

# ART

## A bold project full of IN/SITE

By ROBERT L. PINCUS, Art Critic

San Diego's overused slogan, "America's Finest City," is upside down in a small sculptural tableau by Jay Johnson.

It is held aloft by diminutive figures at either end of a shelf: one man and one woman to create symmetry. There are additional words, too, imprinted on the shelf itself: "Despite where we are, we make art."

The small construction by Johnson, one of San Diego's consistently engaging sculptors, was created for a series of exhibitions dubbed IN/SITE '92, organized by Installation, a non-profit visual arts organization.

Created in an edition of 30 and exhibited at several venues, proceeds from sales of Johnson's contribution will go to Installation.

As his words suggest, the local support structure for local artists

isn't what it should be. But the IN/SITE project is a bold advance for the art community and for the audience for art.

The venues for the IN/SITE exhibitions stretched from San Marcos to Tijuana and opened, in a staggered schedule, from late August through early November. Billed as a series of shows devoted to that favored genre of the '90s, the installation, they confronted subjects as varied as the holocaust, surrogate motherhood and racism.

Nearly every local showcase devoted to serious contemporary art, commercial or non-profit, participated in some fashion, many in a large way.

There were fortunate

coincidences as well. The Museum of Contemporary Art in La Jolla had scheduled a show of British sculptor Antony Gormley. (It continues through Dec. 9)



**Southern exposure:** IN/SITE '92 was the catalyst for "Abandoned (Abandonado) II," an art park made by Michael Schnorr and Ulf Rollof. It's next to the Tijuana bullring.

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## IN/SITE

Non-profit Installation puts art in its place

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The centerpiece of Gormley's show, "Field" (1990), is a haunting piece, consisting of 35,000 terra cotta figures that make the viewer feel as if he is confronting a three-dimensional metaphor for humanity itself.

Plans are already afoot for IN/SITE '94, which would start with a flurry of coordinated openings in San Diego County and in Tijuana in late September of that year.

### Promise fulfilled

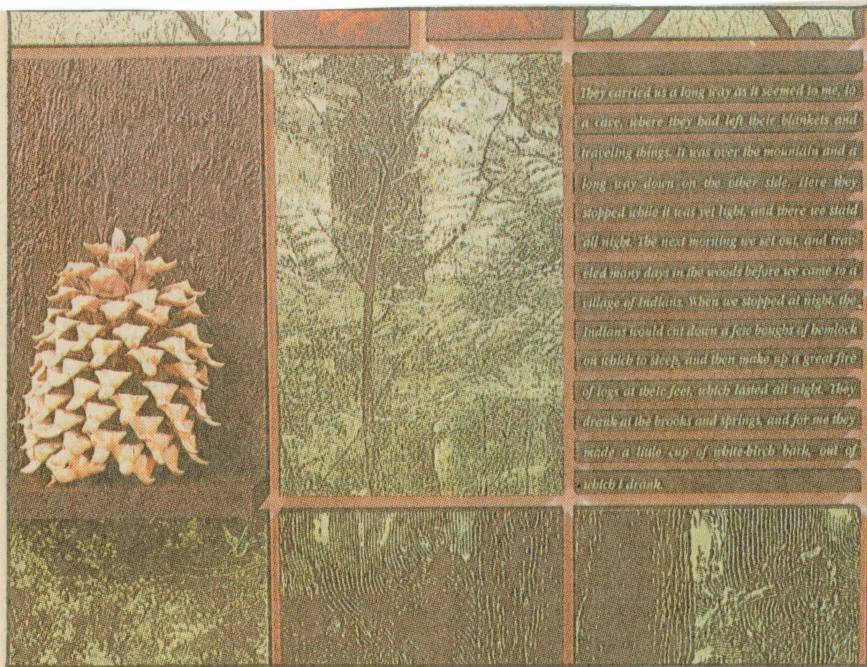
IN/SITE attests that local artists have fulfilled the promise of their work from the early to mid-'80s. Called emerging painters and sculptors in "A San Diego Exhibition," a groundbreaking 1985 show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, they are now mid-career figures.

At the same time, others of equal promise have surfaced, from the graduate programs at UCSD, SDSU and several other schools as well as the ever-changing collaborative of artists that show annually at Balboa Park's Centro Cultural de la Raza, the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo.

Deborah Small, one of the most important figures of the mid-'80s contingency, presented an exhibition at the Linda Moore Gallery in Mission Hills (through today). Titled "MA-CON—AQUA," it continued her critical look at the colonization of the New World, with a rich mix of image, object and word that presented the tragic decline of relations between the Indians and settlers of Pennsylvania.

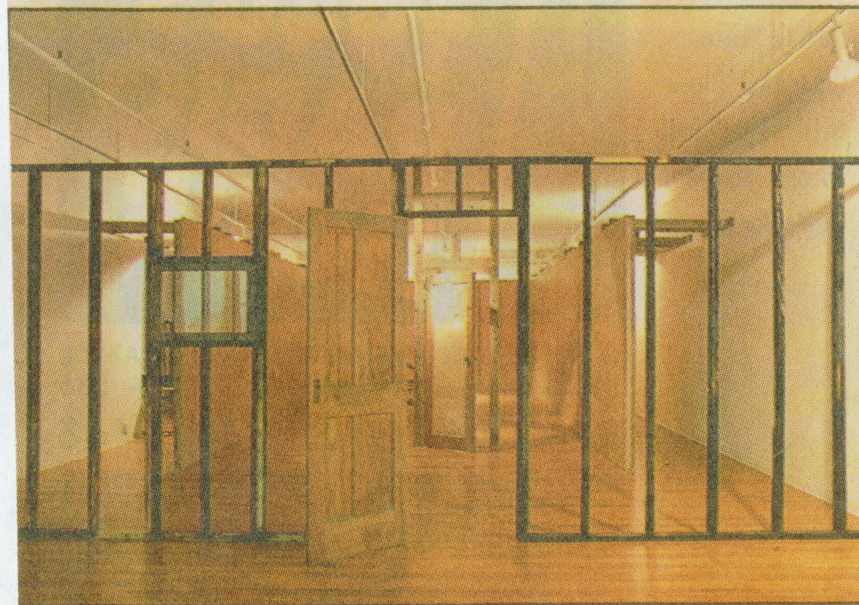
Perhaps the most intriguing element of Small's show was the story of Frances Slocum, published in the early 19th century. Known as Maconaqu to the Miami people, Slocum was captured by the Delaware Indians early in her life, spent most of her years among the Delawares, as well as the Miamis, and declined to return to life among the settlers when offered the chance.





**Detail:** from Deborah Small's multipanel installation, "MA—CON—A—QUA," one of the highlights of a series of exhibitions dubbed IN/SITE '92. The text tells the story of a colonial Pennsylvania woman who was captured by Indians at a young age and lived among them into old age.

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**Johnny Coleman's** "Ruminations" used stage-set architecture, symbolic props and taped text to reflect on the recent riots in Los Angeles.



For the SCALP of every *INDIAN*  
*WOMAN*, produced as EVIDENCE  
of their being killed, the SUM of *Fifty*  
*Pieces of Eight.*



**Relations between** the settlers of Pennsylvania and the Delaware Indians degenerated by the 18th century; and an official document, quoted in this portion of Deborah Small's installation "MA—CON—A—QUA" reveals just how little regard government had for Indians.



Among less-established artists, Johnny Coleman contributed a particularly evocative show, "Ruminations," at the David Zapf Gallery near downtown. Resembling stage-set architecture, it was a meditative reaction to the riots in Los Angeles, containing charred wood and a broken window. Props and a taped voice suggested the possibility, however improbable, of hope rising from the ashes.

Most installations were on view for no more than a month.

However, "Abandoned (Abandonado) II," a site work in Tijuana that doubles as a park and an unusual interactive playground, might endure as a dignified legacy of "IN/SITE '92."

It was a genuine collaboration between local artist Michael Schnorr (well known for his work with the Border Art Workshop/Taller de Arte Fronterizo) and his longtime friend, Swedish artist Ulf Rollof.

Like "Abandoned I," situated in Stockholm, this site work is dedicated to homeless children and orphans.

This collaboration between Schnorr and Rollof exceeded expectations. A small project turned into a large one when the artists were presented with a plot of land grander than the one for which they had drawn plans.

The park is rich with symbolism and also quite functional. "Abandoned (Abandonado) II" stands just in back of the Tijuana bullring and a stone's throw from the border.

The landscaping is formed to simulate Baja California and the Gulf of California. It contains brick and concrete structures — one a bed, another a bench — that can be warmed with fire and which obviously can serve as a refuge for people without a home. (An additional structure is dedicated to poets.)

Or the entire site can be seen as a way station for Mexicans or others making the arduous journey to the United States. A brick boat, just now being completed, is a resonant and accessible symbol of that trip.

The warm, homemade quality of this art park stands in stark

contrast to the antiseptic landscaping of the Border Field State Park just across the fence separating the two countries.

And the artists were quick to offer large credit to students from Southwestern College in Chula Vista, two colleges in Tijuana as well as an expert brick-maker and construction worker, Don Celso, from the neighborhood where the park is situated.

It is populist work of an authentic sort. Those planning IN/SITE '94 say "Abandoned (Abandonado) II" is the sort of project they'd like to see more of: art where it's not anticipated.

"We'd like the next IN/SITE to ambush the unexpected viewer," said Ernest Silva, who helped originate IN/SITE '92.

Artistic collaboration is tricky, however, and some partnerships produced unimpressive art. Four artists — Patsy Babcock, Eva Montville, Laura Crouch and Mary Louise Donovan — created an installation in the form of an immense female figure that doubled as a garden.

But the show, on view in September at the India Street Design Center, never cohered as the statement about female identity it was supposed to be.

Two artists deservedly praised for their solo work, James Luna and Lewis DeSoto, created an installation that was supposed to reveal the disjunctions between affluent American interiors and the traditional American Indian concept of home. "Kish Tetayawet Dream House Wampkish" was its title, and the Mesa College Art Gallery show didn't possess enough domestic detailing to bring either style of culture to life.

The uneven quality of of IN/SITE '92 doesn't detract from its overarching success as a project. It fostered a spirit of camaraderie among participating spaces. This welcome outcome, coupled with planning for the next series of shows, has had a positive impact on the recently faltering Installation as well.

Six months ago, IN/SITE '92 was simply an idea generated by

two members of the arts advisory board of the financially precarious non-profit Installation: Ernest Silva, a professor in the art department at UCSD, and Mark Quint, co-owner of the unconventional commercial space, Quint Krichman Projects.

Quint and Silva have joined three other respected names in the art community to form an executive committee with responsibility for IN/SITE '94: Michael Krichman, Quint's partner in Quint Krichman Projects; Kathleen Stoughton, the director of the Mesa College Art Gallery; and Sally Yard, an art historian on the faculty of the University of San Diego.

Krichman and Stoughton will serve on Installation's newly formed board; Quint, Yard and Silva will continue to serve on a revitalized arts advisory board.

Installation's reorganized board plans to provide the financial support needed to give the organization the secure footing it has long lacked. IN/SITE '94 is intended to offer Installation a sense of purpose.

"This will be the main project for the next two years," said Krichman. "It will refocus Installation."

They agree that IN/SITE '94, as Krichman says, should be an event "with a more regional character and binational quality."

They are seeking also to draw national attention to IN/SITE by sponsoring residencies for artists

prominent in the installation genre and by advertising in the national and international art press and by publishing a substantial catalog for the event.

It is one measure of ambition that the committee hopes to involve at least some artists of international repute.

In the past two years, Quint and Krichman have proven themselves highly capable of choreographing residencies of artists from far afield, under the auspices of Quint Krichman Projects. But, the group stresses the importance of showcasing San Diego artists.

"A lot of the works would be generated within San Diego," said Sally Yard. "We'd like to think of this as a galvanizing context and a broad context in which they can appear."