

inSite_05

Driving across southern Texas, the interstate snakes along the US/Mexico border. Juarez comes into view in astonishing contrast to El Paso, the two cities close enough to touch each other yet punctuated by contrast in every conceivable way. Systemic disparity, economic shift and cultural vertigo saturate every sense. It is exactly this precarious boundary of culture, space, and context that is explored by the bi-city, bi-national non-biennial collaborative arts event inSite_05, further along the border where San Diego and Tijuana meet in similar circumstances.

Every two years, inSite exhibits the site-specific culmination of its one-month to two-year residency programs along the border. Participating artists react to the environment, forge fresh collaborations and present innovative, culturally responsive, site-specific work. The result is an art sprawl broken into five distinct but not mutually exclusive categories: *Framework*, *Interventions*, *Scenarios*, *Conversations*, and *Museum Exhibition*. The overall effect is – not unlike the border experience itself – dynamic and unwieldy, capricious as it is sincere, and slightly bewildering for spectators and participating artists alike.

At the midpoint of the pedestrian walkway between San Diego and Tijuana was an installation by the US collaborative SIMPARCH. *Dirty Water Initiative* was part installation, part social commentary, but fully operational water purification plant. The stark simplicity of solar distillers sealed in glass is an alluring introduction to the project's underlying objective – to emphasize the urgent need to find ecological solutions to improve water conditions in poor communities. Absorbing in both its aesthetic appeal and practical significance, the piece challenges the viewer to assemble a sense of where they are and how to negotiate Tijuana.

On Tijuana Beach – one of the primary venues on the Southern side of the border, swarms of spectators gathered as a brigade of Mexican psychiatric patients sporting homemade animal masks marched past playing musical instruments. The parade was an introduction to Venezuelan artist Javier Tellez' performance *One Flew Over the Void*, in which David Smith, human cannonball, is shot from Tijuana Beach over a corroded metal fence into Border Field State Park, San Diego.

inSite, Tijuana included conversations and lectures, a half dozen performances, installation sites, and interactive projects. The day's program culminated in the organization's first museum exhibition, *Farsites: Urban Crisis and Domestic Systems in Recent Contemporary Art* at the Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT). This show, a collaboration between the San Diego Museum of Art and CECUT, featured notable works by Felix Gonzalez Torres, Catherine Opie, Guillermo

Kuitca, Doris Salcedo, and Gregor Scheider. As day turned to night in a transition from the raucous celebration of cannon launches and curious parades to the cooler trappings of high art, shadows of disparity became full-blown darkness; beautiful people sipped red wine and discussed Gonzalez Torres' candy spill in an elegant museum setting while rusty fences and tainted water were left behind. The sudden shift—the crossing of yet another border—emphasized the dizzying effects of cultural expectations and the demarcations of difference.

InSite_05 explored, collapsed, identified and redefined borders in a wide array of styles, structures and artistic investigations in a multi-cultural framework. Javier Tellez' cannon/parade performance addressed, “the notion of spatial and mental borders in the context of Tijuana and San Diego.” During the performance, a San Diego newscaster asked one of the other inSite artists his opinion on the ethics of including mental patients in the piece. The artist's response was that he spent his residency focused on his project and was unfamiliar with other works in the show. The comment was symptomatic of an event widely available yet in many ways inaccessible and unknowable as a whole. In meeting its goal to “interweave situations of flux, mobility and experiences of interconnectedness,” inSite also accentuated circumstances and conditions of isolation, disconnect and incongruity. In its aspiration to initiate “processes intended to encourage novel, informal and unexpected experiences and alternative modes of citizenship,” it succeeded at every point.