

October, 1994

(Numerous venues throughout San Diego and Tijuana) The binational exhibition of installation and site-specific art inSite94, three years in the planning, is shaping up to be one of the most diverse and ambitious art exhibitions of the year. Installation sites are located throughout San Diego and Tijuana. The Mexican/US borderline, with all its cultural, political, economic, philosophical and social implications, inspires the artworks both as something to be contemplated as well as transgressed and minimized.

Statistics alone can be daunting: the coordinating organization, San Diego-based Installation Gallery, is working in conjunction with some 38 private and state institutions on both sides of the border, and roughly that many curators are working with 37 individuals and groups of artists in the same number of locations. These locations range from the Centro Cultural in Tijuana, to college galleries, parks, schools, and Escondido's new California Center for the Arts.

Given such a massive and sprawling congregation of installation art, better to whet your appetite by example rather than venturing into overarching generalities that would have uneven application at best.

Anya Gallaccio, a Scottish artist who resides in London, is doing two projects, one at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, the other in the Centro Escolar in Agua Caliente. The latter site is typical of the intriguing combination of history, social implications and unusual locale that many of the Tijuana sites bring with them: a former 1920s gambling casino hotel complex for the rich, famous and infamous. The elaborately built and glazed ceramic decorated location was closed down when President Cardenas outlawed gambling in the '30s. The populace of Tijuana, incensed at the crime and vice this kind of establishment brought with it, demolished the buildings. A school was later built at the site, leaving some tokens of the former splendor on the grounds. A very large, elaborate ceramic-decorated swimming pool, dry for 60 years, is the site Gallaccio chose. She has used gold leaf--from English candy bar wrappers--to fill with golden splendor all the areas of the pool walling that had been broken and are missing. Pink flowers will be scattered along some areas. The paradox of the playground for the rich turning into a playground for the poor--an empty pool, a dry fountain, re-emerging with a reminder of the "golden era" via candy wrap-

pers, affordable to the poor.

On the same grounds, a few yards from the pool, a Miaret will be the site for Alan Kaprow's *Muezzin*. Smoke will puff up at regular intervals, obscuring and revealing the base of the silent reminder of the exotic splendor of a former era's decorative escapes.

*Cora's Rain House* by San Diego artist Ernest Silva is an installation that addresses itself to the children across the border. In the San Diego Children's Museum a 12 x 22 foot house with a corrugated metal roof will be installed with water running down from the ceiling to be heard as rain on the inside. Children will be asked to make stories about the rain, houses, families and travels. A similar house, smaller, will be installed inside a classroom in Tijuana, where children will paint an actual boat that will be played in by counterparts in San Diego and visa versa. The stories and images made by the children will be displayed and read across the border. It is an environment and an invitation to cross the border and find connections through the children's own language.

One of the most multilayered works is by John Outterbridge in El Centro Cultural. Simply titled *Window with Wall*, Outterbridge has created a wall covered with earth that is installed inside and outside a large glass window in the cafeteria of the Centro Cultural. The wall, with its implication of the border wall, "crashes through" the window leading to the view of the rolling hills beyond Tijuana, the glass being an imaginary line of confrontation. Outterbridge conceives of the wall as a directive. He also lets it act as a tablet for graffiti. Inscribed are the words "*La Lucha Va Continuar*" ("The struggle will continue"). Even though the courtyard into which the wall protrudes is not normally accessible to the public, Outterbridge does include the possibility of chance graffiti joining his inscription. A rope is included on the outside of the wall "to aid the spirit" in its penetration across the glass barrier. Wooden stakes with railroad spikes are driven into the ground around the wall to signify territory, as in "to stake a claim." It signifies the territory of Mexico, but also functions philosophi-

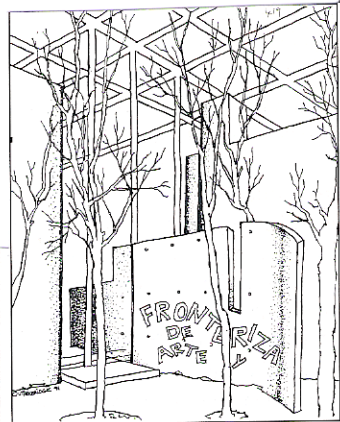
cally to represent mental territory, individual challenges.

A special mix of poignancy, wit and compassion can be found in the installation of Helen Escobedo. This Mexican-born artist, now residing in Hamburg, Germany has chosen the point where the border wall ends and plunges into the sea: Playas de Tijuana. There, twelve boats, made from the same steel mesh out of which the border wall used to be constructed (it is now sheathed in solid metal), will be moored. Attached to the boats will be three catapults, ready to hurl hollow coconuts at the boats. The nuts are empty, hollow shells, and neither the catapults nor the boats are functional. The whole is a sad, humorous and ironic reminder of the frustrated longing to journey north and the futile efforts to hinder the migration.

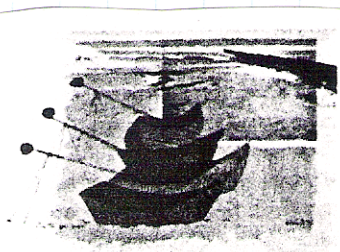
A very poetic exhibition in the Centro Cultural is Marta Palau's *Naualli--Frontera Sur (Naualli--Southern Border)*. This magical invocation to the sorceress Naualli consists of branches, mud, nine spheres, seven arrows and 13 rocks laid out in arrow shape pointing south. The double meaning of the Tijuana border area being the southern border of the United States but the arrow pointing south to Chiapas, the troubled southern border region of Mexico, is well intended. Protective magic, benefiting both troubled areas, is evoked by this installation.

Though the majority of participating artists are focusing on the border aspect with its social, economic and political aspects, a balancing component of exhibitions deal with purely aesthetic concepts. Rolf Julius, from Berlin, will install a series of sound vessels in and around the trees of the courtyard of the Casa del la Cultura Municipal and at San Diego Mesa College, using sound installations to subtly transform a space usually just passed by.

Two of several young Mexican artists invited from Mexico City, Abraham Cruzvillegas and Sofia Taboas, have chosen the Casa de la Cultura Municipal in Tijuana. Taboas constructs *Doble Turno (Double Turn)* in a hallway with both natural and artificial lighting. Fifteen hundred



John Outterbridge, study for "Window with Wall", mixed media installation, Centro Cultural Tijuana, 1994.



Helen Escobedo, study for mixed media installation at Playas de Tijuana, 1994.

small blue plastic balls, the kind used to fasten rubber bands for girls' braids, will be suspended from a frame underneath the skylights and in front of the hallway windows. The reality/unreality of daylight changing to blue with its seemingly natural cause--the blue balls--will be heightened by the installation on the outside of a blue light source.

In Cruzvillegas' installation *The Grass is Greener*, stuffed hummingbirds are placed on one side of a courtyard path placed on thin steel rods which vibrate when touched or blown by the wind. Along the other side are

asthma breathers suspended in the same manner. Green carpet squares and small black rubber pieces, like shoe soles, are placed under the rods. The installation speaks to division, natural and unnatural behavior, helpful and unhelpful manipulations of nature--like stuffing hummingbirds and providing life-giving air to the breathing impaired.

The series of exhibitions is accompanied by lectures, docent tours and guided bus tours throughout October. For details on both the location of the numerous installation projects as well as these special events call Installation Gallery at (619) 544-1452.

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