



**SATURDAY**  
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# Calendar

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



Photos by ALBERTO CARO

"The Rules of the Game" is performed in a Tijuana high school gym, with basketball and soccer (dual goals, below) played at the same time.

## Side by Side

Tijuana and San Diego's inSITE2000 show emphasizes cultural and artistic coexistence. On a basketball court, in a wax museum . . .

### Art Review

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT  
TIMES ART CRITIC

**S**AN DIEGO/TIJUANA—For inSITE2000, the binational exhibition of newly commissioned art made specifically for sites around the border region, young Mexico City-based artist Gustavo Artigas invited two Boys Club basketball teams from San Diego to play a match in the gymnasium at Tijuana's Lázaro Cárdenas High School. He also invited two Tijuana high school football (or soccer) teams to play a match there. Last week, the two games were played before bleachers filled with screaming kids (and some screaming

adults), in what proved to be the exhibition's most thrilling and savvy presentation.

Here's why: The basketball game and the football game were played simultaneously, on the same gymnasium court. "The Rules of the Game," as Artigas titled the extraordinary event, provided a bracing metaphor for the difficult realities of two cultures fitfully occupying the same space.

Four teams, two sets of referees, two groups of cheerleaders to whip the crowds into a frenzy and a loudly amplified play-by-play of each match from bilingual announcers all conspired to transform the routine energy of youthful

Please see Exhibition, F14





# Exhibition: Binational Event Meshes Community With Art

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athletics into delirious, rowdy, barely contained chaos. A basketball team making a drive for a hoop could be racing directly into the oncoming traffic of soccer players heading a ball. (To accommodate an indoor court, the soccer ball was slightly smaller than regulation size.) With the soccer nets set directly beneath the hoops, goalies were regularly surrounded by flying bodies attempting to grab rebounding basketballs, even as soccer wings jostled for scoring position and fullbacks struggled to block them.

Outside the gym, a waiting ambulance signaled appropriate caution.

Over at court side, trophies spread out on a table awaited the final score. Each featured two golden figures perched atop a column, one in a slam-dunk leap and the other in an over-the-head kick. The trophies' eye-popping visual collision of play, violence and concentrated grace perfectly described the raucous action on the court.

The conflicted theme of the performance is one that has been central to inSITE since the exhibition series began in 1992. Here, it got a highly charged, exuberantly optimistic spin. What was most amazing was the way the players, all teenagers, adapted so easily to the tangled situation.

According to organizers, the coaches and referees had received training for the event, but the players had not. There were no practice games. The kids took what their elders taught them, but they entered a new and unprecedented arena on their own. There, they managed. And they had a blast.

So did the audience. Artigas' risky and electrifying performance piece was emblematic of the potential power of inSITE. But it also spoke of a fundamental weakness in the current installment. If you were there, it was an experience you won't soon forget; but if you weren't—well, one of just two strong works I saw during two eight-hour days of touring the exhibition, "The Rules of the Game" will not be staged again.

inSITE2000 is considerably different from its three earlier incarnations. As in the past, projects were commissioned from 30 artists and artist-teams hailing from throughout the Americas. But the focus this time was not on creating a public exhibition at various sites around San Diego and Tijuana. Instead, the emphasis was placed on community arts: Direct interaction between artists and local residents was a major goal.

That's fine for the participants, but it doesn't make for much of a public exhibition. Community-based art is attractive to many philanthropic funders; but it's not necessarily satisfying for an audience, whose experience is not the point.

Indeed, fewer than half the 30 projects commissioned by inSITE2000 could be experienced at the exhibition's opening. Some of that was documentation of past activities—Diego Gutierrez's videos and texts chronicling the ways



MICHAEL POCHE / For The Times

A nun watches Alfredo Jaar's performance piece commemorating deaths at the Tijuana border.

regularly scheduled Friday night wrestling match in Tijuana, or two outdoor projections on the side of a building planned for February by Krzysztof Wodiczko. Rita González and Norma Iglesias have organized a film and video series on a variety of urban themes—traffic, window shopping, home, etc.—and Armando Rascón is doing one on immigration. Glenn Wilson is orchestrating an improvisational series of digital-video projections at sites around the border region, which will culminate next February in a finished work.

Also, several proposals remain a complete mystery—projects that were abandoned as unworkable or else haven't yet been figured out. Caltrans, for example, would not allow Geneviève Cadieux to install the word "desire" in 5-foot, bilingual, neon versions atop two highway overpasses. (It's odd to feel grateful to Caltrans for thwarting this dim academic exercise.)

My favorite scotched plan from the inSITE2000 guidebook, which is available at information centers in downtown San Diego and Tijuana, is Meyer Vaisman's scheme to impersonate a lost Border Patrol officer. In a car painted to imitate an official vehicle, he envisioned driving through Tijuana neighborhoods before abandoning the car to taggers and the elements at a site near the border fence. "Vaisman is reconsidering his project in light of concerns for his safety and that of the public," the guidebook solemnly declares. Is this a wryly subversive bit of imaginative documentary humor for an event that was always intended to unfold only in your mind?

inSITE is also experiencing an enervating de-

Some of these sites are already so peculiarly charged as to make artistic interventions difficult at best and superfluous at worst. At Friendship Park, pairs of reflective mirrored walls etched with texts from Italo Calvino's "Invisible Cities," which Valeska Soares has inserted into the border fence, do little to articulate anything specific about an already loaded site. Indeed, its most telling feature is a nearby disclaimer posted by the exhibition organizers, which announces that Calvino's text "does not reflect the views or opinions of the Border Patrol."

A bit more compelling is Mark Dion's bird-watching shack in San Diego's Tijuana River Estuary Reserve. Protected home to some 370 species of birds, it also hosts helicopters from an adjacent military base. The shack's military camouflage hides your presence from the snowy egrets and other estuary birds, but you soon begin to wonder who is watching whom at this wide-open border field.

Artistic intervention actually works to exceptional effect in only one fixed site. At the Tijuana Wax Museum, Jeffrey Vallance commissioned three new figures to be added to the display: the poet Dante, who points dramatically toward the entrance of the museum's delightfully cheesy chambers of hell, where mythic figures of sorcery and witchcraft burn in eternity; the Virgin of Guadalupe, a queen of heaven as real to the Mexican Catholic faithful as any of the museum's other wax apparitions, who range from Maria Felix to Princess Diana; and, in the hall of world leaders, a shocked and dejected Richard Nixon, who—holding the Watergate tapes in his outstretched hands—resides forever in his own particular realm of hellish celebrity.

Vallance, like Artigas at the high school gym, has chosen a site that is already designed to appeal to a curious and enthusiastic audience. Both artists interacted directly with specific members of a local community—the earnest staff of a kitschy museum and a couple of high school athletic programs—but they also productively engaged a public whose eager participation was valued.

Alfredo Jaar attempted to do the same, but here the result felt flat. At a border site notorious for illegal attempts at crossing, he organized a largely unimaginative ceremony to commemorate those who have died trying.

The most compelling aspect of Jaar's event, witnessed by several hundred observers milling about in the bright morning sun, was a lovely musical dialogue conducted between a violinist and a cellist stationed on opposite sides of the gruesome fence. Music floated freely back and forth beneath the sorrowful sight of a tethered "cloud," formed by 2,000 white balloons tied so as to likewise straddle the awful divide. The climax was more trite than moving, though, because the release of helium balloons is a tired memorial service cliché.

At least one unfinished project is worth looking forward to: In the chaotic commercial jumble of Tijuana, at a site yet to be determined,



in which he introduced himself to families in two neighborhoods, for example, or Mónica Nador's video about ornamenting bungalows with personal symbols in collaboration with a number of families. What these events meant to participants I cannot say, but the documentary materials are dull and uninvolving.

A lot of performance events will take place during the five-month run of the show, such as Carlos Amoraes' planned participation in a

gree of repetitiveness, especially in Tijuana-based projects. Artists are invited to work wherever they choose, but a handful of locales turns up every time: one neighborhood in Colonia Libertad, the official border crossing at San Ysidro, the inaptly named Friendship Park (where the border fence runs incongruously into the ocean), the old casino near downtown. Tijuana is a big place, but artistically it's begun to feel small.

Jorge Pardo will design a clean, Minimalist-inspired interior for a coin-operated Laundromat, scheduled to open for business in January. Like stores everywhere, it will rise or fall on the judgment of the public.

● *InSITE2000, through Feb. 25. Free admission. Information sites: 923 1st Ave., San Diego, (619) 544-1482, and Centro Cultural, Paseo de los Héroes y Mina, Tijuana, (6) 684-0095. Web site: <http://www.insite2000.org>.*