

in
SITE
97

Public Spectacles

Grand-scale exhibition reflects border region



GERALD McCLARD / Union-Tribune

Art to go: For inSITE97, Mexico City artist Thomas Glassford has designed 18 highly unorthodox golf holes.

By Robert L. Pincus
ART CRITIC

A highly modified '60s era VW van has become a gaily painted wagon in the shape of a toaster, laden with small bicycles with two front seats and two front wheels. During the coming weeks, it may be stopping at a mall or parking lot near you. And the bikes will be set out for anyone to ride.

A trunk of a black Mercedes is now a golf green, lined with AstroTurf and equipped with an American flag on a motorized pole. The car and the synthetic grass will make an appearance in a video with other greens as curious as this one, at the International Visitors Center in downtown San Diego.

A two-headed wooden horse will occupy a traffic island down by the San Ysidro border crossing, while on the Tijuana side of the border there will be a public altar with an American car from the '50s at its core.

These are just a smattering of the unusual sights that comprise inSITE97, an art exhibition of epic size and ambitions that opens Friday with a performance by that most widely known performance artist, Laurie Anderson ("The Speed of Darkness") and a street party. The works number 42 in all. They will be at 24 locations, from downtown San Diego to Tijuana and locales in between. The artists who made them have addresses in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Cuba, Chile, Brazil and other countries in South America. Some make their homes in San Diego and Tijuana.

The show is a sequel to inSITE94, which marked the entry of the San Diego-Tijuana area into the burgeoning arena of spectacle scale exhibitions across the globe. (In the beginning there was inSITE92, but it was an ad hoc event more than a formal exhibition.)

There are about half as many artists in the '97 version as there were three years ago: 50 instead of 100. Last time out, there were 37 sites. But numbers are deceptive. The budget is bigger: inSITE94 cost roughly \$1.5 million and this year's version is estimated at \$2 million. And there are now community-based projects as well as an exhibition, 15 of them, curated independently of the show.

Among the community efforts is Cindy Zimmerman's use of the site of an inactive landfill in Balboa Park to create temporary structures — adobe monuments, paths and sculptures of everyday objects — with the help of as

DATEBOOK

"inSITE97"

An exhibition featuring 50 artists from Canada, the United States, Mexico and South America and 15 community engagement projects. Opens Friday and continues through Nov. 30, at sites throughout San Diego and Tijuana. (619) 544-1482.

inSITE97

Artistic oddities at 24 locations

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many volunteers as she can muster. (Her culminating event will be "The Great Balboa Park Landfill Exposition of 1997" on Oct. 25 and 26.) Glen Wilson is making black-and-white film shorts about life in North Park, with help from North Park residents. Ugo Palavicino, an Argentinian-born Tijuana resident who teaches at San Diego State University, is bringing improvisational theater to Tijuana's colonias.

Several of these civic-minded projects are intelligently tailored for children or teens. Amanda Farber's "Mini-City" at the Children's Museum/Museo de los Ninos in downtown San Diego is a table-top metropolis built by children with the assistance of the artist and museum volunteers. Danielle Michaelis is working with San Diego High School students, who will create bus shelter displays from the journals, interviews and photographs they've been generating about the histories of their families and neighbors. And Roberto Salas is conducting piñata workshops at the Centro Cultural in Balboa Park, which will yield an exhibition of them by mid-October.

The diminished number of sites is salutary. Seeing all of inSITE94 tested the faculties of even the most dedicated follower of art. This time, a comprehensive viewing is a

reasonable ambition. Several bus tours are available, at assorted prices. Installation, the supervising organization for inSITE, has published a 74-page guide and handbook to the exhibition. It's available at the Santa Fe Depot, the Children's Museum of San Diego and the Centro Cultural in Tijuana as well as the offices of Installation.

By design, inSITE97 has a kind of built-in geographic cogency that was lacking in 1994, when artists came from Europe and Japan as well as the United States, Mexico and South America. This time, it is a Western Hemisphere affair, a fact mirrored by its four curators: Jessica Bradley is from Toronto; Olivier Debroise, from Mexico City; Ivo Mesquita lives in Sao Paulo. Sally Yard, the American on the list, is local: an art historian and critic who teaches at USD.

Last time, there was only one curator, Lynda Forsha — also a former curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego and wife of longtime director of the same museum, Hugh Davies. In '94, Davies' museum was also a central venue for inSITE, housing one of its most memorable installations (Yukinori Yanagi's ant farms in the form of flags of the world, "America") and one of its most monumental outdoor works (Nancy Rubins' "Airplane Parts and Building, A Large Growth for San Diego").

In '97, the museum is not participating. Nor is the San Diego Museum of Art, which in 1994 presented a fine work by British sculptor Andy Goldsworthy. Balboa Park's Timken Museum of Art isn't presenting art this time either, but it is mounting a "resource center" for the exhibition, with a history of re-

cent public art, maps and information about the San Diego/Tijuana region.

Michael Krichman, the executive director of inSITE97 on the U.S. side, has been the driving force behind this exhibition, though its organizational structure is distinctly binational. He shares the post with Carmen Cuenca, a native of Mexico City, who was formerly a cultural attache for the Mexican Consulate in San Diego and a curator at Tijuana's Centro Cultural. Installation shares institutional credit with Mexico City's Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, one of Mexico's leading fine arts venues.

What will this hemispheric motif and binational structure yield? A grand opportunity to see work by a host of artists that normally don't exhibit in either Tijuana or San Diego. And in each instance, you will see new work by the artist.

The contingency of Mexican artists is considerable. It includes American expatriate Thomas Glassford, creator of the novel golf greens. Filmmaker Rafael Ortega is collaborating with him on a video, for which the artist dresses like a '60s version of a secret agent, complete with steel attache case. He lives in Mexico City, as does Francis Aly's, who dreamed up a truly whimsical project.

What, Aly's wondered, is the shortest distance between San Diego and Tijuana if one were to avoid crossing the border or the line it establishes on the map? He put his question into action, traveling the route he formulated, and documents of his trip will be on view at the Centro Cultural in Tijuana. Postcards of his expedition will also be available at several locales and,

not coincidentally, SDSU's University Art Gallery will be featuring his paintings in a concurrent exhibition called "Reconstructing Ritual."

Baja California isn't neglected in the inSITE97 roster, either. Jamex and Einar de la Torre, brothers who divide their time between Enseñada and San Diego, are concocting a large pyramid, on which they mingle contemporary and ancient icons. Manolo Escutia, a native of Mexico City who lives in Tijuana, is fabricating monumental-sized boxing figures for the beaches of Tijuana. His "El Round Nuestro de Cada Dia" installation is modeled after Mexican thumb toys.

Enlisting a curator from Canada and another from South America virtually ensured that a healthy number of artists from points north and south of our region would be coming. And they are.

The VW van turned wagon is by Kim Adams, who lives outside of Toronto. He has dubbed his customized vehicle the "Toaster Work Wagon" and his description is apt. Also from Toronto: Spring Hurlbut. She'll be adding architectural impediments, with human features that lend a surreal touch, to the staircases of the Casa de la Cultural in Tijuana. (Additional work by her will also be in SDSU's "Reconstructing Ritual.")

The list of American artists takes in both coasts. One of the inspired choices is New York-based Vito Acconci, who came to know the area a decade ago when he proposed a public work that the Port of San Diego ultimately squelched. The noted performance and public artist will be extending the existing border fence into the Pacific. His portion of the fence will meander, of

course, as the ocean currents see fit.

If there is a thematic thread to inSITE97, it's exploration of the character of this region, with recurring emphasis on the international border. As critic Dave Hickey neatly put it in his essay for the inSITE94 catalog. "This exhibition demonstrated the extent to which Geography has replaced History as the prime generator of art's anxiety in the late twentieth century." And, we can add, as a catalyst for societal anxiety, too.

Artists from outside San Diego and Tijuana seem more inclined to make art about the border than those who reside here. Canadian Rebecca Belmore, who lives in Upsala, Ontario, is training her camera on the behavior of Mexicans waiting to cross the border. She's interested in the ritual aspects of those behaviors and will exhibit her visual data on the marquee of the historic Casino Theatre in downtown San Diego. Brazilian Rosangela Rennó is working with Eduardo Zepeda, a Tijuana portrait and wedding photographer, making portraits of Tijuans who've emigrated from other Mexican states.

The other repeated motif, prevalent here as in other exhibitions of temporary public art, is to create art that doesn't resemble art. Edouardo Abaroa of Mexico City is installing gum-ball machines at various locations in downtown San Diego. Melanie Smith, an English born artist who resides in Mexico City, is setting up her own information center in a downtown San Diego storefront. And then there's New Yorker Andreas Fraser's project. She's writing a speech, to be delivered as a sort of inaugural address as part

of the opening festivities for inSITE97.

Deborah Small, who for several years has created some of the most visually complex and elegant multimedia art around, is growing plants in the former baggage room at the Santa Fe Depot. She's also hanging lots of herbs and plants from its ceiling and has painted the walls a cobalt blue. The choice of vegetation relates to the history of herbalists, healers, diviners and wise women — also known as witches.

It's hard to know whether Marcos Ramirez's big two-headed wooden "Toy and Horse" will resemble sculpture to those crossing the border at San Ysidro. If you like them, though, plaster replicas will be on sale at the border crossing. It's just as hard to know if his supply of souvenirs will last through the entire run of inSITE97. But this is one show that will more than justify its two-month window of opportunity for the viewer.

inSITE97 tours

There are tours galore for the inSITE97 viewer. Some focus on San Diego. Others cover only Tijuana. Still others take in both cities. Most are given in English, but some tours of sites south of the border are bilingual. The tours take place throughout October and November. Cost ranges from \$6 to \$35, and some fees include a lunch.

Instructions for self-guided trolley tours have been devised, too. Call Installation, the nerve center of inSITE97, for a complete list, at (619) 544-1482.