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# THE ART NEWSPAPER

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## Plant from Las Vegas gunman's garden is in New York exhibition

*Austrian artist Martin Roth says the aim is to reframe the discussion about violence in the US*

**A DESERT PLANT** taken from the garden of Stephen Paddock, the man behind last October's mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada, will be the centrepiece of an immersive installation at a New York gallery by the Austrian artist Martin Roth.

Roth has launched a crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter to raise \$5,500—half the cost of the exhibition that is due to open on 1 April at Yours, Mine and Ours gallery on the Lower East Side (until 13 May). According to the description on Kickstarter of the project, which is entitled "Desert Holly: in November 2017, I collected a plant from the garden of a mass shooter", the installation will aim "to bring the viewer as close as possible to Paddock's actual garden

in Mesquite", a retirement town around 80 miles from Las Vegas, and "to provide a space for observation and reflection".

One month after the shooting, which left 58 people dead and many others injured, Roth set out to find Paddock's home. "I was curious to see what type of garden he had," says the artist, who regularly works with nature in his projects. By the time he found the mass killer's house, the media and police were no longer stationed in front of it. "His garden was very stark compared with the others in his community," the artist says.

Roth removed a small bush from the garden and brought it back to New York wrapped in wet paper towels.



**Martin Roth removed a desert holly bush from Stephen Paddock's garden**

There, he identified it as *Atriplex hymenelytra*, or desert holly, one of the most drought-resistant plants in the US. "I want this plant to act as a symbol of hope or healing, to help us out of the hopelessness and to find a less violent future," the artist says.

Roth's installation will recreate elements of the Mandalay Bay hotel room that Paddock used as a sniper's perch during the shooting, and where he eventually killed himself before police arrived. However, the artist wants the exhibition "not to be about destruction or death, but to approach the discussion about violence from a different perspective".

Speaking before the shooting in

Parkland, Florida, that killed 17 people on 14 February, Roth said: "The mass shootings in the US seem to be nearly constant; they're taking innocent lives and affecting our consciousness in a significant way. There is a sense of hopelessness that we are still unable to effect political change. I am not suggesting that the answer to the question is in this plant, but maybe there is a way to make progress in this debate by reframing the dialogue as a conversation about healing."

If the installation is eventually sold to an institution, Roth says he "would like to donate that money to the Las Vegas victims' fund".

**Gabriella Angeletti**