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**The Cheech Presents**  
***Our Empire: James McClung and Marcus Mercado***  
*On view March 28 – October 23, 2026*

**RIVERSIDE, CA** - Often overlooked, misunderstood, or reduced to stereotypes, the Inland Empire contains a variety of landscapes: industrial corridors, suburban sprawl, historic downtowns, desert edges, mountain backdrops, and the everyday spaces where culture, identity, and community intersect.

Artists James McClung and Marcus Mercado visually explore the region that shaped them in *Our Empire: James McClung and Marcus Mercado* on view at The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture of the Riverside Art Museum through October 23, 2026.

Raised in Redlands, California, both artists are united by a shared interest in reexamining the Empire's uniquely diverse landscapes. Their combined body of work documents and reinterprets the region, elevating the familiar into something worthy of a second look.

"For both of us, parking lots, street corners, signage, storefronts, and neighborhoods are not just background elements," says McClung. "They are central figures in the story."

The artists highlight the beauty, tension, and character embedded in the Inland Empire's built and natural environments. "We have our own distinct visions, but we both want to invite viewers to look again at the places they pass by and see them with renewed attention and appreciation," says Mercado.

Together, they hope the work creates a dialogue between artists, and between the viewer and the places they call home.

"Ultimately, we're celebrating and recontextualizing the Inland Empire by reclaiming visual narratives of the community and presenting them with intention, care, and pride," says McClung.

"By offering a new way of seeing what has long existed, we hope to spark conversations about place, belonging, and the value of overlooked landscapes," adds Mercado.

*Our Empire: James McClung and Marcus Mercado* is on view at The Cheech's Altura Credit Union Community Gallery, a space dedicated to highlighting the artists, communities, and stories of our region.

## **About the Artists**

### **James McClung**

James McClung is a self-taught visual artist based in Redlands, California, whose work bridges personal experience, travel, and regional identity. Drawing inspiration from the stark landscapes of Joshua Tree, the quiet expanses of New Mexico, and the vibrant streets of New York City, Amsterdam, and India, McClung creates imagery that is both contemplative and visually striking.

In recent years, he has turned his focus toward his home region of the Inland Empire, exploring its overlooked narratives, shifting landscapes, and unique cultural textures. Through his work, McClung examines the intersections of memory, place, and perception, crafting pieces that are at once intimate and expansive, inviting viewers to reconsider familiar spaces.

### **Marcus Mercado**

Marcus Mercado is a visual artist from Redlands, California. His works deal with themes of memory, place, consumption, neglect, and identity. His art focuses on buildings and landscapes that appear destroyed and abandoned; a nod toward neglect and memories of a by-gone era. He invites viewers to connect their own personal memories towards locations portrayed, a self-reflection on not only how we inhabit spaces, but also how we leave those spaces after they are abandoned.

Mercado uses colors within his works to bring a sense of innocence towards the seriousness of defaulted business and bankrupt properties. A local of the Inland Empire, Mercado has seen the removal of orange groves and strawberry fields with the emergence of warehouses and commercial developments. Family-run restaurants and shopping centers that have closed due to financial hardships from commercial competition. Loose brushstrokes give a sense of the blurred memories of the past as well as the disorienting perception of how our environment is treated through human interactions. Mercado suggests the reality of permanence and the effects of neglect on the structures we leave behind.

CAPTION: "Miranda's" by James McClung & "Sand Bernardino Depot, Mt. Vernon" by Marcus Mercado. Courtesy of the Artists.

## **ABOUT RIVERSIDE ART MUSEUM & THE CHEECH MARIN CENTER FOR CHICANO ART & CULTURE:**

The Riverside Art Museum (RAM) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit serving the greater Riverside community since 1959. Through its four pillar programs—the Riverside Art Museum at its historic Julia Morgan-designed building (opened 1967), The Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art & Culture (opened 2022), art education offerings both on- and off-site, and artist residencies—RAM uplifts diverse cultural voices; cultivates inclusive exhibitions, collections and educational programming; and fosters strong community connections.

Riverside Art Museum inclusive of The Cheech is dedicated to ensuring accessibility for all through a range of free, reduced-cost, and general admission ticket options. More information on admission and visiting here.

Visit [www.riversideartmuseum.org](http://www.riversideartmuseum.org). Follow @RiversideArtMuseum on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Threads](#), [X](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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