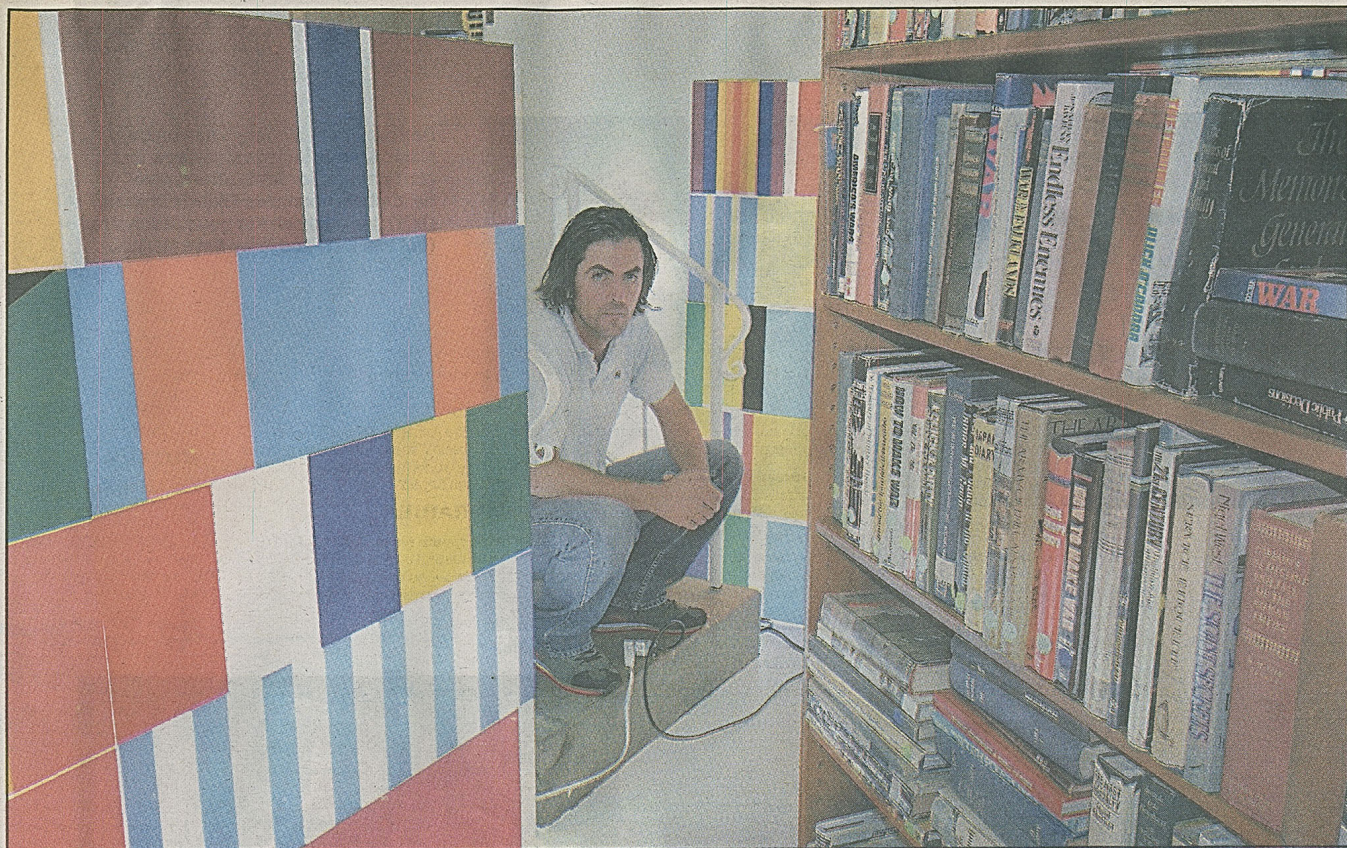


ART REVIEW



Gonzalo Lebrija, based in Guadalajara, has chosen as his inSITE05 project "Heroes of War." In a one-room library on the lower level of the Veterans Museum and Memorial Center in Balboa Park, he has placed monitors with veterans telling their stories. *Alfredo de Stefano*

A pair of artists capture individual stories while illuminating the larger group context

# CORE VALUES

By Robert L. Pincus  
ART CRITIC

The lives of American veterans and of porters at the San Ysidro border crossing are disparate subjects. Yet the artworks about these groups, created for the cross-border exhibition InSITE05, have a powerful quality in common.

In each case, the artist kept his eye on the thing that mattered most: the people at the core of his project. Perhaps that's why they are among the most memorable "interventions" on view.

For Gonzalo Lebrija, in "Heroes of War," the goal has been to reveal individual lives. For Mark Bradford, in "Maleteros," the aim has been to improve the working conditions of these porters, a loose network of laborers who have remained largely invisible.

Lebrija, based in Guadalajara, lets each veter-

## DATEBOOK

**"Heroes of War,"**  
an installation by Gonzalo Lebrija for inSITE05  
Through Nov. 13; Veterans Museum and  
Memorial Center, 2115 Park Blvd., Balboa Park  
Free; (619) 239-2300 or [www.insite05.org](http://www.insite05.org)

**"Maleteros,"**  
a project by Mark Bradford for inSITE05  
Through Nov. 13; The pedestrian walkway  
leading to the U.S. border  
Free; (619) 230-0005 or [www.insite05.org](http://www.insite05.org)

an (11 in all) tell his story without interruption, on videotape. The setting is modest: a one-room library on the lower level of the Veterans Memorial Center and Museum in Balboa Park. There is a monitor in each corner of the room and when you first enter you're likely to think they are carrying on a kind of conversation.

The multiple voices are to the point. The experience of veterans is in part a collective experience. But move closer to any monitor and you can hear a single story.

No matter how you feel about war in general — or any particular conflict — ends up being beside the point. Each tale is an intimate, individual narrative.

There is John J. McCann's story about surviving as a prisoner of war at the hands of the Japanese during World War II. "One hundred a day were dying, he recalls. "The only way to survive was to go out on work details." His days

often lasted 18 hours. But it was better than the alternative.

Paul Gabriel Fusco's account is less of war than war's end, focusing on the chaos of the evacuation process at the close of the Vietnam War. He was on a ship and helicopters were being piloted by people with virtually no experience; they would destroy parts of the ship as they landed or not make the ship at all. To make room for new ones, they would push the aircraft on deck into the sea; there simply wasn't room for both.

"There were feelings of emptiness and abandonment," Fusco says, "of leaving people to their own fate."

What emanates from all of the stories is less a conventional narrative of valor than survival — the desire to last one day simply to get to the next. All of these stories are heroic. And they are doubly painful to digest at a time when the war in Iraq is creating rising body counts.

Lebrija's project, for which Tania Ragasol served as curator, also hints at a gap between the individual stories and the sort of conventional heroism codified in the form of medals. The abstract imagery of medals plays a part in Lebrija's installation: as large light box panels that depict a large array of them. The connection and contrast between the interviews and these panels is subtle — perhaps too subtle. But it does trigger reflection on the gap between the

SEE Shows, 27



## ► SHOWS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

reality of war and the rhetoric that surrounds it.

"Heroes of War" needs a postscript, too, since it's had an impact on the Veterans Museum not readily apparent to viewers. It has enhanced the space in which it appears. Books in the library have been newly arranged and labeled. Old carpet was removed and the floor refurbished. Long after inSITE05 ends, the room will be emblematic of the value of this collaboration between artist and veterans.

## ART HAPPENING

**San Diego Museum of Art** 1450 El Prado, Balboa Park. Open Thursday 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Tuesday through Wednesday, Friday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (619) 232-7931. "Farsites: Urban Crisis and Domestic Symptoms in Recent Contemporary Art," part of a two-city, bi-national exhibition and inSITE\_05, features work in a variety of media that explore border issues through urban and domestic spaces. Runs through Nov. 13. "Maxfield Parrish, Master of Make-Believe," a comprehensive survey of the illustrator's career, runs through Sunday. Presented in conjunction with the Parrish exhibit, SDMA is presenting "Wedgwood's Fairyland Lustreware from the Collection of Maurice Kawahima," also running through Sunday.