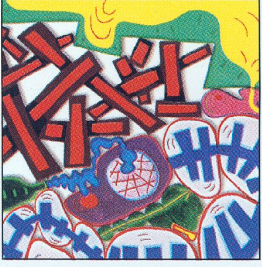


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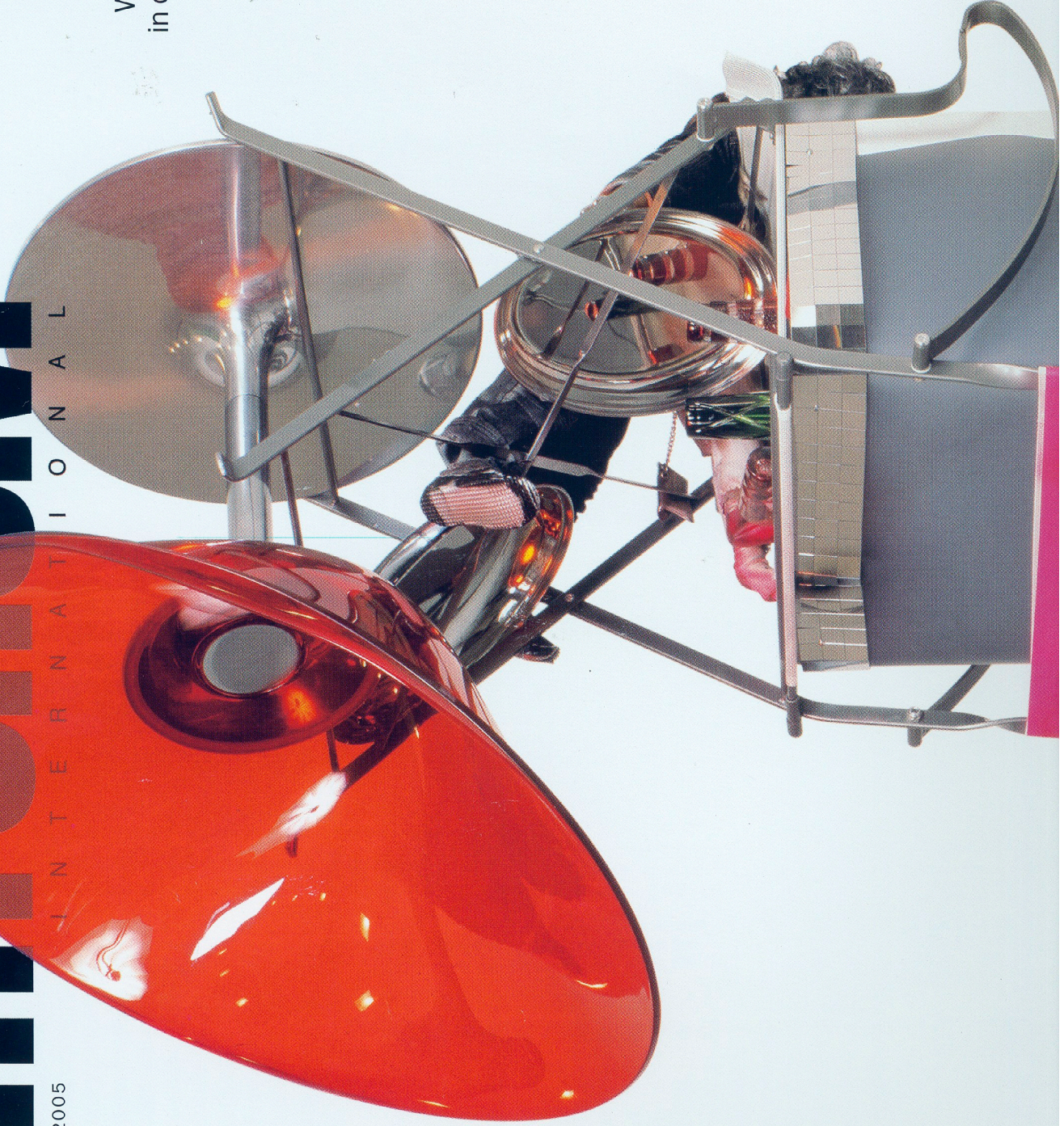
NOVEMBER 2005

INTERNATIONAL



Elizabeth Murray

Wolfgang Tillmans
in conversation with
Isa Genzken



OVER THE BORDER

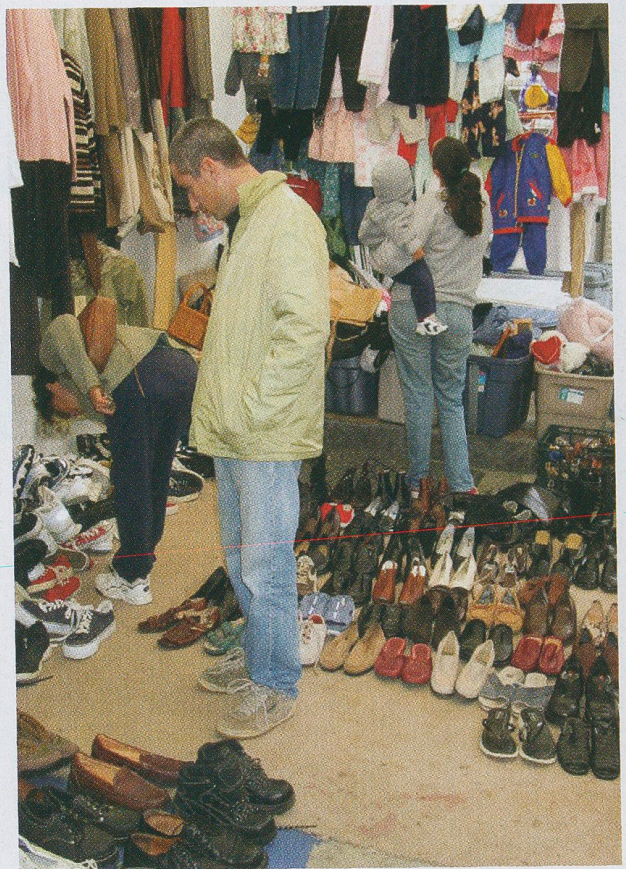
Nico Israel on "inSite_05"

THIRTEEN YEARS AFTER ITS BALLYHOODED emergence in San Diego and Tijuana, "inSite" is approaching art-world adolescence and, like many confused, hormone-addled young adults, finds itself experiencing both a growth spurt and something of an identity crisis. The binational, collaborative-oriented art exhibition's first appearance in 1992 occurred in an era of massive political transformations on a global scale: Walls everywhere seemed to be tumbling down. Accordingly, on the academic front, there was a theoretical fascination with "borders," migration, and hybridities of all sorts and, in art-world discourse, a coterminous confidence in visual art's ability to engage a public in order to reveal political inequalities and potentialities. This was a moment—one remembers it with a certain fond wistfulness—in which one often heard talk of a megalopolis (re)uniting Tijuana and San Diego, just as one heard the World Wide Web trumpeted as a place where racial, gender, and class "subject positions" could be unshackled.

But in our post-9/11 political epoch of retrenchments and reterritorializations, of Sunni Triangles and Guantánameros, the country of Mexico, largely betrayed by big Clinton/Salinas-era promises, has been at best politely ignored by the US government and at worst accused of tacit subversion. (This spring, the civilian-led "Minuteman Project" assembled more than one thousand armed, vigilant American citizens, including thirty pilots and their private planes, to patrol for an entire month along the US side of the Arizona-Mexico frontier and to report "illegal aliens" to the Border Patrol.) In this changed political climate, academic inquiry has departed from the border area and moved to other, more fashionable quarters (the "biopolitical," for example), while the art market has giddily returned to the Euro-American zones where it feels most, well, armored.

"inSite_05," the exhibition's fifth incarnation, which opens in late August and runs through

November, confronts these political and theoretical challenges as an opportunity to rethink the grounds on which its initial presumptions rested. Cuban-born curator Osvaldo Sánchez, formerly director of the Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil and the Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo (both in Mexico City), who worked with a team of co-curators on "inSite_01" before taking the helm three years ago, recognizes that artists' "interventions" tend to blend into the urban fabric and



foster individual art careers or preach to the converted (and well-traveled) art-world insider rather than shake up complacent or intimidated local populations. Seeking to avoid another "mere collection of artistic representations about the border context," Sánchez aims for "inSite_05"—which this year will encompass some seventy venues in San Diego, Tijuana, and surrounding suburban and agricultural areas (its largest manifestation)—to "stimulate novel experiences of the public domain" and to support "strategies" that "interweave situations of flux, mobility, and experiences of interconnectedness." In this spirit, the show will also feature an online component and "Ellipsis," a "live visual and sound image event," alongside works involving people from various demographics, "from porters to psychiatric

patients [and] from military spouses to model airplane enthusiasts.”

At the conceptual core of “inSite” are two- to three-month-long artist residencies that culminate in various location-specific projects. Among the twenty-three artists/groups participating is Dutchman Aernout Mik, whose video *Flood*, intersperses shots of a Tijuana area dominated by car dumps with concocted scenes featuring a local pharmacy swamped with mud after a rain-storm. The video, which Mik views as metaphorical of the circulation of commodities between Tijuana and San Diego, will be projected on a wall of a La Jolla, California, shopping-mall parking lot. For his piece *Fear/Miedo*, Antonio Muntadas (from Spain) has conducted a series of interviews of citizens on both sides of the border, asking them to answer the questions “How would you describe fear?” and “How do these perceptions relate to the border?” Meanwhile, Tijuana media collective Bulbo—a coed group of media-savvy artists ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-four who make films and operate a low-frequency radio station—plan to stage a series of events for *The Clothes Shop*, an ongoing project about customs of dress and movement of textiles in the Tijuana/San Diego area, including a fashion show open to community participants.

The more “static,” museum-based dimension of the exhibition is being headed by talented Brazilian curator Adriano Pedrosa, who will present “Farsites” at the San Diego Museum of Art and Centro Cultural Tijuana. Pedrosa conceives the show as an extension of the frame of the two North American cities/border investigation, having assembled a team of five adjunct curators who in turn each focus on a North or South American metropolis: Buenos Aires, Caracas, Mexico City, New York City, and São Paulo. Not merely curating another documentary-based globalization exhibition, he is at pains to show how recent political and social crises are reflected “on the personal or micro level” in the work of artists such as Guillermo Kuitca, Juan Araujo, Rita McBride, Gabriel Orozco, and Leonilson. Indeed, this mode of curatorial outsourcing seems an apposite way to tackle the question of “Urban Crisis and Domestic Symptoms in Recent Contemporary Art” (the show’s subtitle), as well as to address shifting new political alliances in the Americas. □

Nico Israel is a frequent contributor to *Artforum*.

INSITE_05

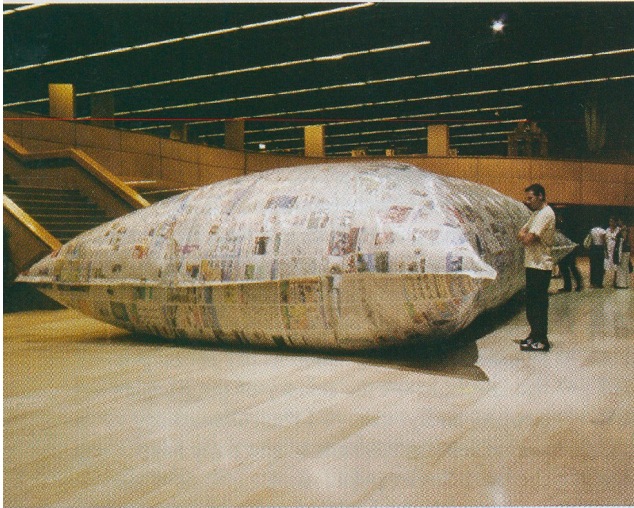
VARIOUS VENUES, SAN DIEGO AND TIJUANA

JAN TUMLIR

When first appearing in 1992, inSite—a biennial artistic event that engages the border area between San Diego and Tijuana through a series of specially commissioned and site-specific works and exhibitions—caused barely a ripple, being underreported and underdiscussed. But within two short years it had the support of the Centro Cultural Tijuana (cecut) and has steadily gained in funding and prestige with each subsequent installment. While the sprawling nature of the project has necessarily made for patchy affairs on occasion, inSite has also delivered such memorable moments as the Trojan horse

hierarchy. To a great extent, this has always been part of inSite's mission, not only "to broaden the scope of international cultural activities that allow Mexico to take part in dialogue through art practice with the rest of the world," as cecut director Teresa Vicencio Alvarez puts it, but to begin tipping the scales in turn.

Of course, in a post-NAFTA era, the nature of the border itself has changed. While inSite still fosters an exchange between North and South America, it must now contend with such cultural developments as the defensive mobilization of NIMBYish neighborhood-watch groups into large-scale nationalistic militias patrolling the American side of the border. On the one hand, such a politically charged context creates a real problem for curators when it becomes an unavoidable, potentially limiting imperative to relevance: Art must engage tensions directly or else face charges of cynical detachment. On



From left: Franklin Cassaro, *A mensagem é garrafa* (Message in a Bottle), 2005. Installation view, Centro Cu Performance view, Mexico/US border at Playas de Tijuana and Border Field State Park, CA, 2005. R

sculpture by Marcos Ramírez (aka ERRE) positioned beside the cabins of border guards in 1997, and Krzysztof Wodiczko's projection of a staring, Big Brother-like head on the exterior of Tijuana's Omnimax Dome theater in 2001.

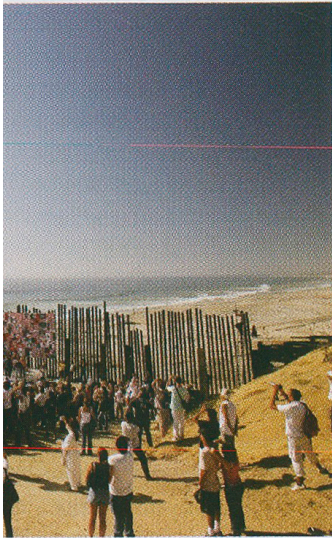
Speaking more broadly, one must acknowledge inSite's instrumental role during the past decade in demarginalizing "border aesthetics" as a category within artistic discourse. We have seen its consolidation in Documenta11 and the last two Venice Biennales, and also in the "tropical modernist" sensibility that is increasingly prevalent in US architecture. All evidence a growing fascination with third-world takes on first-world culture, or with a process of exchange that upsets this global

the other hand, these circumstances put inSite in a newly resonant critical position among so many international biennials that fail to reflect on the socioeconomic infrastructure of their immediate surroundings. In effect, this fifth manifestation of inSite greatly benefits from the fact that an increasing number of contemporary artists around the world are concerned with a "dialectic of inside and outside," as Gaston Bachelard puts it, that explicitly acknowledges the personal impact of economic expansion (as well as its periodic social contractions). Consequently, developments on both sides of the American-Mexican border offer a fulcrum for a larger system of tense relations among global cultures. One is reminded that this particu-

lar border provided that ideal setting for Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil*, a 1958 film that similarly aims to tell an international story in local terms: It is the contiguity of two communities here, their intimate apartness, that affords a uniquely sharp perspective on social dynamics that elsewhere are often overlaid, cluttered, buried.

Accordingly, inSite_05 organizers substantially expanded the usual program of newly commissioned public works and performances, collectively dubbed "Interventions," which here runs a gamut from Thomas Glassford and José Parral's relatively straightforward, civically minded landscaping of a stretch of choice beachfront land (*La esquina/Jardines de playas de Tijuana* [The Corner/Gardens on the Beaches of Tijuana]) to Javier Téllez's broadly satirical depiction of the border jumper as a human cannonball (*One Flew Over the Void* [*Bala perdida*]). A standout was the live, achingly poetic recital that

a more intimate discussion of the show's underlying concerns. This event also includes a by-now-obligatory Web component called "Scenarios." Even more significant for the arc of inSite's cultural concerns, however, is a more conventional exhibition that has been added to the mix, the bulk of which is distributed between two venues, cecut and the San Diego Museum of Art. Titled "Farsites: Urban Crisis and Domestic Symptoms in Recent Contemporary Art," the show is sensitively curated by Adriano Pedrosa, who enlisted a team of five adjunct curators (Santiago García Navarro, Julieta González, Ana Elena Mallet, Betti-Sue Hertz, and Carla Zaccagnini). Each is charged with presenting work related to the specific circumstances of a different metropolis—Buenos Aires, Caracas, Mexico City, New York, and São Paulo—whose setting can be understood as a cultural flashpoint: the scene for a shared condition, both the boon



cultural Tijuana, 2005. Photo: Alfredo De Stéphan. **Javier Téllez, *One Flew Over the Void* (*Bala perdida*), 2005.**
Rehearsal for Althea Thauberger's *Murphy Canyon Choir*, Murphy Canyon Chapel, San Diego, 2005.

Althea Thauberger coaxed from a choir of soldiers' wives left behind at a local army base (*Murphy Canyon Choir*). This piece, collaboratively written and then formalized through months of rehearsal with a vocal coach, spoke to the crossing of a border miles away from this one—Iraq's—in intensely personal and implicated language. Empathy—in such short supply on any military front and forum of political debate—was here resuscitated via intimate interpersonal exchange.

Possibly taking a cue from the last Documenta's expansive, time-based approach to the large-scale exhibition, there is also a dense schedule of lectures and workshops (called "Conversations") that are likewise devoted to stimulating

and burden, in which communities are engaged in an unequal exchange. Borders are meant to contain zones of egregious socioeconomic disparity while simultaneously enabling their mutual exploitation. And so the theme of "crisis" cannot be confined to one side or the other. As with San Diego and Tijuana, every one of the show's chosen cities is haunted by the specter of an "other"—a city, or terrain, better or worse off than itself.

Perhaps it should be no surprise, then, that Robert Smithson, though not officially included, should nevertheless seem a shadowy patron saint of "Farsites," if not the "border aesthetic" in general, since his theorization of entropy here gains a near-universal applicability. Within

Geraldine Lanteri's deadpan, Ruscha-esque documentation of failed Argentine businesses (*Negocios cerrados*, 2001–2004) just as much as the tokens of ingeniously jerry-rigged consumer detritus that catch Cao Guimarães' eye (the series "*Gambiarra*" [Making Do, 2002–2004]), the process of cultural exchange is consistently figured as that ongoing movement between black and white sandboxes that will eventually turn all the sand grey. Of course this reconciliation is still a long way off, and what these works show us instead are, for the most part, instances of uneven development, where the perpetuation of a unified master plan of International Style urbanism has met with vernacular, or as Pedrosa puts it, "domestic," resistance. Whether this is the result of systemic breakdown or deliberate strategy, an opposition that is openly activist (as in the guerrilla street-theater antics of the Etcétera group) or reactionary (Armin Linke's images of the architecture of crowd control at the 2001 G8 Summit in Genoa), it yields an art that is as formally heterodox as it is morally ambiguous.

Although "Farsites" touches on the whole range of objective forms—from painting, sculpture, and installation art to architectural models and proposals—it tends to favor photography and film. Both, however, are mainly deployed in service of a regime of the found object, suggesting in particular those early conceptual riffs on the form of the photo-essay, such as Smithson's "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey" (1967) and Dan Graham's "Homes for America" (1966)—with which so-called advanced art began the exodus first out of the gallery, then out of New York City as the second



Above, left: Geraldine Lanteri, *Negocios cerrados*
 Right: Cao Guimarães, *Vitrola 2*,
 Below: Francis Alÿs, *Ambulantes I* (Pedro)

"capital of modern art." That era's search for a landscape imprinted with what Donald Judd described as the "look of non-art" may have ended with Smithson's *Hotel Palenque*, 1969–72, and if images of South American urbanism predominate in "Farsites," it is because these cities retain unto perpetuity the unfinished condition so crucial to these earlier artists. In the rifts that appear between one abandoned building project and the next, the cityscape opens up like a rotten smile.

Documentary media, typically confined to the external "skin of the world," here gains access to the interior: The "crisis" appears as a wound, a surface effect that clearly exposes its cause. Between the simi-





cerrados (Closed Businesses), 2001–2004, 1 of 50 black-and-white photographs, 23½ x 7½" each.
; 2004, 1 of 18 color photographs. From the series "*Gambiarra*" (Making Do), 2002–2004.
dlers I), 1992–2000, 1 of 80 projected 35 mm slides. From the series "*Ambulantes*," 1992–2003.

larly layered photographs of Thomas Struth and Eduardo Consuegra, for instance, a crucial shift is registered. The first draws on what is for him a novel subject, the city

Documentary media here gains access to the interior: The "crisis" appears as a wound, a surface effect that clearly exposes its cause.

of São Paulo, through a familiar aesthetic filter, his scaled-up, painterly appropriation of the exacting style of German *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Conversely, for Consuegra, who is photographing his native Bogotá, it is the style that is experienced as "exotic" and that is appropriated through the concrete matrix of the city. Each attributes the "crisis" to a very different source.

"Farsites" comprises a quite comprehensive overview of contemporary Latin American artists (wall plaques provide their cities and countries of origin: Gabriel Orozco, Veracruz, Mexico; Doris Salcedo, Bogotá, Colombia; Rivane Neuenschwander, Belo Horizonte, Brazil); a sizable American and Western European contingent (Rita McBride, Des Moines, Iowa; Johan Grimonprez, Roeselare, Belgium; Gregor Schneider, Rheyd, Germany); and finally, rounding out the international proceedings, African- and Eastern European-

born individuals (Julie Mehretu, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Kendell Geers, Johannesburg, South Africa; Marjetica Potrč, Ljubljana, Slovenia). This diverse sampling might seem comparable to that of any number of biennials today, and the grouping offers visitors much more than the usual validation of a host country. What once was a limiting factor, the specificity of the site, now serves rather to ground a wide range of practices—one that comes close to representing a global response to the theme of globalism—to a set of concrete local contingencies. The discussion of national boundaries, trade protocols, labor disputes, and translation problems that is endemic to this particular context is echoed inwardly in the content of the works on view, but more to the point, it is echoed outwardly in their objective status as literal objects of exchange.

While the subject of the city is closely bound up with the history of modern art—the turn to abstraction coming as artists aesthetically reconfigured the already-built landscape of the modern metropolis—inSite_05 suggests that the present task of the urban artist consists of recording the process of urban development as such. More specifically, it is a matter of locating, within a rapidly changing topography, those visible marks and signs of human intentionality—whether productive, counterproductive, or openly destructive—that may serve as analogies for aesthetic production. Hence, for instance, one finds Francis Alÿs's exhaustive slide-show taxonomy of the elemental *continued on page 289*

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forms of economic life, the “*Ambulantes*” (Peddlers, 1992–2003). This work depicts a series of individual street-merchants that the artist has encountered while wandering in and around Mexico City and that, despite their obvious lack of means, have adapted to a highly mobilized market by fashioning from found materials rudimentary vehicles to transport their goods. Alijs pays tribute to this canny entrepreneurialism without glossing over the various civic infractions on which it is founded, as his protagonists tend to operate without permit and thereby also without regulation; their cargo is often questionable; and perhaps most distressing of all, it tends to create, by its very nature, a pre-

carious threat or an outright obstruction to the flow of the street. As an urban drifter himself, Alijs clearly identifies the intuitive aesthetic of the “*Ambulantes*” series as his own, both in its creativity and transgression.

A very similar point is made in Fernando Ortega’s deceptively simple video *Para xó*, 2002, which tracks the excruciatingly slow progress of a similarly improvised bicycle taxi down a country road. Titled after a song by Caetano Veloso (a senior member of Brazil’s Tropicalismo movement) that is playing inside the car that transports the artist and his camera at an equally sluggish pace, this piece pointedly links the fortunes of these two vehicles and their drivers in a moment of solidarity that is simultaneously triumphant and abject. Depending on where you stand, that is, the taxi driver is an icon of either ad-hoc pragmatism or social domination, merely the latest version of the Baudelairean ragpicker. Likewise, the impression that he is incrementally impeding the flow of global trade can be inverted into a saving grace, a statement of autonomy. This sense of ambiguous commitment permeates almost every work in the show, as evidence not of a general cop out but rather of nuanced response to an authentic complexity. Echoed within the general structure of “*Farsites*,” itself internally—I want to say, “dialectically”—divided, it becomes equally contingent upon the audience to consider, as it were, both sides of the argument. Within the present context, to choose this tangled web of problems over any unilateral solution in itself amounts to a political statement. □

Jan Tumlr is a critic based in Los Angeles.

Aernout Mik

Osmosis and Excess

InSite_05

August 27 - November 13, 2005

www.insite05.org



Vacuum Room, MC, Los Angeles: August 23 - October 22, 2005

Vacuum Room, carlier|gebauer, Berlin: September 11 - October 29, 2005

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