



As part of Javier Téllez's "One Flew Over the Void," Dave Smith traveled from Tijuana to Border Field State Park under cannon power. *Howard Lipin / Union-Tribune photos*

ART REVIEW

LAUNCHING inSITE05

Stunt brings home the meaning of San Diego-Tijuana art event

By Robert L. Pincus
ART CRITIC

The moment was the stuff of circuses and country fairs — a man shot from a cannon, reaching a height of about 150 feet and making a perfect arc toward the intended net. Dave Smith had executed the stunt innumerable times. He is, in fact, the world record holder for longest distance traveled by a human cannonball (185 feet, 10 inches in 1998). Just check the Guinness Book of Records.

But this day was different for Smith. It

was the first time he had left the cannon in Mexico and landed in the United States, transcending the fence at the Playa de Tijuana with its 20-foot poles. And it marked the first time he had performed as part of a project conceived by an artist.

DATEBOOK
"inSITE05"
Through Nov. 18
Various sites in San Diego and Tijuana
Free
(619) 230-0005 (San Diego), (011-52-664) 684-0095 (Tijuana) or www.insite.org

Javier Téllez's "One Flew Over the Void" had the highest profile of the artistic "interventions" making their debut Saturday, as inSITE05 opened in San Diego and Tijuana. Since 1992, with the first inSITE exhibition — this is the fifth — its organizers have commissioned projects by artists that respond to the region in a way each sees fit.

This year's version, for which Osvaldo Sánchez has served as artistic director, includes a major two-city exhibition divided between the San Diego Museum of Art and



Moments before being launched across the border, Dave Smith beckons to the crowd of hundreds from the mouth of the cannon.

► **INSITE05**

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Many projects will have lasting impact

the Centro Cultural Tijuana, titled "Far Sites," which includes 53 artists and artist groups.

There is a series of panels and symposia called "Conversations," a Transborder Mobile Archive that will make appearances at different locales throughout the run of inSITE05, online projects dubbed "Tijuana Calling," and a sound and images event, "Ellipsis," featuring four artists that will take place at Tijuana's Caliente Racetrack Sept. 25.

But it is the "interventions" that are at the heart of inSITE. For the viewer, all of them require an enterprising spirit, a willingness to seek out unorthodox locales and consider artist's process as well as the outcome.

As much as the cannon firing in Téllez's "One Flew Over the Void" could be enjoyed as pure stunt, it was also part of a long-standing collaboration between the Argentinian artist, Smith and the patients at a mental health center in Mexicali. Since November 2004, Téllez had been conducting workshops with the patients.

Smith's stunt offered its own sort of metaphor, obvious but seductive, about the transcendence of physical borders — a counterpoint to the fence as a symbol of fear and mistrust in the United States and Mexico.

The presence of the patients created its own sort of complexities. They marched along the beach, creating a carnival procession in their masks, costumes and placards. Their destination was a stage, set against a backdrop of their design, with the rollicking Tijuana Municipal Band and guest performers adding a soundtrack.

The look of the costumes fit the festive moment, but undercut it too. Seeing the patients in masks and comic outfits was a reminder of the way society marginalizes those with mental illnesses, as it does circus performers. The border between these patients and others is as palpable as the border fence.

Téllez wasn't making any overt, moralistic statement about all this himself. Instead, he was a director of a symbol-laden theatrical event that made these issues visceral. And the straightforward message of the placards, imploring the spectators to see them simply as human beings, had its own sort of power. Like Kesey's famed novel, to which Téllez's title explicitly refers, his project can't help but rattle your psyche.

"One Flew over the Void" may have been a fleeting event, but it will survive as video documentary. Other projects endure throughout inSITE05. Some designed to go the distance through Nov. 18, like Simparch's "Dirty Water Initiative" and Mark Bradford's "Malateros," intervene in ways that



Psychiatric patients from Mexicali were on stage during "One Flew Over the Void." They designed their backdrop: a flag patchwork hung on the border fence. *Howard Lipin / Union-Tribune*

could have effects even beyond the close of the exhibition.

Along the pedestrian walkway at the San Ysidro Border Crossing is a row of handsome stainless-steel containers by Simparch, an art collective, which serve as water purification units. They produce clean drinkable water through a solar heating system, elegant in its simplicity.

The entire set-up is an installation that is part minimalist-inspired sculpture and part Buckminster Fuller-style functional sculpture. In its present state, it is simply a demonstration. But all of these units will be donated to families in colonias, where the water supply is lacking.

Simparch's project has a gentle utopian spirit to it. But even utopian examples can effect real change, as the societal equivalent of a stone creating ripples in a pond.

A good number of the current projects may each end up being their own version of a

symbolic stone.

The young (and increasingly well known) Los Angeles artist Mark Bradford spent more than a year getting to know the informal, hidden network of porters or *malateros* on both sides of the border. For his intervention, "Malateros," he devised better carts for them. He also designed a place on the Mexican side of the divide for them to gather and for the public to better understand how they function.

Gonzalo Lebrija from Guadalajara spent time interviewing veterans who tell their stories on monitors spread throughout the Veteran's Museum and Memorial Center in Balboa Park. But along with this work for his "Heroes of War" project came

the obvious need to organize the books at the museum. Now they're neatly categorized and shelves are clearly labeled. Long after Lebrija's installation ends, users of its library will benefit, even if they're never heard of inSITE05.

And if you hear some good rumor about the region in the coming weeks, chances are it may have originated with a project by Swedish artist Måns Wrangé. He's set up a network of people and an informal system to spread a few positive messages about the border region, to counteract what he sees as a preoccupation with bad news.

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