



Mildred Howard, *From Coal to Cotton... The Last Train*, 1994, cotton, coal, baggage cart. Installation view. From "inSITE94."



Louise Wilson, *Possessed*, 1995, mixed media. Installation view.

## SAN DIEGO/TIJUANA

### "inSITE94"

"inSITE94"—an exhibition of over 100 artists at over 37 venues—basically cashed in on the fence that runs across the Northern edge of Tijuana and divides it from the U.S. as if it were the new p.c. hot spot—California's own Berlin Wall. (One of the artists actually added a graffiti to the fence establishing that connection.) The heart of the show was a series of symbolic works on the border itself that purported to comment on, or somehow collaborate with, the border crossing. There were unexplained breaks in the wall through which, from the Mexican side where young men wait for nightfall to cross into the U.S., the four-wheel-drive trucks prowling on American soil were visible. Next to a large gap in the fence, Silvia Gruner, an artist from Mexico City, affixed a series of replicas of a statue depicting an Aztec goddess giving birth. The implications of such a project are disturbing; Gruner seems to be saying that south-of-the-border lies death, or a pre-life state, and north of the border lies life.

Throughout the show, it was impossible not to be arrested by the troubling juxtaposition of work by young, college-educated, mostly privileged white artists attempting

to one-up each other with displays of iconographic cleverness and Mexican youths waiting in the darkness on the other side. (Interestingly, much of the work sited at the border was later vandalized.) Most of the pieces simply did not live up to the social and political intensity of the site itself. They couldn't help but trivialize the lives of those waiting to cross, only to be trivialized in turn by the harsh realities this place of crossing connotes. There were, however, some works that escaped this fate. Perhaps most successful was Terry Allen's piece which consisted of two vans with bull horns mounted on them situated on both sides of the fence so that self-selected speakers from opposite sides could address one another. There were no implications of hierarchy, or of inside and outside, only people speaking to one another across the expanse that separated them.

Other artists, perhaps prudently, chose sites in the city, such as José Bedia who placed heraldic banners emblazoned with images of colonization and enslavement in the railroad station. Chris Burden's *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1981—, had been shown before, but acquired a new resonance when it was installed in the Children's Museum here. Many smaller works, such as Pepón Osorio's *Public Hearing*, n.d., were housed in the Centro Cultural de la Raza. Outside the Centro was Marcos Ramírez "ERRE'S" squatter's shack, *Century 21*, 1994, composed of detritus from various parts of Tijuana, which though compelling would have been more convincing if the artist had been living in it.

"inSITE94" rode in on the wave of previous site-specific shows, such as those in Muenster, Ghent, Newcastle, and Sonsbeek, but arrived about five years too late. What it usefully revealed is that the site doesn't really work the way it once did. Today it is probably easier to make a state-

ment with real impact in a museum or gallery than at some tortured corner of the real world.

—Thomas McEvilley