

TOP STORY

'Peace is Radical' ReflectSpace Gallery presents Shepard Fairey exhibition in Glendale

By Luke Netzley, Pasadena Weekly Deputy Editor
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Shepard Fairey's work has been featured in collections around the world, including Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art. (Jeffrey Rovner/Contributor)

In splashes of vibrant color and layered graphics, the work of renowned street artist and activist Shepard Fairey has filled the walls of the ReflectSpace Gallery in Glendale Central Library. The solo exhibition, titled "Peace is Radical," was curated by Ara and Anahid Oshagan and raises messages of unity and hope.

"I titled this show 'Peace is Radical' because humanity seems to be in a perpetual state of conflict," Fairey said. "Peace requires us to pursue harmony with thoughtful vigilance. I'm a pacifist. I believe in solutions to disagreements that avoid violence. We are an intelligent species capable of cooperation and solving problems without violence."

Centered around the wall mural "Peace is Radical," the exhibition features pieces primarily made through screen printing, using mesh to transfer ink onto a surface, addressing a range of topics like creative empowerment, race and gender equality, environmental justice and the importance of democracy. There is also a section dedicated to displaying several of the original screens that Fairey used to print his art.

"Considering the issues that we faced as a planet in this past year, ... in Armenia ... Ukraine ... the Gaza War ... we thought that to talk about peace, to envision peace and think about how we can help engender piece was a theme that would be really important to address," Ara said.

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, Fairey has felt a passion for art since his childhood and went on to earn his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Illustration at the Rhode Island School of Design. In 1989, he created the "Andre the Giant has a Posse" sticker that transformed into the "Obey Giant" art campaign. His stickers, street art and public murals, of which he has painted nearly 135 across six continents, have become known globally and his

art has been featured in the permanent collections of the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art, Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

"The majority of my art focuses on issues of justice, and an outcome of improved justice is a more equal, fair and peaceful society," Fairey said.

"Through my art, I want to remind people of the equal humanity of all people, regardless of their race, religion, nation or culture. There is no us versus them; there is only us.

"When I look at humanity in general, most people want to live in peace. ... The goal of the art in 'Peace is Radical' is to encourage us to see ourselves in others, and to strive for health and peace for humanity and the planet that sustains us."

Ara first met Fairey on a judging panel looking at student work during Rep. Adam Schiff's yearly high school art competition. They both shared an interest in libraries, and Ara explained that the ReflectSpace Gallery was built within Glendale Central Library during its 2017 renovation. After being introduced to the gallery, which explores social justice issues, human rights violations and genocides through the arts, Fairey agreed to showcase his work in a solo exhibition.

"We spoke with his team, we spoke with him, he came and visited the space ... and it was our decision to focus around the theme of 'peace,'" Ara said.

Once Fairey's work had populated the ReflectSpace Gallery, Ara and Anahid placed additional pieces along a hallway inside the library. Ara called the works more "informal" and described them as lithograph posters that continue the theme of "Peace is Radical." Fairey has also designed a limited-edition library card for Glendale Library, Arts & Culture that will be available at all Glendale Library branches through the run of the exhibit, while supplies last.

Alongside the hallway pieces and the exhibition's central mural, Ara said that he is drawn to Fairey's activist and political portraits of figures like Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Barack Obama. In 2008, Fairey's portrait of then-Democratic candidate Obama became an internationally recognized emblem.

"Everybody knows the Obama poster," Ara said. "We wanted to have the Obama poster in the show ... because our space is a very public space in the library. Anybody could walk in, from all walks of life, from kids to grandfathers and grandmothers. It isn't the art crowd who know the name and they come to see his work, so we wanted to create that connection for people."

Ara said that Fairey's "Peace is Radical" exhibition emulates the purpose of ReflectSpace to use art to generate discourse around current human rights issues across the world. He added that his hope for the show is that people will be drawn in by the style of the artworks and feel compelled to learn more about the meaning behind them.

"Good art moves people," Ara said. "When you're moved, your perception changes a little bit.

"In our everyday, we tend to get bogged down by everything we need to do to make ends meet. Art gives you the space to stop and reflect, at least for a few minutes or seconds ... and I think Shepard's work is in a really unique space that makes people consider these issues."

"Peace is Radical" by Shepard Fairey

WHEN: On view through Sunday, April 14

WHERE: ReflectSpace Gallery, inside Glendale Central Library at 222 E. Harvard Street, Glendale

COST: Free admission

INFO: www.reflectspace.org