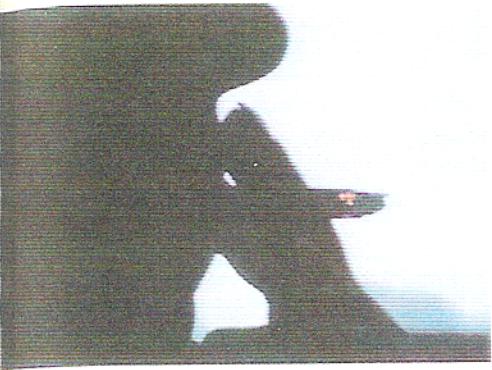




DOUG AITKEN LAURI FIRSTENBERG REINHARD BRAUN HERWIG KEMPINGER ANN THOMAS
LISA HOLZER SUSANNE NEUBURGER MARIA PAPADIMITRIOU YORGHOS TZIRTZILAKIS
MARGINALIEN FORUM AUSSTELLUNGEN BÜCHER NACHRICHTEN KALENDARIUM





RICHARD BILLINGHAM, Untitled. Courtesy: the artist and Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London.



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Kamera überhaupt vorkommt, so unterscheidet er sich wenig vom Blick auf den Fernseher. Gerade in dieser Gleichgültigkeit gegenüber dem Medium offenbart sich die Trostlosigkeit der Lebensbedingungen: Ungerührtheit und Gelassenheit als Eskapismus. Im Fluchtraum der eigenen vier Wände erfolgt ein noch weiterer Rückzug, ins Innere der Individuen. Vielleicht aus diesem Grunde sieht manches, was hier passiert, wie Schamlosigkeit aus; ein Guteil davon ist wohl den Folgen von Sucht zuzuschreiben, die offenbar – wenn man jeder gesellschaftlichen Anbindung und Relevanz entzogen ist – zum Motor wird, der die Zeit am Stehenbleiben hindert. Notorisch konsumiert werden Alkohol, Nikotin, Speed, Videogames, Essen, Fernsehen – nur von einer, der Sehn-Sucht, scheint man gründlich entwöhnt.

Viele dieser Phänomene, in denen so etwas wie die politische Dimension dieser Arbeit liegt, lassen sich erst anhand der Videos beobachten – während in den Fotografien manches davon noch als surrealisch anmutender Bildwitz lesbar war, wie etwa der im Soff vorüberkippende Ray. In den Filmen verschwindet derlei Anekdotenhäufigkeit in den damit gegebenen Möglichkeiten der zeitlichen Ausdehnung und akustischen Erweiterung des Materials – der ständig laufende Fernseher, die vorbeidinnernde Bahn, die (für Non-Natives fast unverständlichen) Stimmen erhöhen den »Reality-Effekt«. 1998 produzierte Billingham seinen Film »Fishtank« für das Fernsehen – dessen Titel ist eine treffende Metapher für beschränkte gesellschaftliche Beziehungen, ein Leben im Container (Ray verlässt tatsächlich die Wohnung nicht mehr, oft auch nicht das Bett). Dieser Film ist gewissermaßen eine umgekehrte Reality Soap: Denken Sie sich das strikte Gegenteil einer Laborsituati-

on mit casting-verlesenen Menschen, die ihre medialen Zurichtungen (etwa als »Typen«: der fürsorgliche Schwule, die kreative Single-Frau ...) und nicht etwa ihre Individualität entlarven, ihre Angepasstheit, ihr Funktionieren in hegemonialen Verhältnissen unter Beweis stellen und sich dabei in ständiger Angst vor Entblösung und Peinlichkeit größtmöglicher öffentlicher Anteilnahme aussetzen.

Billingham für den Ausstellungskontext produzierte Kurzvideos sind mögliche Fortsetzungen von »Fishtank« (der aus etwa 20 thematisch geschlossenen Sequenzen besteht) und widmen sich jeweils einem einzigen, banalen Vorgang, der auch im Titel genannt ist: Liz smoking, Tony smoking backwards, Ray in Bed, Playstation (letzterer zeigt die über die Tasten rasenden Hände von Jason). Die Bewegungslosigkeit bzw. eingeschränkte Mobilität, das »Fishtank«-Dasein, kommt in diesen ereignisarmen Video-Loops noch stärker zum Tragen. An den Großbildprojektionen fällt besonders die Kameraführung auf: Ausgehend von statischen Einstellungen gibt es minimale Zooms und Schwenks, Streifzüge über Details sowie ein rhythmisches Hin-und-Her-Kippen zwischen Scharfstellung und Unschärfe (etwa in »Liz smoking«, wo die Schärfe etliche Male zwischen dem Umriss von Liz im Gegenlicht und der regenbeschlagenen Fensterscheibe dahinter springt). Diese auffälligen Tiefenschärfenspiele könnte man als Augenzwinkern lesen – Momente der Distanzierung aus einer Situation, der man vielleicht zu nah ist; darüberhinaus als eine eindringliche Demonstration der Apparatur, die eben diese Situation produziert.

Dass Billingham derartige Aspekte wichtig sind, belegen auch seine neuen mehrteiligen Foto-Tafeln, in denen er Stills aus den Videoarbeiten zusammenstellt. Ein Triptychon zeigt etwa Details aus Rays Handrücken – unscharfe, überbelichtete Close-ups, mit hohem Abstraktionsgrad. Eine andere riesige Komplikation versammelt Blickwinkel aus »Fishtank«, wie die stark fragmentierte Untersicht auf Rays Kinn und Halspartie, einzelne Momente der völligen Unschärfe sowie unvermittelte Schwenks auf das Aquarium. Doch so irritierend diese Momente in den Videos sein mögen – als herausgelöste Stills zu museal-monumentaler Größe montiert, wirken sie langweilig.

Es ist verständlich, dass Billingham die Auseinandersetzung mit seiner familiären Herkunft nicht in derselben Art (und auch Frische) wie in den Fotografien aus den Jahren vor 1996 fortsetzen konnte: während seine Videos aus den Jahren um 1998 als eine konsequente Weiterentwicklung dieser Arbeit durchaus überzeugen, scheint die Umsetzung in abstrakte Stillfoto-Montagen als überzogener Endpunkt. Denn wenn man diese Großformate nicht als plakativ-medienreflexiven Ästhetizismus oder als Konzession an den Kunstmärkt lesen möchte, sprechen sie vielleicht nur noch von der nun vollzogenen Distanzierung des Künstlers von seinen Wurzeln (»When I came back to the Midlands, I spent a couple of months going into local pubs, talking to people and trying to be like a local person, but I wasn't the same, I wasn't innocent anymore. (...) There's nobody where I live I can really talk to. I'm not lonely but I'm alienated«, The Irish Times, August 2000). Da diese Entfremdung offenbar keine produktiven Räume im alten Themenfeld eröffnet, überrascht es kaum zu hören, dass sich Bil-

lingham in jüngster Zeit einer mehr »imären« Malerei zugewandt hat.



RICHARD BILLINGHAM

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inSITE2000

San Diego – Tijuana, Mexiko – United States,
13.10.2000 – 25.2.2001

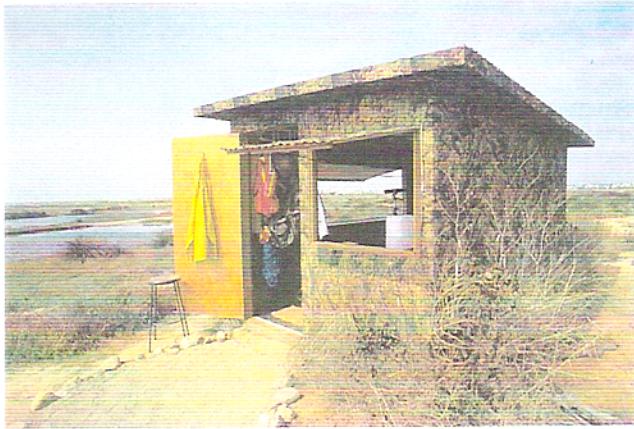
by Sandra Wagner

With the onslaught of large-scale exhibitions worldwide in the last decade, it is not surprising that a number of new projects strive to bombard our senses with pointless sensationalism in order to garner attention. Although well-established biennials have sought to reinvent themselves in the wake of this newfound competition, »inSITE-2000«, a five-month triennial, has morphed its structure while maintaining great relevance and integrity. Since 1992, it continues to be a thoughtful and provocative binational exhibition that puts the politically charged San Diego-Tijuana border region on the cultural map.

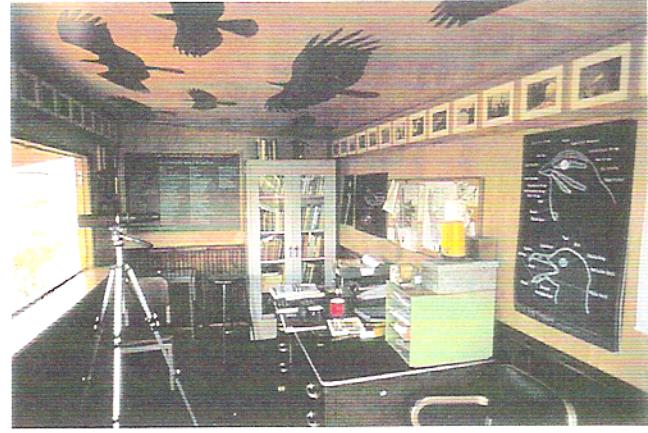
Both legal and illegal immigration from Mexico into the United States at this locale is the busiest, which is a fact that heavily influences the art produced for »inSITE«. At the heart of the exhibition are commentary on methods employed by the U.S. to locate and stop people who attempt to cross illegally, and on the stereotypes and harsh realities of those living in the area. These ideas are conveyed through works placed in communities throughout the border area.

Take for example Mauricio Dias' and Walter Riedweg's »Mama«, a clever 15-minute video seemingly about how U.S. customs officers develop a psychology with dogs that are trained to detect illegal border crossings and drugs. The video captures the relationship between the agents and their dogs, which is sometimes endearing, sometimes ridiculous. From an officer's testimonial of how he cares for his dog like he would his own child, (hence, the video's title »Mama«), to the display of dog trading cards (similar to the obsessively collected U.S. baseball and football player cards), the video ultimately underscores the blind dedication officers have to control the dogs, the border and the people who attempt to cross it. This idea is articulated by one officer, »I'll do everything in my power to stop them.«

With 34 commissioned artists, in solo or collaborated efforts, the 30 resulting art works are on display October 2000 through February 2001. The exhibition features art of all media, some at site specific locations, on both sides of the border. From this contextual format, the



MARK DION, *Blind/Hide*, Tijuana River Estuary Reserve, San Diego, CA.
inSITE2000. Photo: Alan Decker.



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artists have leaned toward film and video, one significant change from past »inSITES« that were object and installation based. In addition to »Mama«, at least one-third of this year's artists incorporated film and video into their projects.

Judith Barry's seductive video, in collaboration with other artists, is projected on large, first-floor windows on a downtown San Diego building at a busy intersection. People walking by are lured into watching narratives of a car theft by »some poor guy from Tijuana«, the hyper-promotion of Mexico's President Fox, and Paul Espinosa's cunning video that circumvents stereotypes of people from the Tijuana border region (typically the very wealthy and poor) and shows working middle class home-owners. Watching those who watch these powerful videos, the reactions range from people discussing it with strangers while waiting to cross the street to some who responded directly to the screen.

The highlight of the videos produced is Krzysztof Woliczko's emotionally driven piece that featured live projections of eight women maquiladora (factory) workers. They spoke of the horrors of their jobs and lives, which included rape, incest and verbal abuse. One-by-one, their faces were projected onto the monumental round sixty-foot-diameter facade of the Centro Cultural Tijuana's Omnimax theater, the area's visible symbol, as they spoke evenly about disturbing events. The projections were distorted through the angle of the camera and the rounded facade, adding to the grotesque nature of their lives. During the two evenings this piece screened, it began to rain on the theater, making it seem as if the women and their surroundings were weeping, heavily emphasizing the sadness these women experience because of their brutal lives.

Not all the videos were as successful. Sylyvia Gruner's work is conceptually interesting, using a 45-minute video to examine herself as a binational site, but its installation at the »inSITE« info center, a two-story space filled with several works, lacks impact. Gruner, who participated in »inSITE94«, engaged two therapists, one in Mexico, one in San Diego. In therapy in the back seats of their cars, the video recorded Gruner while the therapists drove back and forth across the border, asking her questions. Even though it was controversial in the San Diego therapist community, the remaining video is insubstantial compared to the original idea.

In addition to the video and film aspect, installations continue to be a major part of »inSITE«. »Blind/Hide«, an intelligent work by Mark Dion, subtly raises the issue of surveillance, a central topic of the border region. Dion positioned a bird blind (field station) in a national estuary reserve, abutted by a naval helicopter base, the border, and the ocean. Dion was interested in this site particularly because of the military and border patrol presence. During the one-mile walk through the estuary to the bird blind, naval helicopters are constantly flying over the area. The serene visual experience of the natural estuary is pitted against the intense din of the helicopters providing an intense and inescapable experience.

Dion cleverly added the idea of layered surveillance to the bird-watching experience. Once in the blind, you could use the telescope, books and pictures to name local species and document the sightings in the provided bird-watching book. As I looked through the telescope, the navy helicopters, border patrol agents, and even the birds were watching me, in essence they were gathering data, tracking information and classifying me.

What is remarkable about »inSITE2000« is both the scope and depth of programming it has achieved through its four renditions since 1992. The exhibition has incorporated an extensive program including lectures, panel discussions, tours, screenings and performances. These events are held in San Diego and Tijuana at various sites on 46 days of the five-month exhibition in addition to the art on which these events are based. So, the prevailing problem is how do you see 46 events and 30 works of art that are miles apart from each other, some of which are ephemeral? If you do not take the 8 to 12-hour tours, it's difficult. So, audience becomes and issue.

However, the artists are acutely aware that their works inherently have a built-in audience. »InSITE«'s audience is derived more from community involvement than interest from the art communities in both cities, San Diego being the least interested. There are discreet audiences for nearly every project and they are amazingly cohesive and attentive. Over any other art exhibition in these two cities, »inSITE2000« has excelled in community outreach. For example, the »Mama« video is poised on a main sidewalk from San Diego to Tijuana where 40,000 people pass daily, and *Blind/Hide* is embraced by bird-

watchers, the National Park Service, and local schools, which use it to learn about the natural history, sociology and politics of the border.

Another example is a work by Diego Gutierrez who selected 100 houses on each side of the border that would receive a series of video tapes he produced and delivered anonymously. With the first set of tapes in Tijuana, the residents of the community called news media out of fear and »inSITE2000« had to intervene. Then it became a fun game, where people were trading the videos.

With much of the work done for »inSITE-2000«, the artists knew the audience was not the art savvy public, rather a different configuration of public where people were stumbling upon the art but not in the context of an art show. What was most apparent was the huge difference in reaction to the art between the San Diego and Tijuana publics. Cultural aspects weigh heavily, where the Hispanic culture readily embraces the projects with pride and Americans are much more apathetic. For example, Gutierrez did not hear anything from San Diegans until the fifth video was delivered.

In the wake of its fourth incarnation, it is apparent that »inSITE2000«'s legacy is bringing together communities and serving as a spring board for artists' work. Some projects will travel the world, the works of Judith Barry and Gustavo Artigas will be shown at the Venice Biennale and Jordan Crandall's »Heat-Seeking« is now at the Whitney Museum of American Art. This is consistent with past »inSITE2000s«, where the 1997 works have entered the mainstream world. For example, Betsabee Romero's decorated chevy car continues to appear in books and advertising and Allan Sekula's maquiladora photographs have traveled around the world. For the exhibition's administrators, this is gratifying and one reason to look to »inSITE2004«.

A catalogue with a comprehensive documentation of the projects is in preparation.