

ART

CALENDAR

Looking for Art That's Literally All Over the Map?

'inSITE94' features 109 artists, artworks made from tens of thousands of pieces (if you count the animal bones) and covers 37 sites all over San Diego and Tijuana. Big enough for you?

By Suzanne Muchnic

What art exhibition claims 78 works by 109 artists, 37 sites in two countries, 79 sponsors and two grandchildren? "inSITE94," a multifaceted extravaganza that's opening next weekend in Tijuana and San Diego County.

"inSITE94" is not the American version of Germany's Documenta or Italy's Venice Biennale, the art world's two biggest international productions. But the show—which features large, multipart artworks created for specific locations and often loaded with political commentary—is such an organizational feat that any description of it tends to boil down to numbers.

Two years in the making!

Hundreds of trips across the Mexico/United States border!

Artworks composed of tens of thousands of pieces!

As for the grandchildren—they were added to families of two of the artists, Mildred Howard of San Francisco and Terry Allen of Santa Fe, while the exhibition was in process.

"This project has been so complicated and it has gone on for so long that we have become involved with intimate details of the artists' lives," says "inSITE94" director Lynda Forsha.

No kidding. Nothing about "inSITE94" is simple. Even the opening weekend, which is designed to give shape to the sprawling affair by focusing on three major hubs of activity, is something of a marathon. It begins on Friday at 5 p.m. in downtown San Diego with the unveiling of, count 'em, 15 artworks at three institutions.

Visitors at the grand old Santa Fe Depot will see such wonders as Yolanda Gutiérrez's cloud-like

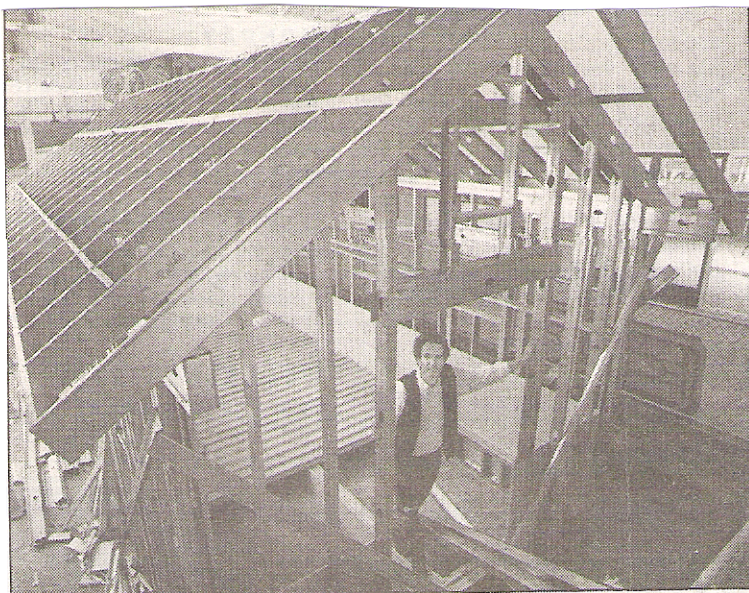
masses, made of 70,000 chunks of animal bones, wired to metal branches that are suspended from the ceiling of the waiting room. Across the street at the downtown branch of the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, Nancy Rubins' conglomeration of airplane parts will fill a ground-floor gallery and spill onto the sidewalk from a second-floor walkway.

About six blocks away, at the Children's Museum of San Diego, the museum's entire building has been brightly painted in a scheme designed by Patricia Patterson, as her "inSITE94" project. Inside the cavernous space, Ernest Silva has built a metal house as a video/reading room for kids, while Chris Burden has re-created "A Tale of Two Cities," the third incarnation of his war-toys portrayal of a battle between two imaginary city-states.

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On Saturday at 1 p.m., the spotlight will shift to Tijuana, where art will go on view at cultural centers, historic buildings, the beach and obscure border outposts. Among works at the Centro Cultural Tijuana is John Outterbridge's poetry-covered steel wall, which appears to pierce a garden window. At Centro Escolar Agua Caliente, a school built near the crumbling remains of a gambling resort, Allan Kaprow is installing fog machines and a recording of barking dogs around a minaret that once served as an exhaust exit for the resort's kitchen and laundry. Nearby, Anya Gallaccio is using imitation gold leaf to decorate broken areas of a tiled swimming pool and fountain.

Visitors who venture out to the beach near the border fence will discover Helen Escobedo's boat-



IN HONOR OF HIS WIDOW: Artist Ernest Silva stands inside framework of "Cora's Rain House" at the Children's Museum.

like structures, fashioned of junk metal, and a mural by Oscar Ortega, painted on one side of a building that has fallen over in the sand. Those who are lucky may even catch up with Terry Allen's pair of vans, which will be moving in tandem on either side of the border throughout the exhibition. The idea is to climb a ladder on one of the vans, stand on a platform and communicate through loudspeakers with riders in the other vehicle.

In another border location, Sylvia Gruner is installing plaster figures of women in childbirth

along a corrugated metal fence that cordons off a densely populated section of Tijuana from the U.S. desert. A few blocks away, on a plot of sand, Ulf Rollof is building a circular "railway" that invites viewers to sit in a chair at the center of the track and contemplate a screen of fir trees that serves as a metaphor for cultural barriers.

Then on Sunday at 10 a.m., it's back to San Diego, where five museums in Balboa Park will launch exhibitions. Additional events, including lectures, per-



WAR TOYS: Jeff Gautreaux assists in "A Tale of Two Cities."

Vital Stats

"inSITE94"

Information

Free brochures or a \$5 handbook listing all locations are available at all participating institutions, including the San Diego Museum of Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego.

Phone

To order a handbook or for general information, call (619) 544-1452



Photos by DAVE GATLEY / Los Angeles Times

AS EVERYTHING ROLLS BY: Wispy clouds, made of 70,000 chunks of animal bones, hover above waiting room of historic Santa Fe Depot. The work is the creation of Yolanda Gutiérrez.

'inSITE94'

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performances, bus tours and openings in outlying locations on both sides of the border, will continue to Oct. 30, when the show closes.

No wonder this project has been dubbed "the mother of collaborations."

Appearances to the contrary, the goal of "inSITE94" is not to confuse the public or to install art on every stairwell, sandpile, fence, hospital or school, as well as in the usual places. Indeed, a handbook has been published to provide visitors with maps, photographs of sites, project descriptions and artist biographies. (It's on sale for \$5 at participating institutions.) In addition, a comprehensive catalogue is in the works.

But the aspirations of "inSITE94" organizers are as big as the geographical sweep of the project. They want nothing less than to put the San Diego/Tijuana region on the contemporary art map while forging partnerships across the border.

To that end, the exhibition concentrates on installations and site-specific art, two related art forms that flourish in San Diego despite their unwieldy, temporal nature. (While installations are generally defined as multipart works designed to fill a large space, site-specific works are created for a particular place and explore themes related to the location's function or history.)

"inSITE94" is actually the second in a projected series of biennial exhibitions, but it has grown exponentially, according to Michael Krichman, president of San Diego's Installation Gallery, a nonprofit organization that coordinates the event. Virtually all the region's nonprofit art institutions, including major museums, now participate in the show, which began in 1992 as an artist-inspired fringe event. With funding from the James Irvine Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts and the Nathan Cummings Foundation, "inSITE94" has a budget of about \$800,000, covering two fiscal years. But if in-kind contributions of materials and services were count-

ed, the total budget would be close to \$3 million, Krichman said.

An attorney with a longstanding interest in art, Krichman was only peripherally engaged with "inSITE92," but he is working around the clock on "inSITE94." "I decided to get seriously involved when I saw that it could be successful," he joked. Along the way, Installation Gallery, which had closed its exhibition space in 1990 and used its resources to sponsor community events, was reorganized as coordinator of the biennial exhibition.

The project gained considerable weight and prestige in 1993 when the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, became a partner of Installation Gallery, along with the Department of Culture of the City of Tijuana, the State of Baja California (through the Instituto de Cultura) and the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (through the Centro Cultural Tijuana and the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes). As it evolved, "inSITE94" became a truly collaborative effort, with artworks distributed evenly on both sides of the border and a mixture of nationalities represented among the artists, including a few Europeans.

Although most of Krichman's and Forsha's time is spent on administrative complexities, they say the project is fueled by the art itself. The San Diego area is rich in artists who make installations and need a forum for their ideas, Forsha said. "It became difficult for Installation Gallery to keep its doors open, but there's such a lot of good work, we wanted to find a way to harness it and focus on it," she said.

No unified curatorial vision has shaped the exhibition, however. The emphasis is on diversity and variety, Forsha said. Each participating institution was responsible for choosing its own artists and sites. Participants submitted proposals to a review committee, which offered advice on feasibility rather than aesthetic judgment. Members recommended artists and sites, if asked, but they served more as facilitators than critics. "In no case did we say, 'That's a stupid proposal. We don't want it,'" Krichman said.

Hosting unorthodox contemporary art was "a stretch" for more traditional institutions like the

Timken Museum of Art, which is known for its collection of Old Masters, Krichman said. During "inSITE94" the museum will show Deborah Small's computer-generated installation "Metamorphosis," based on 17th-Century studies of flora and fauna in Suriname, a Dutch colony in South America.

According to Krichman, peer pressure among participating institutions helped to keep the quality of the artworks high. And committee member Hugh Davies, who directs the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, and who is Forsha's husband, agreed: "No one wanted to be the weak link in the chain." Although the project has been costly, it is likely to bring press and public attention to nonprofits that normally have a low profile, he added.

Organizers also claim that "inSITE94" has created a new camaraderie among dissimilar institutions that are sprinkled over a vast region. "There was never a reason for these people to sit at the same table or be in the same room, so this is a breakthrough," Forsha said. Artists have effected breakthroughs, too, though they are often quite gentle. Take Sylvia Gruner, a Mexico City-based artist who has leased a three-room house near her Tijuana site and enlisted neighbors in her project. A local workshop that produces plaster sculptures for sale at the border cast the figures for her work. When she needed a metal plate as a sign to identify her piece, a craftsman produced it in a few minutes.

She says everyone in the neighborhood knows what she's doing. Furthermore, they aren't likely to be disturbed by outsiders who come to stare at the figures, which she plans to affix to little metal stools that will be welded to the Mexican side of the fence.

Neither does she expect vandalism. "My experience in Mexico is that people don't vandalize art," she says. "They have a big respect for images, especially religious images. I hope the piece will be strong enough that everyone will respect it and change it into something meaningful for them." □

Suzanne Muchnic is The Times' art writer.