

inSITE97, an effort was made toward refinement: the previously amorphous curatorial process was consolidated in the hands of four curators (Jessica Bradley of Canada, Olivier Debroise of Mexico, Ivo Mesquita of Brazil, and Sally Yard of the United States); the roster of artists trimmed to 50 (all based in 11 countries in the Americas); and the organization handled equally by Installation, a San Diego non-profit, and Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes.

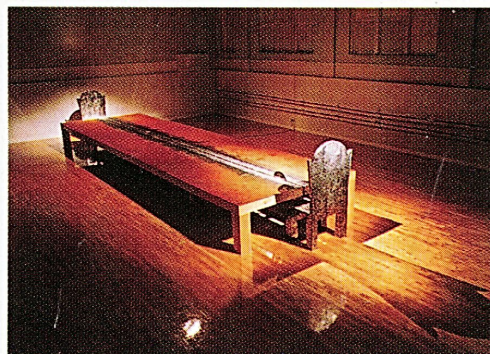
Despite these structural improvements, however, inSITE97 was an exercise in diffusion. It was a theme show without a clearly stated theme, a group show whose participants formed no meaningful group, and a site-specific show whose sites defied any commonalities in nature, function, and accessibility. Against these formidable odds, only a handful of works made a strong impression.

During residencies of variable length in the year leading up to the show, the commissioned artists steeped themselves in the rich physical ambience and contentious politics of the border region. Most gravitated, naturally, toward using the inexhaustible phenomenon of the border itself as subject or site. Nevertheless, inSITE's curators explicitly avoided pegging the event as a "border exhibition," and framed it instead in terms of public space, an elastic term that stretched, for the purposes of the exhibition, to include sites of 24-hour accessibility—storefront windows, theater signs, and the Tijuana

San Diego and Tijuana

inSITE97

InSITE97 was the third in a series of binational exhibitions of art in public places that has operated at a high order of magnitude since its inception in 1992. Each incarnation of the project has engaged the talents of up to 100 artists from around the world and occupied dozens of sites spread out across Tijuana and San Diego. For



seashore—as well as others that became accessible only during inSITE, such as unused sections of San Diego's Santa Fe Depot, the basement of a children's museum, and a private home in Tijuana. As a result, the notion of public engagement that stands as one of inSITE's *raison d'être* devolved into a false premise; some of the works could be happened upon by an unintentional audience, but most would be seen only by the determined and self-selected, as with conventional museum and gallery exhibitions. The unconventional sites and far-flung footprint of the show turned the experience into an adventure

screened in a bare room in the Santa Fe Depot, and had little relationship, if any, to its site. Deborah Small (in collaboration with William Bradbury, Dana Case, and Patricia Mendenhall) took full physical and spiritual occupancy of several adjoining rooms next door, painting them a deep royal blue, filling them with living plants in pots, dried herbs hanging from the rafters, and snakeskins lining a central pillar. *Rowing in Eden* centered around a richly textured multimedia projection piece exploring the profound links between women, herbs, and healing, and the persecution that this threatening "witchcraft" has

tographs of Mexican workers and North American excess, Miguel Rio Branco's meditative visual tapestry inspired by the border and the body, and Jamex and Einar de la Torre's pyramid of vinyl, fake fur, and glass, a wild thrash of rebellion against Mexican Catholicism. True to the site-specific concept of the show, these works attempted to distill meaning from the locale, to define and even redefine it.

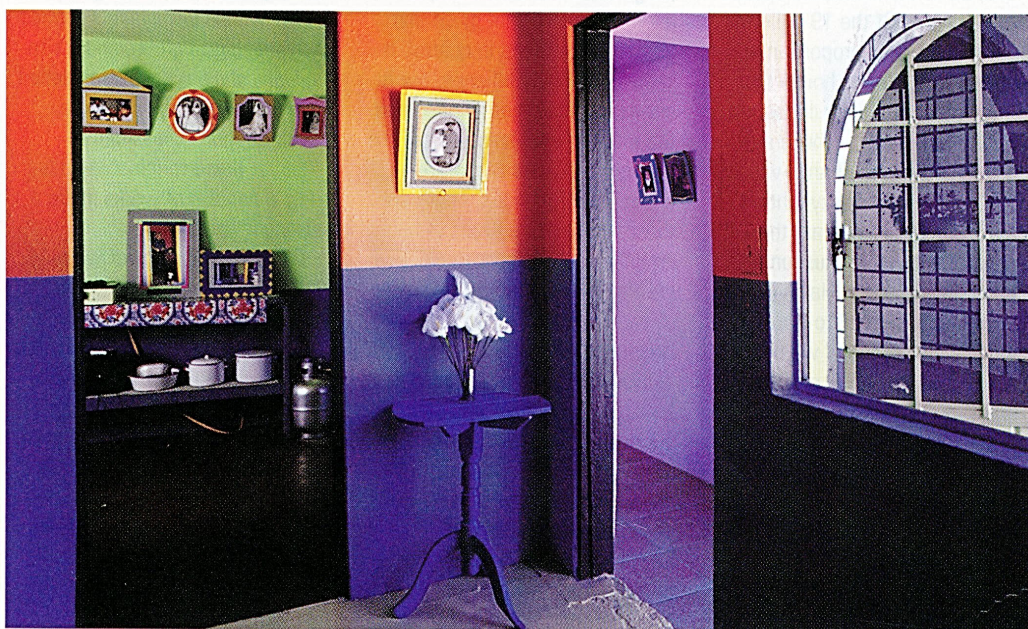
Quite a few others—Quisqueya Henríquez, Gonzalo Díaz, Anna Maria Maiolino, Daniela Rossell, and Pablo Vargas Lugo—failed to engage the charged context of the region in any but a superficial

grace, and beauty, reinforcing the notion that the border is at once an intimate experience and a global phenomenon. Marcos Ramírez (known as ERRE, and collaborating with Hugo Josué Castro Mejía, Javier Galaviz Sánchez, José Julio Orozco García, and Alejandro Zacarías Soto) constructed a stately, 30-foot-tall, two-headed horse out of wooden slats and parked it on the southern side of the border crossing. Towering over the sluggish lines of traffic heading into the United States, this Trojan-style decoy, with a ladder leading up to its belly and its two heads facing in opposite directions, asserted the mutuality of "invasion," but also the possibility and naturalness of interdependence of a less aggressive sort. Rich with political and poetic suggestion, the horse made a poignant monument to the more elusive, unquantifiable elements of binational exchange.

Patricia Patterson (collaborating with Trinidad de León) broke down the barriers between tourist and citizen by inviting visitors into a private home in Tijuana that she transformed into a celebration of vibrant color. The setting of *La Casita en la Colonia Altamira* was at once rarefied—with its walls of turquoise, rose, gold, and tangerine—and also functional, a working home. An intense and yet serene space, the "Casita" fully integrated site, voice, and the binational spirit underlying inSITE97.

Whether it called itself that or not, inSITE97 was at its best being a "border show," overtly assuming the challenge and opportunity of sustaining new visions within the charged landscape of the border itself. When that potential wasn't met or even addressed, inSITE withered, and in a setting already so saturated with meaning, the art had no purpose (to paraphrase artist Robert Filio) except to reveal how much more interesting life is.

—Leah Ollman



Patricia Patterson, *La Casita en la Colonia Altamira*, 1997. Mixed-media installation.

but not necessarily a revelation.

The tremendous variety of sites generated an equally diverse range of strategies to engage with them, from subversion to transcendence to simple occupation. Lorna Simpson's mildly engaging short film, *Call Waiting*, tracked several overlapping telephone conversations that skipped from English to Spanish, Chinese to Punjabi. This dramatized slice of multicultural American life was

provoked through history. The installation had tremendous sensual and intellectual presence.

Cultural idiosyncrasies on both sides of the border and the extreme visual disjunctions that occur where Mexico meets the United States fueled many of the works in inSITE97, such as Judith Barry's eye-popping video billboard contrasting land use in the border cities, Rubén Ortiz Torres's bizarre exaggeration of the souped-up low-rider, Thomas Glassford's video spoof on San Diego's leisure economy, Allan Sekula's quietly powerful pho-

way. Tony Capellán reduced the complexities of the border to an affecting, edgy metaphor in *The Good Neighbor*. A high-backed chair stood at each end of a massive table, while a saw blade roared deafeningly down the middle, splitting the table in half and keeping the wound ever raw. David Lamelas, on the other hand, simplified the context down to a facile, bipolar juxtaposition of light and dark corridors in *The Other Side*.

Two of the strongest projects in the show approached the conflation of countries with aplomb,