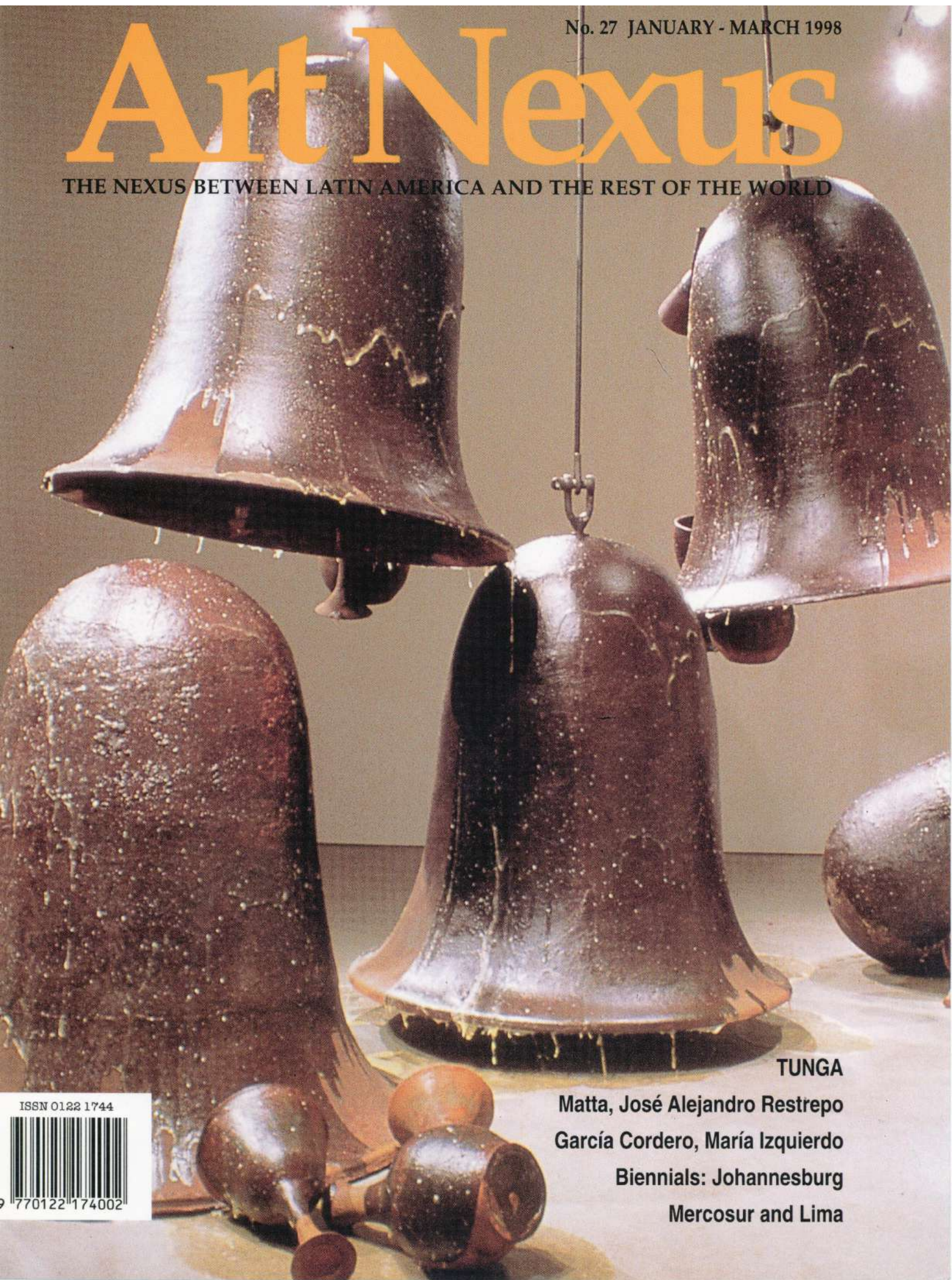


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ArtNexus

THE NEXUS BETWEEN LATIN AMERICA AND THE REST OF THE WORLD



TUNGA

Matta, José Alejandro Restrepo

García Cordero, María Izquierdo

Biennials: Johannesburg

Mercosur and Lima

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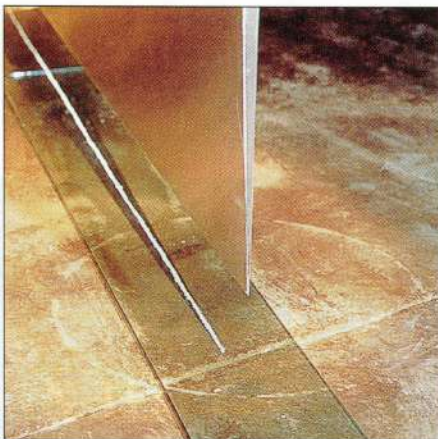
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San Diego-Tijuana

MAGALI ARRIOLA

According to the curatorial team of *inSite97*, the participating artists were invited to *localize or construct places of encounter and dialogue* within the transnational context of the Tijuana and San Diego region. The various interventions carried out in public places in both cities also provided an opportunity to think about the capacity of art to function as a medium, a construction or articulation of meaning, as a strategy for examining its possibilities and scope. At the opening, the artist Andrea Fraser made her own inaugural speech after listening to messages from the Presidents

Fernando Arias. *The Line.* Mixed media installation. Various dimensions.



of Mexico and the United States delivered through a government spokesperson, as well as to words from the different organizers. Her performance consisted of repeating the same words of protocol thanks, calling into question both the good intentions of the official institutions as well as the importance of the *inSite* initiative. Fraser's intervention was one of the few works of political content which was able to demonstrate that only by acting from within can critical discourse in art become effective. In this respect, only some of the artists who wanted to express a commitment with frontier problems were able to meet the challenge posed by subversion and denunciation.

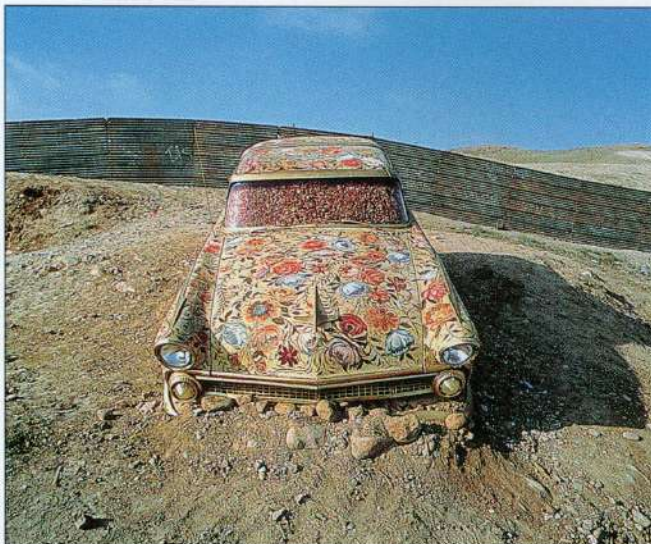
One of the most successful pieces was by the Colombian artist Fernando Arias, who drew a white line simulating cocaine under a sharp fragment of the dividing wall. By creating an atmosphere which was both disturbing and cozy, the work referred, Arias explained, to the themes of power, dependency and separation, from a political, social and economic standpoint. Power relations were also explored by Tony Capellán in *The Good Neighbor*, a work which was more aggressive and therefore less subtle. An electric saw moved from one end of a table to the other, generating a tremen-

dous noise; at both ends, two empty chairs evoked the ineffective good intentions of our political leaders.

Many of the works that tried to adopt an ethical position proved to be mere illustrations of the political and social problems they wanted to address. Miguel Rio Branco presented in a dark basement a work entitled *Between the eyes, the desert*, three parallel projections which associated the tired eyes of migrants with the desolate images of a desert. The piece by Jamex y Cinar de la Torre, a pyramid which sought to denounce the loss of the values of national identity through the use and abuse of hackneyed symbolism, merely revealed its own recourse to cultural stereotypes. In a similar way, Patricia Patterson remodeled *The little house in the small village of Altamira*, painting its walls with Mexican colors which revealed the touristic exoticism of imported criteria.

The most interesting works were undoubtedly those of the artists who worked in open spaces, encouraging the spectator to change their parameters of perception. The Trojan horse which Marcos Ramirez Erre constructed at the busiest point of the frontier clearly alluded to the idea of invasion and the reciprocal influences of both cultures. The two heads of the horse—each looking to one side of the frontier—encouraged the spectator to see the wall not as a dividing line but an expression of contiguity. By acting in such ways on the implicit meanings of the frontier region, the artists

Bestabeé Romero. *Ayate Car*, 1997. Installation of automobile altered with work on surface. Various dimensions. Photo: Philipp Scholz Rittermann.



Marcos Ramirez Erre. *Toy and Horse*, 1997. Sculptoric Installation. Various dimensions. Photo: Jimmy Fluker.



established a network or discursive system which managed to link the two regions rather than point to their differences. On the beaches of Tijuana, Louis Hock's two drinkers appeared on both sides of the wall; converging to the same point beneath the wall, they offered visitors a *drink of international water*. The ambitious project by Vito Acconci, an island of sand subject to the ebb and flow of the tides, evoked the successful and failed encounters on both sides of the frontier. Set in the sea almost at the end of the wall, the work used the natural elements which challenge the artificial and arbitrary separation created by the wall, since the water remained the same, circulating in the same way on both sides of the line.

Alongside these works, others seemed to have reorganized geographical space, proposing new readings or alternate solutions to link both cities. Francis Alys' proposal was one of the most discrete and subtle: *To go from Tijuana to San Diego without crossing the frontier. (Going via Santiago, Papeete, Hong Kong, Alaska, Los Angeles...)* I will take you around the world in a perpendicular line back to the point of departure. Iran d'Espiritu Santo arranged twenty granite dice on both sides of the frontier, with their sides suggesting that they had been cast at random. On coming across the dice, the spectator could draw an imaginary line between Tijuana and San Diego, depending on his or her trajectory and sense of perception. From a different standpoint, Thomas

Glassford proposed in his *City of Greens* another trip through San Diego in which he allocated 18 *greens* in unusual places. The work played with the different connotations of the word *green* while at the same time as functioning as a metaphor of the nearby Garden of Eden, the Promised Land to which access was difficult and from which expulsion was relentless. *This is the desert*.

Other artists worked in public places which, unlike the frontier line, lacked specific historical, social or cultural connotations, and transformed them into specific sites. In a busy San Diego street, Melanie Smith create a discrete travel agency using a series of additions which, although artificial, seemed to be taken from reality. Mocking in all seriousness the less attractive tourist attractions of both cities, Smith reworked the meanings of national identity by showing how the intrinsic relations associated with this region become dissolved in a cultural amalgam. By ironically exalting these kinds of places, the artist highlighted their heterogeneous and *bastard* nature which did not cease to be authentic because they were artificial. In a different perspective and using different means, Lorna Simpson explored the phenomenon of hybridization in a video entitled *Call Waiting*, which consisted of crossed

telephone conversations in English, Spanish, Chinese and Punjabi. Although they used very different languages, the speakers conversed with one another, creating a network of communication which was theirs and from which the spectator was excluded.

It is difficult to assess the more than 40 projects by artists from different countries of the American continent. However, despite the divergent themes explored and the different procedures adopted, the works as a whole tried to awaken a territorial or urban conscience, even though some of the pieces had little or nothing to do with the frontier issues of the region. This was the case, for example, with the «promotional stand» of Daniela Rosell in the windows of the Balboa Theater, and with the esoteric *Kiosk* which Pablo Vargas Lugo created for the Tijuana Cultural Center, a space which *lacks an important component of all public buildings: a newspaper stand*. From the beginning the curators were aware that art does not promise any immediate solutions to the problems of a political or social kind which day by day are affecting this region, but they reaffirmed their belief in the fact that *art exercises a force which strengthens awareness. And it is awareness which in the final analysis makes up reality.*

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Patricia Patterson. *Little House in the Altamira neighborhood, Rio de Janeiro No. 6757. Tijuana. Mixed media.*



Louis Hock. *International waters. Installation View. Various Dimensions.*

