
MEXICO / CALIFORNIA

MexiCali

BIENNIAL 06

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October 7 - November 4, 2006

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La Casa de la Tia Tina
Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico

Chavez Studios
Los Angeles, California, USA

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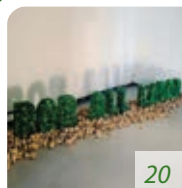
INTRODUCTION

The MexiCali Biennial is a bi-national, dual-venue exhibition of contemporary art and music. Featuring artists and musicians from Southern California and the bordering Mexican states, the MexiCali Biennial aims to provide a platform for border crossing, progressive art exhibitions and events. These events encourage dynamic cultural exchanges that resonate within the fluid context of the US-Mexico border. This border biennial distinguishes itself by tapping into the unique aesthetic derived from a culture of art, music and critical dialog evolving from the confluence of both countries in a region defined by its hybridism.

The 2006 MexiCali Biennial encompassed two events, one on either side of the US-Mexico border. The first exhibition was comprised of thirteen Los Angeles-based artists at the Casa de la Tía Tina, an alternative art and music space in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico. The second phase of the biennial was a contemporary multi-media event with visual artists, live bands and DJs from both Los Angeles and Mexicali at Chavez Studios in East Los Angeles, California.

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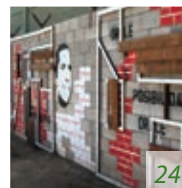
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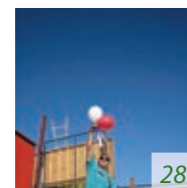
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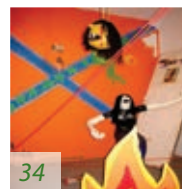
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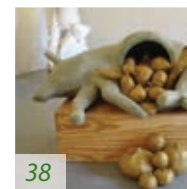
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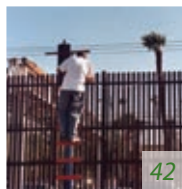
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INTERVIEW WITH MEXICALI BIENNIAL ORGANIZERS – 1/29/07

E: Luis and I first started talking about putting together an art exhibition in Mexicali, at La Casa de la Tia Tina around March of 2006, but we had trouble coming up with exhibition titles that worked. We wanted to somehow deal with the idea of a border because of Mexicali's proximity to the US/Mexican border without the project only being located inside a larger discussion of border politics. What we were trying to do is to come up with something that would tie in the specificity of the site and still be open enough to allow artists to make or show whatever work they wanted. We didn't want a restrictive theme or title and we also didn't want to curate specific works, but instead invite artists to participate under one cohesive project. We came up with a half dozen or so possible titles, none of which worked or sounded the way we wanted. After shooting ideas back and forth we decided to just dump what we had and go for something very open-ended, right? We started talking about what would happen if we were to title this exhibition that just happens to be in Mexicali, a biennial and how that would re-contextualize the show. Would the audience understand this art exhibition as a Biennial and how could we use that to question how traditional Biennials function?

L: For us, the conception of this project was not as a biennial, but as an exhibition that would comment on the conventions and mechanisms of art biennials.

E: That was the initial proposition. An art show in Mexicali, Mexico that has Biennial attached to it along with all the prestigious, well-recognized baggage that Biennials have at a time when no one wanted another Biennial. In a way putting something into play that would force the audience to see this exhibition as a Biennial but have it function differently from traditional programming.

P: Yes, this is a different platform than a traditional biennial. The premise we used of taking artists from Los Angeles to exhibit them in Mexicali (with a re-presentation of the exhibition to a Los Angeles audience accompanied by an invitation to select Mexicali artists) is not true to the constructs of most international biennials. But yet biennials take the pulse of artistic production, assessing what is important regionally or allowing artists to represent their respective nations. In a way, as the MexiCali Biennial, we are providing artists an opportunity to respond to and simultaneously transgress the overarching environmental context where they produce work, which in and of itself is indicative of larger shifts within a political and cultural moment in time. This is a paradigm that is of particular interest to me and I was intrigued when Ed spoke with me about the project initially with the idea of why not call it a biennial if there are biennials springing up all over the world? It may not follow the same traditional model exactly, or function within a highly institutionalized, heavily funded framework, but I believe it is just as valid and as true to the region's open-ended nature and inventiveness to approach such a project with the same informal, freeform practicality inherent to the bi-national exchange that happens every day between the US and Mexico.

E: Right. It initially appears to be that. Once you get into the project, it unfolds and you find out that it could happen on either side of the US-Mexico border and it doesn't necessarily have to happen every two years. It can be reciprocal with artists showing on either side of the US/Mexican border and hopefully call into question how traditional Biennials function. We also wanted to take into consideration the exhibition sites. We were able to do all of this without the funding or support that large institutions have.

The word "MexiCali" comes from the merger of the words Mexico and California and the city of Calexico is also that kind of merger or hybrid between the words California and Mexico. Given that this place is called, Mexicali, we decided to interrogate that and invite artists from California to exhibit in Mexicali and then have artists from Mexicali exhibit in Los Angeles.

L: And that's where the show becomes international, not for the reasons that other biennials are, the invitation of established or international artists, but because of its location and reciprocity between the two cities that host it.

E: The conditions that are already inherent to those sites.

P: For me it was really interesting to be involved in a project that is active in a region that is so fascinating and yet hard to classify. The idea of doing something along the border is inherently difficult and problematic because it is not a definitive place. By nature, it is a place that is in a constant state of flux, in a constant state of exchange, in a constant state of metamorphosis. I think the US-Mexican border is unique in comparison to other international borders because of the nature of the deep dependency of the two countries for the labor force, for the economics...it is a different kind of political relationship than, say, the US-Canadian border. It is much more charged. There are so many things that are happening there right now that make it more vague and more turbulent than if you were talking about a contemporary Western Eu-

E: Yeah, we wanted to give artists the opportunity to exhibit at the border where one country kind of bleeds into the other, where it's not so clearly defined like you said. We also felt that it was very important to have the participating artists experience crossing the Mexicali/Calexico border first hand and be present for the opening reception.

We didn't curate specific works that dealt with the border but instead gave artists the opportunity to create or show whatever they wanted. If someone wanted to deal with the border as a site for their work, we all worked hard to make that happen. For me the exchange became an important part of the process. Having artists from LA physically go to Mexicali and install or fabricate their work and then reciprocating by showing Mexicali artists in LA. Artists and artworks crossing borders back and forth.

L: That involvement was interesting because I'm pretty sure that most artists kind of had something in mind; they had a well defined idea of what they wanted to exhibit, and then, many of them got to the space and changed something about their projects. They tried to accommodate their works in relation to the space and to their experience in it.

E: Which is the nature of everything that happened there. Nothing went precisely as planned.

L: Yeah, this was not limited to the artists and their projects, but to the overall preparation and installation of the exhibition.





E: Luis had a great quote about Calexico-Mexicali, that everything is at a state of breaking down and not working, but somehow it keeps functioning.

P: rasquache.

P: Well, it was very true to form - because it has this nature of being in a dilapidated state, things are less precious. It allows you to call into question the idea of location and how precious an artist's work becomes once placed within that space. Is it something that can be morphed, something that can respond to and become activated within a different kind of setting, one that is less traditional, and how does it hold up in that sort of environment? What changes when you take it off of a white wall and put it in a less determined space? Though in this setting we did have a gallery that had white walls, where we displayed half of the body of work, but that was also in relationship to the entire compound, which was very punk rock.

E: Yeah, I like to refer to La Casa de la Tia Tina as 'the real'. It is not pretending to be anything other than what it is: Very raw and still in the process of being defined.

L: I think I mentioned in another conversation about artists opening alternative spaces here in LA, and it feels that they're trying to move away from what would be considered to be the white cube, the clinically white space. The spaces I'm referring to are 'raw' in look, and it feels that they are consciously moving away from an over-established way of showing art.

P: One of the things I think you are touching on is that the Mexicali venue is very authentically what it is, as opposed to trying to make the statement, 'we are rebelling against the institution'. Instead, it is organic and true to itself. I think the artists that came down and were able to pick up on that and to engage it were the ones who had the richest experiences.

L: And there's always the question if this is a monetary thing, or if there's a real need for younger artists to do that sort of thing, to move away from the establishment. But is well known that all generations have this phenomenon, that of trying to move in and out of the idea of the, 'institutional'. We are even playing with that notion by using the term, 'biennial'.

E: The next question is, what happens when this project goes to another setting and space; how will it change? Artists who exhibited at La Casa de la Tia Tina had to deal with how that space framed up their projects. Tia Tina is not a "white cube;" it's raw. For the LA component of the Biennial we saw first hand how much the exhibition space can change the context of this exhibition, just like how adding the word biennial to an exhibition can change the context of a show. The intent for both the Mexicali and the LA events was the same but the outcomes were very different.

P: Yes, very different results.

14 E: But then again, that's the intriguing part of the project, that it doesn't necessarily have to reside in one place and can make light of how location affects reception. I like to think of the process that we all went through to make the Biennial happen as the art. Crossing borders back and forth, interacting with the locals, meeting new people, dealing with the parameters of the exhibition sites weren't just parts of some process that facilitated the art, but also the art itself.

P: I also think that our objective is important to consider. It was an experimental practice and experimental approach to a biennial, working collectively and interacting in a setting that is really in our backyard, internationally speaking. It was a testing ground for ideas, and I think it still continues to be freeform.

E: Especially like we mentioned in earlier discussions, in the very highly politicized climate of the border. As much as one may not want to deal with or like the way border issues are being sensationalized through the media, border issues are prevalent in our social consciousness right now.

P: True. We came to the experience from that perspective, whether or not we directly addressed it, but when we went down there we found that among the people that we interacted with that it was just not even part of their consciousness, not even part of their understanding of what was happening. Their level of engagement of the same issues concerning the border that we are bombarded with right now in 2006/2007 is not what I imagined.

L: I believe many of them said that as citizens from Mexicali, there are other issues they have to deal with on a daily basis that take greater importance.

P: I think just knowing and being cognizant of the fact that immigration issues and border politics are hot political concerns right now is integral to the MexiCali Biennial— you have to be aware that if we are going to do a project that is on the other side of the border, that inherently it has all of this as the backdrop. So, I think it is there implicitly in the Biennial, but it's not specifically selected [curatorially] as a topic to discuss.

L: I agree.





E: ¿Como se sintieron al tener una exposición en La Casa de la Tía Tina con el nombre de MexiCali Biental que consistía de trece artistas de Los Angeles?

I: Lo que yo creo es que el proyecto para empezar, no era un proyecto de nosotros, era un proyecto de trece artistas, bueno de algunos artistas de Los Angeles, y nosotros estábamos siendo nada mas como un espacio que recibía a esos artistas. Porque de alguna manera, nosotros ni siquiera sabíamos quien venía, como era la obra, ni nada. Y pues primero, nuestra posición era esa ¿no?, como una casa que habría sus puertas para recibir a los artistas. Que ya cuando el proyecto se llama MexiCali Biental, se nos hacia muy interesante, pero aun así no sabíamos como venia, con que ideas venían y como era la idea de todo esto.

Así de entrada, pues fue nada mas como una cosa que para nosotros, como casa que funciona teniendo exposiciones y eventos, nos resultaba muy interesante y muy fácil porque no íbamos a hacer un esfuerzo más que abrir la casa y dejar que ustedes trabajaran con lo que quisieran. Que de alguna manera habíamos hecho eso pero siempre eran artistas que nosotros invitábamos, que nosotros convocábamos. Entonces, era mas bien como expectativa de ver que iba a pasar.

L: ¿Y cuando deciden abrir las puertas y básicamente dejarnos hacer lo que quisiéramos? ¿Que los motivo, o les dio la confianza de dejarnos trabajar tan libremente, sin restricciones, si dices que anteriormente la casa nunca había trabajado de esta manera?

I: No, si lo hemos hecho, pero como que de alguna manera siempre sabíamos de que se trataba. Por ejemplo, tuvimos una experiencia con unos artistas de Guadalajara que es lo que se me hace más cercano a lo que paso esta vez. Que nada mas, al fin de cuentas, bueno, conocíamos a uno de los participantes, y sabía

mos que estaban haciendo cosas muy interesantes y todo, y entonces dijimos, bueno, vengan y hagan con la casa lo que quieran. Y ahorita yo creo que esto es similar pues, mas o menos conocíamos ya a Luis, y nos planteo el proyecto y se nos hizo, digo parte de la casa ha funcionado así casi siempre, que es imposible saber si viene una banda a tocar saber como toca.

P: ¿Y que pensaron del uso de este nombre, MexiCali Biental, que es una exposición de arte en donde participan solamente artistas de Los Angeles? ¿Que piensan de la terminología del nombre?

I: Primero supimos como un show de Los Angeles, y luego después supimos que era la bienal. Y lo malo, a lo mejor yo no tengo como una buena anécdota de eso porque al fin de cuentas hable con Luis y ya mas o menos me explico la idea,...a pensar mas halla de porque es llamarlo bienal y todo eso.

L: Si, Ed y yo, cuando empezamos a trabajar con la idea era eso ¿no?, una exposición nada más en la que en el nombre se incluiría la palabra 'bienal'. Estábamos pensando en una exposición que más que se alineara a lo que se asume como una bienal, su funcionamiento iba a ser mas el de cuestionar los mecanismos y las convenciones de estas.

E: Y gente cuando vio esa palabra: bienal, para pronto lo vieron como un gran instituto, con dinero, y era todo legítimo. Nada más por leer esa palabra.

L: La palabra legitimizo todo el proyecto, llamo la atención de mucha gente que no le hubiera puesto atención a una exposición mas. Muchas exposiciones pasan desapercibidas, y mas estando aquí, tan lejos de lo que es el centro del arte. Pero el MexiCali Biental, por su nombre, genero como una curiosidad entre la gente; se creo un discurso alrededor del proyecto..

I: Es mas o menos lo mismo cuando ya hablo con Luis y que me dice que es nada mas como un juego con el nombre este. Y luego hace 'click' al igual que todos y dices, bueno, es un juego, pero puede ser algo más cabron.

E: Algo serio, pero empezó como un juego. También queríamos cuestionar como funcionan las bienales. Las bienales pasan, que, cada dos años tienen una; casi todo el tiempo en el mismo lugar; y cuentan con el apoyo de grandes instituciones. Y nosotros queríamos hacer algo diferente; queríamos hacer una bienal que se puede hacer en EU, que se puede hacer en Mexicali, se puede hacer cada año, dos veces al año

I: Cada dos meses.

E: Y también, estábamos tratando de usar la palabra 'Mexicali' porque el show iba a estar en Mexicali. Teniendo en cuenta de que la palabra Mexicali es la unión de México y California, al igual que Calxico es California y México. Entonces, ya estaba hecho, todo ya estaba allí. Y como funciona California y Mexicali, ahorita, todo el tiempo artistas van allá, acá. Ustedes invitan a gente que tocan de Los Angeles que vienen aquí. Entonces, todo ya estaba aquí, nosotros nada más pusimos el nombre en algo que ya estaba en funcionamiento.

I: Si, por ese lado, por ejemplo, si pensamos, por lo menos yo cuando me imagino a la tía tina y esto, que empezamos a trabajar blue y yo, mi idea si era mas como poder hacer un vinculo con el sur de EU ¿no?, de, este, Arizona y California. Pues igualmente aquí estamos bien cerquitas y todo, y que no hay, no hay un intercambio así real y cotidiano en el arte. Lo hay en el trabajo, lo hay como en muchas otras cosas, pero en el arte no es tan común.

Para nosotros, de Baja California, es mas difícil ir al D.F. que ir a San Francisco, California es mucho mas cerca, la relación con California es mucho mas fácil- en movilidad y todo esto, pero, que estar mas cerca del D.F., que seria donde se mueve según esto (el arte) en México. Entonces, en mi por lo menos, si había un interés, y lo ha habido desde hace mucho tiempo, de hacer como el intercambio.

P: ¿Y tu crees que este evento a tenido un impacto a la comunidad de aquí de Mexicali? ¿A la comunidad de nuevos artistas, de artistas jóvenes, gente que tiene cierta inclinación por este tipo de trabajo?



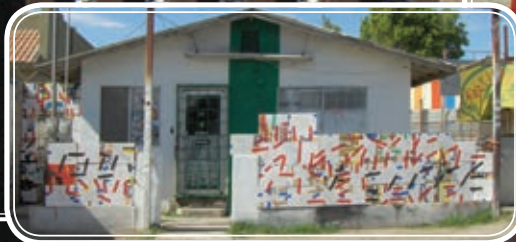
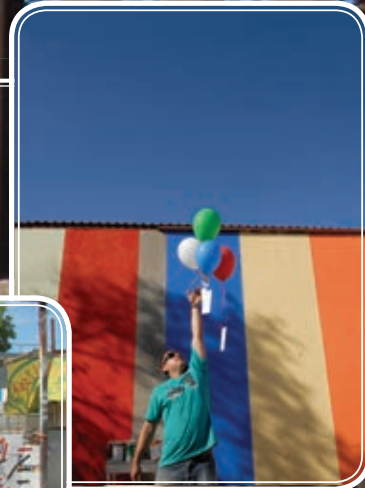
Uno que vive aquí que mas o menos conoce a la gente que esta produciendo allá, y luego, aparte de conocer la gente que produce allá, también ve como lo que se publica y lo que se habla, entonces ves como una diferencia bien grande en cuanto a la gente que es de Tijuana, que esta haciendo cosas, y luego a la gente que sale en los catálogos y todo esto, en exposiciones y eso. Es que hay mucha gente que en realidad no es de ahí, ¿no? Que hay como un movimiento, hay un desfase ahí especial que bueno, como uno, si quieres estar sonando te mueves a donde esta sonando. Hay

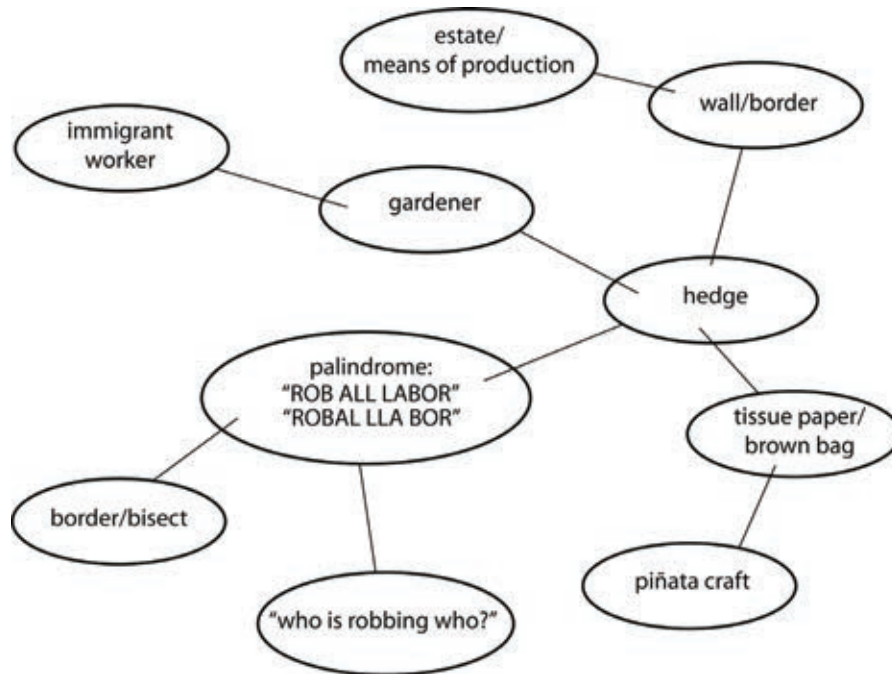
E: ¿Y tu que crees que es esa distinción?

Entonces, partiendo de allí, el tipo de migración, el tipo de costumbres y todo como se formó la ciudad son bien distintas. Tijuana es una ciudad que está cerca del mar pero no produce pesca ni nada, si no vive de ellos mismos, de la gente que lo visita y todo eso. Entonces, de alguna manera turística, y a lo mejor de hace un tiempo para acá maquiladora ¿no?, que también Mexicali ya tiene como la mitad y la mitad. Digo, la agricultura sigue funcionando como algo bien carbón aquí, aunque ahorita ya hay una diferencia considerable a como era la agricultura antes y ahorita. Ahorita solo son unos cuantos los que están produciendo.









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Debating the Dinosaur Extinction by Leslie Mullen

The dinosaurs dominated the landscape for 160 million years, living over a thousand times longer than modern humans (*Homo sapiens* first evolved about 150 thousand years ago). During this vast stretch of time some dinosaur species became extinct, but overall the impression is one of an immensely tough class of animals that could endure whatever hardships the planet managed to throw at it. When the end finally came, it came from beyond Earth.

A meteorite impact 65 million years ago is the simple explanation for the extinction of the dinosaurs. The exact details are much more complex, and researchers are still trying to nail down exactly what happened. The Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) extinction event is like an ancient tapestry that has become matted and soiled due to time and neglect. There are hundreds of threads of evidence that need to be untangled, smoothed out, and put in their proper place before a clear picture can emerge.

The first, most important thread of evidence is a strip of clay that runs through rocks around the world. Known as the K-T boundary layer, this is the line no dinosaur could cross (although their relatives, the birds, did survive).

In 1980, a team of researchers led by Luis Alvarez and his son, Walter, discovered that the boundary layer contains a relatively high concentration of iridium. Iridium is rare on the Earth's surface but is often found in meteorites. During the molten phase of our planet's formation, most of the iridium of Earth traveled down with iron to form the planetary core. The Earth does receive a light surface dusting of iridium from the occasional meteorites, and some volcanoes can release iridium if their lava comes from a deep enough source. These events give the planet's surface a background iridium level of 0.02 parts per billion (ppb) or less.

Depending on the location of the rocks, the K-T boundary layer has varying amounts of iridium, but all are far above that background level. The section analyzed by

Alvarez had 9 ppb. Other sections have upwards of a million times the background level. Luis and Walter Alvarez surmised that a large meteorite rich in iridium must have hit the Earth, and the after-effects of the impact led to the demise of the dinosaurs.

Later, a large impact crater underneath Mexico's Yucatan peninsula was fingered as the smoking gun. When a meteorite punches the Earth's crust, some rocks and minerals are vaporized, some are flash heated and become molten, while others shatter, or become "shocked" in a distinctive pattern. Samples of the Chicxulub crater had all these features of a meteorite impact. The crater was dated to be about 65 million years old, the same age as the K-T extinction.

The meteorite that made the Chicxulub crater was 10 to 15 kilometers in diameter, or about the size of the island of Manhattan. It screamed to Earth faster than a bullet, smashing open a vast cavern 40 kilometers deep and 100 kilometers across. This crater quickly collapsed under the force of gravity, leaving a hole 180 kilometers wide and only 2 kilometers deep.

The energy released by this impact was equal to 100 million megatons of TNT. In comparison, the 1980 eruption of Mount Saint Helens released energy equivalent to just 10 megatons of TNT. The atomic bomb that exploded over Hiroshima released energy equivalent to about 10 kilotons of TNT (or 0.01 megatons).

The impact obviously destroyed life in the immediate area, and the shock wave likely generated huge tsunamis and earthquakes further away from ground zero. Other, longer-lasting effects, such as dust and chemicals from the vaporized rocks, dispersed around the world.

The debate about the K-T extinction was contentious before Alvarez's hypothesis, and the discovery of Chicxulub seems to have done little to stem the often emotional arguments about the extinction event.

At first, some doubted that Chicxulub even was an impact crater. The structure is buried 1 to 2 kilometers underground half under land and half under the seafloor and was only discovered by gravitational and magnetic anomalies from readings taken at the Earth's surface. However, samples from drill cores helped confirm that Chicxulub was formed by a meteorite impact.

While most scientists now agree that Chicxulub is an impact crater, not everyone believes it caused the K-T extinction. For instance, some wonder if the Chicxulub impact occurred at the right time. Gerta Keller of Princeton University argues that its true age pre-dates the dinosaur's demise by 300,000 years. However, other scientists contend that Keller's sampling method was flawed, and resulted in an inaccurate date.

Among scientists who agree that Chicxulub was the cause of the extinction, there are disagreements about the tangible effects of the impact. Some scientists think so much dust was sent flying high into the air that the skies darkened for years, halting photosynthesis and killing plants worldwide. Others contend that the dust wouldn't have been so long lasting, since rain would have soon cleared the air. Some have suggested that red-hot impact debris raining back down would have ignited forest fires worldwide, darkening the skies with black soot. Another theory suggests that so much sulfur was sent up into the stratosphere that the rains became like battery acid, poisoning land and sea.

Finally, there are some who believe that while Chicxulub played a role in the extinction, it was not the primary cause. They are seeking answers beyond Chicxulub, wondering if anything else could have contributed to the loss of species. The dinosaurs weren't the only creatures to suffer death and destruction, after all. The K-T mass extinction event killed at least 50 percent of all the world's species. Could a single meteorite impact - even one as large as Chicxulub - have dealt such a fatal blow to life?



My work leading up to the Biennial located me in the middle of the Mexican election protests in Mexico City as well as in Tel Aviv during the first days of warfare between Israel and Hezbollah, while my trip to MexiCali did not include warfare, it did possess the transformative quality of a region living its own societal terms.

The on-site fabrication of *Oh the Possibilities/Orale las Posibilidades* included my daily entrance and exit across the US/Mexico border, a factor that, in retrospect afforded me the opportunity to further understand the tension that exists in territorial separations, as well as the nuances experienced between the familiar and extraordinary in a border area. The pastiche of border imagery that was created for the piece allowed each layer of material to be viewed, e.g. painted bricks and mortar on top of a pre-existing cinderblock wall. It is upon the arrival

of the viewer's eye to the stenciled language and layout of the phrase "oh the possibilities" that cerebral penetration can engage with the physicality of the on-site wall. The application of geometric outlines of buff marks and panels of wood activated the visceral play of separations between spaces. The three sections engaged compositional constructions derived from the human psyche's ability to re-configure familiar objects.

The fabricated alterations are only a few of the formal possibilities, but in a space as active as La Casa de la Tia Tina, the wall will easily transform itself to meet the needs of the social climate that is hosted within the art space. Pertaining to the dialogue of alternative sites, this particular project addresses the deduction and addition process of a contextually-specific piece occurring in a location where cultural maps overlap and malleable termi-





ViSite EStado\$ Unido\$

At the beginning of the 20th century, the increasing speed of railways and the development of sea travel marked the takeoff of the international tourist industry. Alongside this business, a new art genre of its own called "Tourist Attraction Posters" also flourished. When invited to participate in the Mexicali Biennial in a border town with a complicated social and economic situation, I chose to reference these posters as an invitation to visit the United States. Knowing that all Mexican border towns have a big floating population of immigrants waiting for the right moment to cross, and in the context of the Bush administration's recent approval of the construction of a 700-mile wall intended to keep immigrants away, I thought it was a good time and place to recreate the classic "Tourist Attraction Poster" as a billboard.

When we think of the United States, several facts come to mind: It is the largest economy in the world; it has the strongest and biggest army; every political, military and economic decision the US government makes has global repercussions; it is the land of opportunity; every year it is the final destination of thousands and thousands of immigrants, both legal and illegal; it is also a major world tourist destination.

Undoubtedly, making virtues of your flaws is a good strategy and that is the angle that I choose for my piece. Initially I considered using Paris Hilton and *American Idol* as the principal US tourist attractions. (In the US more Americans vote on *American Idol*'s TV show than they do during presidential elections. Paris Hilton is in the news every single day of the year and there are 64,200,000 web sites about her). But instead, I decided to go with John K. Blackwell, a former secretary of state from Ohio who successfully gained national prominence for his dual roles as Chief Elections Official of Ohio, who honorary co-chair of the "Committee to re-elect George W. Bush" during the 2004 election. He allegedly was responsible for preventing more than 350,000 voters (most of them inner-city black Democrats) in his state from casting their ballots by inventing a Level Ten terrorist alert to justify counting votes behind closed doors. He deployed faulty voting machines that spoiled 66,000 ballots, tried to scrap tens of thousands of registration



cards filed by new voters and refused to count ballots of voters who lined up at the wrong table on election day.

Also included is Katherine Harris, the person responsible for the scandalous irregularities in the 2000 elections in the state of Florida that finally gave Bush a margin of victory officially tallied at 537 votes that signified his ticket to the White House.

How could I omit IRAQ? The US, acting as World Police, invaded Iraq because there was irrefutable proof of the existence of weapons of mass destruction and because of a supposed connection between Saddam Hussein and the 9-11 attacks. Long after both of these premises were proved completely wrong, and after the deaths of more than 3,000 American soldiers and tens of thousands of Iraq's civilian casualties, Joseph Stiglitz, winner of a Nobel Prize for economics, estimates the true cost of the Iraq war at \$2.267 trillion. The president recently sent 20,000 more soldiers to Iraq.

As another tourist attraction, I chose the US's support of the Israel invasion of Lebanon. Hezbollah paramilitary forces kidnapped an Israeli Army soldier on July 12, 2006. Israel responded with massive air strikes and artillery fire on targets in Lebanon, which damaged almost all of Lebanon's civilian infrastructure, including Rafik Hariri International Airport, hospitals, freeways, schools, and factories. Additionally, there was an air and naval blockade, and a ground invasion in the southern part of the country. The conflict killed over 1,200 people, most of them Lebanese women and children, caused more than \$3.6 billion in damage and displaced nearly 1,000,000 people. Even after the ceasefire, much of southern Lebanon remained uninhabitable due to unexploded cluster bombs. It is known that the Israeli Army illegally used 4 million American made cluster bombs. George Bush and the US Congress (which in the House voted 410-8 in favor of such a response) expressed "strong support" for Israel and condemned the "attack" (???) by Hezbollah.....

Guantanamo: Bush moves prisoners to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and holds them for years without charges, trials, or access to lawyers while they are systematically tortured. These tactics are ruled illegal by a Federal Judge on Jan 31, 2005. It is speculated that Bush has set up secret prisons run by the CIA in foreign countries to escape US laws and regulations against torture as a method of interrogation.

Katrina, Fox News, WMD...the list goes on and on...Jack Abramoff, Dick Cheney, Halliburton, Wolfowitz, Carl Rove.....but I only had 40' of billboard to try to motivate immigrants enough to "ViSit the U\$A!"



My initial project for the MexiCali Biennial consisted of shipping my artwork in two large wooden crates from my studio in Los Angeles to Mexicali. Once there I was to unpack the crates myself and display them alongside the work that had been shipped inside. I had heard that crossing artwork over the border could be very difficult and might involve gifting money to customs agents and dealing with declaring the art. It was also suggested to me to have a Mexican courier familiar with the proper procedures there to receive the artwork and deal with the necessary paperwork, mainly negotiating with customs agents.

When I contacted several local shipping companies I found that either they would not ship to Mexicali or if they did, they charged a ridiculous amount and could not guarantee that the crates would even arrive. When I asked why, the shipping companies responded by saying:

"It's not cost effective for us to ship there,"

"We don't know why but we don't ship there,"

"We've had too many problems in the past with shipments disappearing for us to ship there anymore."

I had to rethink my project.

100 Letters From Los Angeles to Mexicali:

AIRMAIL, 100 Letters from Mexicali to Los Angeles:

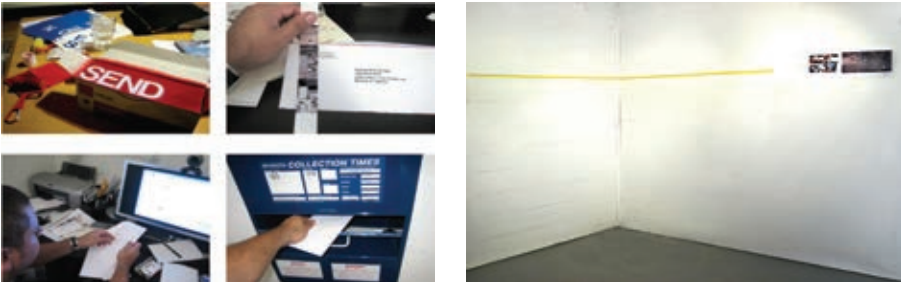
During the month of August 2006, I mailed out 100 letters by U.S. ground mail from my home in Los Angeles, CA, USA, to La Casa de la Tia Tina in Mexicali, B.C., Mexico. Inside each envelope were 1 x 8.5-inch segments of a satellite map showing the U.S./Mexican border between Calexico, CA and Mexicali, Mexico. Upon my arrival in Mexicali I was to reassemble these fragments back into a 100-inch long aerial map of the border.

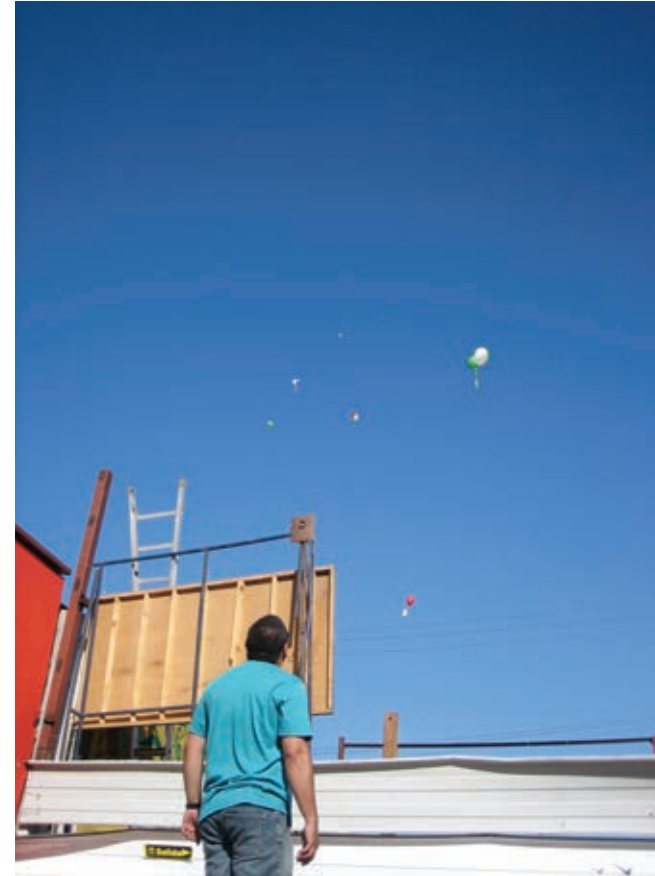
Despite the exhibition space being less than a mile away from the U.S./Mexican border, none of the 100 letters that I mailed out arrived. The yellow line in the installation shot below represents the space that the map sections would have occupied had they arrived.

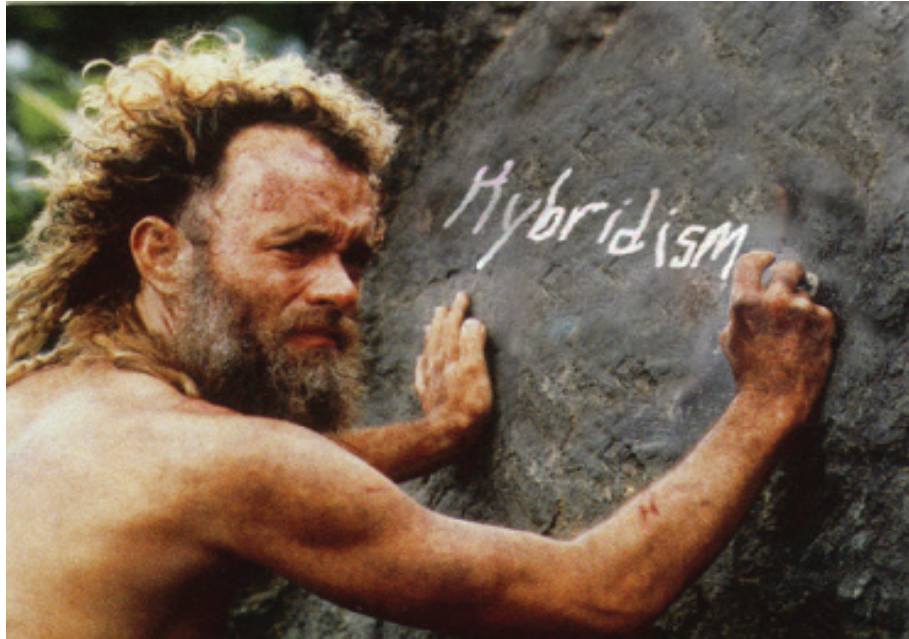
Since none of the letters that I mailed from Los Angeles arrived to the exhibition, I determined that I had a better chance of mailed letters reaching their destination by helium balloon then by standard U.S. or Mexican ground mail. On October 7th, 2006 I airmailed out 100 letters from Mexicali to my studio in Los Angeles, and I had the process documented.

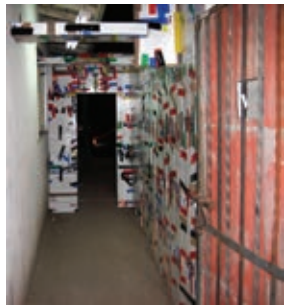
Four months after the Biennial, I began receiving piece by piece the U.S. ground-mailed letters stamped, "undeliverable," and by February, 2007, all 100 letters had been returned to me because the postal service in Mexicali could not find the address to La Casa de la Tia Tina.

I am still waiting to receive any of the 100 air-mailed letters.









Tu te sentirás satisfecho de imponerte a ellos; confíésalo: te impusiste para que te admitieran como su par: ...desde entonces elevaste la mirada allá arriba, en el norte, y desde entonces has vivido con la nostalgia del error geográfico que no te permitió ser en todo parte de ellos: admiras su eficacia, sus comodidades, su higiene, su poder, su voluntad y miras a tu alrededor y te parecen intolerables la incompetencia, la miseria, la suciedad, la abulia, la desnudez de este pobre país que nada tiene; y mas te duele saber que por mas que lo intentes, no puedes ser como ellos, puedes solo ser una calca, una aproximación, porque después de todo, di: ¿tu visión de las cosas, en tus peores o en tus mejores momentos, ha sido tan simplista como la de ellos? Nunca. Nunca has podido pensar en blanco y negro, en buenos y malos, en Dios y Diablo: admite que siempre, aun cuando parecía lo contrario, has encontrado en lo negro el germen, el reflejo de su opuesto: tu propia crueldad, cuando has sido cruel, ¿no estaba tenida de cierta ternura? Sabes que todo extremo contiene su propia oposición: la crueldad la ternura, la cobardía el valor, la vida la muerte: de alguna manera-casi inconscientemente, por ser quien eres, de donde eres y lo que has vivido-sabes esto y por eso nunca te podrás parecer a ellos, que no lo saben. ¿Te molesta? Si, no es cómodo, es molesto, es mucho mas cómodo decir: aquí esta el bien y aquí esta el mal....No querrás pensar en todo eso. Tú detestaras a yo por recordártelo. Tú quisieras ser como ellos y ahora,... casi lo logras. Pero casi. Solo casi.

Extracto del libro "La muerte de Artemio Cruz" de Carlos Fuentes- (Mexico D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1962), pgs. 32-33.

You will feel satisfied to have imposed your will upon them-confess it: ...ever since you fixed your glance there, to the north, ever since then you have lived with regret for the geographical error that has prevented you from being one of them. You admire their efficiency, their comforts, their hygiene, their power, their strength of will; and you look around you and you find intolerable the incompetence, misery, dirt, the weakness and nakedness of this impoverished country that has nothing. You ache because you know that no matter how hard you try, you can never be what they are but can become at most only a pale copy, a near approximation. For after all-confess it-has your vision of things, in your best and worst moments, ever been as simple as theirs? Never. Never have you been able to think in terms of black and white, good and evil, God and the devil. Confess that always, even when it has seemed otherwise, you have found in black the germ of its opposite; your own cruelty, when you have been cruel, has it not been tinged with a certain tenderness? You know that every extreme includes its contrary: cruelty, tenderness; courage, cowardice; life, death. ...Does that disturb you? Yes, it's troubling. How much more comfortable to be able to say: this is good, and this the evil. ...You will prefer not to think about this. You will detest the I, the part of your you that calls it to your attention. You would like to be like them, and now...you have almost accomplished it. But only "almost".

Excerpt from the book "The Death of Artemio Cruz" by Carlos Fuentes- (New York: Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1964), trans. Sam Hileman, pp. 28-29, originally published in Spanish by Fondo de Cultura in 1962.





I Bet You Dream of Drugstores II
(or How Do You Explain To Someone That His Brain is Fried?)

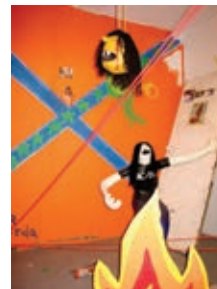
"If you're going to do something, do something witchy."
Charles Manson

When approaching the work of art to be made, it is best to view this situation as having no a priori. Or, in the words of a Frenchman, "existence precedes essence." There is, of course, the impulsive impression of past, present, future, causing this link to history. But time and space is consistently moving forward, so that there is only "future thought" or "future essence." To this there seems to fall the insistent consistency to view the importance of the work of art in its ability to "will" itself into the realm of fixed time.

Timelessness and the masterpiece are consistent with these notions. Although the physical components of the work of art will eventually perish, due to erosion and age. It is the "will" of the work that remains timeless and never bound to the notion of time and space.

Hence we artists are sleepers in private worlds of our own making (mental illness is not funny), and since we no longer exist in the time of masterpieces, I bet you dream of drugstores, for drugstores carry the strongest "will" of all.





Estimados ciudadanos del norte de México; les agradecería que contestaran las siguientes preguntas. Con sus respuestas intentaré formular un futuro determinado en relación a la zona fronteriza entre México y los Estados Unidos desde mi posición como artista visual.

Si México continúa con su política neoliberal, apoyando el libre comercio y suprimiendo las fronteras del capital ¿hubiera necesidad de fronteras nacionales? Si en política interna, apoya la desregulación de los mercados, incluyendo el laboral, y el Estado interviene poco en la economía y privatiza las empresas públicas, ¿para qué sirven las fronteras nacionales?

¿Para qué sirven las fronteras nacionales?

¿Aparte, cree usted que las fronteras existen para contener la pobreza?

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El 25 de Marzo y 1o de Mayo del 2006 ocurrieron manifestaciones que revalidaron la presencia latino americana en los Estados Unidos. ¿Qué impacto tuvieron?

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Las remesas son cantidades de dinero enviadas por emigrantes a sus países de origen. Las cantidades anuales de dinero son tan grandes que en algunos países han desplazado a las exportaciones tradicionales como la principal fuente de ingresos de la economía nacional. ¿Cómo se pueden usar las remesas para revalidar el poder económico de inmigrantes hacia la mejor

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¿Si se iniciara un nuevo modelo de gobierno en México de gestión militar y social que asegure acceso universal, a un mejor nivel de vida a cambio de la disolución de derechos constitucionales, usted lo apoyaría? Por favor explique brevemente.

No. No somos Estados Unidos.

¿Cree usted que el próximo presidente de México podría ser un individuo que haya sido inmigrante ilegal en los Estados Unidos?

SI ☒

NO ☐

¿Si los estados del Norte de México y los Estados del Sur de Estados Unidos renunciaran de las dos republicas para formar un nuevo país, usted apoyaría esta nueva nación?

SI ☒

NO ☐

¿Si esto sucediera, se consideraría usted Chicano?

SI ☒

NO ☐

Este es un proyecto coordinado por Hugo Hopping para la Bienal de Mexicali

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SI ☐

NO ☐



For the Mexicali Biennial I originally wanted to make objects that related to the early or more traditional piñata. I also wanted to reference the animal vessel sculptures that came out of Colima, especially the many clay sculptures that featured the native hairless dogs.

My forms consist of my two cats, Sigmond and Joshua, and my neighbor's German Shepard, Arkus. Using the simple clay pot form, the animals were built around or attached to the pots. Poses typical to these three animals were used to construct their form while the different contents were created in consideration of these poses. For example, the dog lying on its side with opened belly resembled a mixture of road kill and offering, tapping into a favorite image of Joel Peter Witkin's *Cornucopia Dog*.

These objects embrace the cyclical philosophy of life, birth, and death, which is deeply embedded in the lifestyle and celebrations of Mexico and Catholicism. The acceptance of death and the chronic desire to surround oneself with its reminders is quite culturally passionate. In my Grandma's hutch next to the dinning room table sits a shrine to my Grandfather, the ashes of the family dog, and an urn which contains my aunt Joanie.





A brand new aluminum suitcase filled with bundles of money is transported to Mexicali. It is left on a table, half opened. Is it intended to be given away? Or is it a matter of finder's keepers. Upon closer inspection, this does not look like Mexican bank notes. It does not look like any kind of binding monetary bills we are familiar with exchanging. But it is made of a recognizable fiber; newspaper cut up to mimic piles of money. Much like the kind one might see in the movies. The association with kidnappings, ransoms, or drug trafficking is inevitable. Ochoa's inversion of real money for paper money complements a border town backdrop.

By doing so, Ochoa points out how border towns tend to be ideal conditions for such black market dealing because of the accessibilities to escape to other jurisdictions. One could argue in this situation, the suitcase of money does not buy one's life and neither is it a reward for a good deed. Rather, the payoff of the perceived value of the paper money could in fact be exchanged for authentic money from an art buyer. The fact that the larger than life cinematic prop is presented as art is almost absurd. The act of purchasing a suitcase of false bank notes in exchange for government approved funds also comments on the perceived value of art.





The U.S./Mexico border has been a flashpoint for many years, but in the past several months, it has gotten particularly heated in the U.S., primarily over economic and security issues in the post-9/11 environment. When the Bush Administration proposed building a 700-mile long wall on the border, it seemed like all reason had evaporated. The economic issues of immigration to the U.S. have nothing inherently to do with the security concerns of global terrorism, and perhaps security is a convenient excuse to clamp down on economic migration along the border, but the issues have become linked nonetheless. The U.S. government is reinforcing the border with determination and National Guard troops. The issues involved are complicated, but right now, they are fueled, largely, by fear. While this should seem to be the best time to increase communication with our neighbors—when many of our strategic friendships around the world are being strained—there seems to be little public or official interest in dialogue.

For me, the Mexicali Biennial offered an opportunity to address the xenophobia that is percolating in much of the United States. My project, called *Telephone/Teléfono*, was designed as an instrument to foster cross-border communication. It consisted of two structures: one placed in the U.S. and one in Mexico along the Calexico/Mexicali border. The structures were identical except that the U.S. structure was painted red, white, and blue and the one in Mexico was painted red, white, and green. They were 13-feet tall, set in a base, with rungs attached to the central pole. When installed on the border, they were connected by a string attached to Dixie Cups placed at the tops of the structures. Users could climb to the top, where they could pick up the cups/phones and also see each other over the wall while talking.

On Friday, October 6, *Telephone/Teléfono* was placed on opposite sides of the border fence approximately 200 yards from the primary Mexicali/Calexico border crossing. On the Calexico (U.S.) side was a dirt parking lot. A dirt road primarily used by the border patrol ran alongside the 15-foot-tall, steel-reinforced fence. A U.S. Border Patrol officer in his vehicle—parked about a quarter of a mile away—sat watching the wall with binoculars. On the Mexicali side of the fence, the main road leading to the border crossing was clogged with traffic, which moves at a crawl 24 hours a day.

With the assistance of Luis Hernandez, Ed Gomez, Pilar Tompkins, Gilberto Monreal, Ismael Castro, and Michele Mattei on the Mexicali side, and Rebeca Hernandez and Susana Hernandez on the U.S. side, the structures were put in place. On the Mexicali side, Luis Hernandez, wearing a t-shirt with “Mexico” and the country’s flag emblazoned across it, and I, on the U.S. side, wearing a “U.S.A. Home of the Brave” t-shirt, climbed up the poles and tried to talk. Within two minutes, U.S. border patrol officers on bicycles rode over to me and stopped the action. The structures were dismantled. The U.S. structure was taken to the Calexico campus of San Diego State University for display, while the Mexico structure was brought to La Casa de la Tía Tina for the biennial exhibition.

Telephone/Teléfono took some effort to climb up, few people saw it, and the sound was not too clear, but, at least symbolically, it was a start at discussion.





Open Your Eyes and Buy Some Gum

When asked to participate in the Mexicali Biennial, I immediately agreed. Raised in a household that was courteously xenophobic, I ate Mexican food often as a child but never ventured below the border for fear of children peddling Chiclets and other unspeakable horrors. As a young adult, friends would make day trips to score prescription goodies, but fear of the inside of a Mexican jail cell always dissuaded me. It wasn't until my Luna de Miel, at the age of twenty-eight, that my wife and I traveled to Mexico City. But that was the interior. The border was another animal entirely. The fear that was so politely (read insidiously) introduced into my mind would soon be taken to task.

Generally, my surroundings will present peculiar images or objects. Through drawing or sculpture, these peculiar moments are isolated and recontextualized. These images or objects serve to point the viewer towards the bewildering prospects of being alive. For the exhibition, I hoped to make work that spoke to what is essentially human and didn't cater to cultural clichés or emphasize the real or imagined divide between the United States and Mexico. In addition to several drawings and a large sculpture, I had the opportunity to make an outdoor sculpture while in Mexicali.

The three drawings exhibited in Mexicali were appropriated from the Mexican tabloid *¡Alarma!* Images of the severed heads of two assassinated drug enforcement officers are juxtaposed with a revealing image of the Mexican singer and provocateur, Gloria Trevi. Adjacent to these drawings was a six-foot tall sculpture of a gorilla hand.

In *Panty #2* (2006), a woman (Gloria Trevi) squats while singing into a microphone. While engaged in a dramatic moment of performing, her panties have been revealed. The 'panty shot' has always been a strange phenomenon to me. While in school, I recall seeing the panties of an attractive student sitting across from me. What was surprising and tantalizing at first, turned to embarrassment and shame. What if she knew that I had spotted those gleaming white panties?

Head #1 and *Head #2* (both 2006) have been isolated from the fence they were impaled on in the Yucatan. At times, I think about being murdered. Violent death is a reality, however uncommon in the scope of possibili-

ties. Their eyes are covered, a signal of execution, not of accident. I am reminded of the sleep that death brings, the fears that lurk in our minds, and of the embarrassment that I experienced with that panty shot. An enormous gorilla hand greeted viewers in Mexicali. Constructed of fabric and paper-maché over an armature, *Rumors of War* (2006) is one part sculpture and one part Hollywood ephemera. My desire was to allow the viewer to imagine themselves as Faye Rae (or Naomi Watts) with the hand of Kong approaching. Is this a hand of menace or a hand of friendship? Are we guided by paranoia or, for lack of a better term, pro-noia? The title of the piece came from the mistrust of the Bush administration against Iran and North Korea, the still unresolved conflict between the factions of Felipe Calderón and Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and the metaphors that can be extracted from both.

Constructed from cinderblocks, rebar, concrete, and glass bottles, *So As Not To Impale Yourself* (2006) was derived from my encounters with various construction projects witnessed while spending time in Mexico City. Walking throughout the city and its periphery, exposed rebar, emerging from cinderblock, crowned many structures indicating future growth: proposed second or third stories, new bedrooms, new lives. To prevent any unfortunate accidents, various bottles topped the rebar. As light passed through the glass bottles, I was struck by the aesthetic beauty of these minimalist forms. Simultaneously, I was impressed with the ingenuity and immediacy of this safety measure. I also thought of how safety often emerges from tragedy or from our fears of the worst. Is it possible to shield ourselves from life's worst-case scenarios?

Mexicali turned out to be a strange hybrid of the United States and Mexico. Despite geo-political barriers, the culture was deeply penetrated by this duality. Differences and similarities could be posited as one could between LA and New York City or LA and Bakersfield. The human factor is the one that overwhelms and frustrates such distinctions. There were children hawking Chiclets and there were horrible sights of poverty, disease, and inequity, but these are the sights of life's worst-case scenarios. They are around us always. They are within us and in our minds. Close your eyes and they are there. Open your eyes and buy some gum. Tutti Frutti is the flavor of joyfully participating in the sorrows of being alive.



list of works

46

Andrew Armstrong 20

ROB ALL LABOR

tissue paper, brown bags, and styrofoam
dimensions variable
2006

Cindy Santos Bravo 22

Oh the Possibilities/Orale las Posibilidades

cinderblock, wood, acrylic paint
120"x 720"x 1"
2006

Jesse Benson 24

Another Extinction Theory

polymer clay, acrylic paint, wood,
brass plaque, razor blade
approx. 18" x 24" x 18"
2006

Gomez Bueno 26

ViSite E\$ta\$do\$ Unido\$

Acrylic on Canvas
48" x 40"
2006
recipient of the David K. Parker Award

Ed Gomez 28

100 letters from Los Angeles to Mexicali

letters and postage with satellite map
shipped using the U.S. ground postal service
2006

AIRMAIL

100 letters from Mexicali to Los Angeles
letters and helium filled balloons
photo documentation
2006

Skylar Haskard 30

Untitled (Mexical)

FedEx boxes, tape, Castaway video tape and
participants
dimensions variable
2006 ongoing

Luis G. Hernandez 32

Untitled #83

Home Depot paint from the USA and Mexico
dimensions variable
2006

Gustavo Herrera 34

666
mixed media installation
dimensions variable
2006

Hugo Hopping 36

Untitled

6.5" x 10" printed paper
dimensions variable
2006

Untitled

toilet seat covers, cardboard box and tape
dimensions variable
2006

Kristi Lippire 38

Sigmund in Calavera

gouache and pencil on paper
30"x24"
2006

Cornucopia Dog

plaster, clay, paint, and papier-mache
16"x48"x18" plus pedestal
2006

Sigmund Vessel

plaster, clay, fake flowers
12 1/2" x 48"x18" plus pedestal
2006

Joshua Vessel

Plaster and clay
34"x27"x21" plus pedestal
2006

Ruben Ochoa 40

Payoff

briefcase and newspaper
dimensions variable
2006

Mike Rogers 42

Telephone/Telefono

Border Intervention
2006

Matt Wardell 44

Rumors of War

mixed media
5' x 3' x 6'
2006

So as Not to Impale Yourself

cinder blocks, cement, rebar, concrete, bottles
dimensions variable
2006

Untitled (Panty #1, Head #1, Head #2)

ink on paper
18" x 24"
2006

Directors and curators for the
MexiCali Biennial / 06 are:

Ed Gomez
Luis G. Hernandez
Pilar Tompkins

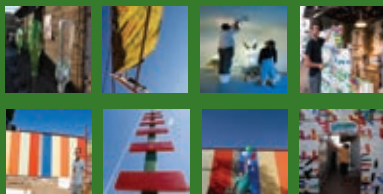
for more information please visit:
www.mexicalibiennial.org
e-mail: info@mexicalibiennial.org

photographic credits:

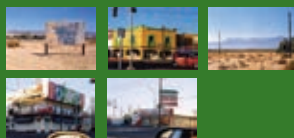
We would like to thank the following for
their contributions

April A. Lillard

Michele Mattei's images can be found on
these pages. 18, 19, 26, 30, 31, 32



Andrew Davis's images can be found
on the following pages. 48, 49





A Comprehensive but Limited Perspective (in alphabetical order) by Matt Wardell

Antics, Architecture of immediacy, Barbershop, Bleeding, Blow, Boing! Brazil, Broken sidewalks, Broken toilet, Carne asada, Cazadores, Chased by dogs, Chiclets, Chinatown, Climbing fences, Coffee at AM/ PM, Coca-Cola, Cocodrilos, Colonialism, Confetti, County Fair, Cowboy hats, Cripples, Cumbias at 3am, Dancing, Detained at the border, Dirt floors, Dogs, Double talk, Quién es Droopy? Dust storms, Eating in the mall, Ex-patriots, Farmacia, Feathers in hair, Federalis, Fiberglass coatlicue, Fiestas, Fighting, Flim flam, Fortunes as satanic verses, Fortunes at the end of a meal, Fortunes told by a bird, French toast, Game shows, Generosity, Geronimo, Graffiti kids, Grass, Green room, Gringolito, Hall of mirrors, Hanging corpse, Haunted house, Helping, Holes in the ground, Holes in pants,



Home Depot, Hookers in the stairwell, Hula dancers, Intoxicated interviews, Jaguar pacing, Joaquina, Kindness, Labor? Laughing, Lucha Libre, Makin' love, Man in gutter, Mariachis, Mechanical bull, Memín Pinguín, Money on the sidewalk, More grass, More Tecate, More tequila, Moustaches, Mucho gusto! Music in the streets, New growth, Owls, Pagoda, Peasants, Poncho Villa, Pony rides, Poor translations, Precarious, Punk rock kids, Raccoons, Repairs, Rodeo rider, Rubber chicken, Ruta de la evacuación, Sanborns, Schemes, Shantytowns, Shave and a haircut, Sister Nancy, Spin, SuperFreak, Tecate, Tarantula Girl, Tequila, Tight pants, Uncle, Waca, Wall of tires, Vaudeville, Vitriol, Zapata

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Abstract

