

INSITE JOURNAL

FALL_2019 _01

PERFORMING RESILIENCE



PERFORMING RESILIENCE

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We are extremely pleased to present the first issue of the *INSITE Journal*, a new initiative that is conceived as a quarterly online publication that will be a primary component of the new INSITE website.

This will likely be our first and last appearance in the *Journal*. Other than this introduction, it is in the more-than-capable conceptual and editorial hands of Andrea Torreblanca, INSITE's Director of Curatorial Projects. Indeed, we decided to support the *Journal* as a major undertaking after being convinced by Andrea that something of its nature was necessary if INSITE were to (re)assert the relevance of its past work and develop an instrument for looking toward the future. In turn, we suspect that *Performing Resilience*, the title Andrea chose for the inaugural issue, is as much a reference to the existence and vitality of INSITE after twenty-eight years, as it is to a necessary tool of survival in the times in which we find ourselves.

Andrea's vision for the *INSITE Journal* includes four online issues each year—commissioning original texts by four writers—two who will be asked to shape their writing around a theme viewed through the lens of past INSITE projects, and two who will be asked to respond to the theme without specific reference to INSITE. Other elements of the *Journal* will include DOCUMENTS, a collage of images from two past INSITE projects, and CONVERSATIONS, an opportunity to reconsider contributions originally written by participants in INSITE's public programs.

By Carmen Cuenca &
Michael Krichman

Our plan is to compile, publish, and make available small books with the primary texts from the four editions of each year.

We are enormously grateful to the team that has made the *Journal* possible: first, to the authors who generously agreed to create new texts for a publication with no track record; to Cítrico Gráfico + ReD for their innovative yet respectful design; to Julie Dunn, our tenacious but gentle copy editor; to Liz Mason-Dees for her sensitive translations of complex texts; and last but not least, to Andrea Torreblanca who, through all aspects of INSITE on which she is currently taking the lead, has made this past year a great learning experience and a true pleasure for both of us. ■

Michael Krichman
Executive Director (United States)

Carmen Cuenca
Executive Director (Mexico)

By Carmen Cuenca &
Michael Krichman

Performing Resilience

Andrea Torreblanca

Sometimes words reappear into the public sphere to act as antidotes to the status quo—words that offer alternatives to endure, resist, and adapt to transitions and flux, but that also make it possible to inhabit different places and anticipate the near future. During the past decades, one of these words has been *resilience*, a term with many interpretations, yet essentially defined in psychology as an ability to reinvent ourselves after adversity. Arguably determined by many as a capacity and ability to return to prior conditions after shock, resilience is also thought of as a radical spin that can have an impact in the next era. However, “resilience has a peculiar logic. It is not about a future that is better, but rather about an ecology that can absorb constant shocks while maintaining its functionality and organization,”¹ as Orit Halpern notably underlines. In such ways, everyday life allows for endurance precisely at the very height of radical changes in our environments—a fitful political climate and restlessness in the social arena. From this perspective, “normalcy” remains feasible even when acceleration and turbulence prevail for the sole reason that as individuals, we have developed forms of *urgent resilience*, in particular unconscious shifts, splits, detours, and deviations that hasten our reincorporation into the world. These impulsive behaviors are not necessarily forms of resistance, protest, and unrest—either healing or comforting panaceas—but rather slight and random actions that unwittingly bypass our imminent reality. As a result, ordinary life is imbued with *resilient*

Performing Resilience

Andrea Torreblanca

actions that make it possible for us to “withstand” while simultaneously having an impact in the reality thereafter.

In essence, contemporary art—in responding nimbly to immediacy—develops similar short-lived experiences that displace the daily life of bystanders and participants alike. Even still, beyond the blatant dissimilarities between “real” and “hypothetical” forms, one could say that while an act of urgent resilience is a *reflex*, a work of art is a *rehearsal*. In other words, contemporary art is always projected, brainstormed, and analyzed in anticipation: i.e., *performed*. In doing so, it is conditioned to act simultaneously between present and future, but mainly to return to the past to fathom the current state of affairs. *Performing resilience* is thereby less about an impulsive act of resistance and more about embodying history to shape our possible, probable, and preferable futures. The affinity between both forms of resilience, *urgent* and *performed*, lies in the fact that they will both eventually reverberate somewhere else in the world, equally affecting social life—regardless of their transient nature and ensuing disappearance.

To dedicate our first edition of the *INSITE Journal* to *resilience* consequently responds not only to understanding why we are resilient, but also to asking how we *perform* resilience today. Throughout its twenty-eight-year history, INSITE has been immersed in the reality and exigencies of its immediate context, where artists incisively have had an impact in the public realm—

Performing Resilience

from metropolitan neighborhoods to larger binational regions. Planned over extended periods of time, these projects represent specific microhistories that once were demanding and critical. However, to return and reinterpret them today, with different issues at stake, is an opportunity to look at how contemporary art unfolds and relocates meanings in the social space, and beyond the *zeitgeist* of its time. To intersperse them with ongoing debates about our present state of affairs reminds us of how art continues to shape our sense of urgency and belonging in the world.

About this edition

In this first issue of the *INSITE Journal* we spotlight writing for inSite_05 by cultural geographer David Harvey in which he asked fundamental questions such as: What does it mean to be human right now? Who are we and what do we want to become? What kind of world do we want to live in? At the same time, we must understand our immediate reality, and intervene— at a personal level—in far-reaching worldwide developments.

In the IN FOCUS section, in his perception of Nari Ward’s work *Untitled Depot* (INSITE 97), Chris Sharp brings attention to democracy today by borrowing the political analogy of an “empty place” as a symbolic dimension always in conflict, while Lucía Sanromán chronicles the work by artists Michael Schnorr and Ulf Rollof,

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Abandonado II (INSITE 92 and INSITE 94), while reflecting on the present vulnerability of the Tijuana-San Diego border. In ESSAYS, Sandra Pinardi elucidates the distinctions between the autonomy of modern art and the “enunciative events” that define contemporary art in the realization of “the common”; and Simon Sheikh outlines how contemporary art and cultural institutions address the “social” in the political current state of affairs. DOCUMENTS is dedicated to Johnny Coleman’s work *Ruminations* (1992) based on the 1992 riots in Los Angeles incited by the verdict in Rodney King’s case claiming police brutality; and Betsabeé Romero’s *Ayate Car* (1997), a 1952 refurbished Ford intentionally deserted at the border, which fused Mexican imagery with American low-rider culture. ■

Lucía Sanromán

IN FOCUS

*Abandonado II:
On Contradiction
and Forgetting,*
2019

Lucía Sanromán
Abandonado II:
On Contradiction
and Forgetting,
 2019



Michael Schnorr
 & Ulf Rollof
Abandonado II,
 1992, 1994

I remember it well. *Fire-Chair* had a mysterious shape capturing the negative space of a body and looked uncomfortable. Yet, I was not certain what it was or how it was meant to function. In 2003, when I first arrived and encountered *Abandoned II*, 1992, of which the aforementioned sculpture was part, Playas de Tijuana was, like a lot of Mexico's coastline, enmeshed in the terrible drama of unhinged urban "development" but with few if any building codes applied to stem the construction of self-made housing, giving the beachside neighborhood the appearance of a place born as a ruin.

This impression was all the more dramatic next to that beautiful Baja California coastline not sixty meters away, right at the most extreme corner of the Americas: an "exquisite corpse" of surfer waves hacked by the blunt knife-edge of the border wall. It is a landscape chopped and cut, erased, where erosion by the tides is constant and where another form of entropy is also at work: the willful forgetting of things, events, institutions, actions, people—a phenomenon that I have observed in many aspects of life at the border and believe comes hand in hand with Tijuana's liminal and hybrid gestalt and the transience resulting from constant self-invention and migration.

It might have been this very tendency to forgetfulness and deletion that fueled Michael Schnorr and Ulf Rollof to collaborate on a work that they described as a "playground for abandoned children along the international boundary" made of heated pieces of outdoor furni-

Lucía Sanromán
Abandonado II:
On Contradiction
and Forgetting,
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Michael Schnorr
 & Ulf Rollof
Abandonado II,
 1992, 1994

ture based on various adaptations of a brick oven, as well as other “demonstration” pieces such as the *Habla/Head - Cabeza/Speak* meant to be used by poets and others to practice oration within a brick conch. I don’t know if such children meandered Playas, but apparently two poets did use the resonance chamber. However, years later and on the B-side of the California dream, the strange mounds of brick and cement that were part of *Abandoned II* always appeared as if in my peripheral vision, even when looking at them squarely. I did not realize, for example, that they were part of a larger installation taking up the entire plot. Originally, the landscaping that informed their location was made by removing the first layer of dirt of parts of the plot to create a large shape resembling the peninsula of Baja California that also included piled earth and water channels with plantings interspersed throughout. A little more than ten years after its making, everything had become camouflaged with the environment and what remained looked, as the installation’s title already foretold, abandoned, derelict. The brick pieces built clearly with affection and care seemed more like the reticent gesture of a hopeful but doomed new homeowner than the assured making of artists. It was even later that I found out the installation was part of the first 1992 edition of INSITE—the iconic binational art project—and that it was continued and improved by its creators in the second edition of INSITE in 1994. It turns out Schnorr and Rollof already had a long history

Lucía Sanromán
Abandonado II:
On Contradiction
and Forgetting,
2019



Michael Schnorr
& Ulf Rollof
Abandonado II,
1992, 1994

¹
Rollof, Ulf.
“Abandonado II:
A Border Project.” *Kunst*
& *Museum Journaal* 4,
no. 4 (1993): 31–34.

together before they collaborated to produce this site-specific installation. As Rollof explained in *Kunst & Museum Journaal* in 1993,¹ the Swedish artist had met Schnorr as a sixteen-year-old and had assisted him in painting the important mural *The Death of a Farmworker* (*Tribute to Cesar Chávez*) in 1978, located in San Diego’s Chicano Park. Indeed, Rollof has always referred to Schnorr as his mentor and teacher, which makes their installation in Playas de Tijuana even more resonant given the many unlikely coincidences and connections across space and time from which it resulted. Schnorr, born in Hawaii and bred in Chula Vista, just on the other side of the Mexican Border, was a rarity—an Anglo member of the Chicano movement in San Diego County, but also an important social activist for migrant, Chicano, and, by the time I met him in the 2000s, housing rights in the informal settlement of Maclovio Rojas on the southern outskirts of Tijuana, where he was a key if enigmatic community leader. A true cultural amphibian, he also converted to Islam and maintained a full-time teaching position for thirty-nine years at Southwestern College. Importantly, in 1984 he had founded the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo with David Avalos.

One can only imagine the young Rollof as an eager Swedish kid having his mind blown by the mere existence of the border and by the intensity of its politics, which appear to acquire actual physical form to this day, like transubstantiated geopolitical golems. Schnorr

Lucía Sanromán
Abandonado II:
On Contradiction
and Forgetting,
2019



Michael Schnorr
& Ulf Rollof
Abandonado II,
1992, 1994

taught him that art must be of its time and respond to social and political urgencies, rather than simply explore formal invention. By 1992, Rollof had grown into himself as an international artist just at the time when the global art world was emerging and the international biennial circuit forming. It was then that Schnorr extended to his young and charismatic pupil the invitation made to him to participate in INSITE 92.

In *Abandoned II* we encounter two artists that in uncanny ways represent the tensions not only of the whole era of biennials and parachuting artists that the 1990s and global capitalism made possible, but also of INSITE itself as a project always poised at the edge of a contradiction: to reflect on the local while addressing the global. Schnorr was the deeply embedded artist who grew in and through local practice to make sense and in a way create that very place—community—brick by brick. Rollof, on the other hand, flew in from elsewhere and responded authentically, mining certain histories, making this installation and a second in Tijuana, titled *23 September 1994*, and also commissioned by INSITE. Rollof then returned to where he came from, followed by a condensation trail that connected that small plot in Playas de Tijuana with concerns elsewhere.

The scope of a project spanning two countries and thereby “bridging the divide” was right for the times as the Free Trade Agreement was already being negotiated, and the era of global trade and softening borders rising. INSITE 92 was firmly located in two cities—San Diego and Tijuana—

Lucía Sanromán
Abandonado II:
On Contradiction
and Forgetting,
2019



Michael Schnorr
& Ulf Rollof
Abandonado II,
1992, 1994

but by the time INSITE⁹⁴ took place, San Diego and Tijuana emerged as a single bifurcated reality. Today that world is no more. The age of national divides and protectionist policies is again upon us. And so, we might do well to ask: what shall be forgotten or erased this time?

Twenty-seven years later everything has changed around *Abandoned II*, which now exists only in the photographic record and in the memories of those of us who witnessed its various stages towards erasure. The border is no longer a single territory, although many of the same hybrid and porous activities and transactions still take place. Even more, the violence of the war on drugs, and the abandonment of this territory to Narco control, make it very hard to think of artists working there in the same freewheeling spirit. The traces of Schnorr and Rollof's work are gone, but perhaps this is as it should be. Might we consider forgetting itself as a form of survival and a natural part of Tijuana/San Diego's contradictory resilience? While resilience in cities is often tied to conscious (or unconscious) adaptation of positive traits to improve conditions, it may be that forgetting plays an important role in this process in sites of extreme trauma or violence. Forgetting allows for radical reinvention, and that may be the only possible way forward in a site that has been at the edges for so long, and so vulnerable to the ravages of global capitalism and geopolitical manipulation. Maybe it's time to start anew. To forget a little and move onto new memories. ■

Chris Sharp
The Empty Place,
2019

IN FOCUS

Chris Sharp
The Empty Place,
2019



Nari Ward
Untitled Depot,
1997

¹
Deutsche, Rosalyn.
“Agoraphobia,” in *Evictions:
Art and Spatial Politics*.
Cambridge, Mass.:
The MIT Press, 1996, 273.

Despite the work’s stated intention of bringing people together, Nari Ward’s *Untitled Depot* (1997), originally commissioned and made for inSITE97, assumes a conspicuously and poignantly militaristic character today. Indeed, the work almost feels like an allegory of democracy in the politically fraught year of 2019. Narrowly hedged in by an oval of concrete walls, it demarcates a space populated by strategically placed doors, which would seem to shield a given individual as he or she advances, close-combat style, toward what appears to be an empty boxing ring in the center of the oval (but which is actually a trampoline). This boxing ring could be read in Rosalyn Deutsche’s work, “Agoraphobia,” as the physical analogue of her reference to Claude Lefort’s much-celebrated image of democracy, the “empty place.”¹ Building on the agonistic political theories of Lefort, Chantal Mouffe, and Ernesto Laclau, Deutsche identifies public space inside of which public sculpture might take place as always already freighted with the conflict of democracy. Deprived of the positive, localized meaning provided by monarchical power, democracy becomes a negative site of mystery, whose meaning and definition are dispersed among “the people.” But which people? To what end? Who owns it? Can it be owned? Or is it, the power of democracy, always contested? Anything but fixed, it is always open to renegotiation. The moment one tries to permanently define it, it forfeits its democratic character and becomes something else. It is for this reason that the

Chris Sharp
The Empty Place,
2019



Nari Ward
Untitled Depot,
1997

physical space of democracy, as per Lefort, is an empty place—an empty place to be temporarily, not permanently, inhabited, but continually open to contestation, conflict, and dissension.

Never, at least not during my lifetime, has this felt truer of democracy. If before there were ever any doubts about democracy's combative nature, it is now incontestably clear. It is as if democracy has gone on to reveal its essential character as anything but determined and physically safe. We are bombarded with images of American militias marching down city streets with what basically amounts to heavy artillery and bulletproof vests, combat ready for pitched battle. Which is precisely what Ward's *Untitled Depot* looks like—a combat zone. The multi-door-knobbed doors become barriers from which the visitor dodges a firefight while trying to storm, occupy, and defend the empty space at the center of his installation. That the entire installation is so constricted by wall-like barriers merely speaks to and reflects the lack of maneuverable margins while one lays siege to the empty space. The fight for that space cannot be avoided. Everything, especially in the United States, but also throughout Western Europe and especially Latin America, feels “political”—has never, indeed, felt so political. As such, the terms of democracy are always at stake. Whom they favor, how and why, are a source of unending negotiation, tension, and even violence. This is the nature of the proverbial beast, and must, by necessity, be

Chris Sharp
The Empty Place,
2019



Nari Ward
Untitled Depot,
1997

tolerated to a certain degree. This is not to say that there aren't genuine forces of evil at play in this so-called negotiation, but that, despite its obvious violence, there lurks a very dark and uncomfortable truth at the heart of what is generally agreed upon to be the best post-monarchial form of government. And while the social unrest and dissensus that attends it fluctuates, it is getting hard to imagine anything other than a state of upheaval so radical that it borders on civil war. Where before the image of democracy in the West, as promulgated throughout the cold war, was an image of "freedom," it is quickly being replaced by an image of radical intolerance, armed militias, and injured rage.

This being the case, it becomes difficult not to wonder at democracy's capacity for resilience. Indeed, it feels as if it has been stretched to its breaking point. Lefort/Deutsche's celebrated image of an empty space, which one imagines to be periodically restored to calm and emptiness, has been all but completely and permanently subsumed by throngs of warring peoples and tribes. Curiously, what seems to threaten it is not so much its ability to accommodate so much conflict, but rather the assumption that so much conflict is contrary to its nature (and maybe it is? Maybe it has reached a tipping point?). And that, as a consequence, the only way to end so much conflict is to modify the terms of democracy through a kind of absolutism, which is strongly evocative of monarchy (or fascism, which, it just happens, is on the rise,

Chris Sharp
The Empty Place,
2019

well, everywhere). It feels like we're at a point in history where the resilience of democracy is being tested by extremism and intolerance. Whether it overcomes that test and the empty place is restored to its periodic emptiness, or whether it disappears altogether remains to be seen. ■



Nari Ward
Untitled Depot,
1997

Johnny Coleman
Ruminations, 1992

DOCUMENTS

“This installation, *Ruminations*, is a dreamscape: an exploration of shifting narratives at the crossroads. In the wake of a painful and humiliating verdict in Simi Valley, and the searing image of L.A. in flames, I find myself focusing upon thresholds: a state of being on the line. The fire ain't out.”

Johnny Coleman

Johnny Coleman

Ruminations, 1992



Friday, September 4, 1992

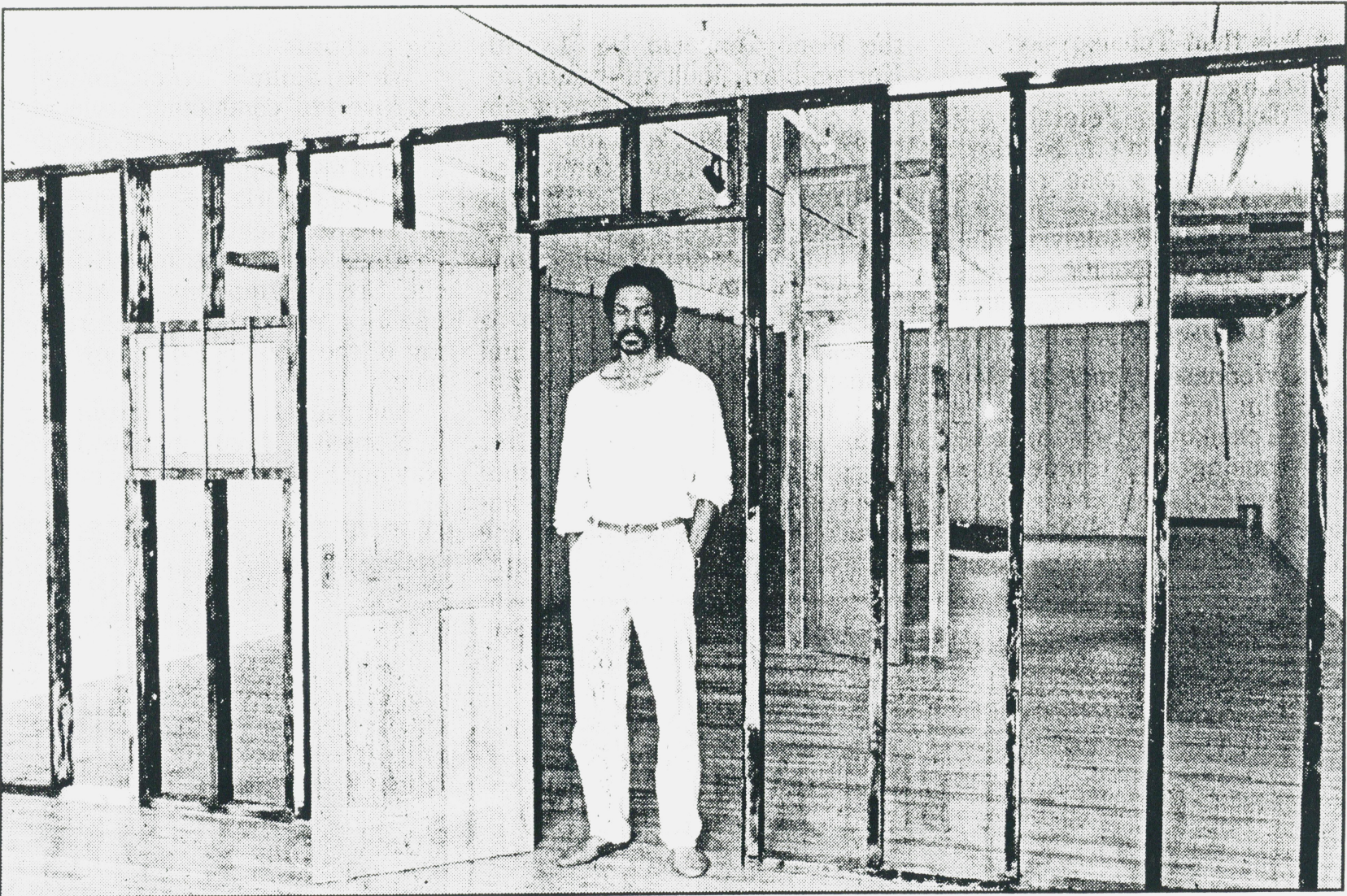
THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

‘Ruminations’ sifts through psychic ashes

By NEIL KENDRICKS

There probably isn't a TV viewer in America who hasn't seen the startling footage of Rodney King handcuffed and beaten by L.A. police officers. We remember the violent flash of nightsticks pummeling a human being into the asphalt, and we know there was something deeply wrong with the picture.

These frequently repeated images, combined with the acquittal last April of the officers involved



Artist Johnny Coleman: standing with his installation, “Ruminations.”

ART REVIEW

“Ruminations: An Installation,” solo exhibition by Johnny Coleman

David Zapf Gallery, 2400 Kettner Blvd., San Diego. Through Sept. 26. Free. 232-5004.

in the beating, sparked more than a wave of violence in Los Angeles and across the nation.

For many blacks outraged over the verdict, the violence was a revolt against the system, a Molotov cocktail of rage exploding in the streets.

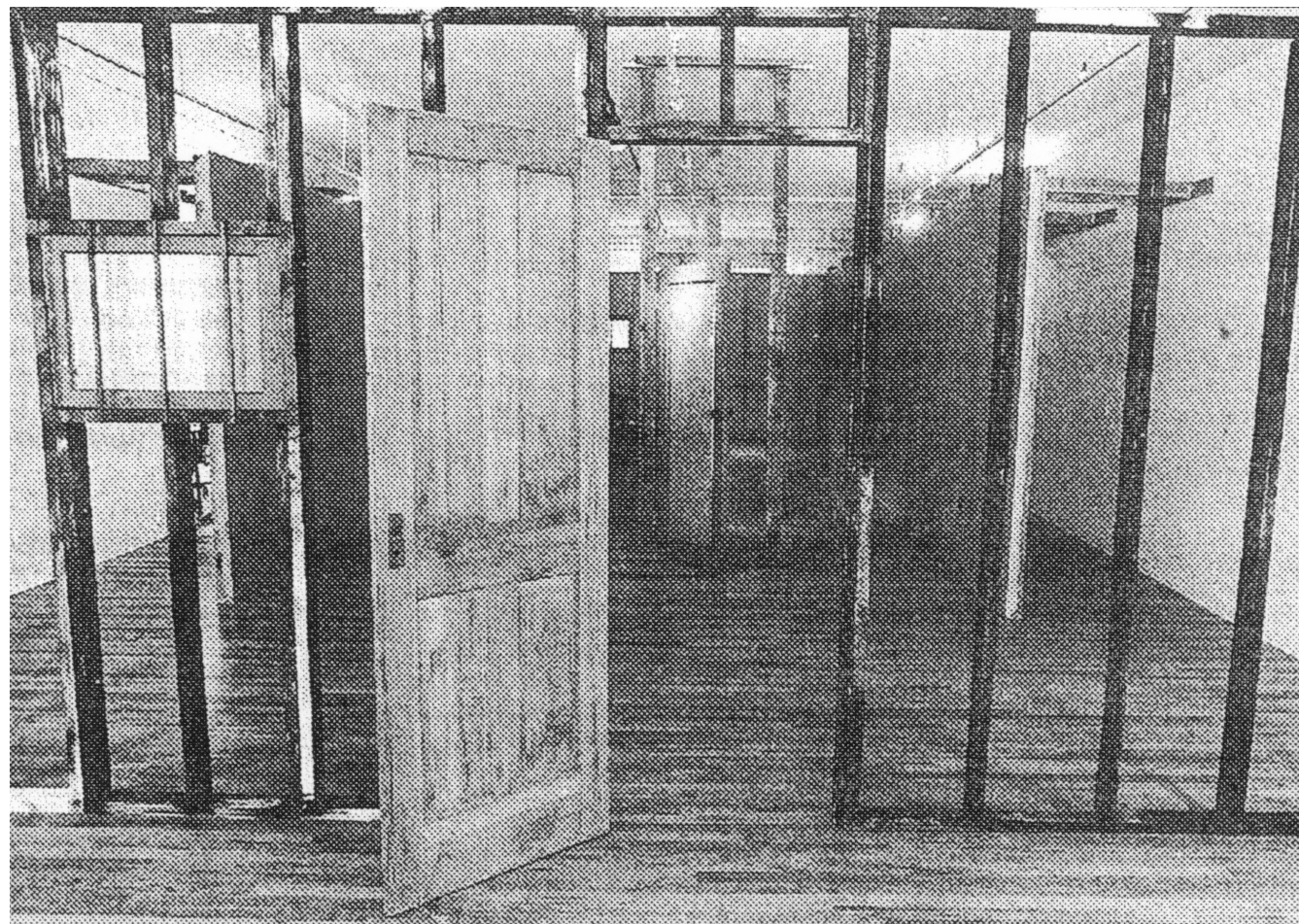
Today, Los Angeles is no longer in flames, but the source of the conflict remains. Artist Johnny Coleman sifts through the ashes with his installation, “Ruminations,” at the David Zapf Gallery. (The show is one of a series of exhibitions, collectively titled “IN/SITE '92.”)

Johnny Coleman

Ruminations, 1992

INSITE Journal / Performing Resilience

DOCUMENTS



Johnny Coleman
Ruminations, 1992

INSITE Journal / Performing Resilience

DOCUMENTS



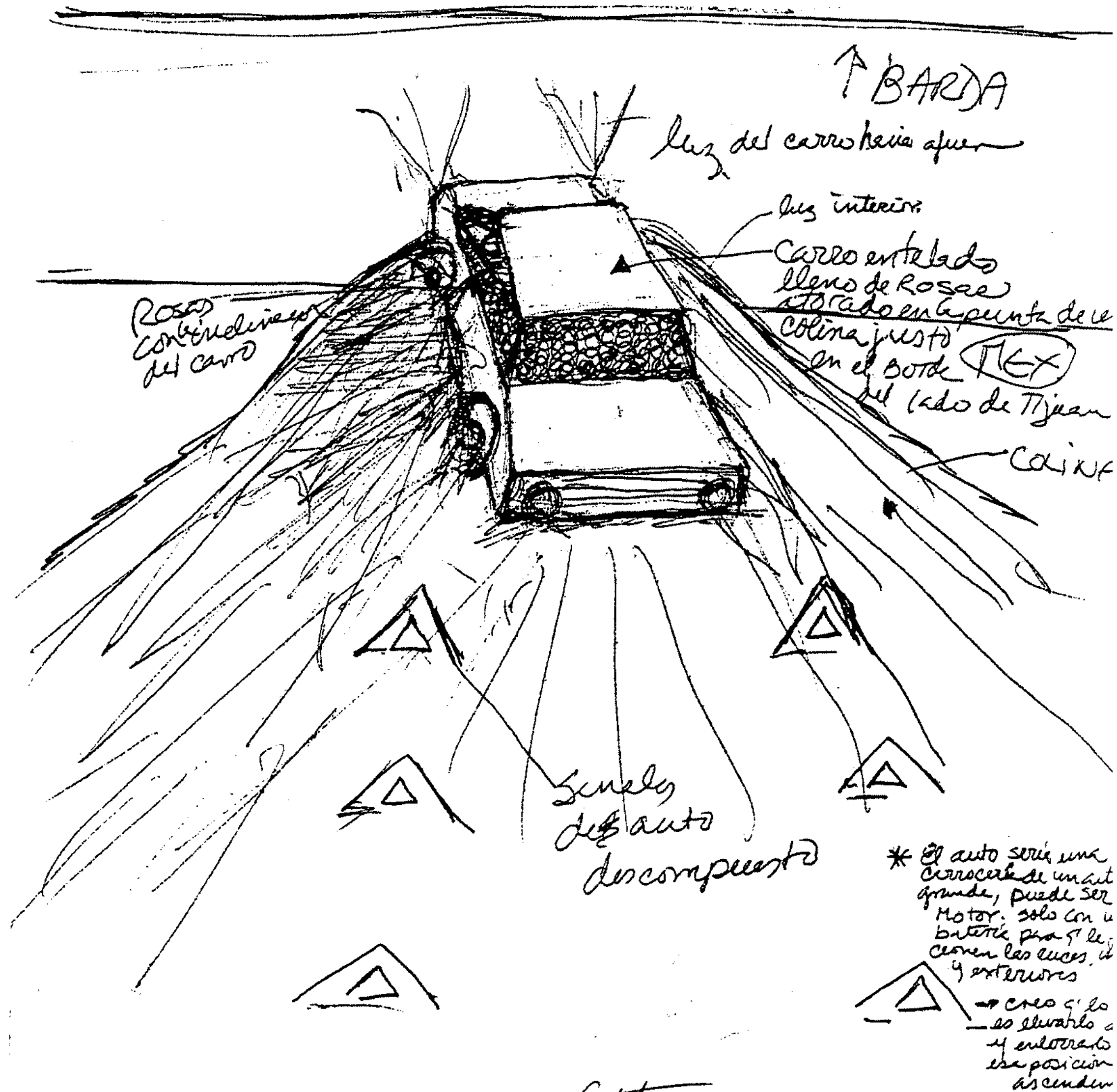
Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car, 1997

DOCUMENTS

Betsabeé Romero's INSITE 97 project, *Ayate Car*, was installed next to the border fence in Colonia Libertad. Romero covered a 1955 Ford Crown Victoria with floral painted fabric and filled it with roses that decayed slowly over the course of the exhibition.

The residents of the colonia protected the car throughout the exhibition and saw it as their own shrine. Meant to contrast the masculine with the feminine, the car was a symbol of refuge and an altar at which residents could seek solace from the struggles that are a part of daily life in Colonia Libertad.

Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car, 1997



Atte

Betsabeé

Si no es muy claro platicamos cuando llegues

Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car, 1997



Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car, 1997



Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car, 1997





Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car, 1997



Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car, 1997



David Harvey
*The University
and the Museum
in the Global Economy*

Excerpt from his intervention
in Conversation I,
October 15, 2000

CONVERSATIONS

David Harvey
*The University
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Excerpt from his intervention
in Conversation I,
October 15, 2000

I want to take up two explicit problems. And it's going to sound a bit portentous in the sense these are, I think, the major problems that we should really be thinking about at this time. And the two problems are: first of all, the issue of the paths of technologic and scientific change, in old-fashioned Marxist language, revolutions and productive forces. And the second issue is the issue which goes under the name of globalization right now, which is the reorganization of the world economy along rather new lines. In both cases, I want to argue that these processes are driven by capital accumulation and that they've been with us for a very long time. The powers of technological change have been connected to the military industrial complex since the sixteenth century at least, if not before. Globalization has been going on—the formation of the world market through trade, export of capital, transformation of labor forces in different parts of the world. That's been going on since at least 1492, if not before. So, both of the processes I'm talking about are long-standing. But I think a case, a strong case, can be made that of the last twenty

or thirty years, that ratcheted into a slightly different terrain, which makes them qualitatively rather different. I'm not going to spend much time on the technological scientific side except to say the following. Because there's a lot made of the creation of cyberspace, the internet, computer technology information revolutions and all the rest of it, and that is clearly a very important component part of the new kind of world in which we live in, which poses a whole set of specific issues. And, of course, it does connect very strongly to the globalization process.

But I think even more important as far as I'm concerned, are the revolutions which have been occurring in biological understandings and biological technologies over the last twenty or thirty years. I think processes of genetic engineering, genetic interventions, genetic transformations are rather critical because they're opening up the possibility that we can actually intervene at that level in the evolutionary process and intervene in major ways. Now of course, human beings have always been evolutionary agents through plant breeding, habit modification, and the like. But

David Harvey
*The University
and the Museum
in the Global Economy*

Excerpt from his intervention
in Conversation I,
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this seems to me to be somewhat qualitatively different in that we're intervening at a level and with a set of mechanics, which are instantaneous as opposed to rather drawn out. And these revolutions pose immediately the question of what kind of evolutionary process we wish to be engaged with. That through both the indirect interventions of habitat destruction and habitat modification and through genetic interventions, we are in a position to control the evolutionary process or intervene in it in these fundamental ways, not only in terms of our evolution but also the evolution of many of the species on the earth. This then poses a whole set of issues as to whether this evolutionary process should be left to the direction of the multinationals...What kind of planet do we want to live on? What kind of species diversity do we wish to maintain? So all of these issues, it seems to me, collect around the notion that we are at this point of either a conscious discussion of these questions in an attempt, not necessarily to come to a specific answer but at least to transform and intervene in the processes that are transforming and intervening in the evolutionary

process—whether we're going to do that or just sort of be objects of this evolutionary process and just, as it were, let it happen. And it seems to me there's a very important topic of conversation to be had around that question.

The second issue is the globalization process. Again, [this process has] been going on for a very, very long time. But over the last thirty or so years it's been connected of course with this strong financialization of capital, the organization of financial markets, the reorganization of divisions of labor on a world scale. The deindustrialization and reindustrialization, all of those sorts of things, which you may well be familiar with. Now, we can make an analysis of globalization. I don't propose to do that here and the various ways in which it can be understood. But I want to point out a number of specific elements about it because I also want to see it as a somewhat contradictory process and a rather more complicated process than is usually set out in the literature. The first point I want to make about it is that an interesting dialogue is being set up, as it were, between this process called globalization, which

David Harvey
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Excerpt from his intervention
in Conversation I,
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assumes very much in consciousness and in representation as if it's something ethereal, something that's so far up there that somehow or other none of us can deal with it. It's operating on us. You know, governments can't control. Nobody can control it. There's something called globalization that's going on. It's sort of, it has this ethereal quality to it. That ethereal quality then connects to, as it were, the opposite end of the scale of things, which is the notion of the individual and the personal. And it sometimes seems like dialogue and discussion get segregated into this discussion of globalization, which is way up there, and then personal life, personal well-being, the person as it were, the other end down here. And somehow there's no connectivity between those two levels. One of the things I tried to do in this last book is to say what is the connectivity between those two discourses of globalization and, for example, the body or the person or the individual. What is the connection between the two? And of course, if you think of the labor process, immediately you see what the connection is, that the body of the worker in an IKEA plant in Indonesia is being used

in a certain kind of way for certain kinds of purposes, which connect to the first. So, there're all sorts of connections that exist. But there is also an interesting progressive connection. I want to play on the duality here. A progressive connection. There has been a tremendous resurgence in the last few years of interesting questions of let's say human rights, which is about the rights of individuals and the body in relationship to these global processes. And at that point you kind of start to see the connectivity. And then you start to see it at other levels like some of the international conferences on population and women, talking about, you know, what're the reproductive rights of women and what has that got to do, as it were, with the global processes of population transformation. So, there are points of dialogue between those two levels, and I want to come back to that a little later.

Because the next point I want to make is that actually if you start to unpack what globalization is about, it doesn't exist to some ethereal aspect up there. It actually is occurring at all kinds of different levels and all kinds of different scales. And I think

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we'd have to start to look at the different scales at which the globalization process is operating in order to get a better grasp on how to politically intervene in relationship to it. Because one of the things I've been very antagonistic to over the last few years is the sense of helplessness that you can't intervene, you can't do anything. The best you can do is do something in your own back yard. Take care of your own property and it enhances value or something like that. And you can't do anything much else, you know. And that came over in this famous Margaret Thatcher phrase, which I'm thoroughly at war with, which is the notion that there is no alternative. And to say well maybe we should be thinking alternatives. And then the issue arises where can we think alternatives? How can we think alternatives? And it's very hard to think alternatives if you just think about globalization as some ethereal set of processes that nobody's in control of. But you can start to think alternatives when you start to unpack it. Globalization has implications at the very personal level. And I've mentioned this issue about human rights. And the resurgence in recent

years, for example, with this notion of crimes against humanity. General Pinochet being arrested in London at the behest of a Spanish judge for crimes committed in Chile. Well, this is one aspect of globalization and it's a very interesting aspect. It starts to say there are ways to hold individuals and entities accountable in some way for events in other parts of the world. And this is one of the places where there are some constructive possibilities that come out of the globalization argument. The globalization also has effects at other levels at, for example, the community level. David [Avalos] just talked a little bit about this. I think it's very important to recognize that what's happening in say San Diego, what's happening in Baltimore, is not just something which is just our own back-yard politics. It is connected in very important ways to what this globalization process is about. And by acting at that level, you can actually engage in transformative work, which has possibilities when taken towards other levels to do something quite different about the political situation. Many people have given up on the nation state. They say the nation state is powerless any more.

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Well, you know, having crossed that border down there twice in the last couple of days, the idea of the nation's state as powerless? Come off it. I mean, this is crazy. And, so, at that level there is also something, which is crucial. Nation states are not powerless. Nation states are terribly important containers of power with a possibility of engaging with this process in quite different ways. And if you start to look at the ways in which different nation states have responded to globalization, have affected globalization, then you can kind of say national state policy is actual a very important terrain of intervention. There are regional configurations, which are below the nation state and some instances above the nation state, regional configurations which are rather important to consider. And, actually, the formation of regional consciousness in some cases, you see it happening in many areas of Europe. At the same time, you're getting the European Union, a sort of large-scale region, you're also getting lots of regional consciousness movements which are emerging, I mean not only in the traditional centers like the Basque country, but also in Northern Italy and in places

like that. So, you're getting as it were again a different reconfiguration. Again, those things are not unconnected with this very general process that we call globalization.

And then there are the multinational or transnational institutes like the European Union, like NAFTA, which are also important in the way in which this process is being worked out. And then there are the global institutions—the IMF, the World Trade Organization, the World Bank— and all those things that have been the target of a lot of radical attention in the last few years through Seattle, Washington, Prague, Melbourne, and the like. So when you start to think about it you see there are all these layers of activities that occur at different scales. And one of the questions we need to look at is what is the relationship between what is happening here in San Diego at the community level, the very local community level, at the metropolitan level, and what that relationship is also to the kind of regional consciousness that might be emerging across the border. What is that all about and how does that relate as it were to processes of globalization? There have been many transformative things

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occurring in the last few years. Just to give you one example that struck me quite catastrophically yesterday when looking at that, you know, Operation Gatekeeper and the wall. I mean, I kept on thinking back to the tremendous euphoria attached to the attack on the Berlin wall, when people took sledge hammers and smashed the whole thing down. And frankly my response to that, the balloon event, was I wanted to take a sledgehammer to that damn wall. And then thinking, but why is that wall somehow rather regarded legitimate? Why are we putting walls up in some parts of the world and tearing them down elsewhere? Why are people going behind gated communities, living in gated communities and putting walls all over the place? At the same time, we've got globalization going on. What's going on? What's the relationship between these two? And I want to argue that the relationships are not contingent or accidental. There is a structural transformation going on in the ways in which life is being worked out geographically through globalization.

Now, what kinds of responses can we have to these two processes of globaliza-

tion and technological change? It seems to me there are some fundamental questions that might be asked. I work in a university and I can assure you these questions are not generally asked inside the university. I'm not sure they're being asked anywhere in any sort of coherent form. A month ago I was in the Vatican of all places. I'm not Catholic. I'm not particularly religious at all. But one of the things that was interesting about the discussion in the Vatican was precisely this issue of saying, what does it mean to be human right now? And can we develop a way of thinking that resonates with the marginalized, the oppressed, the excluded, and the alienated? And if so, what kinds of things would we want to say? As a force in opposition to, from the Vatican's language, the crafts materialism, the nihilism, and the postmodernism of contemporary culture and all the rest of it. And I think, for me anyway, what was interesting was the seriousness of the question. What does it mean to be a human being right now with all of these capacities and powers in front of us? And how are we going to understand ourselves? And some of these issues are being discussed in

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things like issues about human rights in general, the interests of collective rights, the whole kinds of questions of cultural relativism, misuse of those sorts. So there is, there's a whole a series of sites, if you want to call it that, of discussion of thinking and of feeling. And I think feeling is probably more important than thinking. Feeling that there is something which is catastrophically wrong. There is something that is really out of whack. We seem to be headed in the wrong direction. We're on the wrong train. We need to get off it. We need to create another one. How can we do it? And if you ask yourself the question, where is the opposition to this whole system we're talking about occurring? The answer is it's all over the place. I find it in my own city in terms of living-wage movements and discontent and alienation in many marginalized communities. I find it in many other places, you know the peasant movements in India or movements in rural Brazil. I mean, you name it, there's sort of movements all over the place, which are oppositional movements. All of them expressing the view that something is wrong, that something's got to be done. And it can sometimes take

specific issues about the environment or cultural autonomy or personal liberties and freedoms and all those sorts of things.

But there's something wrong. And then we have to start to talk about why is this thing that's wrong so wrong? My answer is a very simple one. It's because we've given up before the powers of capital cumulation and money. It's as simple as that. We lie down in front of it all. Which is not to say everybody who wields that power is an evil, nasty kind of person, but to say basically look, that's where the power lies. And we seem not to be able to mobilize ourselves against it. Look at the elections and look at what David was talking about. So how do we start to configure a conversation about alternatives? And that conversation has to address what for me is really the fundamental kind of issue about who are we and what do we want to become? What kind of world do we want to live in? And if capital can't give us that world, then we should find some way to get rid of capital and construct something completely different. And that's a revolutionary solution. It's a terrible place to say that right here, right? There are possibilities

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it seems to me that the social democratic possibility would be to control it in some way. Turn it into a servant rather than a master. Control it, and see if it can be used. And actually right now, of course, we're getting all these institutions which are precisely about regulation and control. We have sort of the questions of financial instability, how can that be regulated and controlled? We have questions of the environment. How can that be regulated and controlled? We have social and political questions. How can that be regulated and controlled? So actually right now there's a whole kind of almost coming back of a notion of there's going to be some global regulatory apparatus. And along with that sort of issue, which is seen as a technical sort of managerial kind of problem comes another problem, which is what kinds of values are going to be incorporated in those institutions, which is what the struggle in Seattle in many ways was about. What kinds of values should be incorporated in the WTO or in the IMF if you can put any values in them whatsoever other than the purely monetary ones? So those are the issues that then come back,

these sort of moral issues. Where can these things be discussed? Will they be discussed within the formal structure of university education? I don't see it. I really don't see it. I try to discuss it, but frankly, you know, I get pretty much marginalized in my own institution, which is one of the reasons I'm leaving Hopkins because it's all about selling itself to technological change and the state apparatus. It's all about that. It's all about gaining money. I don't own enough research grants. I'm a non-valued person in my institution. And they make it clear you're non-valued. And they treat you that way. You're a parasite because you're not making, you're not giving yourself over to government and industry. They have a mission statement, the first draft of which said, "We have to give ourselves over to serving government and industry." When I got up and said, "Well what about the public interest? What about poor?" People kind of said, "Oh, yeah, well, oh yeah. Maybe we should modify the statement." But they're not going to modify the practice. So it might occur not there. Would it occur through I don't know museums and so on? I don't

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know much about museums and so on. And it seems to me that organizations like INSITE have a real possibility. And it's a possibility, not necessarily a realization and we might want to discuss that. Of exploring some of the contradictions that would exist within this process particularly between the levels, between the way in which the personal is political for many artists. And the way in which that relates to something called community, which maybe relates to the question of regional consciousness across borders. Are there sort of contradictory elements there that can be actually played upon? And how can those contradictory elements be played upon? I think this is for me the sort of question which arises: is INSITE a site where these kinds of issues can be discussed and brought to the floor and how can they be brought to the floor? That is as I say, the major issue from my standpoint. So there are then these two fundamental questions that I would want to look at. And in looking at them I think it's not that we can look at them and say, "Well, I have all the answers or you know this is what we should do and this is how we should do it." But it is a moment where

I think we need conversations, conversations about alternatives, conversations about where we are. Where we're going with all this stuff, how to understand it perhaps. And having understood it a bit better, put ourselves in a position to intervene in it in some sort of conscious political way through the formation of alliances, through the configuration of linking together activities at one scale with another scale. You know there's a tendency for people who work with community action to say the only place that matters is community action because people that work at the state say it's at the state that matters. People that work at the global institution say the global institutions matter. They all matter. And if we can find ways to talk across those different scales of political action, I think we'll be in a much better position to confront some of the dynamics of technological change and globalization. Thank you very much. ■

Sandra Pinardi

ESSAYS

*Contemporary Art:
An Offering
to the World,*
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In the text *The Conditions of Contemporary Art* (2013)¹ Alan Badiou proposes that “contemporary art” be defined by its divergences from “modern art” and that we should ask ourselves if that divergence involves a substantive difference in regards to the idea of art itself, as well as to its strategies of constitution and appearance. In his conclusion, he affirms that “... contemporary art is going to combat the very notion of the work (...) Deep down, contemporary art is a critique of art itself, an artistic critique of art. And, that artistic critique of art, above all, critiques the finite notion of the work.” This divergence between “contemporary art” and “modern art” involves an essential transformation since both the place occupied by the “artwork” in the sociopolitical fabric, as well as the very definition of the “work of art” are modified.

The proposal of modern art is based on an idea of art dominated by epistemological and/or expressive paradigms in which the “work” materializes a free exercise of subjectivity that “opens the world” by operating critically. To the contrary, the proposal of contemporary art is based on

...in contemporary art, the work is an “event” defined by the fissures that it can generate in cultural sectors and discourses...

an idea of art dominated by political and/or relational paradigms, in which the “critical function” is materialized by the incorporation of the “work” in a specific situation, producing distinctions, reaccommodations, and reconfigurations of the given that generate divergent narratives and tangential mechanisms of intervention. This modification has to do with large cultural changes and concerns that mark the contemporary world: technological advances (photography, film, information networks), the shortcomings afflicting civilizational models, cultural diversity, and the emergence of the question of what it means to be human.

While in modern art, the work is an autonomous “object,” defined by its formal and expressive qualities, in contemporary art, the work is an “event” defined by the fissures that it can gen-

erate in cultural sectors and discourses. This mutation is the result of the fact that contemporary art attempts to strengthen its inscription in the systems and discourses that constitute reality, and it does so in two senses: overcoming the problems that originate from the modern conception of art (especially that of “autonomy” on which it is founded), and, on the other hand, contributing symbolically through the establishment of “the common,” spaces of public participation based on co-appearance and not identity.

It would seem that this world of images, discourses, and networks, with its incessant changes, has given rise to a scene for artistic artifacts to operate as a web of arrangements and potentialities embedded in the public sphere—in the space of “the common”—thanks to the fact that the contexts

¹ Alan Badiou. “The Conditions of Contemporary Art.” Paper presented at the National University of San Martín, Argentina, on Friday, May 11, 2013.

<https://exilsite.wordpress.com/2013/11/28/alan-badiou-las-condiciones-del-arte-contemporaneo/>

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acquire “other” meanings. It is this relational condition that makes performance and installations characteristic “works” of the contemporary period: temporary “works of art” that, based on the interconnection of multiple elements, act as “bodies” of questions and links. We are witnessing a reconfiguration of what artistic elaborations are—and propose to be—that seeks to strengthen the critical role and “opening to the world” of the artistic in the social body, in the cultural fabric, which it has had since modernity. In such a way that divergences occur so that “works” can continue being necessary in the cultural order, their transformation affirms an essentiality. One could understand this transformation as a “process of resilience” that enables artistic practice—while saying and doing sensibility—to form a reflexive and critical substrate for the processes of signification. Furthermore, one could venture that perhaps something similar happened with the appearance of “modern art” that reconfigured its own conception and aspirations to find its niche in the new perceptive and epistemological

orders that emerged starting with the Industrial Revolution.

These processes of resilience take as their theme that capacity that people, societies, and cultures have for overcoming adverse situations, transforming them so that inconveniences not only strengthen them, but also allow them to recuperate their desires, dreams, and achievements. Namely, they allow them to “experience the wounds” turning them into “spaces of signification” without obliterating or denying them. They function to understand human plasticity without the need for reducing it to “ideological” processes—referring to ideal concepts or schematics—but rather understanding it as “ecological” processes alluding to organisms, bodies, and materialities, that gives an account of experiences.

Given the multiple and radical political, social, environmental, and technological changes that have altered the cultural and existential landscape of the present, processes of resilience are being addressed by diverse disciplines and fields of human activity. The majority of the ap-

proaches to resilience that are carried out by the arts are of a “therapeutic” nature, that is, they signal the capacity of artworks to name and represent individual or social wounds and traumas, enabling reflection about them. However, as I tried to show, these processes can be discovered within the space of artistic practice, recognizing them as mechanisms and strategies of constant reconstruction and restoration, of “re-creation.”

However, it is valid to ask why this type of link between art and processes of resilience is being made, a connection that could seem arbitrary and forced. It is a relevant connection given that this political “vocation” of contemporary art that motivates it to effectively incorporate itself in the fabric of the world is the result of the fact that modern art, in its search for autonomy, radically separated itself from everyday spaces, from “the world of life.” Recognizing that wound—that of an art that is established as a “separate and autonomous sphere”—in the contemporary scene, artworks have taken up “the political” as an exercise from which to “imagine” and

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“experiment” with the “being-with,” the “being-among-others,” a type of human articulation that does not require a “common identity” or a “universalization of oneself.” This is the relational character of the works of contemporary art—their critical quality—because “experimenting” with “being-among-others” involves establishing multiple systems of connection with different discourses and artifacts, with diverse acts and ideas, in such a way that the “work” is embodied as a reconfiguration of those diverse elements. It needs the art history that it alludes to and is in dialogue with, and also the sociopolitical contexts in which it is exhibited and to which it refers, it requires cultural memory and interpretation, it demands that spectators be “participants” and authors. The “event” that

is each work is established as a community that is always making itself, a community without univocal and homogenizing projects, following Jean-Luc Nancy we could say “a completely exposed, expropriated community, without substance, which is precisely its ‘existence,’ its constant action of being.”² Based on the formal and expressive autonomy of modern art, contemporary art proposes itself as a “heteronomous” artifact, dependent on its contexts and participants, as an “enunciative event” that understands multiple discourses and recalls its own history.

I said that contemporary art is postulated as an “enunciative event,” a critical-theoretical body that is inscribed in specific situations leaving an incision that transforms that in which it occurs, that informs its displacing prior and/or authorized meanings.

An enunciative event is a “language act” whose realization is defined by the system of links and connections that it manages to establish with other spaces of reality, with other images and discourses. The works of contemporary art are enunciative events that desire to “wound” and fissure the contexts in which they are inscribed, affecting them and being affected by them.

On the other hand, every enunciative event is a call to communication, it asks the other to open a space of interconnection and therefore functions as a model of a community that far from being a “social or ethnic or cultural institution” is simply the encounter and practice of “the common.” An “inoperative” community as Jean-Luc Nancy proposes, which gives rise to an “among-all,” and that for that very reason is increasingly, in every situation, an opening toward the Other, and is also a place where it is not possible to reconstruct the experience unless it is accompanied by the need to share it.

If we think, for example, about performance or installation, we understand that their force is inscribed in the fact that both proposed as some-

The “event” that is each work is established as a community that is always making itself...

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Jean-Luc Nancy.
La comunidad desobrada.
Madrid: Arena Libros,
2001, 52.

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thing that should be “experienced” to be able to be understood, something essentially unfinished, which requires each participant or spectator in order for it to exist. It is elaborated, in the manner of a collage, based on fragments that come from diverse situations and contexts, thus building a work that is a “place”—a scene—for experiencing situations based on perspectives and realities that are different from one’s own. Both artistic forms involve, in each case, the creation of space for “the common,” the “among-all,” not as an exercise of identification (in which the spectators contemplate and make interpretations based on their own needs), but rather as a learning process in which the gaze of the Other encounters one’s own: an interconnection. Unlike modern art, the contemporary work does not display itself as an “object” that is enclosed in its immanence and possessions, but rather an “object” that is completed in its placement and the experience that is made of it, an event that is exceeded, that goes beyond itself. Therefore, it gives rise to an “overflowing” of meanings that are the product

of the common space that it shares with all and from the circumstantial activity in which it is updated.

In this sense, contemporary art is resilient not only in regards to modern art and the modern world, with respect to its history that it openly references and thematizes, but also in relation to the reality that it seeks to influence, due to the fact that its political “vocation” is not the fulfillment of a regulatory idea or belonging, but rather the possibility of experimenting with an unforeseen opening to “the common.” These “enunciative events” make it possible to participate in a critical experience that not only understands the shadows of different areas of culture, but also recognizes the possibility of a different idea of “community,” without exclusions, that is always making itself and that is realized in and as the very desire to participate in it. ■

Simon Sheikh

ESSAYS

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1

For a theoretical account of a political alternative to the enforced neoliberal politics of austerity in Greece, see Heiner Flassbeck and Costas Lapavistas's now regrettably wholly historical book, *Against the Troika: Crisis and Austerity in the Eurozone*, London: Verso, 2015.

2

Indeed, in addition to his influential theoretical work, Nicolas Bourriaud is also a sort of Biennale Czar, with experience from curating biennales in Moscow (twice), Athens, Kaunas, Taipei, and Istanbul, as well as from the Tate Triennial in London.

Responding to the double onslaught of the austerity measures forced upon Greece by the Troika (the European Commission, the ECB, and the IMF),¹ and the invasion of the supreme European art institution, the German funded Documenta 14, equally learning and earning from Athens, the Athens Biennale of 2015–17 tried—in vain, as it turned out—to reform itself and its political forms and functions into what then curator Massimiliano Mollona termed an artless biennale, consisting not of artworks in an exhibition, but rather of discursive public events and community based workshops and projects. During one of these events, a discussion on the use value and politics of biennales themselves among various practitioners, including curators such as this author, a somewhat heated exchange ensued, when the renowned curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud categorically stated that “there cannot be and should not be any connection between biennales of art and social movements.”¹

Rather than direct alignments with social and political movements, Bourriaud posited, paraphrasing Jean-Luc Godard, the politics of art as always being between one image and the next, and one sound and the next (neatly forgetting, though, that Godard also added that control over the apparatuses of film production and circulation was crucial for thinking film politically, hence his move to video from film in the 1970s).

Needless to say, this was a somewhat provocative statement in the context of a biennale that tried precisely to establish such connections between art and the social, and delivered by one of the biennale's former curators, no less! Now, as is well known, Bourriaud's writings on art—specifically his notion of relational aesthetics—have been highly criticized for their inherent neoliberal politics, so need not be reiterated here, rather my aim will be to understand the politics of curating as stated by an international star curator.² It is a position to oppose, surely, but also one that is, in my view, actually untenable in the current cultural and political landscape, and how this conditions contemporary art. First of all, two things are indicated in this statement: if

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the politics of art only lies between images, one may want to ask from where these images originate if not in social production, and furthermore if they remain within an isolated circulation of art and its spaces? I would argue that the production of images does not only refer to other images, but also to ways of living with images, and thus social forms. And it deals with subjects and subject matter, both in terms of being producer through subjectivity and producing subjectivity. Images cannot be exclusive from their circulation, interpretation, and use, and are as such always already social; but of course, one can insist on exclusivity, and disregard how images circulate and produce identities.

Moreover, there is a demand made on the institution of art itself in Bourriaud's comment, in terms of its conception of a public as a community and constituency, in the sense that it should *not* have any alignment with social movements. The question here is, then, which publics and subjects—politically as well as aesthetically—exhibitions of art are then addressing and/or representing? This is indeed

a curatorial and political choice, and attests to a chasm among practitioners and curators, and in terms of our mode of address and political alignments, and is thus highly instructive in thinking about forms of resilience in contemporary cultural production, and what we are up against within the so-called art world as much as outside of it. Technically speaking, there is no public as such, but only something named as a public, brought into being, however fleetingly, by the mode of address itself, as Michael Warner has so brilliantly observed.³ As practitioners, we imagine and try to produce our public, and our aesthetic forms are thus also our political and social forms, both in terms of exhibition making and institution building. There is always an addressee, and our choices and attempts at alignments are: if we do not want to connect with social movements, whom are we addressing? Whom are we fighting for (if we are indeed putting up a fight, that is)?

I do agree with Bourriaud on one implication, which is that the 1 percent can probably not be designated a *social* movement, but maybe as an

anti-social movement—which brings me to my second concern, which has to do with not just our disagreement, but also why this traditional notion of an exhibition such as the international biennale will not be sustainable in the future as well as in the present. Ironically, this is not about cultural politics or the politics of culture *per se*, but rather has to do with the culturalization of politics on a global scale, in terms of new nationalism, right-wing populism, and economic deglobalization. All across the globe, we are now witnessing a reaction to globalism in the form of rejection, xenophobia, and anti-internationalism in the form of the march and success of the populist right, and its preference for autocratic and toxic alpha-males (Bolsonaro, Erdoğan, Duterte, Johnson, Modi, Netanyahu, Orbán, Putin, and Trump). What these leaders and their followers share, among other things, is a hostile takeover of the identity politics so long favored by the Left, and an outspoken disdain for the very liberal and humanist values of contemporary art and its permissiveness, preferring instead a political agenda of so-called

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Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York: Zone, 2002.

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illiberal democracy, to use Orbán's truly bone-chilling term. It should also be noted that their policies are a response to the economic effects of neoliberal deregulation and global trade in favor of protectionism and neonationalism, which has systemic consequences for the international system of biennales and art fairs that can now be understood historically as the cultural logic of globalization, representing and advancing neoliberal globalization. How will the political changes, openly hostile to contemporary art and all its values as they are now, affect the production, distribution, and sustainability of the art world-system? One thing that is clear is that a centrist response, and an appeal to remain within neoliberal globalization and its uneven geographical development, will not be enough—the center cannot hold, and we thus need to consider more resilient practices and strategies, including our social and political alignments, and cultural producers and art workers. To turn a phrase, site-specificity is not enough: we must move towards *fight specificity*, as once suggested by the Isola Art

...the gathering and self-organization of people, as *a* people, if not *the* people?

Center in Milan in response to the relation between art, urban form, and gentrification.⁴ We need, then, to think not only of space as antagonistic, although this is crucial when thinking about art institutions and their public role, but also to think of our practice as involved in particular struggles: what we are fighting for as well as against.

Now, let us draw a diagonal line across Europe, from crisis-prone Greece, to the fossil-fuel-subsidized welfare state of Norway and its western city, Bergen, where an experiment with triennial form, the Bergen Assembly, is now in its third edition. As the name indicates, this is an attempt to change the mode of address of the international biennial format, with its circulation of the contemporary, into something that is also

a political form of gathering, mostly associated with grassroots politics, particularly after the rise and fall of the Occupy movement and its close relations to the cultural sphere, and especially cultural producers. This, in itself, creates an inbuilt contradiction: namely, how can an institution of art—established by government and renowned professionals from the art world—become an assembly, which is usually understood to be transient rather than solid and recurring, and, crucially, emerging from the ground up, from the gathering and self-organization of people, as *a* people, if not *the* people? As formulated by Judith Butler:

Popular assemblies form unexpectedly and dissolve under voluntary or involuntary conditions, and this transience is, I would suggest, bound up with their

4

See, Isola Art Center, ed., *Fight-Specific Isola: Art, Architecture, Activism and the Future of the City*, Berlin: Archive Books, 2013.

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“critical” function. As much as collective expressions of the popular will can call into question the legitimacy of a government that claims to represent the people, they can also lose themselves in the forms of government that they support and institute.⁵

Any institutional form that tries to facilitate such democratic forms, including institutions of art, could do well by carefully heeding these cautionary words. On the one hand, it is clear that any instituting from top down, and that deals in audiences and publics, cannot be assemblies proper, while, on the other hand, as Butler goes on to observe, the very “conditions for acting together are devastated or falling away,” so could perhaps the solid foundations of the art triennial offer precisely the kind of support structure popular assemblies need in our times of increasingly de-democratized democracies in the former West and beyond? If, strictly speaking, an art event is not yet an assembly, and maybe never can be, or never should be, depending on your politics of aesthetics, it can certainly

implement a different encounter with the artwork, and with the ideas and methods of contemporary art and theory. Convened by Hans D. Christ and Iris Dressler, we worked on a project about life, the right to life, and on voicing the muted, under the title *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead*.⁶ One of the approaches was, simply, to have not just an exhibition and an adjacent public programme, but also to open a space, Belgin, in the middle of the city that would not only host various workshops, performances, and events, but also be open, free of hire, for social and political groups working in the city, as a way for the institution to contribute to the place rather than only detract content, context, and value from it, and instead offer a place for people *to actually assemble*. Belgin

also hosted Paul B. Preciado and Victor Neumann’s ongoing performative and political platform, the Parliament of Bodies, originally founded during Documenta 14, in Athens, in response to the failings of representative democracy, and instead positing a parliament of living bodies for those who lack representation within the nation state and the normative body. In this way, several modes of address and encounters with art and its ideas can take place in parallel, in concert, and in conflict: the space of art can provide representation in multiple ways. To simplify, it offers a place to see, and thus imagine, and it offers a place to meet, and thus imagine.

The setting up of such a space also allowed for the experimentation with a curatorial method that could

...“conditions for acting together are devastated or falling away”...

⁵

Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015, 7.

⁶

For more on themes, events, and artists in this project, see: www.bergenassembly.no

*What Are We Fighting
For? On Art
and Resilience,
2019*

temporally and contextually switch the encounter with the artwork to a place and time *before* rather than only *after* and perhaps during the exhibition itself. This method was used across a number of new commissions, such as the Mycological Twist's work with gaming and trolling, and the Capital Drawing Group's close reading and drawings of chapters from Marx's *Capital*. As processes, these new works were not social artworks in the sense of representing specific communities, but rather made in dialogue *and* in discussion with a variety of communities, in order to embed the work in the context and fabric of the city, but also in order to strengthen the works themselves, allowing for different competencies and knowledges to influence each other, also when they do not end in resolution, consensus, and agreement. A work that is rarely received in any consensual way is Banu Cennetoğlu's continuous collaboration with the anti-racist organization UNITED for Intercultural Action, The List, which uses the conceptual thinking in art and the resources of art's institutions

to produce and distribute an updated list of the many casualties of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants trying to cross the borders into Europe, and by naming, when possible, and listing cause of death, when possible, tries to counter the current necropolitics of Fortress Europe and its violent border regimes. The project has been disseminating in a number of cities, using billboards and newspapers, and thus the historical forms of the bourgeois public sphere. For the Bergen Assembly 2019, the list was published in the local tabloid newspaper *Bergensavisen* [Bergen's paper], to a fairly muted response. What did gain a lot of publicity, though, was the Nordic Media Festival held in Bergen in May 2019, and organized by national television and a number of Bergen-based news media, such as the aforementioned daily. Despite the protestations of the Bergen Assembly and many practitioners in Norway demanding that the invitation to Bannon be withdrawn, the festival proudly promoted one Steve Bannon as one of its keynote speakers, and publicly celebrated how this would be the main draw...

It is hard to decide which is the greater injury—the cynical celebration of commercialism in media, or letting media be a complicit vehicle for the fake news of white supremacism, but this should remind us of not only the difficulties, but also the absolute need for art production and institutions to be, and become, much more resilient, and also responsible in terms of how we simultaneously address and represent. Representation is never full and always asymmetrical, but it does not simply show someone or something, it produces the horizon of the possible and the impossible, so our task is to decide not what we are fighting for, but also whom we are fighting for, with, and against. ■



Lucía Sanromán is the new Director of the Laboratorio Arte Alameda in Mexico City and Curator at Large of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA), San Francisco, where she previously served as Director of Visual Arts (2015–18). During her tenure at YBCA she organized *The City Initiative* and the program *Changing the Ratio*, which included exhibitions by female artists including Tania Bruguera and Suzanne Lacy. She was also an associate curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego from 2006 through 2011.

Chris Sharp is a writer and curator based in Mexico City where he runs the project space Lulu. He recently co-curated *Post hoc* by Dane Mitchell for the New Zealand Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale (2019), and *La Promesse du bonheur: Tom Wesselmann* at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (2018). He is a contributing editor of *Art Agenda*, and his writing has appeared in numerous catalogs, magazines, journals, and online publications.



Photo: Ana Hop



Simon Sheikh is a curator and writer. He is Reader in Art and Programme Director of the MFA in curating at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Sheikh was also curator at NIFCA, Helsinki, 2003–4 and, prior to that, Director of Overgaden Institute for Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, from 1999 through 2002. His recent curatorial work includes *Actually, the Dead Are Not Dead*, Bergen Assembly 2019. He has edited and authored several essays and publications, including “In the Place of the Public Sphere? Or, the World in Fragments” (2004).

Sandra Pinardi is the Postgraduate Coordinator in Philosophy of the Simón Bolívar University in Caracas, Venezuela, where she was formerly the Director of the Social Sciences and Humanities Division. Pinardi has a doctorate in philosophy from the Simón Bolívar University (2000). She has published the following books: *The Understanding of the Art of the End of the Century* (1997); *Blind Space, Non-Classroom Space* (2006); *The Modern Work of Art: Its Consolidation and Its Closure* (2010); and *Ávila* (2012).



Sandra Pinardi

Image index



A bold project full of IN/SITE

By ROBERT L. PINCUS, Art Critic

San Diego's overused slogan, "America's Finest City," is upside down in a small sculptural tableau by Jay Johnson. It is held aloft by diminutive figures at either end of a shelf: one man and one woman to create symmetry. There are additional words, too, imprinted on the shelf itself: "Despite where we are, we make art."

The small construction by Johnson, one of San Diego's consistently engaging sculptors, was created for a series of exhibitions dubbed IN/SITE '92, organized by Installation, a non-profit visual arts organization.

Created in an edition of 30 and exhibited at several venues, proceeds from sales of Johnson's contribution will go to Installation.

As his words suggest, the local support structure for local artists isn't what it should be. But the IN/SITE project is a bold advance for the art community and for the audience for art. The venues for the IN/SITE exhibitions stretched from San Marcos to Tijuana and opened, in a staggered schedule, from late August through early November. Billed as a series of shows

IN/SITE
Non-profit puts art in
Continued from

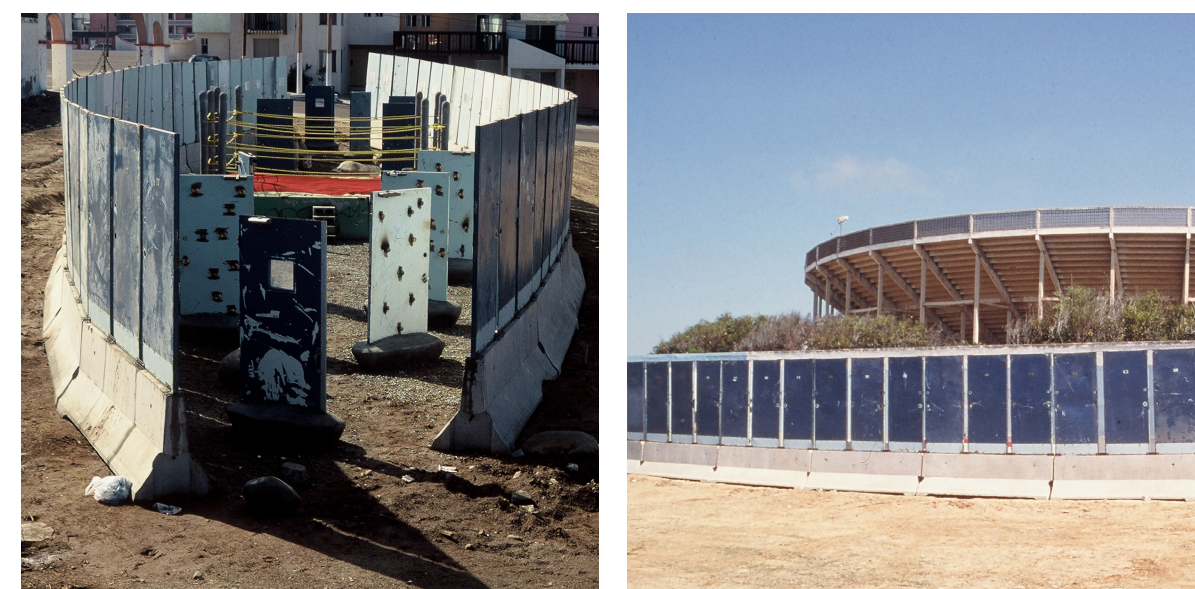
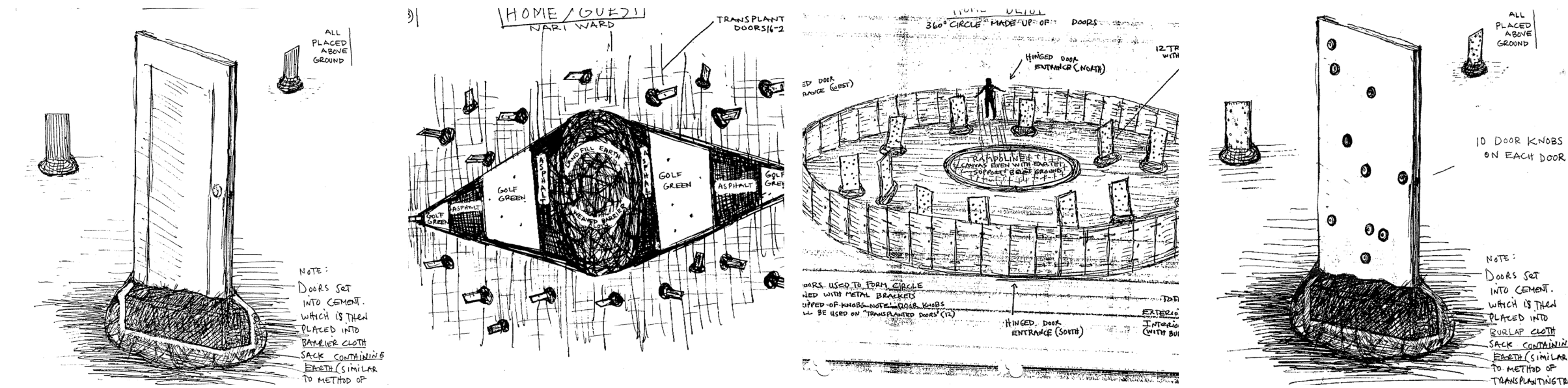
The century show, "Field" (a big piece, con-terra-cotta figs viewer feel as if a three-dimensions humanity itself).

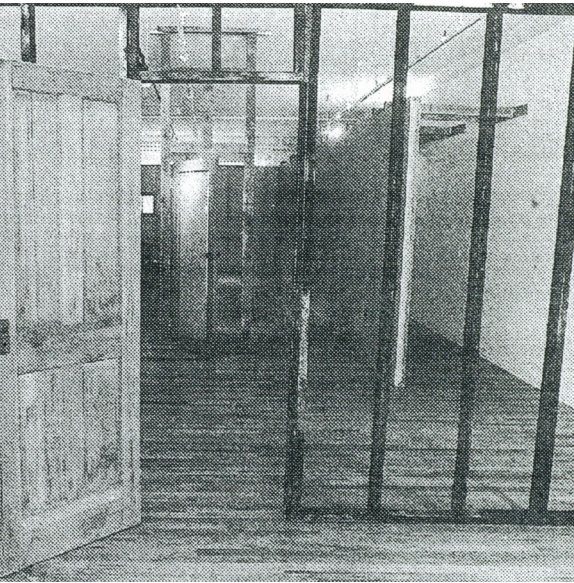
Plans are a IN/SITE '94, with a flurry of ings in San Die- tigua in late- year.

Promise fulfilled

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Image index





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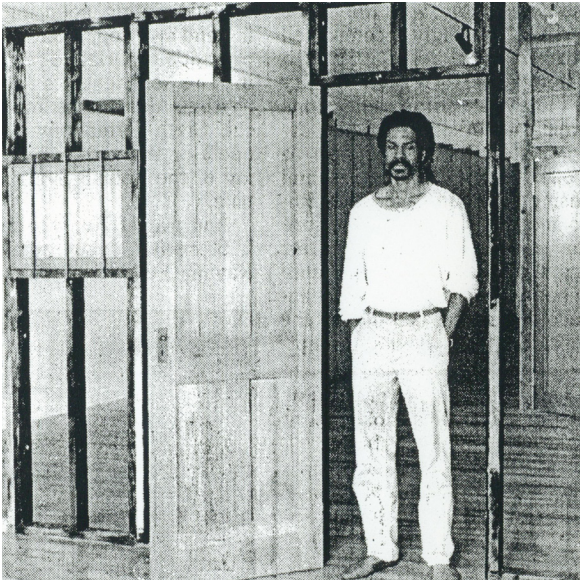
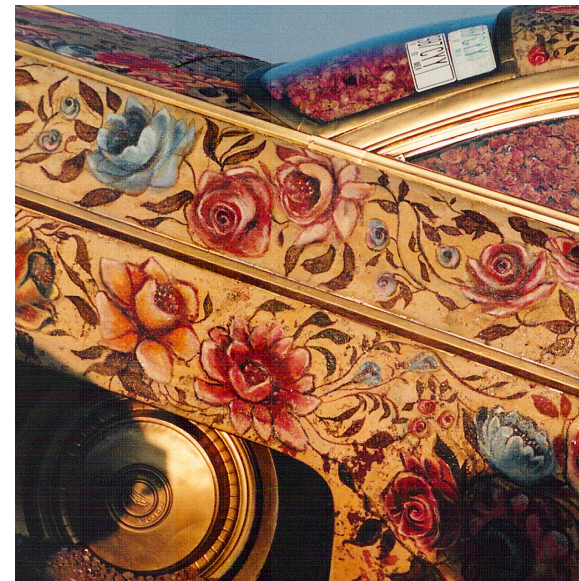
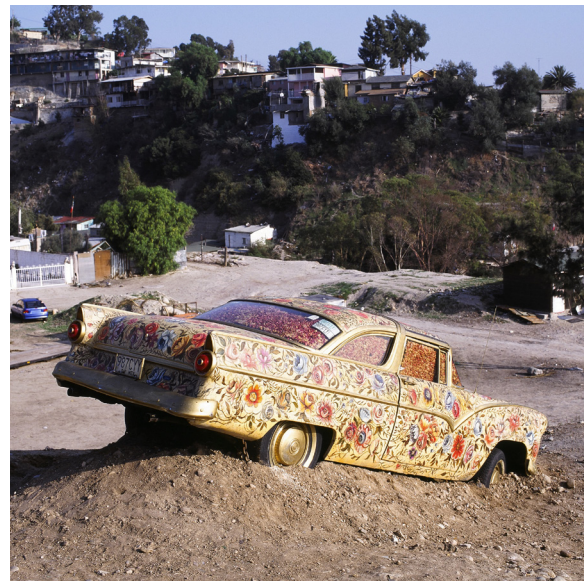
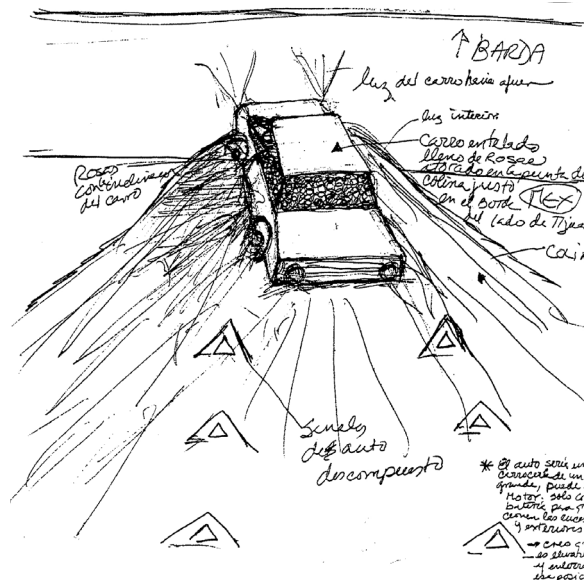
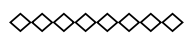


Image index

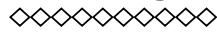


Editor



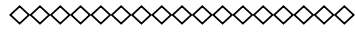
Andrea Torreblanca

Design



Cítrico Gráfico + ReD

Copy-editor



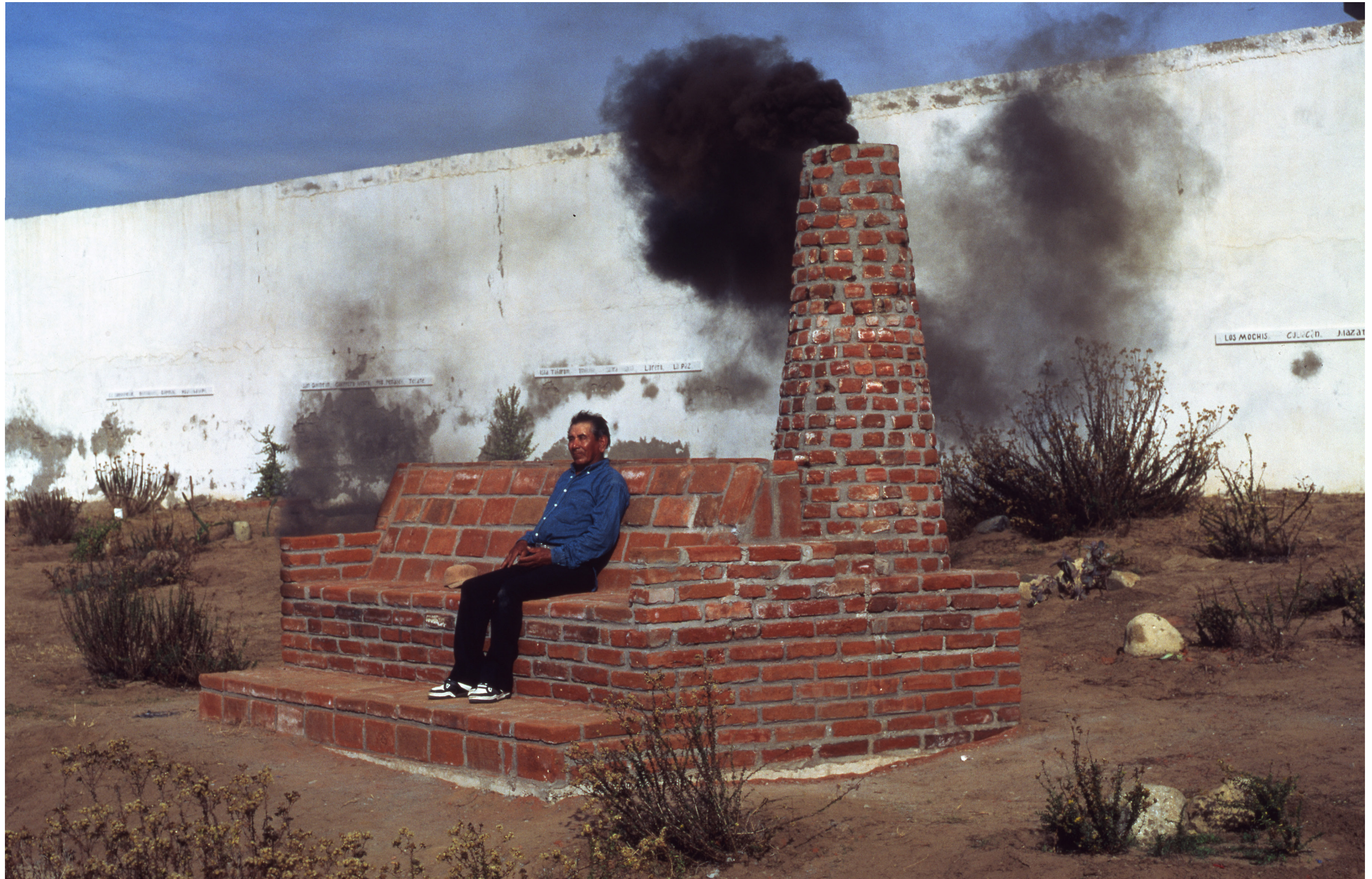
Julie Dunn

Translator



Liz Mason-Deese

Michael Schnorr
& Ulf Rollof
Abandonado II,
1992, 1994



Michael Schnorr
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Abandonado II,
1992, 1994



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ART

A bold project
full of IN/SITE

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The venues for the IN/SITE exhibitions stretched from San Marcos to Tijuana and opened, in a staggered schedule, from late August through early November. Billed as a series of shows devoted to that favored genre of the '90s, the installation, they confronted subjects as varied as the holocaust, surrogate motherhood and racism.

Nearly every local showcase devoted to serious contemporary art, commercial or non-profit, participated in some fashion, many in a large way.

There were fortunate coincidences as well. The Museum of Contemporary Art in La Jolla had scheduled a show of British sculptor Antony Gormley. (It continues through Dec. 9)



Southern exposure: *IN/SITE '92* was the catalyst for "Abandoned (Abandonado) II," an art park made by Michael Schnorr and Ulf Rollof. It's next to the Tijuana bullring.

E-8

IN/SITE

Non-profit Installation
puts art in its place

Continued from E-1

The centerpiece of Gormley's show, "Field" (1990), is a haunting piece, consisting of 35,000 terra cotta figures that make the viewer feel as if he is confronting a three-dimensional metaphor for humanity itself.

Plans are already afoot for IN/SITE '94, which would start with a flurry of coordinated openings in San Diego County and in Tijuana in late September of that year.

Promise fulfilled

IN/SITE attests that local artists have fulfilled the promise of their work from the early to mid-'80s. Called emerging painters and sculptors in "A San Diego Exhibition," a groundbreaking 1985 show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, they are now mid-career figures.

At the same time, others of equal promise have surfaced, from the graduate programs at UCSD, SDSU and several other schools as well as the ever-changing collaborative of artists that show annually at Balboa Park's Centro Cultural de la Raza, the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo.

Deborah Small, one of the most important figures of the mid-'80s contingency, presented an exhibition at the Linda Moore Gallery in Mission Hills (through today). Titled "MA-CON—AQUA," it continued her critical look at the colonization of the New World, with a rich mix of image, object and word that presented the tragic decline of relations between the Indians and settlers of Pennsylvania.

Perhaps the most intriguing element of Small's show was the story of Frances Slocum, published in the early 19th century. Known as Maconagua to the Miami people, Slocum was captured by the Delaware Indians early in her life, spent most of her years among the Delawares, as well as the Miamis, and declined to return to life among the settlers when offered the chance.

Nari Ward

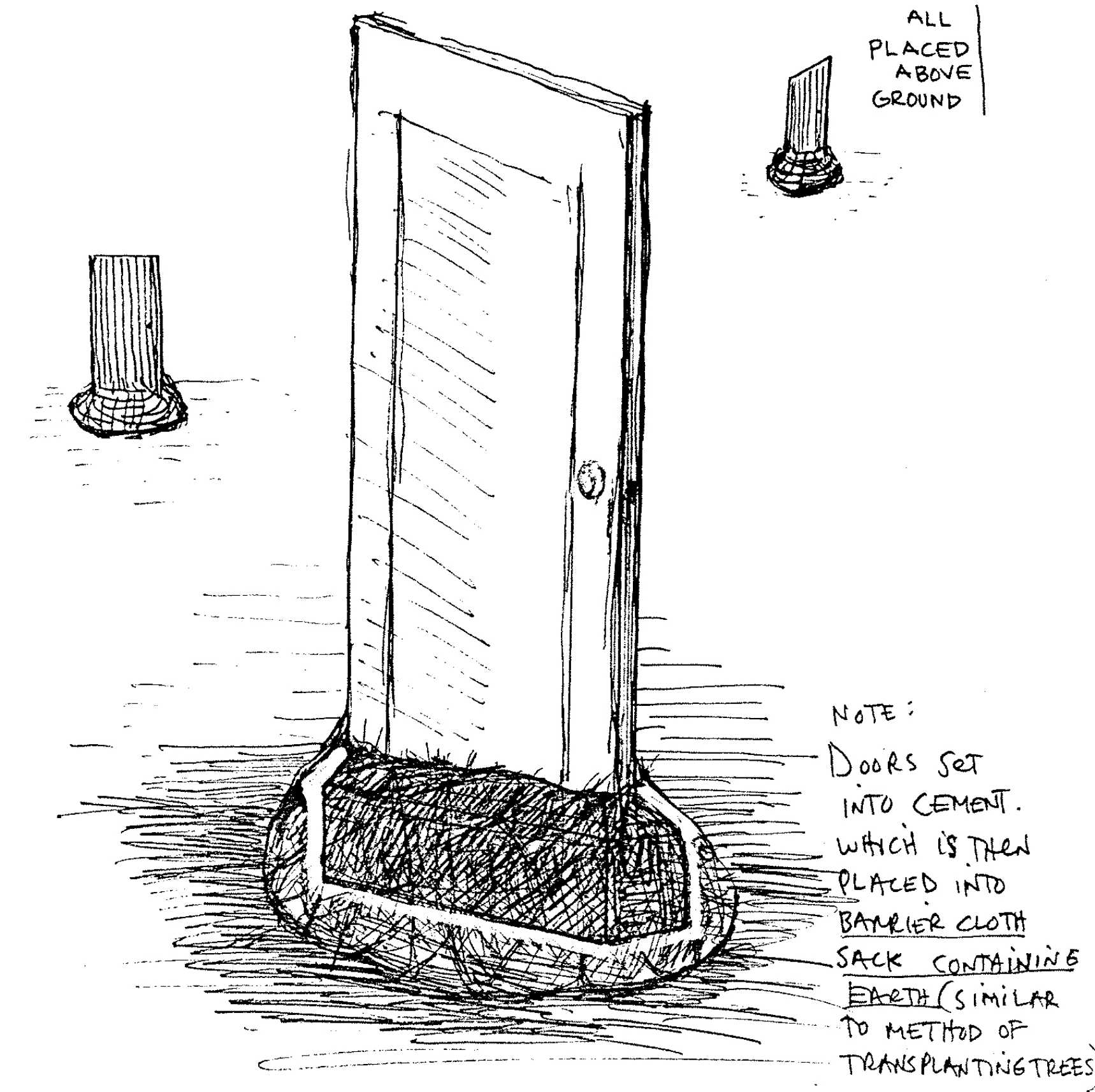
Untitled Depot, 1997

PG 304 | AT LEAST 20 OLD DOORS
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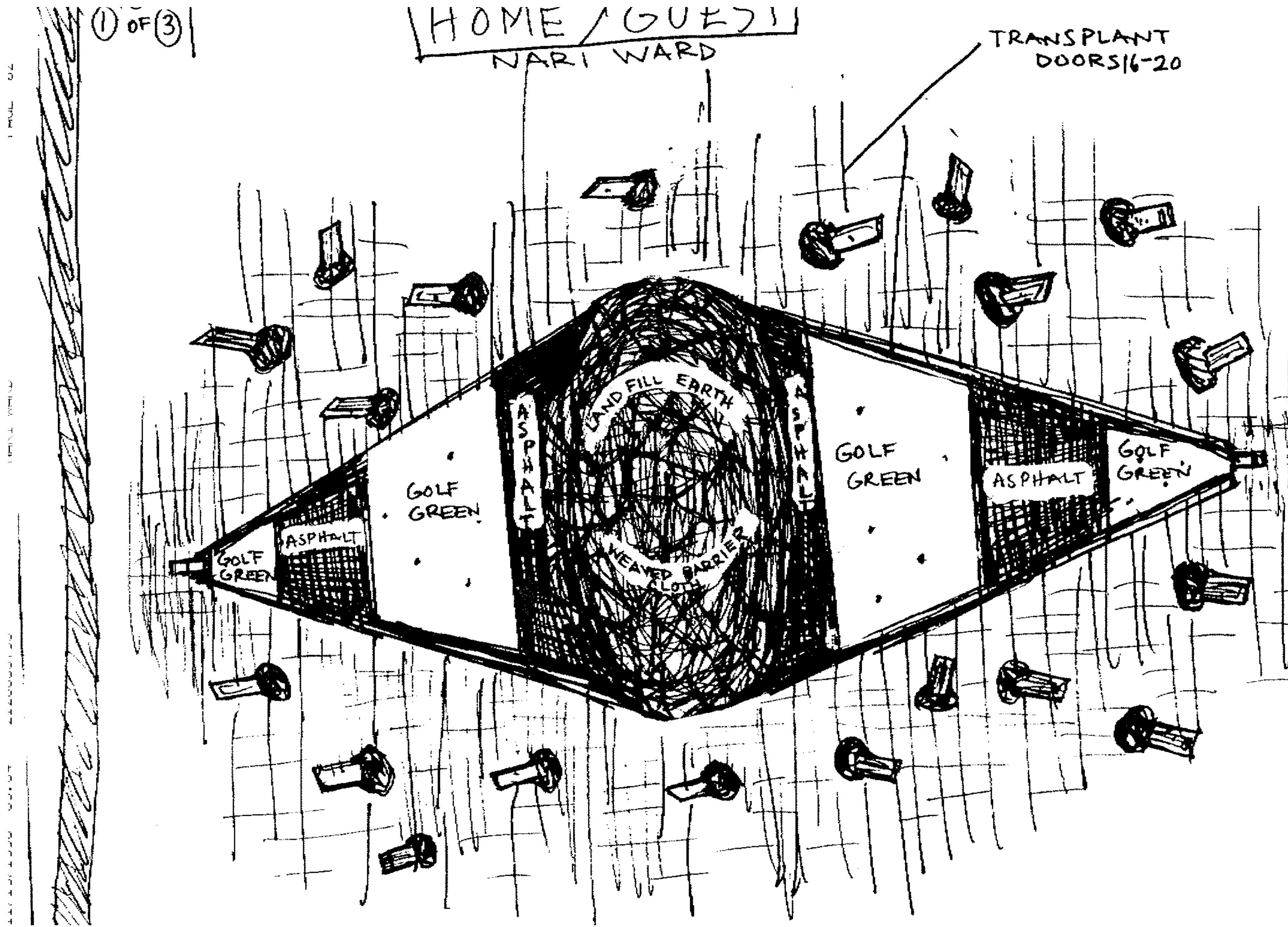
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83"-90" HEIGHT

HOME/GUEST
NARI WARD

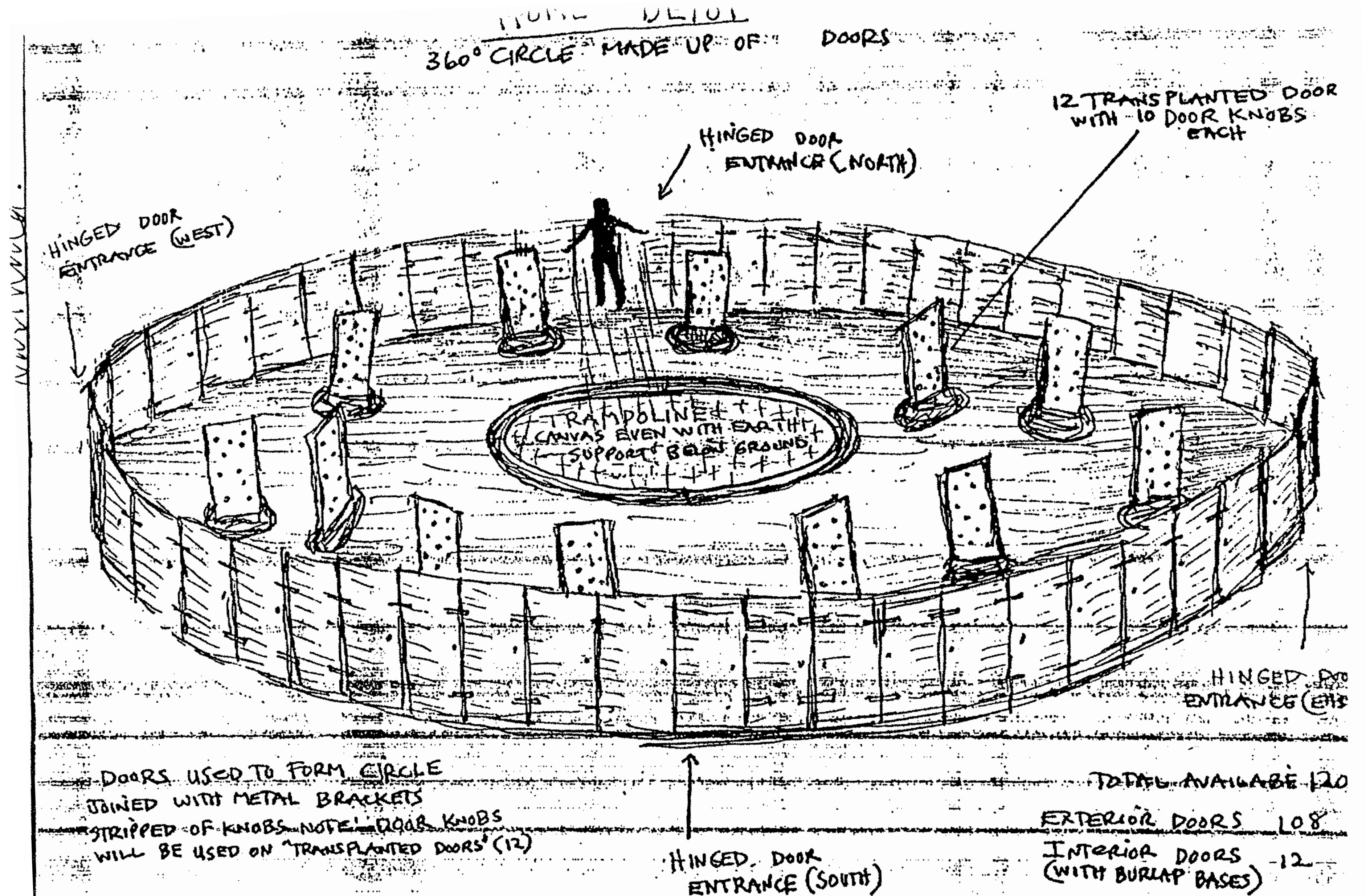
TRANSPLANT DOORS



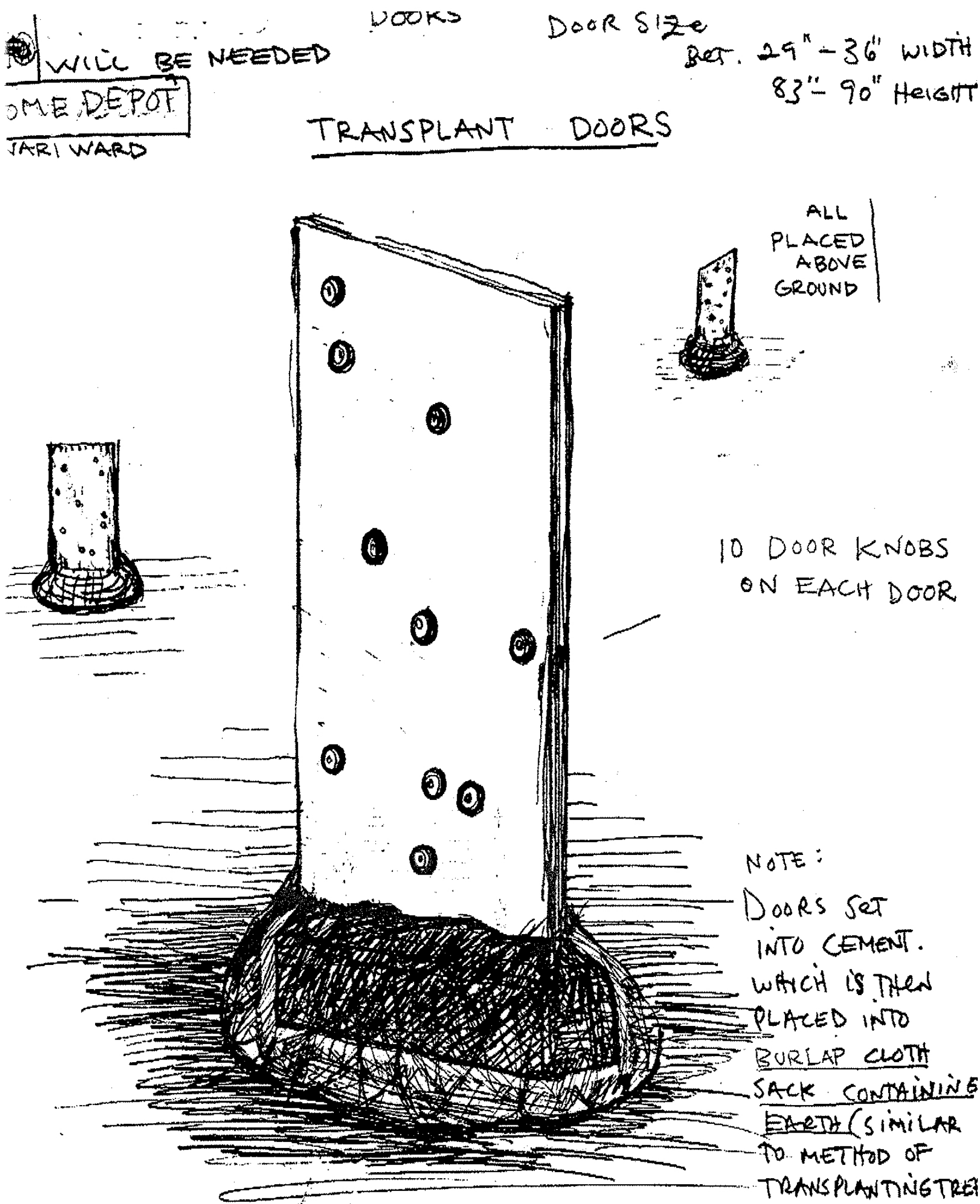
Nari Ward
Untitled Depot, 1997



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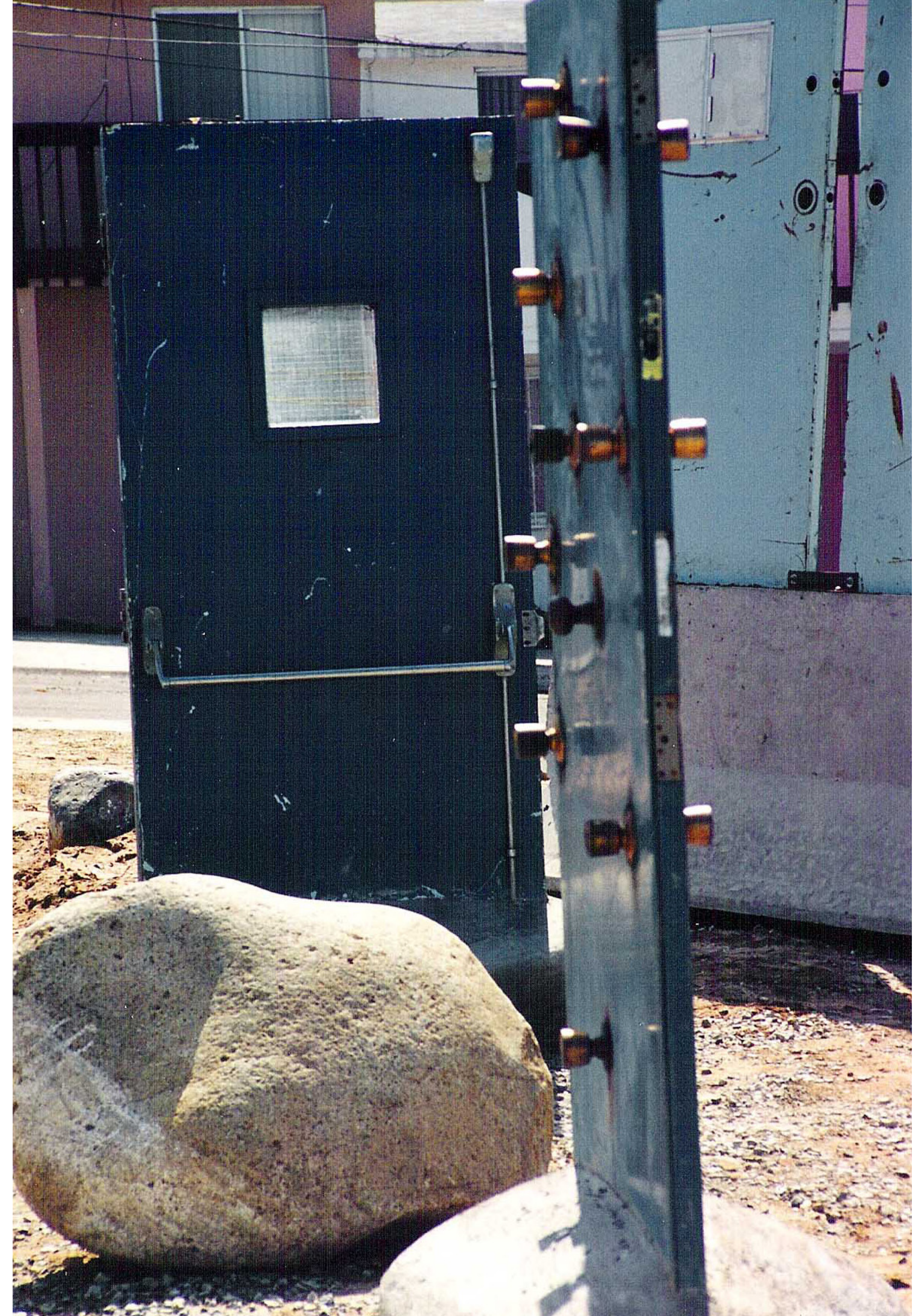
Nari Ward
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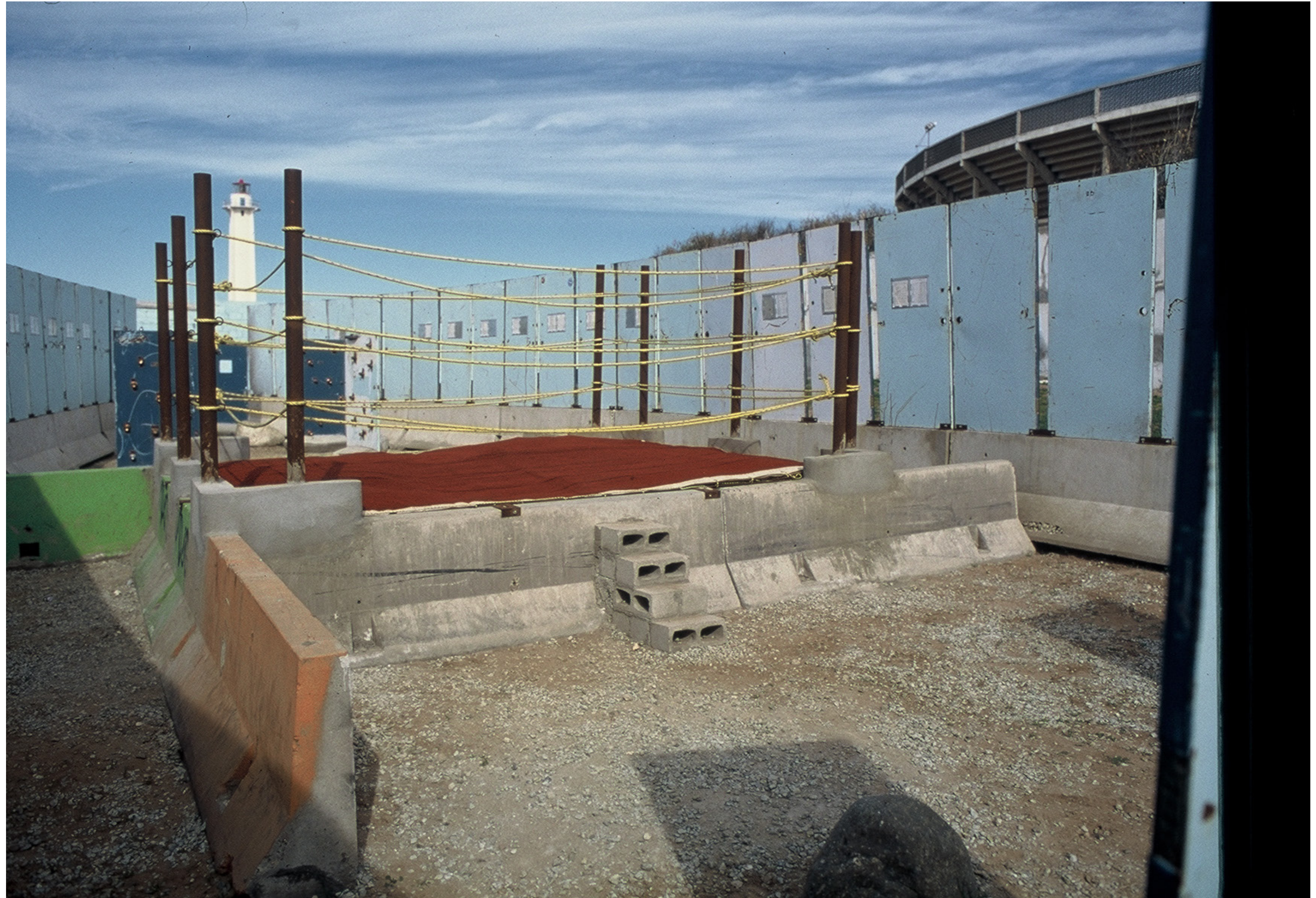
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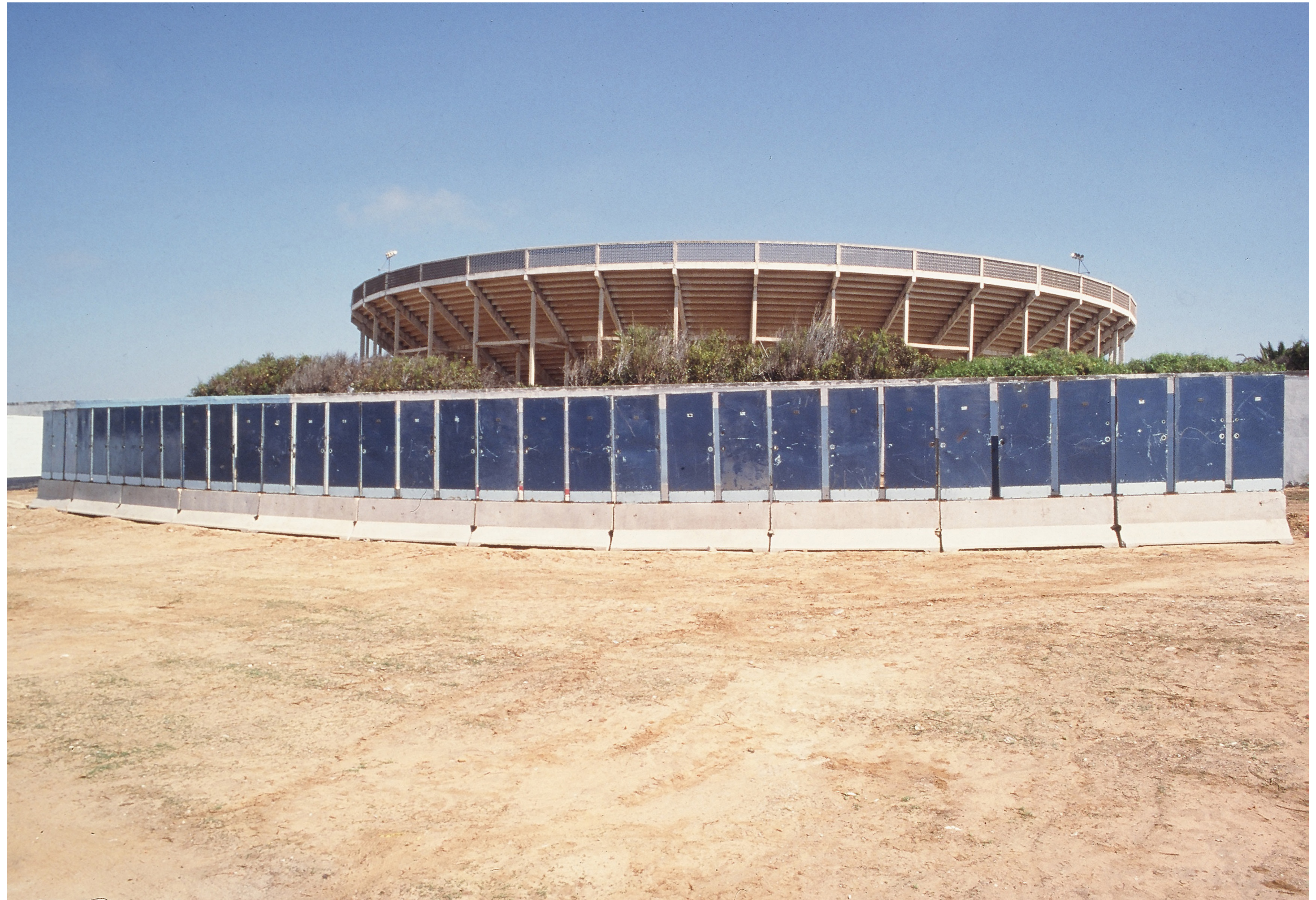
Nari Ward
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Nari Ward
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Johnny Coleman
Ruminations, 1992



Johnny Coleman
Ruminations, 1992



Johnny Coleman
Ruminations, 1992



Johnny Coleman
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Johnny Coleman
Ruminations, 1992

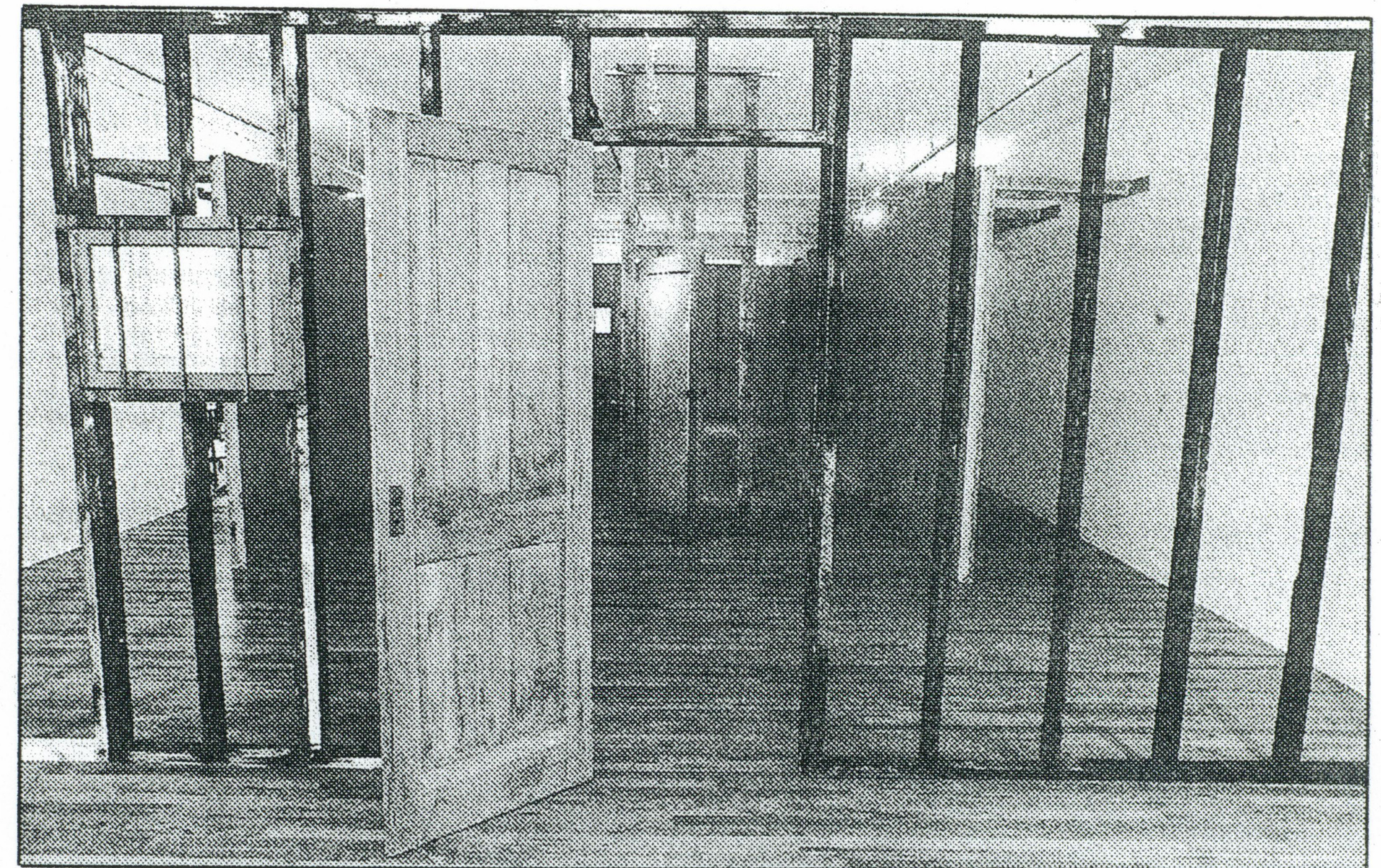


Johnny Coleman
Ruminations, 1992



Johnny Coleman

Ruminations, 1992



DON BOOMER / Los Angeles Times

In “Ruminations” at the David Zapf Gallery, viewers pass through a charred, wood-framed wall, where they hear voices and the sound of broken glass being swept.

AT THE GALLERIES / LEAH OLLMAN

View of a Riot-Scarred L.A.

■ **Art:** Johnny Coleman’s ‘Ruminations’ reminds us that we are still in the smoky aftermath of April’s events.

SAN DIEGO—The pungent smell of a burning city remains in Johnny Coleman’s memory, months after the violence that erupted in Los Angeles following the acquittal of four police officers accused of beating motorist Rodney King. It is this smell, this musty, mournful odor that first sobers the visitor to Coleman’s new installation at the David Zapf Gallery.

“Ruminations,” as the installation is titled, reminds us that we are still in the smoky aftermath of those late-April

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

events. The wounds are still fresh, the anger still sharp. As Coleman writes in his artist’s statement for the show, “The fire ain’t out.”

Coleman, who received his master of fine arts degree this year from UC San Diego, has created a remarkably powerful, poignant environment in which to meditate on the post-verdict state of things. Not a single element is facile or gratuitous in this spare space. The sounds, smells and sights resonate with one another to evoke a pounding pressure in the soul that feels like it won’t abate until a higher level of humanity is restored to our culture.

Rather than focus on the facts of the case to spin yet another sociopolitical analysis of

Please see GALLERIES, F5

Johnny Coleman

Ruminations, 1992

LOS ANGELES TIMES

September 2, 1992

GALLERIES: View of Riot-Scarred L.A.

Continued from F1

the "rebellion"—as he calls it—Coleman has conjured a metaphoric space, a richly poetic layering of words, memories and visual associations rooted in the real, but not bound to it.

The installation begins with a wall, but a permeable one, setting up at once a marvelous interplay of opaque and transparent surfaces, concrete and amorphous thoughts, that continues throughout the show. A door in the middle of the charred, wood-framed wall stands open, leading to an inner room defined by three framed walls covered with brown paper. It's dark, and voices can be heard along with the sound of broken glass being swept.

Beyond a second, free-standing open door stands a comfortable wooden chair where the viewer can sit amid a pool of gritty ashes. At the foot of the chair rests a low crate filled with charred wooden beams and broken ostrich eggshells. One of the shells contains a compass, sitting in fine, pale-gray ash. A plumb line hangs directly over it, and a light bulb and two audio speakers hang nearby.

On tape, Coleman tells the story of a man "who has worked his way into my dreams," a one-toothed "brother" who always carries a broom, sometimes wearing it on his back like a weapon. In Coleman's anecdote, the man is crouching on the sidewalk, watching as a bird "the size of a large man's fist" struggles to peck its way out of its shell. The nascent creature must destroy its own shelter to survive. This notion of new life emerging from ruins, rising Phoenix-like from the ashes, has clear parallels with the rebuilding efforts in Los Angeles. The compass and plumb line, both instruments for determining direction, are offered as symbols of assistance in setting a new course.

A narrow path runs around the outside perimeter of this room within a room, and along the gallery's back wall appear the words, "All the Kings (sic)—All the Kings horses and all the Kings men—All," written in charcoal. The familiar Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme instantly sparks connections and allusions with the rest of the installation (the broken eggshells) and with the events in Los Angeles. Coleman deftly works a double-entendre with Rodney King's name, letting it signify not

all such victims: "All the Kings"—but the authorities who, as in the nursery rhyme, cannot put what's broken back together again.

On the floor below sits strewn, burned debris—wooden beams, bent nails and more ashes. A speaker plays a tape of Coleman describing an encounter with another African-American man. Their contact brings tears of solidarity and reassurance.

In his brief gallery statement, Coleman describes "Ruminations" as a "dreamscape," an exploration of thresholds. Indeed, an acute sense of ambiguity permeates the space; the cataclysm has past, but the future is uncertain. Thresholds, he notes in a journal that is also part of this show, are beginnings, but they are also breaking points. Fires destroy, but they also clear the ground for new growth.

Several equally evocative sculptural works by Coleman accompany the installation in a side gallery. Together with "Ruminations," they attest to the artist's deep emotional connection with the pain of historical and contemporary racial oppression felt in the African-American community. They demonstrate, more than amply, Coleman's ability to make that pain palpable through a fugue-like arrangement of images, sounds and smells, and to approach that pain not as a scourge but as an opportunity.

■ *David Zapf Gallery, 2400 Kettner Blvd., through Sept. 26. Open noon-5 p.m. Friday-Saturday and by appointment (232-5004).*

ART NOTES

Tina Yapelli, director of the San Diego State University Art Gallery for the last seven years, leaves next week to become curator of exhibitions at the Madison Art Center in Wisconsin.

Yapelli received a layoff notice in June when university officials made campus-wide reductions in staff and courses in the face of major budget cuts. After Yapelli applied for and accepted the job in Madison, her layoff and more than 100 others at the university were postponed.

She has applied for a leave of absence from SDSU in order to fulfill her commitment to the Madison Art Center, a private, non-profit museum of modern and contemporary art, and may return to San Diego next year.

Johnny Coleman

Ruminations, 1992

Friday, September 4, 1992

THE SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE

'Ruminations' sifts through psychic ashes

By NEIL KENDRICKS

There probably isn't a TV viewer in America who hasn't seen the startling footage of Rodney King handcuffed and beaten by L.A. police officers. We remember the violent flash of nightsticks pummeling a human being into the asphalt, and we know there was something deeply wrong with the picture.

These frequently repeated images, combined with the acquittal last April of the officers involved

ART REVIEW

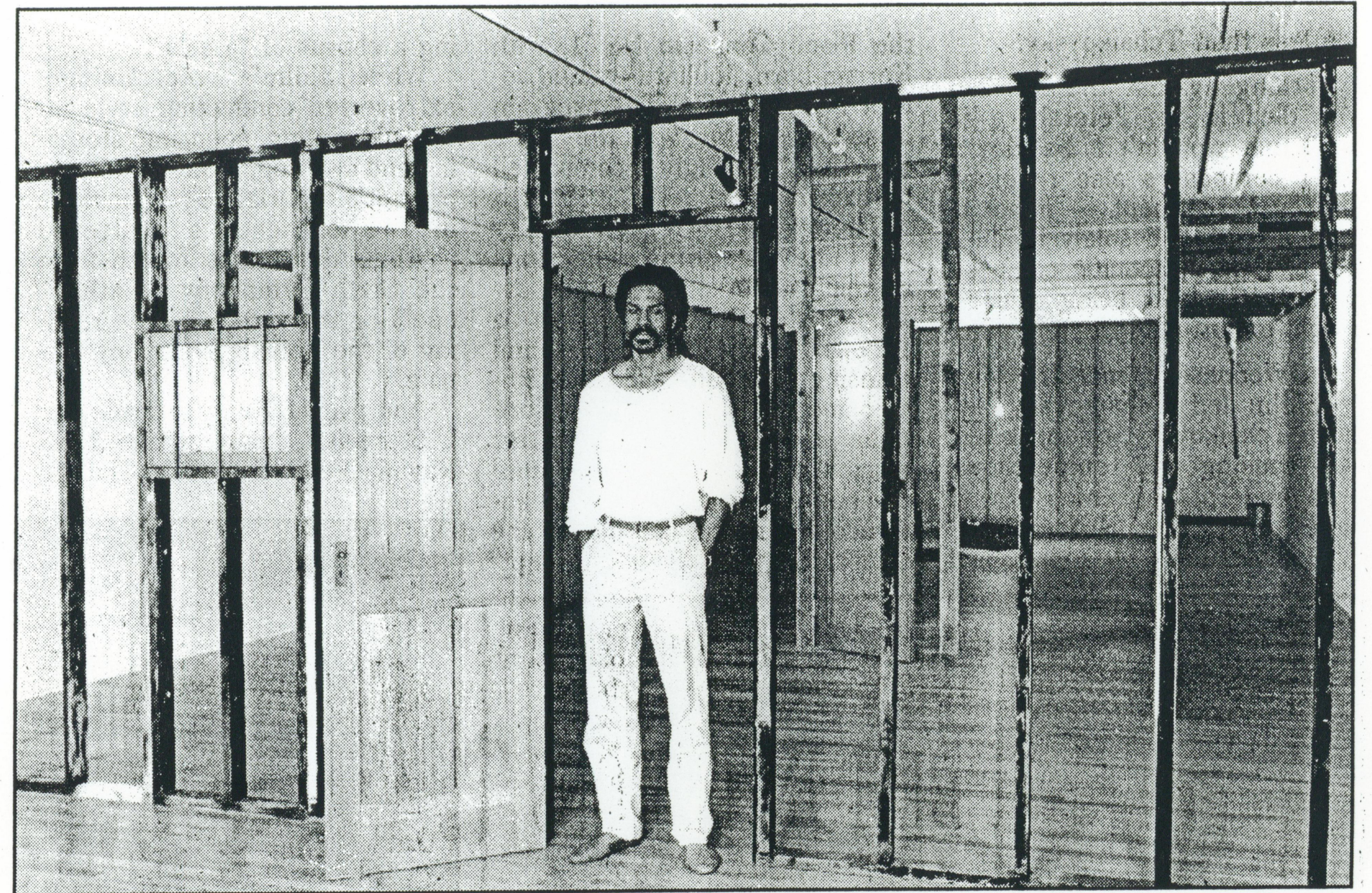
"Ruminations: An Installation," solo exhibition by Johnny Coleman

David Zapf Gallery, 2400 Kettner Blvd., San Diego. Through Sept. 26. Free. 232-5004.

in the beating, sparked more than a wave of violence in Los Angeles and across the nation.

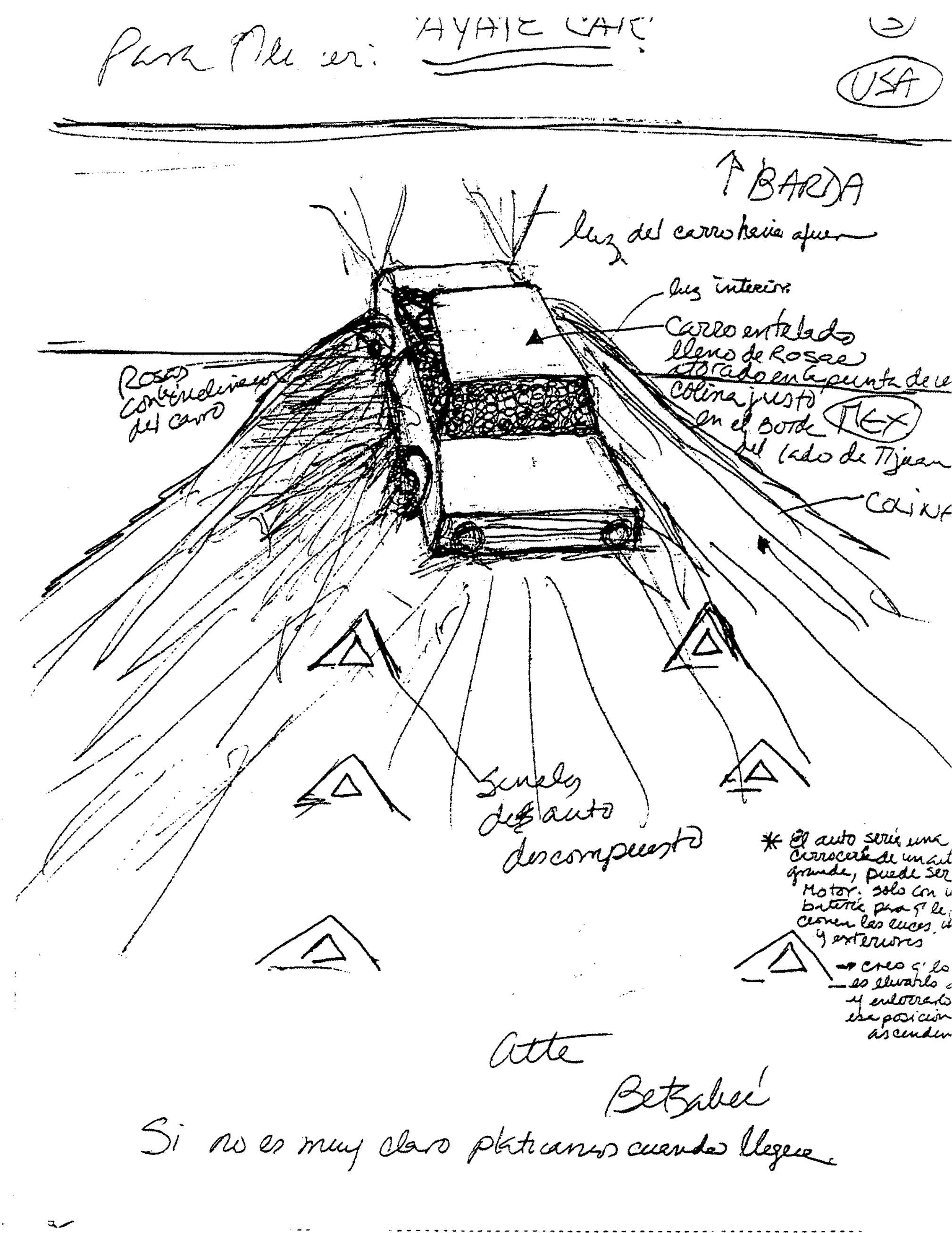
For many blacks outraged over the verdict, the violence was a revolt against the system, a Molotov cocktail of rage exploding in the streets.

Today, Los Angeles is no longer in flames, but the source of the conflict remains. Artist Johnny Coleman sifts through the ashes with his installation, "Ruminations," at the David Zapf Gallery. (The show is one of a series of exhibitions, collectively titled "IN/SITE '92.")



Artist Johnny Coleman: *standing with his installation, "Ruminations."*

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Ayate Car,
1997



Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car,
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Betsabeé Romero
Ayate Car,
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Ayate Car,
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