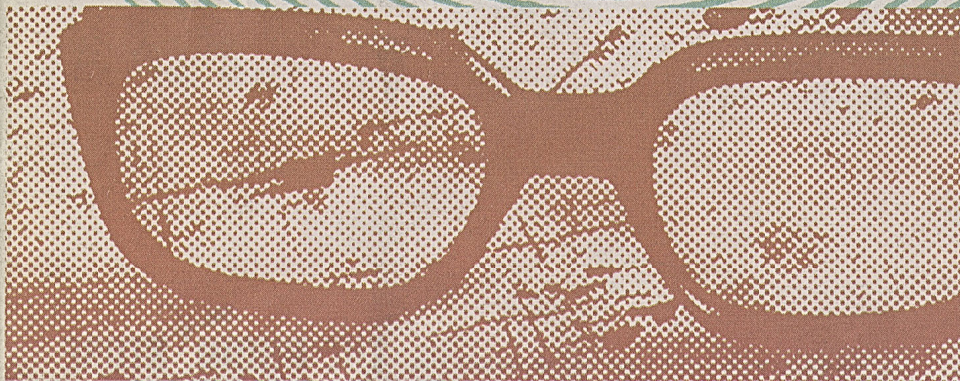




in and out of Site



Looking past The Art—to find the art
by Kinsee Morlan

in and out of by Kinsee Morlan Site

Worn and torn

from Friday night and unshowered, I showed up to the Aug. 27 inSite .05 media bus tour a little late. By the time I got settled, I had convinced myself that my disheveled appearance was acceptable—I had a duty to represent the alternative-weekly crowd. Robert Pincus, the art critic from the *Union-Tribune*, was already there, looking all professional, and so were several other local and national journalists who seemed to know a lot more about the binational art project than I did. Whatever. Good for them.

The fancy underscore in the title and the fact that the public relations people from inSite .05 initially forgot to invite me on their press tour gave me some reservations about the so-called “network of contemporary art programs” scattered across San Diego and Tijuana. The whole thing sounded pretentious to me, but after some provocation from my editor (and desperation because no one else from *CityBeat* would commit to a Saturday 10-hour bus tour), I decided to give inSite .05 a chance. I cleared my mind of all prejudice—no more thoughts about artists’ overblown egos or skepticism about what passes as contemporary art. I strived to reach that state of “unbiased observation” my professors used to talk about in journalism school.

My first “unbiased observation” of inSite .05 was a trailer propped up on two semi-truck beds parked directly in front of the San Diego Museum of Art (SDMA) in Balboa Park. The monstrous thing sits there still. When you see it, you’ll understand why I say this is no ordinary trailer. It takes the “white trash” thing to a whole new level. Bright orange construction cones decorate the exterior while Astroturf carpets the interior and extends until it nearly touches the front steps of SDMA. There’s a small, wooden-frame one-room house attached to one side of the trailer

and three big, yellow bean bags sit on the Astroturf, baking in the sun, silently waiting for the next unsuspecting 5-year-old to run up and, in a flying leap, jump into the depths of the scalding-hot plastic.

I went inside the trailer and discovered it’s more than just an eyesore—it’s one of two cleverly named “infoSites” where people can get a sense of what the inSite .05 projects are all about and where they’re located.

But let’s fast forward a bit. Long after my first encounter with the infoSite—minutes before I sat down to write this story—I e-mailed the mastermind behind the thing, local architect Teddy Cruz, and asked him why the infoSite was so “ugly in the traditional sense of the word.” Instead of a precise written response, I got an e-mail saying, “Call me to talk about this.” To me, those six words carried the same tone my mom used the time she found my little wooden-dolphin weed pipe.

I took a deep breath, then called the man. Cruz was polite but obviously concerned about my use of the word “ugly.”



Looking past The Art—to find the art

"I'm very interested," he said, "in why you think the infoSite is ugly."

I balked, and instead of saying, "Look man, I think the thing looks like a heinous zit on the face of Balboa Park," I said, "I don't really think it's ugly; I just think older, less progressive-minded people might look at it, not understand it and label it as not so aesthetically pleasing."

Cruz dropped the bomb. "We're so obsessed with style," he was lecturing now. "We're obsessed with beauty in a way that is so ignorant."

"The infoSite," he explained, "is more about claiming back open space."

I listened while he explained the inspiration for the infoSite. It turns out that every little piece of the damn thing either serves a purpose or makes a statement. The orange cones, he said, are like a bunch of middle fingers held up to the 26 cars that can't park in the parking lot now that the infoSite takes up all the space. The Astroturf, Cruz explained, represents the ridiculousness of Americans' obsession with manicured lawns. The bright-green fake grass, he said, "is taking back the ugliness that is part of everyday life."

"It's about use and not about aesthetics."

After its life as a piece of art, the small wooden house frame attached to the infoSite is going to be sent to a family living in a shantytown in Tijuana. "This was an opportunity to comment on the transfer of materials between San Diego and Tijuana," Cruz explained. "Many structures in Tijuana are built with remnants from San Diego."

Even the bean bags serve a purpose. They're there to give people

the idea of lounging and kicking back while learning about inSite_05.

When it comes right down to it, the inspiration for the infoSite—

about the new direction of post-modern art and some book called *Relational Aesthetics*. Thank Jesus the bus made periodic stops—

firmed" or "unidentified" in war-speak. Lebrija's project was a series of taped interviews with war veterans. Televisions were installed in

the library section of the Veteran's Museum, and Lebrija had reorganized the entire library so people can walk through the aisles of books while glancing at five different screens and listening as various old men tell their war stories.

It was interesting, but I wasn't totally blown away. InSite has been around since 1992—this year marks the project's fifth run. I expected something a little edgier, a little more subversive.

After two more stops in San Diego, one for a video installation called "Osmosis and Excess" in a downtown parking garage on Sixth Avenue, and the other for a look at a wall on a downtown hotel on L Street explaining the "Good Rumor project," we were off to Tijuana. As I pushed my way through the first set of revolving doors at the bor-



The San Diego infoSite (above) is the brainchild of local architect Teddy Cruz.

"Osmosis and Excess" (right) can be seen in the Parkade parking lot at Sixth Avenue and K Street downtown.

and all the projects of inSite_05, as I would later learn—is simple. It's all about inserting something, anything, into public space, rearranging urban flow, either permanently or momentarily, and letting people experience it firsthand.

Back on the bus

I didn't get any of this at the time of the bus tour. Instead of catching up by reading about the upcoming projects in the catalogue we'd been provided, I was stuck listening to some photographer from New York (and Oslo and Santa Monica, as he so proudly pointed out)

my ears were able to get a few breaks here and there.

After our rendezvous at the infoSite, we boarded the bus and headed over to the Veteran's Museum at the south end of Balboa Park. Our onboard curator, Donna Conwell, briefly described what we'd see next: a video installation called "Heroes of War" by artist Gonzalo Lebrija.

It was here where I learned the word "boggy" means "uncon-



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der crossing, I came across the "Dirty Water Initiative" project by the U.S. art collective SIMPARCH. Again, at first glance, it didn't seem very spectacular. The project looked like a bunch of stainless steel boxes attached to water jugs—most people just walked right by without even noticing it. Those who did stop to read the accompanying placard learned that the boxes purify water through evaporation and condensation, and the jugs collect the newly drinkable water. For those who chose to investigate even further by taking a look at the inSite_05 catalogue, they learned that each of the boxes would eventually be donated to poor families throughout Tijuana—a place where drinkable water is as good as gold.

Most of the inSite projects in Tijuana and San Diego require this kind of involved process of look first, discover later. As one of the executive directors of inSite_05, Michael Krichman, put it, "We like to think of it as an adventure."

An adventure it was. The press tour took us to the pedestrian bridge crossing the Tijuana River to see "Hospitality," a permanent installation by Felipe Barbosa and Rosana Ricalde that involved hand-painting people's first names on the cement walkway of the bridge. We drove to the Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT) to see the Tijuana infoSite and then left for the Playas de Tijuana—to the place where the border fence disappears into the ocean—for Javier Téllez's project, "One Flew Over the Void." We crossed paths with the "Mobile, Transborder Archive" and "Some Kindly Monster," both vehi-

cles made into transportable inSite_05 projects, and eventually ended up back at the CECUT for the opening bash of *Farsites: Urban Crisis and Domestic Symptoms in Recent Contemporary Art*, the visual arts component of inSite_05 on display at both SDMA and CECUT.

By the end of the tour, we were all tired. Most of my journalistic cohorts partook in the festivities in the form of a drink or two plus a few nibbles of the appetizers. They

Téllez had psychiatric patients run around on a stage for a bit—check the inSite_05 catalogue for why this is justified—and the grand finale featured the world's most famous human cannonball, Dave Smith. Smith waved a passport in the air before being shot from a cannon on the Playas de Tijuana side over the border fence into a giant net on the San Diego side.

Yeah, it was a spectacle, and even big-time actors like Gael García

Ingónizález had come to the party at CECUT, I got hammered and went off in search of some non-inSite artists who could give my story a twist.

The great escape

I took Claire Caraska, who writes for *Voice of San Diego*, along with me for the ride. Claire introduced me to a dude who knew a chick at the opening party who was

the crowd, I knew I'd found what I was looking for. She was wandering around, mingling, telling everybody about her new studio-turned-art-gallery—she was even offering people rides to it.

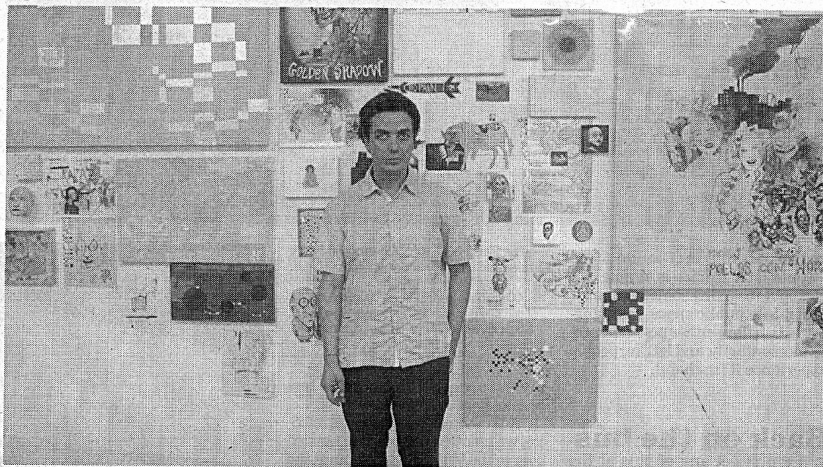
Claire was wary about getting into a stranger's car. She wondered how we'd get back to the states. I assured her we'd be OK. "Just save a few bucks for the trolley, stick with me and we'll be fine," I told her.

The lady in the red dress, Tania Candiani, drove us to her studio. We were greeted by two giant breasts sewn into a loveseat—one of Tania's original pieces—sitting at the top of the stairs. I think the whimsical welcome helped calm Claire's nerves. We settled into our surroundings, had some wine and took in the artwork. Tania was featuring the work of her friend, Francisco Fernandez, better known as Taka. Taka's paintings and mixed-media works hung on one wall of the large open studio. They were displayed as individual pieces that, when hung together, created one giant piece. The predominant color (bright lime green) and the principal subjects (evil clowns and skulls) made his work easy to describe: angry and loud.

My post-party state of mind wasn't conducive to intelligent conversation with Tania or Taka—the latter spoke little, if any, English—so I told the pair I'd be back.

Out of site

Two weeks went by before I made my way back across the border. This time, my mode of trans-



Taka's work is currently featured at Tania Candiani's studio in the Zona Centro in Tijuana.

returned home on the tour bus, I woke up the next day and wrote their inSite_05 stories, many predictably leading with "One Flew Over the Void," Téllez's project.

Bernal were there to see it, but I knew I couldn't write about it. I knew that I couldn't take the easy path, so instead of sipping a few drinks, nibbling on some appetizers and return-

walking around handing out fliers for her opening party. I saw her from behind—she was clad in a short red dress and sandals. Watching her confidently work her way through

portation wasn't a nice air-conditioned bus with a tour guide; it was a taxi cab with a driver, Romero, who spoke excellent Spanglish. We made it to the studio, *no problema*.

Tania greeted me with a kiss on the cheek and a glass of white wine. She and her ex-boyfriend, Ruben Bonet, an author from Mexico City, cracked open a couple of beers. Taka was asleep in the clos-

lost in translation. She was in constant motion—bringing me pictures and portfolios, lighting cigarettes, pouring another beer, punctuating her speech with animated hand gestures.

I could see how quickly Tania's mind worked. She described how she's overwhelmed with the number of things she wants to do with the studio space. "All I have are my

laborative art exhibition in Tijuana.

"If a space like this can become support for the artists—" She interrupted herself to list all the things she needs help with first: someone to help write grants, someone to help with a website, someone to help with promotions and marketing.

"I would love to have somebody help me with stuff like that," she said, "but it will take some time."

InSite_05, however, was the perfect time to take action. Instead of waiting around for help, Tania took advantage of the artistic-minded people streaming into Tijuana to see the inSite_05 projects. That's what had her walking around the CECUT opening night handing out fliers that said "Takarama" with directions to her studio printed below. As Tania talked about inSite, I learned that she's not quite the "anti-inSite" artist I'd expected. She was smarter than that.

"It's better not just to say, 'I hate inSite because they didn't invite me,'" she said. "I think it's better to say, 'What can we get from them?'"

She's not just talking about self-promotion—Tania's already made a name for herself. Her work was featured as the first in the *Cerca Series* at the downtown San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art and she's had her own solo exhibition at the CECUT. The SDMA even purchased one of her pieces, but for some reason, she's never been invited to participate in inSite. She said it upset her in years past, but this year she's taken a new approach.

"I'm not just emotional," she said. "[In] the last edition of inSite, my thoughts were very different. I was very pissed off for the lack of

interest in what people were doing here. There are plenty of tourists coming from all over and they are really interested."

That's why this year she's building a kind of "infoSite" of her own. She said her studio will eventually become a place where people can learn about all the artists in Tijuana.

"The [current] infoSites have plenty of information," she said, "but only about the artists that are involved with inSite projects. There is more than that. I understand that inSite, they don't have to promote or invite Tijuana artists.... That is not their responsibility, but I think it's our responsibility to take advantage of the situation and try to use it the best we can."

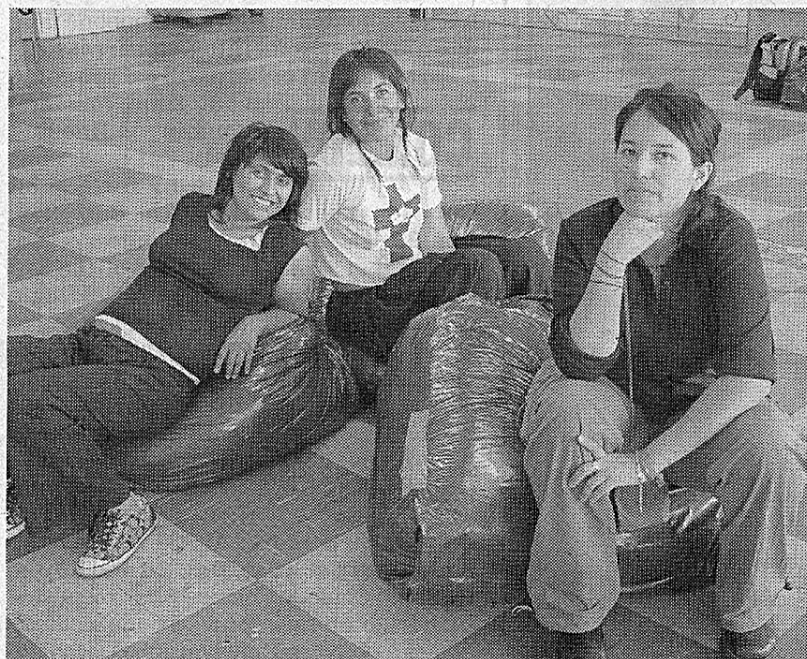
Tania has decided what's "best" is to turn her studio over to local

Garcia Nuñez will take over with *Sexual Domestics*, a photography and mixed-media exhibition. Tania hopes that during the closing weekend of inSite_05—Nov. 11-13—visitors will venture off the trodden trail and stop by her studio (located at Edificio Valencia, Calle 4ta 1518 Altos in Zona Centro in Tijuana) to see a few local artists' work and to introduce themselves to the Tijuana art scene in general.

Seeing clearly now

After the interview with Tania, I called a cab and had him drop me off on Avenida de Revolución. As I walked past the rows of bars, taquerias and vendors, I thought about all the things the typical Tijuana tourist is missing. My feet scuffed across the names, freshly painted on the Tijuana River pedestrian bridge, and I wondered how many people would see the paint, dig deeper and discover the connection with inSite_05. Of the few who would, how many would then dig even deeper to find people like Tania? Who knows. I stopped off to have a \$1 Corona and a fish taco and headed home. **CB**

Most of the inSite_05 projects and the museum exhibitions at the San Diego Museum of Art and the Centro Cultural Tijuana will be open through Nov. 13. For an upcoming schedule of special events, and more information about the closing weekend, Nov. 11 through 13, please visit www.insite05.org. If you're still confused, the infoSite in front of the Museum of Art is your best bet.



Three Tijuana artists trying to make a name: Ingrid Hernandez, Tania Candiani and Carmen Nunez.

et—TJ's nightlife had, apparently, done him in.

Tania—a smart 31-year-old who chose life-experience over a college education—was well-spoken. There were only a few times when the meaning of a word or phrase was

own hands to make these things happen," she explained.

Taka is the first artist featured in her studio. She proudly told me that the show had already won him an invitation to *Vitrinas de Experimentación Arística*, an upcoming col-



The "Hospitality" project colors the pedestrian bridge crossing the Tijuana River.

artists. Come November, Taka's work will be replaced with the photography of Ingrid Juliana Hernández. In January, Carmen