incarceration and re-entry,” he said. “Is there a name for this type of cultural shame? I came up with ‘silent shame.’ My hope? Opening the conversation will make other factors of cultural shame seem not so bad.”

**Gregory Sale**

For ARC member Luis Garcia, 49, who earned his doctorate in education and has worked in governmental and nonprofit organizations since his release more than 20 years ago, the project offered space to sift through layers of identity ossified by a lifetime of institutionalization.

“That experience at the workshop really kind of began to get my mind outside of that public employee mindset (I’d just graduated), to really kind of deconstruct being in the system. ... It really pushed me to think outside of the box of what I was creating in my identity,” Garcia said. On his ID, he replaced “University of Southern California” with “University of Resilience.”

“The project really allowed me to untangle all that shame and stigma and really liberate myself.”

ARC member Phillip Lester, 38, donated his artwork to the show but kept a copy for himself. “It’s my inspiration – it’s where I want to go.”

Sale is currently looking for partners to complete work for the show and expand the workshop format to reach more people. Brought on board to help realize a vision of Alcatraz as a “site of reconciliation,” he balances a desire to go deep with content, pushing past the island’s Hollywood mythology, but accepts that putting up a show on a federal government site is not the same as a private gallery.

“The art will do its job. We feel if the message gets out, we’re doing OK.”

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