

inSITE94

The 74 site-specific art installations designed to make you think

By Pat Stein
Staff Writer

Site-specific art has changed radically since Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, as visitors to the 74 temporary art installations of inSITE94 will discover. The paint, gold leaf and stone from which classic installations were fashioned have been replaced by materials such as bones, wire, twisted metal, cotton, coal, flowers, microchips and more.

And instead of the "coohs" and "aaahs" that classic site-specific art-work elicits in response to its grace, beauty or monumentality, many of the inSITE94 installations, which are on display in 37 museums and galleries throughout San Diego County and in metropolitan Tijuana, may make you say, "Huh?"

If you don't grasp the significance of an inSITE installation at first glance, don't feel foolish. And don't fret, because the exhibition continues through Oct. 31. The works are intended to make you think — perhaps even puzzle — over their meanings.

"The purpose of site-specific art is to encourage people to think about their surroundings in a different way and to put them more in touch with where

they live," said Lynda Forsha, director of the ambitious binational project.

For the 100 emerging and established artists who created pieces for the event, inSITE has been a catalyst to launch what Forsha calls "creative investigations."

Each of the installations interacts in some way with the site.



Staff Photo / Jamis Scott Lytle

The flags of North and South America are made of colored sand by Yukinori Yanagi and are featured at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego.

"Some connect directly with the physical space; others interact with the history of the site or with the political or social implications," Forsha explained.

The exhibition is centered around four major hubs: downtown San Diego (especially the Museum of Contemporary Art and the Santa Fe Depot at the corner of Kettner Boulevard and Broadway and the Children's Museum at the corner of Front and Island streets), downtown Tijuana, Balboa Park and La Jolla. There's also a North County "corridor," which stretches from the new California Center for the Arts Museum in Escondido to the Kruglak Gallery at MiraCosta College's Oceanside campus.

At CCAM, Mathieu Gregoire's 500-foot-long "Blue Granite Shift" installation ushers visitors through the center's courtyard. Made of boulders from nearby hills, the installation features rocks in their natural state that give way to saw-cut and finely polished blocks. The different stages of stone parallel

the evolution of the center itself from indeterminate and natural to controlled and idealized. Gregoire's outdoor installation can be viewed at no cost.

Dennis Oppenheim's "Digestion: Gypsum Gypsies" is showcased in one of CCAM's three galleries. It consists of six reindeer with flaming antlers. CCAM is housed in the new California Center for the Arts, Escondido at the corner of Escondido Boulevard and West Valley Parkway.

Roberto Salas' installation at the Kruglak Gallery will make you smile. Salas has created colorful totems that reflect trends in popular United States culture. He was inspired by the border crossing at Tijuana where vendors wearing stacks of straw sombreros hawk plaster-of-Paris figurines to motorists waiting in line.

Salas calls the installation "Los Vendedores de

Tijuana," and he says, "These shamans of kitsch could have been my childhood heroes, but I was in El Paso admiring the velvet paintings and selling seeds and candy door to door."

Having grown up in a poor neighborhood that had "no access to high art in museums and galleries but was rich in its own culture," Salas strives to communicate with artistic symbols people can readily relate to. With the totems, Salas said he has responded to U.S. commerce and culture and is questioning "society's reverence for icons of television, cereal boxes and advertising."

Trying to make sense of the groupings of plaster-of-Paris figures on each pole is an amusing challenge. One totem pole features a skull with a Nazi helmet, Snoopy reclining atop his doghouse, a monkey on a surfboard, Mickey Mouse in a convertible and a triple-decker hamburger. Another features a circus elephant, a Southwestern wagon wheel with cactus and cow skull, a hamburger, a dog and a madonna at the top. Religious icons and hamburgers show up with regularity. But there are Power Rangers, piggy banks, burros, Buddhas and Ninja turtles. We thought we were onto something when we noted one totem pole with figures that started with the letter "p." There was a parrot, Pinocchio, a Power Ranger, a pooch and a plug (fireplug, that is). But it was just a coincidence, according to the artist.

North County artist Anne Mudge created an installation for Cal State San Marcos. Titled "Heirloom," Mudge's work in the library courtyard is designed to provide a context for connecting with San Marcos' past. Where clean architectural grids of the relatively new campus have replaced raw land, Mudge and her CSSM student helpers dug the outline of 20 bodies in each of the library courtyard's grassy squares. Charred remains of plants found at the site fill the outlines, which are connected by a filament to a sky grid suspended above the courtyard.

At Palomar College's Boehm Gallery (1140 W. Mission Road, San Marcos), an interactive exhibit explores the structure and history

of the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Community members, artists, writers, students and activists were all involved in creating the work that aims to provide better understanding of bilingual education today.

Other North County connections with inSITE94 include Encinitas artists Kim MacConnel and Jean Lowe, who both have installations in Tijuana. MacConnel has embellished the Stairway of the Ancients in Tijuana, and Lowe has created a classroom setting with large educational charts at the Casa de la Cultural Municipal. Lowe's installation is designed to encourage viewers to "rethink the already known."

At the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, there's a fascinating

installation by Yukinori Yanagi that features the 36 flags of North and South America in a colorful grid. The flags are made of colored sand encased in plastic and connected by plastic tubing. A closer look reveals ants crawling through the tubing and tunneling through the flags to carry sand back to their ant farm on the reverse side of the

installation. There the ants are creating a "universal" flag of their own out of grains of sand from the national emblems.

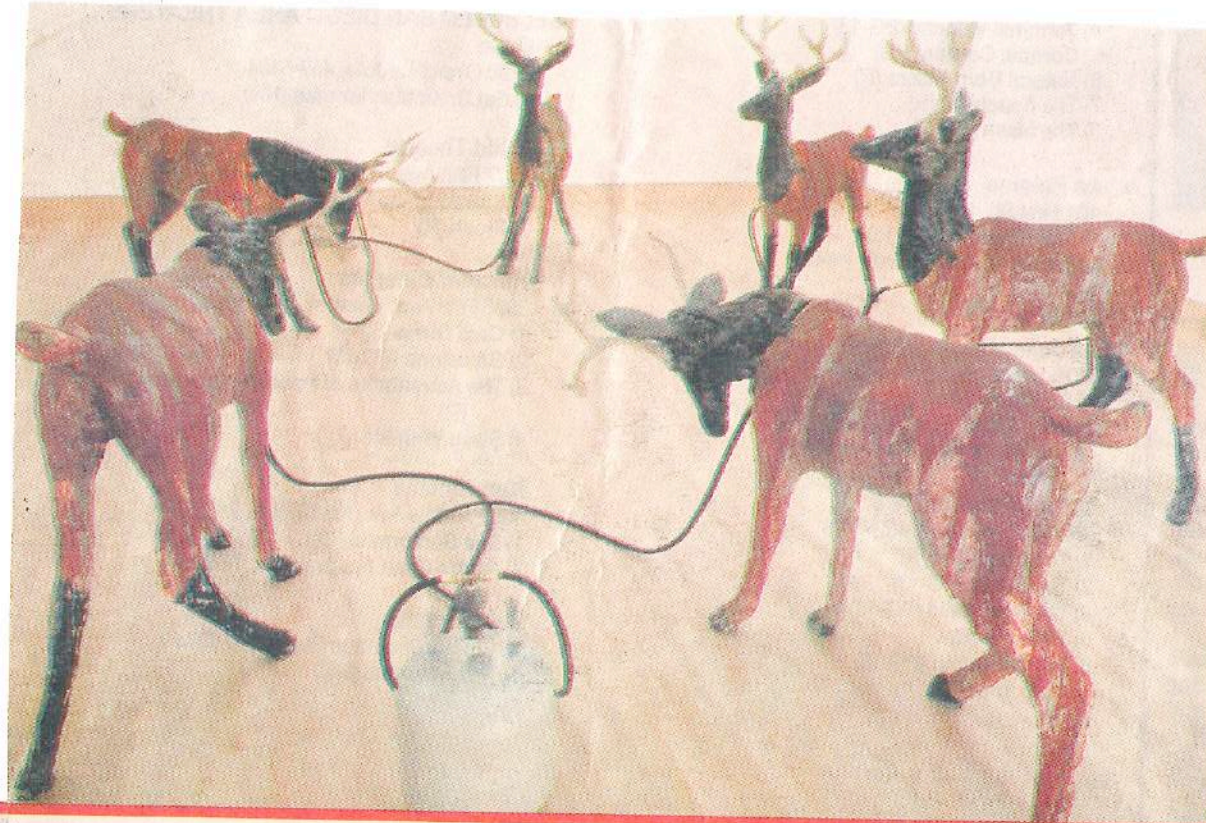
"The installation is about the blurring of tightly formatted and framed boundaries and about the dissolving of national identities and re-creating a more universal essence," Forsha said.

The monumental "Airplane Parts and Building" installation, which begins inside the museum and explodes through the glass wall, consists of airplane parts welded together in a frozen mass that hangs poised above the plaza. It, too, is about exploding boundaries, and it also speaks to San Diego's historical connection with the aerospace industry, according to Forsha. Unlike most of the other works in the inSITE exhibit, this work by Nancy Rubins will remain on display at MCA through Feb. 9.

At the Santa Fe depot, Yolanda Gutierrez has suspended 45 clouds made of shell, animal ash and iron from the vaulted ceiling. The installation invites viewers to meditate about life and death, according to the artist.

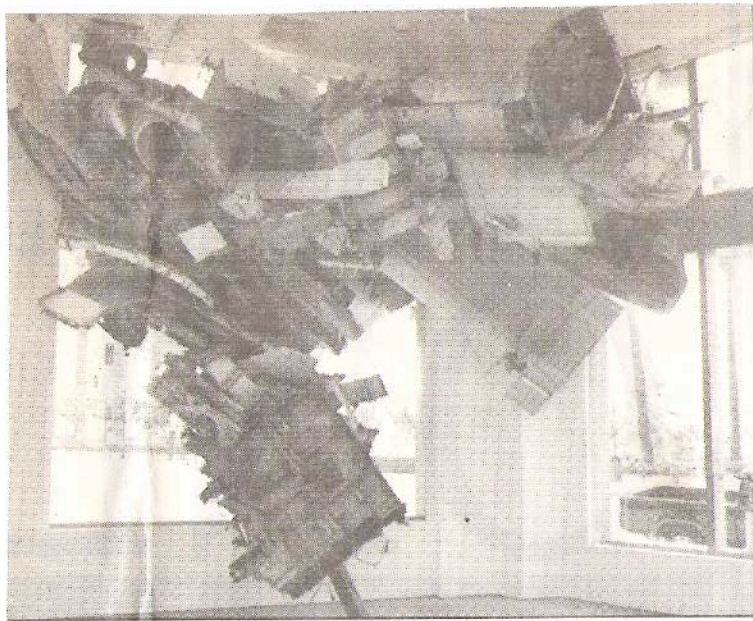
"While waiting for a train, the traveler may realize that this is just part of a much larger trip," Gutierrez said.

One of the most fascinating installations is Robert Therrien's "Under the Table," which fills the vast chambered baggage building of the depot with a larger-than-life table and chairs that tower above visitors. "Under the Table" is a memory piece, according to the artist, but it also provides visitors with a chance to explore a part of



Dennis Oppenheim's 'Digestion: Gypsum Gypsies' is featured at the new California Center for the Arts, Escondido.

Staff Photo / Bill Wachte



Staff Photo / Jamie Scott Lytle

'Airplane Parts and Building' protrudes outside the MCA.

the Santa Fe Depot that's never open to the public any other time.

"One of the things we hope will happen with inSITE94 is that people will rediscover places they've forgotten about — like the Santa Fe Depot," Forsha said.

Five-hour bus tours of Tijuana installations leave from MCA (1001 Kettner) at 9:45 a.m. on Saturdays and Sundays through Oct. 30. The cost is \$28 per person.

A docent-led bus tour of outlying sites, including those in North County, is set for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Oct. 13. It too leaves from MCA and costs \$28.

Docents will lead walks of inSITE94 projects in Balboa Park Saturdays and Sundays through Oct. 30. Tours leave from the steps of the San Diego Museum of Art and cost \$6. Docent-led walks of

projects at MCA, the Santa Fe Depot and Children's Museum depart from MCA at 1:30 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays through Oct. 30 and are free with museum admissions. Docents will lead walks of projects on the UCSD campus as well as the university's Stuart Collection of site-specific art from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sunday and Oct. 16, 23 and 30. Meet at the Sun God sculpture just outside the Faculty Club.

The inSITE94 guidebook provides detailed maps of each installation and includes artists' statements. It can be purchased at Installation Gallery, which organized the exhibition. Installation is at 964 Fifth Ave. in San Diego's Gaslamp Quarter. The 210-page book can also be ordered by calling 544-1452. It costs \$8. For more information on inSITE94, call 544-1452.

Staff Photo / Jamie Scott Lytle

This drawing by Roberto Salas is part of his 'Los Vendedores de Tijuana' installation at MiraCosta College's Kruglak Gallery.

