

DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM REGION,  
inSITE97 ARTISTS CREATE PROJECTS  
THAT SPAN CULTURES – AND GENRES

# border

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JOHN GASTALDO / Union-Tribune

**Teaming up:** Los Angeles artist Rubén Ortíz-Torres (right) with San Ysidro car customizer Salvador "Chava" Muñoz.

## Car

Project makes for an unlikely pairing

*Continued from E-1*

For his theater on wheels, Ortíz-Torres will collaborate with Muñoz. But before work can begin, they need a truck. And the artist, with a new copy of *Truck Trader* magazine in hand, is looking for guidance from the nationally known car customizer for the big acquisition.

A deadline looms. They'll need to have the one-of-a-kind vehicle ready by Sept. 26, when inSITE97 opens. The plan is for UCO — Ortíz-Torres' acronym for Unidentified Cruising Object — to appear at several locations before the sprawling binational exhibition closes Nov. 30. He'll show "Alien Toy," a sci-fi-style video that makes use of puppets and sundry kitsch icons and playthings.

Ortíz-Torres and Muñoz are a highly improbable pair. In Mexico, where they were born, it's almost certain they never would have met. But then, this is America.

Ortíz-Torres, 33, who divides his time between Los Angeles and Mexico City, had a privileged, cosmopolitan upbringing. Muñoz, who lives in San Ysidro, is a working-class guy who creates his "Radical Class" cars — the name for the most free-form category of customized autos — in the garage of his modest home.

Muñoz's house has a corner of the living room filled with trophies: blue, purple and red. Most are first-place awards for "Bed Dancing, Radical Class." On the other side of the living room, the photographs — rather than the static truck in his garage — illustrate what that term means. The back portion of a bed-dancing truck lifts and moves like an automotive kin to the kinetic art of the late Jean Tinguely.

After the drive to Muñoz's house and a quick tour of the garage, this

system that turned it into an abstract sculpture," he recalls, as we're heading south on I-5 toward San Ysidro in his Nissan pickup.

Our destination is the house of the man who built that car, Salvador Muñoz. Ortíz-Torres, wearing small, stylish glasses and a red cap with the L.A. Dodgers logo, discusses baseball stats with as much zeal as he does art and theories of art while traveling down the freeway.

**By Robert L. Pincus**  
ART CRITIC

Artist Rubén Ortíz-Torres can't quite pinpoint the moment he first imagined a customized car as a mobile video theater. He thinks the idea may have lodged itself in his head during his grad-school days at CalArts in Valencia during the early '90s. But the way to accomplish that idea crystallized when he was leafing through a lowrider magazine and a small photograph caught his eye.

"It pictured a car that had a hydraulic

## Ortíz-Torres shifts gears, medium to create video theater on wheels



# Painter transforms Tijuana house using universal language: color

By Ann Jarmusch  
ARTS CRITIC

**T**IJUANA — In a foreign land of brilliant colors with names such as *tangerina* and *azul bikini*, artist Patricia Patterson is making a spectacular site.

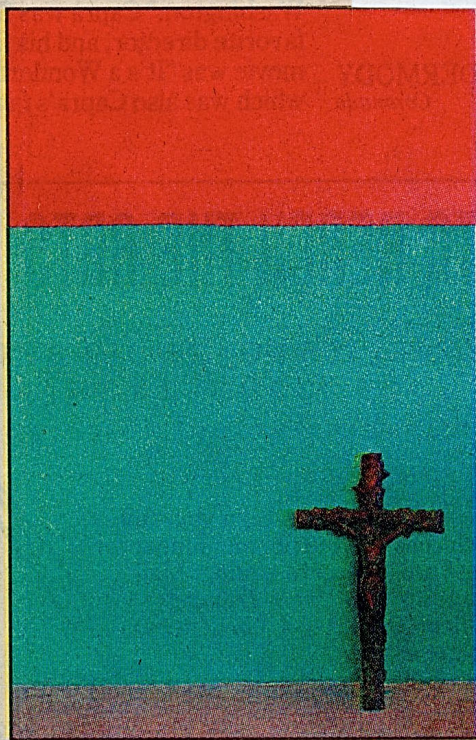
On a breezy hilltop in Colonia Altamira, which overlooks downtown, the Leucadia-based artist is transforming a four-room wing of a small, L-shaped house and its fenced courtyard into a welcoming public place of dazzling color and joy.

It also will be a private place where, once it's furnished, Patterson can stay overnight, make her morning coffee and begin to feel as though she's successfully shedding her *gringa*-tourist status.

In February, the Resendiz-Navarrete family rented her the two rooms, a kitchen (with character but devoid of appliances) and a bathroom (with mismatched fixtures) for a year, for \$125 a month. They knew that this fall, they inevitably will be caught up in an international art-world whirl known as inSITE97.

Patterson, an associate professor of art at UCSD, is one of nearly 60 artists at work on projects for inSITE97, the international exhibition of art installations that in September opens on both sides of the border. Hundreds of visitors, some arriving by the busload, are expected to visit the house and courtyard during inSITE's two-month run.

Patterson, her artisan-assistant and friend



**Goodwill gesture:** *The Resendiz-Navarrete family, Patterson's neighbor and landlord, gave the artist this crucifix.*

Trinidad de Leon, of Rosarito, and five of Patterson's UCSD art students or recent graduates make up the project crew. They have painted the house inside and out in a stunning array of hot and cool colors.

A handmade picket fence that runs along the street sides of this corner property also is freshly painted in tropical colors. A new sprinkler system is in place, courtesy of Patterson, to sustain new and 40-year-old drought-resistant plants in years to come. One young tree was transplanted to a roomier spot; Patterson soon will add an olive tree.

The crew's most laborious task may be turning a large, dirt plot into a courtyard paved with beach stones. "The model (for the pavement) is a taco stand downtown in a cobbled courtyard," Patterson says.

She envisions the courtyard as a party site filled with neighbors and inSITE97 artists and visitors, flowers, lighted candles and food served on huge, rustic tables — brightly painted, of course.

Hector Resendiz-Navarrete, her landlord, already has offered to cook carne asada.

"I can see myself getting very attached to this place," Patterson says, smiling.

## Jolts of color

The artist's plain-spoken title for her project, "La Casita en la Colonia Altamira, Avenida Rio de Janeiro No. 6757, Tijuana," speaks to her respect for the site and its dignified simplicity.

Her ambitious cosmetic alterations to the house and land are not just about expressing her love of Mexican color and culture. The project is also a means for the artist's personal journey into Mexico, an experience that may prove infectious to inSITE visitors.

"I'm using the project as an opportunity to get to know Tijuana. I want to use (the house) as a place to voyage out from," she says. She also envisions the place serving as an informal community center.

Patterson, 56, is already immersing herself in the long-settled working-class neighborhood, and by extension, in the life of a fast-growing city that melds burgeoning contemporary forces with traditional customs and ceremonies. Her daily interactions, dominated thus far by bilingual conversations with her neighbors and trips to shops that sell paint and ice cream, are central to the artist's project.

For the 26 years she's lived in