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SUNDAY Calendar

Art & Architecture



"Forests and Seascapes," an exhibition of photographs by Pavel Banka, opens Friday at Stephen Cohen Gallery, including "Seascape #8," left.

A Vision Both Near and Far Sited

With works on both sides of the border, inSITE has gained complexity, recognition in its fourth outing.

By LEAH OLLMAN

This weekend marks the launching of the fourth incarnation of inSITE, an event whose look, feel and description have changed—at least slightly, but sometimes dramatically—each time it's been staged. Since its inception in 1992, the constants have been these: inSITE showcases installation and site-specific art; it takes place at multiple venues throughout San Diego and Tijuana; and it is as much a model of binational cooperation as it is of communal and individual ambition.

The current edition, inSITE2000, features new projects by 35 artists from Mexico, the U.S., Canada, Brazil and a smattering of Latin American countries. About half of the projects went on view this weekend and will remain accessible until inSITE concludes in February. Several won't be viewable for at least another month, and others consist of performances or events staged at specific times during the run of the program.

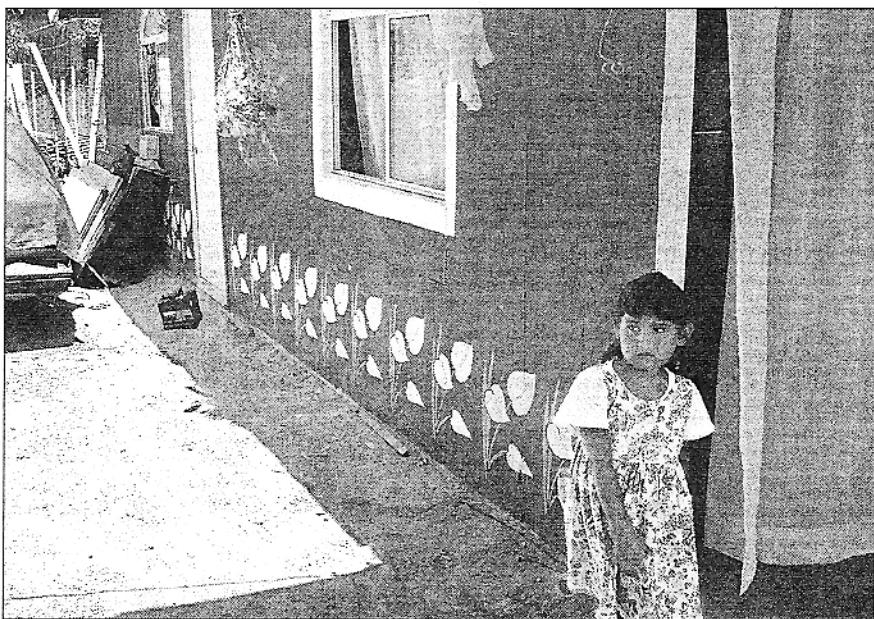
This year's inSITE has fewer total projects than inSITE94 or '97, but, according to Carmen Cuenca, inSITE's executive director in Mexico, and Michael Krichman, her counterpart in the U.S., the projects are more complex, they use more resources, and the permissions for siting the works were much more complicated to obtain.

As in the past, inSITE defies the mall mentality of the one-stop shopper. Artists' projects will be sited in residential neighborhoods of Tijuana, in downtown San Diego office buildings, Tijuana's wax museum, the Tijuana River Estuary Reserve on the U.S. side of the border, and numerous other publicly accessible spots.

Many of the projects require ambition and effort to reach. A video installation by the Swiss- and Brazilian-based team of Mauricio Dias and Walter Riedweg, for instance, can only be seen when passing through a pedestrian border-crossing into Mexico.

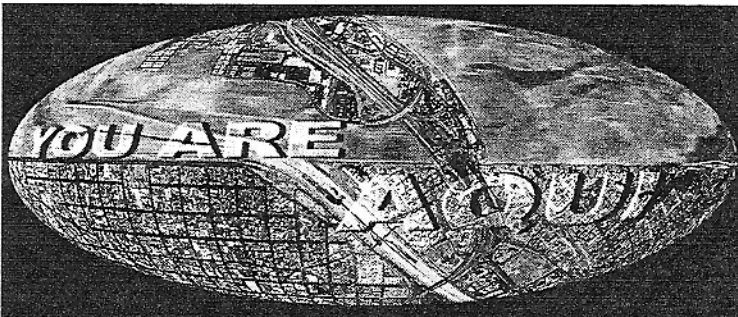
"You could say it's difficult to get to," Krichman says, "but it's brilliantly sited. Forty thousand people a day walk past that piece," which, he explains, is about U.S. Customs officers who work with dogs to sniff out drugs, and people being smuggled across the border. "It's not a documentary, but a more psychological consideration of this type of work."

New Yorker Jordan Crandall's project will screen sporadically on a huge electronic billboard in a commercial area of downtown Tijuana. The film, called "Heat-Seeking," was made using the same high-tech imaging systems that border police employ for surveillance purposes. It will also be viewable on hand-held cellular devices that can be checked out from the inSITE information centers,



Photos courtesy of inSITE 2000

Homes in a Tijuana neighborhood bear the stamp of Brazilian artist Monica Nador, who helped residents decorate their houses with ancestral symbols. Below, a billboard design by Arturo Cuenca.



where wide-ranging documentation of other projects will also be on view.

The range of locations, says Krichman, invites "multiple audiences. There's an incredible variety of experiences, with audiences built into many of them, like the 'Lucha Libre' fight program in Tijuana where Carlos Amorales' project will intervene [in a regularly scheduled wrestling match]."

The diffusion of projects over time and space

makes it a daunting challenge to catch everything, but seeing it all isn't required, says Krichman. "It's not any different than a chamber music series. People will pick what they're going to do from what's offered."

Encouraging audiences to venture beyond familiar territory has been one of the fundamental goals of inSITE since it was conceived in early 1992 by Installation Gallery. The gallery, a dynamic alternative

inSITE2000, locations throughout San Diego and Tijuana. **Dates:** Through Feb. 25. **Info:** (619) 544-1482; <http://www.insite2000.org>.

ART

space in downtown San Diego throughout the '80s, had hit upon hard times. It no longer had a director, an exhibition space or much of a budget, but it still had momentum, and an arts advisory board that wanted to continue programming.

"San Diego has a lot of rich talent and venues spread all across the county," artist and advisory board member Ernie Silva remembers thinking. "Since Installation didn't have a space of its own, we thought, wouldn't it be interesting if it worked with these venues to harness all these separate energies, to create an event where the audiences of all these separate venues would move around and visit the others, and to focus in on the talent that's here."

The committee, spearheaded by Silva and contemporary art dealer Mark Quint, started contacting directors of college galleries, museums, commercial spaces and cultural centers throughout San Diego and Tijuana to coordinate a unified schedule of exhibitions featuring installation art.

For its part, Installation—by then an organizing entity rather than a gallery per se—rented some empty office space that it turned over to local artists, and printed a guide to what was widely considered to be a wonderfully varied, vigorous display of regional talent.

With 50 artists represented in 21 venues, north and south of the border, inSITE had achieved critical mass on its first try. From this humble but exhilarating beginning, inSITE could have gone one of two ways, Quint muses in retrospect. "If it went in the direction it started out with, it would have stayed provincial, which would have been great for local people, for a sense of community." Instead, Quint says, there was a conscious decision to grow.

By 1994, when inSITE struck again, it was a far slicker event. The budget had ballooned to \$1 million. The number of venues had doubled. There were more than 75 projects, with roughly 100 artists from all over the globe taking part.

The planning was now shared (albeit not yet equally) between staff in the U.S. and Mexico, although Installation remained as the clearinghouse for the project. Lynda Forsha, former curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, directed the selection of artists, who each spent at least two months in the area, conceiving and creating site-specific installations. Many of the participating institutions curated their own shows. The modest two-fold guide of inSITE92 gave way to a thick, spiral-

bound handbook, a hefty catalog, and expansive educational tie-ins. Reviews—generally positive—followed in national publications such as Newsweek and Art in America magazine.

In 1994, inSITE had serious breadth, the critics pointed out, and the unwieldy, uneven energy of a huge group show, with locals now sharing the spotlight with headliners like Terry Allen, Yukinori Yanagi, Dennis Oppenheim, Chris Burden, Robert Therrien, Andy Goldsworthy and Pepon Osorio. Still, some of the most memorable works, like Marcos Ramírez's "Century 21," a shanty carefully constructed on the plaza of Tijuana's cultural center, were made by locally based artists steeped in the social, economic and political issues of the border region.

"The relationships that have developed between institutions in both countries are important to us. We're not trying to solve any global problems here, but it's been significant."

MICHAEL KRICHMAN
inSITE executive director

It took three years to stage the next inSITE, a time frame that Installation has since formally adopted. For the 1997 event, a curatorial team of four (one each from the U.S., Brazil, Canada and Mexico) reined in the process a bit, choosing 50 artists from 11 countries to participate. Again, the operation's budget swelled, to nearly \$2 million, and growing with it was the machinery required to set it all in motion and the funding sources to keep that machine lubricated. Fully binational in organization, inSITE97 received support from a host of government sponsors, corporations, foundations and individual donors.

In just five years, inSITE had transmuted from an earnest, grassroots enterprise to an extravagant showpiece on the international art festival circuit. The dissonant context of the border itself continued to inspire many inSITE projects, though organizers have resisted claiming the border as an explicit theme. This year's inSITE promises to engage even more directly with the fertile friction of the border. "We started with the concept of not using [each] city as a gallery, placing art here and there," explained Osvaldo Sánchez, one of

the four curators at a press briefing earlier this year. Instead, San Diego and Tijuana were to be used as subjects.

"Investigation" became the buzzword for this year's event, added another member of the curatorial team, Susan Buck-Morss, a professor of political philosophy and social theory: "Investigation of the area, of the way things really work here."

In an effort to make not just a bigger splash, but more lasting ripples, the curators—Ivo Mesquita and Sally Yard complete the team—inSITE2000 staff extended the event's running time, from just over two months to more than four, with staggered openings and programs, and lengthened the artists' local residencies to an average of 100 days, over an 18-month period.

They also did away with the two-tier system in effect in 1997, when local artists commissioned to develop "community engagement projects" were given separate billing from the higher-profile "artists' projects." This year, community engagement has been more integral throughout, and more focus has been applied to process—going beyond the concept of a show, to leave more "remains," as Mesquita put it.

Monica Nador of Brazil, for instance, spent two months living and working in the Maclovio Rojas neighborhood of Tijuana, helping families there paint their homes with ancestral signs and symbols, imagery that will remain after inSITE officially ends.

Another seemingly durable aspect of inSITE has been the channels of communication and cooperation forged between U.S. and Mexican institutions and cultural agencies. "The relationships that have developed between institutions in both countries are important to us," Krichman says. "We're not trying to solve any global problems here, but it's been significant."

"The collaboration is what is valuable," Cuenca adds. "This is the only project in Mexico that works like this with young and mid-career artists, that offers them this kind of opportunities, and a budget that creates possibilities for them to create something complex." □

Leah Ollman is a regular contributor to Calendar.