

Sculpture



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Judy Pfaff

Stone Sculpture

Public Art in Brazil

inSITE97

**Sculpture Conference
Registration Brochure**

“The underlying thread is for the artists to work in public space, in subject as well as context.”

—Sally Yard, Curator,
inSITE97

Negotiating Boundaries

Artists Explore

THE TIJUANA - SAN DIEGO BORDER

Sandra Wagner interviews five inSITE97 artists

InSITE97 was the third in a triennial exhibition series held in the Tijuana-San Diego area in which up to 100 artists are invited to produce artworks relating to the dynamics of the U.S.-Mexico border. The following interviews, with artists Marcos Ramírez, Helen Escobedo, Louis Hock, Jamex and Einar de la Torre, and Quisqueya Henríquez were conducted shortly after the opening.

Marcos Ramírez

Marcos Ramírez is one of four artists invited for a second time to participate in inSITE. His two-headed wooden horse on wheels, titled *Toy and Horse*, was constructed with the help of local collaborators, and was installed directly on the boundary line between the United States and Mexico.

Sandra Wagner: What has influenced your work?

Marcos Ramírez: The main subject I work with is the border. What impresses me the most is Carlos Fuentes's idea of the border as a scar. I am part of a group, *RevolucionArte*, which is made up of three Americans and six Mexicans. We had a show called “Fronteras” (“Borders”) at the Centro Cultural Tijuana. I was tired of the topic at the time, but I developed a game that would invite the public to participate in a classroom installation that includes borders worldwide. I like to deal in my work with being on the

other side of the border, the other side of the knife. We each deal with the subject of the border from a completely different point of view.

Everyone forgets the people who work and live in both the United States and Mexico. I live in Mexico and often work in the United States. It's what I know best, it is where I operate. Still the border is part of me and it is a scar.

Wagner: You also have certain materials you like to use. Why?

Ramírez: I like to use wood. The formal part of it is interesting to me. I often work with wood because I am a skilled craftsman with this material and I work in construction.

Wagner: Your piece in inSITE94 was very different from what you are doing now. How have you evolved as an artist?

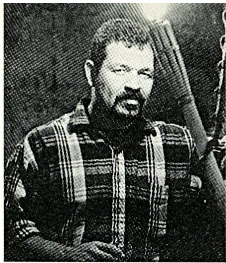
Ramírez: Both pieces required the same amount of effort. For the shanty I recreated in inSITE94, I had to forget

that I was a skilled carpenter, and to develop the artist side of myself because the artist wasn't so sure. Now, I am more mature as an artist and want to use my talent as a craftsman with a work that is well-constructed formally.

The inSITE94 piece was not about the border, it was about Tijuana. It was about borders of poverty and wealth within Mexico. It was criticizing inSITE at the same time, because inSITE portrayed a rich facade for a city that is not well-developed. There is a lot of poverty in the area and I wanted to construct the house accurately to show the lack of security and stability in the way so many people live. Art critics described the houses as temporary migrant shelters for people waiting to cross the border and that's not necessarily true, they are also used as families' homes. It says a lot about how the United States perceives Mexico.

Between the two inSITE shows, I did a piece with a grant from the Baja California government called *187 Pares de Manos* (187 Pairs of Hands) based on California State Proposition 187 that would prohibit migratory workers from coming into the United States. The installation was composed of 187 photographs of hands of Mexican- and Central-American people working in their major California job areas: hotel services, fruit-picking, and construction. The show opened at the Centro Cultural in Tijuana the same day that the Republican National Convention opened in San Diego. This work also represented Mexico in the 1997 Havana Biennale.

187 was not about the border either. It dealt with those issues, but it was more about California. It was about how anyone who looks Latino is scrutinized and subjected to mistreatment in the United States. The people I photographed for this project could not understand how and why a Baja California-funded project was dealing



Marcos Ramírez

with a California issue. My only explanation was that these problems are really universal. I live in Mexico and it is something that is important to me.

Helen Escobedo

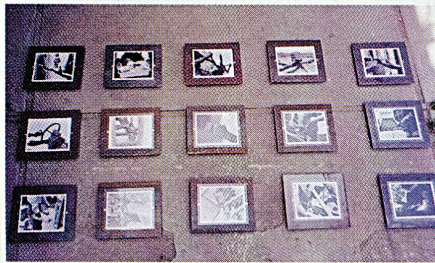
Helen Escobedo is a returning inSITE artist whose three-room collaborative installation for inSITE97 was constructed in an abandoned Carnation milk factory in Tijuana. The installation was site specific, dealing with milk in terms of its source, meaning, production, and marketing.

Wagner: What is your concept of space, and your idea of objects related to space?

Helen Escobedo: I am extremely site-specific as an artist. I believe in process rather than the final product. I am interested in the actual act of creating, the act of putting things together. I am not interested in what happens to it afterwards. Whenever I have finished an installation, I usually leave the next day. Those that have helped me with the work will inform me of what happens by making a log book of events.

Because I am the sort of artist that “has toothbrush, will travel,” I take nothing with me and bring nothing back. I don’t require packing, crating, insurance, or unpacking, nothing. I simply arrive, choose a site, do something extremely specific to the site and beg, borrow, steal, or find materials that can be left behind, recycled, returned, or given away. For inSITE94, I did a project right up against the U.S.-Mexico border wall, on the Mexico side. I made three boats out of steel mesh located exactly where the border wall plunges into the sea. One would think it would be easy to swim around, but it is very dangerous because the patrols are just on the other side. So, using black humor, I put a nonfunctional, conceptual catapult on each boat with coconuts as ammunition.

This time I was invited back, along with three other artists, and each of us



Above, top: Marcos Ramírez, *Toy and Horse*, 1997. Metal and wood, 30 ft. high.
Above: *187 Pares de Manos (187 Pairs of Hands)*, 1996. Photographs.

led a team of younger artists to show them what installations are about and how to work as a team. I chose three Mexican colleagues: a painter, an architect and a sculptor/designer. We chose the ReinCarnation Project building, the old Carnation milk processing plant, because it is so full of echoes of the past, so full of lactose ideas. What we found there was something we could reinvent. We chose the room that was known as the launderette. The idea was, “What on earth could they have laundered here, they didn’t launder milk, they must have laundered cows, to take the spots off the cows.”

Wagner: This is quite different from your last inSITE installation in ’94.

Escobedo: It was the first time I had been to Tijuana and spoken with the people, and I was confronted with the wall in all its horror. On the Tijuana side there were all these lovely families looking over the wall as if it were the promised land, and you know intu-

itively what is going to happen to them, the slow process of disintegration when once again there is no way over, but they cannot go back home because they’ve spent their last penny and they must stay in Tijuana. It is the process of human disintegration, which to me was extremely shocking. I became very involved in the project, making hopeless boats with the sadness of knowing that people actually slept in them. So this time, because I decided to come over to this side, we all got into a kind of spoofer humor, because there was heavier work going on with other inSITE projects. We’d been hearing what the projects were going to be about, and I thought that milk was an important subject matter.

Wagner: What have you done in your own projects between inSITE94 and inSITE97?

Escobedo: I live six months in Hamburg, Germany, and six months in Mexico City. I have a studio in both places. I try to split my exhibitions into two parts of the world; when I am in Mexico, I try to do my installations in the Americas, and when I am in Germany, I work in Europe. In Germany, I recently did an installation in a 15th-century cloister, and then in Hamburg’s central park. The cloister is the very large Borge Cloister Lubeck. I chose the hospital room of this beautiful place. Because there are remnants of the ancient Roman system of heating on the floor, they think it was a hospital room. I recreated the atmosphere by collecting pallets and bottles, made line figures in sand, and built a mosaic of broken glass—in the image of what humans would look like with the title of the piece being *Broken Images* (1997)—seen through sheer curtains. It is installed now and will be up for six months. Apparently, the public has asked for it to remain because it gives the idea of how it must have worked.

I also did a piece in Hamburg’s central park that was influenced by the



Helen Escobedo

news and hearing about 50 million refugees. The city has a history of its own with deporting refugees. What I wanted to do was create 101 refugees made from five tons of hay. They were standing with heavy poles and during the three weeks it was up, 40 of them were vandalized, and eight of them were burned. And the curious thing is that the audience thought that it was part of the project, and more figures were down as they passed by every day. I let it stay like that for three weeks. It activated a lot of things, but it was not political aggression, which is what everyone was afraid of, it was vandalism. But it got a lot of press.

Wagner: How do you come across your ideas? Are you influenced by ideas on TV and or do the exhibition organizers approach you?

Escobedo: I had the refugee idea for at least three years. I had seen what seemed to be refugees on the sides of hills in Austria, but it was actually just hay drying vertically. So, I was funded by the United Nations Fund for Refugees. I worked with students and most of the materials were donated.

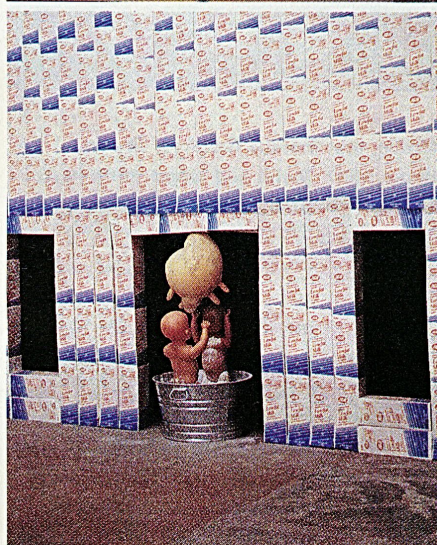
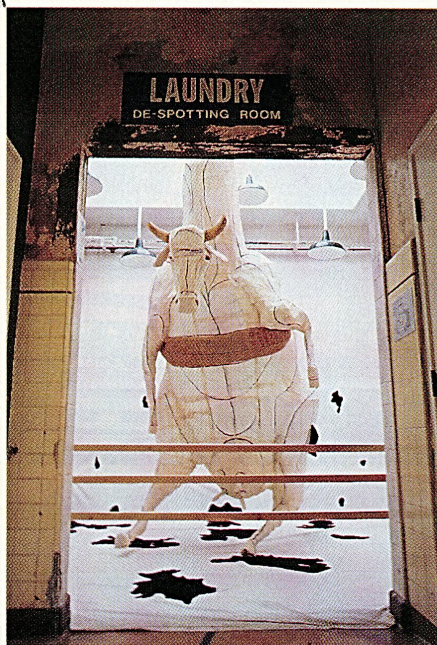
I think the most important part was what happened to the piece publicly. A dance school dressed in hay-colored robes and acted out a scene of wailing at the site. One night a group of Bosnian refugees went and held onto the figures because they themselves were about to be deported. Germany has reached its limit in refugees. The piece cultivated a lot of community interaction.

Quiqueya Henríquez

Quiqueya Henríquez's work ranges from photography to installation. For this exhibition, she created a grid of posts surmounted by crosses, using paper, wood, and graphite, that gave viewers the sensation of entering a drawing.

Wagner: Did you choose the space for your inSITE residency early on?

Henríquez: Yes, I knew I wanted the



Above: Helen Escobedo, *Milk at the L'Ubre Mooseum* (views of two rooms), 1997. Mixed-media installation.

space as soon as I saw it. The untitled piece is a grid and it relates to the space; it's very site-specific. I worked with the idea of a space with two doors, one that has a recessed level and divides the space horizontally in equal parts. The movement of the spectator inside the space is controlled by this grid of crosses. I use the grid as an element of classification and order, working with the need to classify in order to understand a phenomenon.

Everything is classified: cities are classified by streets, our society classifies everything. So what I did was to control the movement of the viewer inside the space like on the city streets. Also the material is very important; the installation is made of horizontal paper crosses. The material is what you start with at the beginning of any project—it is a maquette in real three-dimensional space. I wanted the spectator to enter a real space filled with unreal objects. The project features monochromatic crosses, which initially trick the viewer's eye, then they can navigate and interact with it.

The space itself is very important. There are two doors: one to enter, one to exit. Once viewers are inside, they have to navigate their journey and make rational, controlled movements inside the space. I wanted to give the viewer some extremes connected with the thematic between San Diego and Tijuana, but I didn't want to make a piece with a direct discourse. I wanted the viewer to feel that it was something that they could interpret on their own individual level.

Wagner: Your installations are quite diverse in material and concept. Where is the piece that is a wall made of inflated plastic bags?

Quiqueya Henríquez: That piece was very fragile. It was up for almost a month, but it is so hot in Miami that all of the bags exploded. It was part of The Warehouse Project by artists from Miami. We were looking for a place to show our work because in Miami there are no alternative spaces, just museums. We wanted to do something separate from institutions and the curatorial process. The Warehouse Project was a great space and idea. There were seven artists and six pieces. My piece is a collaboration with Consuela Costinera. Jose Bédia and Teresita Fernandez also participated.

Wagner: Do you still have the space?

Henríquez: No, it is amazing, the space is now divided between two galleries,



and one of them is the gallery that represents me. But now we are where we were with no alternative art spaces.

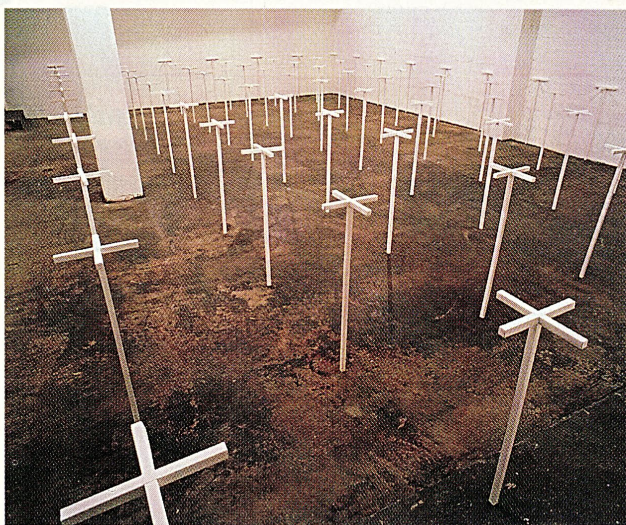
Wagner: Can you describe some other works you've done recently?

Henríquez: One recent piece was a minimal installation of 224 photographs of my cupped hands, on the ceiling and floor. Viewers try to enter the imaginary space, but they can't. It is a fragile and frustrating piece because it is inviting viewers into the space, but they're not allowed in. The curator called me the "architect of air," because there was nothing on the walls.

Another work, titled *The Idea of Fragmentation*, was a piece of canvas where all the threads were separated into two mounds, one of vertical threads, the other of horizontal threads. It was a deconstruction of painting. I have a show at the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore in October 1997 with work from 1991 to 1996 plus new work commissioned by the museum—two cupolas and columns, one on the floor, one on the ceiling. It will be about the relation between two and three-dimensional form. Then, in November, I have another project in Miami which is an exchange between Brazil and Miami.

Louis Hock

Louis Hock is a film, video, public art, and installation artist whose work for inSITE97 included a drinking fountain whose pipes pierced the fence along the border and extended 15 feet on either side. Originally, the piece also included a "window" in the wall, through which someone drinking from the fountain could see the other side. The Border Patrol, however, replaced the solid wall with a chain-link fence during the exhibition, allowing an open view across the border and eliminating Hock's window.



Quisqueya Henríquez, *untitled (detail)*, 1997. Wood, paper, and graphite pencil, (each cross), 3 ft. high.

Wagner: Would you like to comment on the provocative art that you and a group of San Diego artists have been doing since the '80s?

Loius Hock: We are a loose group of friends that participated in projects together when topics came up that were sufficiently interesting to lure us away from our individual careers. The artists have varied with each project and have included Elizabeth Sisco, Deborah Small, David Avalos, and a number of others. We were intentionally nameless as a group because we weren't really a group. Each project was seen as a singular public art event. What we tried to do is initiate a dialogue, invite a community performance through a provocative event. We always needed to create a physical space for the event because public space, for art or anything else, really doesn't exist today.

In the first collaboration we bought back advertising space on the backs of city buses with city grant money. The

action's incendiary presence in the news media then created a larger space for a public dialogue to occur. The work's site bloomed from a physical to a conceptual space. We also bought billboard spaces and rented commercial property to create a space for other projects to operate. With *Arte Reembolso* (1993) we worked the street corners, rebating \$10 bills to taxpayers, particularly undocumented taxpayers.

It was very difficult for the U.S. public to imagine when they said "we taxpayers" that the "we" in question included undocumented immigrants.

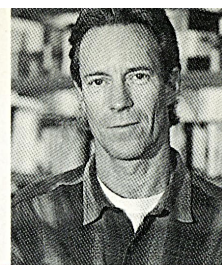
We attempted to participate in the community narrative as citizen artists. In the case of *Welcome to America's Finest Tourist Plantation* (1988), the city's public relations machine was advertising a San Diego for the Superbowl in 1988 that was unrecognizable to the people that lived here. The ads never acknowledged that the reason you could have a successful Superbowl was because of the low cost of the undocumented labor in the restaurant and hotel industry. We thought we should bring it up so that when people read about the undocumented people in their hometown newspapers, the visitors would know how they personally benefited from the workers' presence.

The performance really took place in the community. So it wasn't art in public, it was public art. When the community talked about the work, then the work became alive. A lot of people confused the bus poster or the billboard with the artwork, but it was always much more about the dialogue that these components engendered. The art was the public performance.

In the past a community was primarily centered around physical proximity—dialogue with your neighbors. Now your community is who you talk to on the phone or computer, it does

**The border
is enormously
charged, rich
with monuments.**

Louis Hock



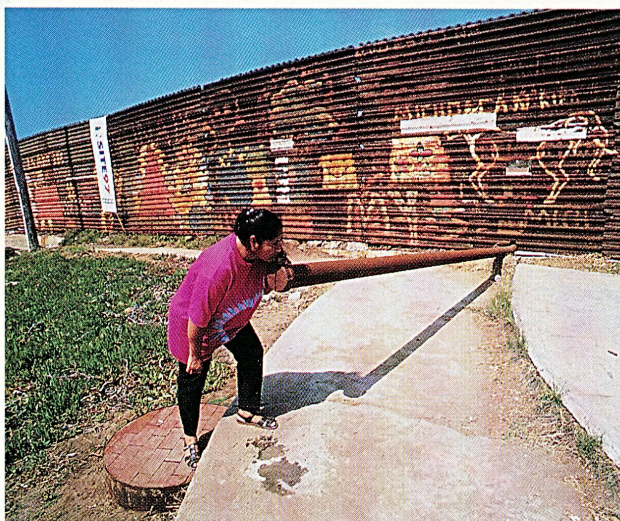
not necessarily have a geographical basis. Much of our public performance took place in the media: phone, fax machine, e-mail, newspapers, and TV. That's now the community space, a contemporary space for public art to operate.

Wagner: How do you develop your concepts?

Hock: I am just finishing a feature-length motion picture film called *La Mera Frontera* (1997), which means the absolute, the very border. The film is a meditation on Nogales, Sonora, and Nogales, Arizona, and the last battle between the United States and Mexico that was fought there. The inSITE project was interesting to me because the film was gobbling up all of my time and yet I had an idea that I thought would be conceptually sophisticated, but practically simple and not personally labor-intensive. The public art project also shared some ideas with the film. I was fortunate to have Nina Karavasiles and Scott Richards helping me construct things. I had never done that before. I was always the person that was grinding or shaving, I always wanted my hands right on it, to get it right. But they allowed me to have the luxury of approaching a very physical sculpture as a conceptual artist.

Wagner: The actual look of it, though, is as if it had been there for decades.

Hock: It rusted in about three days, since it is located only a hundred yards from the ocean. I was interested in taking a part of the border that, to me, was enormously charged, rich, not neutral—there are tons of monuments in the area. There are 258 obelisks, running from the Rio Grande in Texas, along the border to the Pacific Ocean. They were laid there in the 1890s to newly define a national boundary. My project for inSITE is next to the last obelisk. Then there is the border fence itself, clearly a significant monument.



Louis Hock, *International Waters*, 1997. Filter, water pipe, and mixed media.

The 1972 plaque and a flagpole on both sides of the border mark the “friendship parks.” Then there is the bull ring on one side and Border Patrol on the other; both are clearly unique national monuments.

I wanted to enter into discourse with that field of monuments so that I could operate in its vernacular. Rather than have the work function in contrast to the materials, I wanted it to stand out in a conceptual way. I wanted to use the same components that were already there—the bricks, pipes, and fences—so that the work would be able to interact with the other materials present as players in the field of monuments, not to trumpet a distinction, but to share in the same kind of formal discourse. I really wanted to make it fall into the landscape of the monuments.

There were originally bars around the obelisk, so that no one would steal the Italian marble. The 1972 “Friendship Park” monument had flagpoles that are now sawed off at the ground.

Is El Niño a good or bad baby; will it be sacrificed or will it sacrifice us?

So the monument field is continually evolving. I thought it would be great to engage the field of monuments, at least temporarily, and play off people's expectations.

Wagner: What are you trying to achieve with the water element?

Hock: If you're going to construct a public artwork, one of the things you want to be able to do is have multiple avenues of access. Kids can come and

drink out of the water fountain and not read the plaque and it has a certain function. It's interesting and curious and they get a drink. Other people are willing to stand around, read the plaque, follow the line of the water, look at the tank, look at the other side, spend some time, think a bit, and get a whole different kind of reading. And those people who bring more to the border, their own histories, understand the work. My idea is to start with something fundamental, a drink of water, and then have people be able to engage the piece in different ways and degrees. It has a means of access to whomever might encounter it.

Einar and Jamex de la Torre

The de la Torre brothers are multimedia artists whose work for inSITE97 was an Aztec-style pyramid, constructed of cushioned vinyl panels, glass stairs, fur, cast-plaster arms holding broken wine bottles, and blown glass elements representing blood, flames, and a human heart in which putti figures floated. The artists state that the work expresses the dislocations and excesses of the border region.

Wagner: You're known for creating provocative art in bright colors using a lot of different mediums, and now on a huge scale. Is this the largest piece you've ever done?

Einar de la Torre: Oh yeah. Normally the work would be even more sculptural. We didn't want it to be a big



Einar and Jamex de la Torre

sculpture, but we really wanted this space. For a while, there was a question about being placed in San Diego, but we needed the Centro Cultural Tijuana specifically because the work needed to clash with the Centro's Brasilia type of architecture, with the feeling of a bright future, the utopia that never happened here in Tijuana.

Wagner: How was the heart installed?

Einar: We had the help of a lot of people. But it is easy to disassemble.

We're very interested in the work going to other venues. As long as we're producing it in the context of the border, it can be shown anywhere. It's so big that the limiting factor in installing it is the doors it must go through, so it is ironic that the architectural piece is dependent on the architecture of the building.

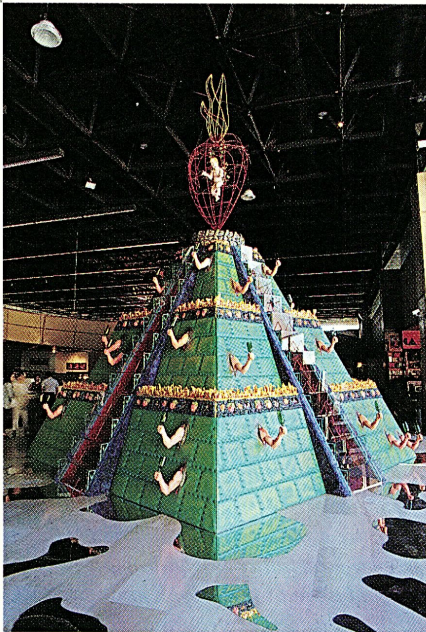
Wagner: How did you build it?

Einar: We first made it on our ranch in Ensenada. We assembled it there, but not fully, because we wanted to see colors and proportions. We put time into thinking about these combinations, especially because we work with a great range of materials—everything is fair game.

Wagner: Why did you choose these materials?

Einar: The vinyl is very much part of the region. Immediately after you cross the border, everyone wants to re-upholster your seats. You see these wonderful color-combinations of vinyl, the gaudy vinyl Mexican restaurant seats that we like too, and the plaster Tweety Bird products you can get everywhere around here.

What we normally use in our work is blown glass, like we used for the hands on the steps. We love the medium of blown glass sculpture because nothing is as immediate. With a crew of five people, we can produce a fairly large work that's out of the kiln the next day. There's a spontaneity and you have to shoot from the hip. A lot of creativity happens in those moments where we let the process just flow. So



Einar and Jamex de la Torre, *El Niño*, 1997.
Glass, plaster, vinyl, fur, and mixed media,
12 ft. tall.

there is a complete contrast between that and pieces for which we don't blow glass. But we don't want to limit ourselves by being "glass artists." It's similar to being known as "border artists" because we live in the border region

Jamex de la Torre: Why limit yourself, why feel limited?

Einar: What we liked about this project was that we were able to do a large-scale exhibition. We enjoyed doing it, but we will have to see what reaction it gets. A lot of the biennials have that emphasis on installation art. Hopefully we will be considered for these types of exhibitions, and that is another whole world in itself.

Wagner: Thematically your work incorporates figurative elements, things that people can relate to.

Einar: Here, it is *El Niño*, which is responsible for the bad weather that we will experience. The *Niño* is a cyclical thing. We're asking, is it a good or bad baby, is it leaving or is it locked up, is he going to be sacrificed or is he going to sacrifice us? We have no idea and I think that ambiguity is important to our work. This work has

turned out to be a lot about identity and the reaction. We haven't shown much in Mexico and most of our shows have been in the States. As Mexicans ourselves, we considered this a big vacuum in our career; we would love to take this to Mexico City.

Wagner: What's it like collaborating with your brother?

Einar: We think it's really interesting that people ask us this so much because, in the United States, people don't even talk to their brothers. We don't work together all the time, generally our shows are one-third mine, one-third his, and one-third collaborative, but it all ties in. In this case, that's the way they gave us the project. It would be fun to do separate projects in the same show and maybe the pieces would work off each other, maybe in a strange way that we wouldn't know of until the end. But it is a question that is raised all the time.

Wagner: Do you work well together?

Jamex: I think we work very well together, but stylistically we work differently. Generally speaking, I am much more of a sculptor, Einar is more of a painter, but we both sculpt and paint.

Einar: Generally, he loves starting work and engineering—I think sculpture is a lot about engineering—and I like finishing the work, so we work very well together.

Jamex: I went to Long Beach State and took figurative sculpture.

Einar: So he gravitated to the figurative side of things and I experimented more with the shrine. I looked at things more ritualistically and Jamex dealt more with the human body. And of course now that we have worked together so often those lines are blurred a lot; we've influenced each other, that's inevitable.

Sandra Wagner is a writer and frequent contributor to Sculpture. She lives in San Diego.