



▲ Elsa Medina, *Migrant*, 1987
(gelatin and silver on paper).

Fascination and moral condemnation,
recognizable expressions of the dialectic of fear,
defined the stigma imposed on certain border cities
and very particularly on Tijuana.



▲ Elsa Medina, *Border Fence between Mexico and the United States*,
2007 (gelatin and silver on paper).

THE CITY'S SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

The border has been a space associated with threats, de-nationalization, and cultural indigence: Mexican educator and philosopher José Vasconsuelos said that Northern Mexico is where culture ends and barbeque begins. This idea has been reiterated by different officials who have denied that “cultural or artistic manifestations” could develop along the border, and this perspective fed the representation of Mexico’s North as a desert.

An important part of the urban border profile involves the needs of the service sector, but the socio-cultural construction of the space was also defined by urban struggle and the unrestrained demand for land, housing, and services.

The condition of the border played an important role in the use of objects and materials utilized and their conversion into options for housing by the poor, who live in cars, trucks, campers, motor homes, and other junked vehicles. Together with them, the purchase of second-hand houses

became an important option for cheap housing for the poor. However, in the early 1970s, importing used houses was banned, arguing that they were “unsanitary.” Intense conflicts also exploded due to demands for housing and public utilities combined with official urban reordering policies and government and the business community’s interest in appropriating land with high commercial value where poor people were living. These conflicts became especially tense and dramatic in the Tijuana River Zone, which witnessed many clashes, injustices, and deaths over which the city’s modern profile was paved.

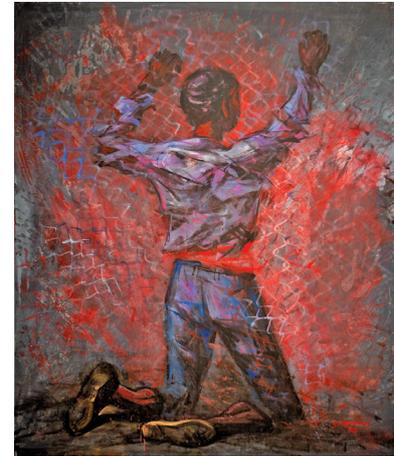
Tijuana reordered its urban spaces and social stumbling blocks through the expansion of the *maquiladora* industry. This was the expression of new global scenarios characterized by the internationalization of productive processes and the labor market, labor flexibility, tax breaks, and benefit packages for entrepreneurs, which included the obstruction, control, or extermination of unions, feminizing the workplace and eliminating job security, prompting the emergence of new work-site related diseases and risks.



▲ Daniel Ruanova, *Identity, Temporary Guardian*, 2011 (acrylic on canvas).



▲ Hugo Crosthwaite, *Laocoon Drama*, 2010 (colored pencil and charcoal on canvas).



▲ Joel González Navarro, *Migrant*, 1988 (oil on canvas).

THIS IS TIJUANA!

Twenty-first-century Tijuana has not managed to shake off its blackened legend fed by violence and drug trafficking. But it has been able to call national or international attention to its artists and cultural proposals. Together with the projects mentioned here, a large number of young people are recreating the arts and constructing new reference points and representations of the city. Projects like Bulbo, Radio Global, Yonke Art, among others, show new perspectives for the Tijuana world.

Tijuana culture is nourished by sampling. Tijuana codifies diverse cultural elements and sounds and recreates them, reutilizes them, recycles them, adapts them to new situations. Tijuana cultural sampling is made up of a broad symbolic and cultural repertoire that relates different cultural samples and experiences. In Tijuana, life is redefined intensely, and original or pre-codified cultural elements are changing samples that transform themselves in the city's web with no guarantee of fidelity. In Tijuana there is an intensive use of

cultural loops, like splintered elements or cultural sections that repeat themselves by enculturation or custom. The cultural loop produces processes that define familiar, recognizable, guiding coordinates.

Tijuana reinvents itself, renovates itself, based on the day-to-day, and by so doing, resorts to the palimpsest, to the pastiche, and cultural sampling as important resources for the (re)signification of art and social imaginaries, like inter-subjective frameworks where the meanings and significance of life and the day-to-day are defined, manifested in an infinity of artistic manifestations. **MM**

NOTES

¹ An extended version of this text has been published in "This is Tijuana: Pastiche, Palimpsests and Cultural Sampling", in *Strange New World. Art and Design from Tijuana* (San Diego, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, 2006).