

# THE MEXICALI EXPERIMENTAL PROJECT

This exhibition is the result of over two years of conversations and collaborations between institutions, artists, researchers, architects, and writers around The Mexicali Experimental Project, a low-cost housing proposal built between 1975 and 1976 by Christopher Alexander and a team of collaborators from the Autonomous University of Baja California (UABC) and the University of California, Berkeley.

The research process began when INSITE commissioned Mexicali-based artist Pastizal Zamudio to create a project for Commonplaces, a curatorial initiative led by Andrea Torreblanca that explores the microhistories of the Mexico-U.S. border region. During their initial conversations, Zamudio shared that they had spent the early years of their life in a section of Alexander's project known as the builder's yard or *El Sitio*, a group of buildings adjacent to the homes of the five families who participated in the design and construction of the original project, that served as model house, meeting center, and manufacturing workshop, and which is now under the protection of UABC.

Zamudio developed a site-specific installation that revisited Alexander's main ideas about vernacular, emotional, and spiritual architecture. This collaboration prompted new reflections on the history of The Mexicali Experimental Project and highlighted the importance of recovering its unique legacy. At the same time, Felipe Orensanz, who has been coordinating a project with Rodrigo Durán to document and analyze Alexander's proposal within the framework of modern Mexico's social housing policies, joined this effort.

In May 2023, INSITE and the School of Architecture and Design at UABC, under the direction of Alejandro Peimbert, organized a three-day gathering at El Sitio, which included Zamudio's installation and a temporary pavilion designed by Veintedoce —Beatriz Villegas and Ángel Verduzco—and Localista —Giancarlo Reyes—, that hosted a series of roundtable discussions with Rudy Argote, Georgina Cebey, Adriana Cuéllar, Marcel Sánchez, Teddy Cruz, Alejandro D'Acosta, Howard Davis, A. J. Kim, Michael Mehaffy, Felipe Orensanz, Alejandro Peimbert, Andrea Torreblanca, and Lorenia Urbalejo.

Subsequently, INSITE decided to expand these collective reflections through two additional efforts. The first was the number 7 of the *INSITE Journal*, edited by Torreblanca, with essays by Georgina Cebey, Dorit Fromm, A. J. Kim, Nancy Kwak, Felipe Orensanz, and Alejandro Peimbert, as well as excerpts from the 2023 conversations. The second is this exhibition, presented first in November 2024 at the Bread & Salt gallery in San Diego, and then at the UABC Institute for Cultural Research-Museum in Mexicali.

This collective initiative seeks to analyze the multiple layers of The Mexicali Experimental Project through a critical, multidimensional lens. It includes new artistic commissions by Pastizal Zamudio and Cynthia Hooper, as well as material from various archives, including The Christopher Alexander & Center for Environmental Structure Archive, and the personal collections of Alexander's collaborators Dorit Fromm, Peter Bosselmann, and Howard Davis. It was curated by Andrea Torreblanca in collaboration with Felipe Orensanz, while Adriana Cuéllar and Marcel Sánchez of CRO Studio conceived the exhibition design, and Alejandro Magallanes developed the visual identity.

Throughout its different editions, the exhibition has been enhanced by a rich public program, including conversations with artists, scholars, architects, and urbanists such as Judith Barry, Thom Mayne, Ginger Nolan, Teddy Cruz, Fonna Forman, Renee Chow, Jessica Sevilla, Juliana Maxim, Dorit Fromm, and Peter Bosselmann, and different pedagogical activities such as workshops, fieldtrips, publications, and discussions, developed in coordination with the Transborder Association of Architectural Education (TAAE/ATEA).