

## CHAPTER VIII: ARTS AND CULTURE

One of the most important yet overlooked regional assets in the San Diego-Tijuana border region is the vibrant arts and culture scene emerging in Tijuana, which is not only catalyzing a binational arts community but also playing an instrumental role in promoting community beautification, educational arts enrichment to under-served communities and special education programs across Tijuana.

Identified by Newsweek International as one of the top eight creative cities in the world, Tijuana was recently recognized as the home of *Nortec*, which is the convergence of high and low tech traditional Mexican Norteño music. This distinction won the city a reputation among world music aficionados from as far away as Berlin and Tokyo.<sup>318</sup> Berlin-based Haus der Kulturen der Welt affirms that Tijuana “was the cradle of Mexican rock and where the music of the future is being born for Mexico.”<sup>319</sup> According to Britain’s Guardian Newspaper, “Tijuana is in the middle of an artistic flowering in which artists are re-examining the city’s hybrid (binational) culture.”<sup>320</sup>

The growing interest in Tijuana’s arts and culture extends beyond *Nortec*. Over the past five years, a growing number of exhibitions across Europe, particularly in Germany, have sought to feature the city’s visual arts in exhibitions and congresses. For example, a recent international congress in Hamburg entitled “Unlikely Encounters in Urban Space” highlighted the built environment of Maclovio Rojas in Eastern Tijuana along with that of New Dehli, India; Mar de Plata, Argentina; Milan, Italy; and Berlin, Munich and Hamburg, Germany.<sup>321</sup>

Tijuana’s intrigue for a growing number of artists, arts curators and followers of *Nortec* is its strategic location along the international border with San Diego, considered “one of the hottest interfaces between ‘first’ and ‘third’ worlds.”<sup>322</sup> In a profile of Tijuana’s arts and culture by the Tucson Weekly, it was noted that some artists were attracted to and inspired by the San Diego-Tijuana region because of its unique characteristics, where “essentially a Third-World environment [is] slammed up against a city [San Diego] that is one of the richest

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<sup>318</sup> Piore, Adam, “How to Build a Creative City” Newsweek International, September 2, 2002.

<sup>319</sup> “Tijuana: Techno with folk-roots,” Berlin, Germany: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, September 2002

<sup>320</sup> Park Fiction, “Forget Paris and London, Newcastle is a creative city to match Kabul and Tijuana,” Guardian Newspaper (Manchester, UK), September 2, 2002.

<sup>321</sup> “Unlikely Encounters in Urban Space” International Congress/Exhibition, Hamburg, Germany, June 26-29, Unlikely Encounters in Urban Space

<sup>322</sup> Haus der Kulturen der Welt (September 2002).

in one of the richest states in the richest countries in the world."<sup>323</sup> Tijuana, in particular, has rapidly become a magnet for artists, both from within Mexico and from abroad. For example, musicians and visual artists from Russia and Eastern Europe have improved the ethnic diversity of the Orchestra de Baja California.

The level of cultural exchange between San Diego and Tijuana for institutions and individuals is rich and complex. In fact, it is fair to say that the binational arts community of the San Diego and Tijuana region may be the most progressive, yet among the most under-funded and least understood, when compared to other binational communities surveyed in this report.

While the binational region's cultural assets and their increasing world recognition are to be celebrated, a recurring criticism locally is that focusing on arts and culture diverts attention and funding away from the more urgent and immediate need for economic development. However, recent studies have highlighted economic benefits of investment in arts and culture. Arts and cultural activities can also lead to a sense of pride for communities. They provide educational enrichment and stimulation for children and youth, who, without artistic outlets, might be at risk of engaging in less desirable, dangerous activities such as substance abuse or crimes. Binational arts and cultural activities have already brought positive impacts to the region. This chapter highlights these successful binational initiatives.

#### Cultural Assets in Our Binational Region

Many artists have come to the region, or became attracted to the region, thanks to civic leaders in arts and culture, such as Carmen Cuenca and Michael Krichman, who have proactively promoted this binational region as a place for creativity. Pioneering the binational region's leadership in the arts has been inSITE, which seeks to promote binational visual arts through cross-border arts exhibitions and displays. Led by the husband-wife team of Cuenca and Krishman, inSITE has brought artists from around the world to jumpstart a visual arts laboratory. By working on a binational basis, inSITE has permitted artists to engage in work outside the context of traditional arts venues and to explore the convergence of cultures and socio-economic differences that exist in the region.<sup>324</sup> In the 2000-2001 program, artists put more emphasis on participation of the residents of the region than in the past, especially in Tijuana, creating a more interactive space for artistic expression.

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<sup>323</sup> Hans Fjellestad, quoted by Cristián A. Sierra, "New documentary exposes different layers of the border metropolis," Tucson Weekly, September 19, 2002.

<sup>324</sup> InSITE 2000 web site

While many artists have focused on the contradictions and problems of the border region, some native artists have benefited from living in a region with diverse cultural inputs – from Mexican traditional culture to the fast-changing American contemporary culture. As noted earlier, such is the case with Nortec music whose founders were chosen by the Mexican government to be represented at the World Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany.<sup>325</sup> Other artists have become active participants in the Nortec movement by producing CD covers, graphics and T-shirts for the musicians.<sup>326</sup> These musicians and artists challenge the stereotypical, negative image of Tijuana, as they see the city as “a place of opportunity and creativity, not just a springboard into the United States.”<sup>327</sup>

For artists, another benefit of living in the binational region is that residents can take advantage of cultural activities on both sides of the border, and many arts organizations in the region now have binational programs. For example, Mainly Mozart (known as *Festival Binacional de Mozart* in Baja California) has a binational organization, and performs with internationally-known musicians and orchestras in both California and Baja California. San Diego Opera's Ensemble, a group of six young singers, tours the region each year, giving more than 150 performances in schools, libraries, community centers, and at concert venues. Widely recognized for its performing and visual arts, Tijuana's cultural arts center, CECUT was officially opened in 1982, and now serves as a focal point for Tijuana's cultural scene.<sup>328</sup> World-class musical acts now arrive to the region to perform solely in Tijuana, completely bypassing San Diego, encouraging San Diego trans-border residents to cross the border and attend cultural events, purchase art, or listen to concerts in Tijuana.

### **Mainly Mozart**

[www.mainlymozart.org/](http://www.mainlymozart.org/)

Since May 1992, when the first concert was performed in a private home in Tijuana, Mozart Binacional has contributed to the cultural, economic and educational ties between San Diego and Baja California.

The Mainly Mozart Guild in Tijuana, headed by Alida Guanjardo de Cervantes, succeeded in securing the Centro Cultural as a venue in 1993, and in adding the Catedral de Guadalupe the following year. Since that time, concerts have been performed in Mexicali, Ensenada, Rosarito, Mazatlán and Tecate as well. In addition to the summer festival, Mainly Mozart Spotlight Series concerts by

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<sup>325</sup> Melissa Sattley, “The Bastard Child of Norteño and Electrica, Nortec, ‘the Future of Mexican Music’,” [Austin Chronicle](#) November 3, 2000.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, quoting Raul Cardenas, an architect and designer living in Tijuana.

<sup>328</sup> Alberto Ubach (a 41-year old classical guitarist from Tijuana), an interview in 2001 quoted in Sandra Dibble, “Ciudad de Arte,” [San Diego Union Tribune](#) November 4, 2001.

some of the most acclaimed chamber ensembles in the world are held in many of the same venues. In an effort to promote greater cross-cultural exchange, Mainly Mozart's "Mingle in Mexico" provides San Diego audiences the opportunity to enjoy the Mainly Mozart experience in Tijuana.

*Mozart Iluminado* is the non-profit's Spanish-language program presented to 10,000 children in Tijuana by Mainly Mozart's Mexican actors to introduce elementary school students to the life and music of Mozart. Additionally, Mainly Mozart's program for top students in the youth orchestras of Baja California presents master classes by the internationally-renowned artists who visit the San Diego area.

It is important to emphasize that the cross-border flow of arts patrons and cultural exchange is two-way with Tijuana residents regularly heading northward to attend musical or artistic performances and exhibitions in San Diego. Here, one institution of growing importance in promoting the binational arts culture in the San Diego-Tijuana region is the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego that has over the past decade staged some noteworthy exhibitions highlighting the border experience as exemplified by "La Frontera/The Border: Art About the Mexico/United States Border Experience," (1993); "Alex Webb: Crossings" (2003) and most recently "Baja to Vancouver: The West Coast and Contemporary Art" (January 23 to May 16, 2004).

Beyond artistic exhibitions and live performances, an emerging dimension of the San Diego-Tijuana arts and culture scene is evolving on the internet as well as in film and video. Nortec musicians from Tijuana share their music scores with listeners world-wide. The inSITE archives have also been kept alive via the web. The San Diego Independent Media Center (SDIMC), a grassroots organization based in Barrio Logan, is using media production and distribution as a tool for promoting social and economic justice in the San Diego-Tijuana region. Thanks to a recent three-year grant from *Hispanics in Philanthropy*, the SDIMC now plans to expand its exhibition programming, youth media production, and resources to local independent filmmakers in the San Diego-Tijuana region.<sup>329</sup> Among SDIMC's recent cross-border initiatives has been a web and video based campaign to oppose the construction of a triple border fence.<sup>330</sup> Paul Espinosa, a local independent film producer/writer and director has made notable contributions in interpreting the unique San Diego-Tijuana region. Through his film production company, Espinosa Productions, this former KPBS-TV Executive Producer has produced a number of important border-related documentary films including: *The New Tijuana* (1990); *The Lemon Grove Incident*,

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<sup>329</sup> '\$1 Million awarded to Latino Non Profits,' *Hispanics in Philanthropy* Press Release, February 7, 2004.

<sup>330</sup> [www.sandiego.indymedia.org](http://www.sandiego.indymedia.org)

a docudrama on the nation's first successful legal challenge to school segregation; and *Uneasy Neighbors* (1990), a profile of escalating tensions between migrant worker camps and affluent homeowners in Carmel Valley area of San Diego. Beside Espinosa's work, Los Angeles native Phillip Rodriguez recently produced "Mixed Feelings: San Diego-Tijuana," a documentary about the San Diego-Tijuana region and its inevitable transnational future.

Just as border-related policy issues are being captured on film and the web, the San Diego-based- Border Arts Workshop, a project of the Combined Visual Arts (COVA), has used art as a form of political expression in assisting the community of Maclovio Rojas address their long-standing land dispute with Mexican authorities. In Tijuana, local artists line the border fence with crosses and coffins signifying those that have died attempting to cross the international line. In this sense, art is being used as an integral part of a political strategy to shape the hearts and minds of residents on both sides of the border.<sup>331</sup> Here again, San Diego-Tijuana is seen as the "nucleus of a movement now spreading across the entire U.S.-Mexico border, including the Arizona/Sonora and Texas/Chihuahua borders, to use border art to shape public opinion and influence perceptions about this fast changing region."<sup>332</sup>

#### Cultural Environment and Economic Development

The conventional wisdom among many civic leaders is that support for arts and culture is a luxury that takes potential funding away from economic development. If one only focuses on the allocation of the available funds, it is true that a dollar spent on arts and culture programs means a dollar less available for economic programs. However, arts and culture can also have positive impact on economic development as highlighted by a study commissioned by Americans for the Arts. The study shows that spending by nonprofit arts organizations for cultural events and by audiences who attend these events creates jobs not only in the arts sector, but also in industries such as restaurants, hotels and transportation that benefit from audience dining before or after the cultural events and staying over night at hotels for the cultural events. In San Diego County, the study found that total spending by local nonprofit arts organizations and their audiences reached \$326 million during fiscal year 2000. This spending, according to the study, supported the full-time equivalent of 6,462 jobs, generating \$135 million in household income, \$9.0 million in local government revenue, and \$12.4 million for the state.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Preto, Antonio, "Border Art as a Political Strategy" Information Services Latin America, 1999, [isla.igc.org/Features/Border/mex6.html](http://isla.igc.org/Features/Border/mex6.html)

<sup>332</sup> Beyond Borders Binational Arts Foundation, 2003 ([www.beyondbordersbinationalart.org](http://www.beyondbordersbinationalart.org))

<sup>333</sup> Cunningham, Kelly, San Diego Chamber of Commerce, Business Action Newsletter, Winter 2004, p. 20.

The positive economic impact of arts and culture goes beyond direct economic benefits arising from spending by arts organizations and audiences. For example, a study by the National Governor's Association lists several benefits of promoting arts.<sup>334</sup> Arts programs can encourage promotion of local crafts and increase cultural tourism; arts can serve as a centerpiece for community revitalization or as the center of vibrant public spaces; and arts can create a more positive regional and community image. According to the study, then, "[c]ultural facilities and events enhance property values, tax resources, and overall profitability for communities. In doing so, the arts become a direct contributor to the urban and rural revitalization."<sup>335</sup>

One potential impact of arts and culture on economic development has attracted particular attention from government and civic leaders after the publication of Richard Florida's book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. The book's main argument is that knowledge workers, whom Florida calls the *creative class*, are crucial resources in today's increasingly information- and knowledge-based economy, and that the creative class is "transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life."<sup>336</sup> He then argues that the creative class needs a vibrant artistic and cultural environment to thrive, and thus communities with rich cultural environment will prosper while those lacking such an environment will fall behind.<sup>337</sup> By this logic, fostering a vibrant arts and cultural environment is not merely complementary to economic development but rather necessary for knowledge-based economic development. Here then, the question to ask is, to what degree can Tijuana help strengthen San Diego's creative quotient?

### Impact of Arts and Culture on Communities

As examples throughout the San Diego-Tijuana region has clearly demonstrated, arts and cultural activities can also have a positive impact in promoting community development. Participation in arts programs may lead to a sense of pride for communities as highlighted by the innovative work undertaken by the *Border Arts Workshop* in Maclovio Rojas, an unincorporated and under-served squatter community in Eastern Tijuana (See human services section). In this community of largely working poor, a school, women's center, and community center have been built and beautified through the work of regional artists.

Some local participants of inSITE 2000-2001 had a transformative experience by being part of artists' projects. As a case in point, six female maquiladora workers expressed their thoughts and feelings about domestic difficulties and abuses, workplace problems, and police violence, projecting their voices and faces to a

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<sup>334</sup> National Governors Association, 2001, p. 1.

<sup>335</sup> National Governors Association, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>336</sup> Florida, 2002, quoted from the subtitle of the book.

<sup>337</sup> Florida, 2002, part IV.

crowd of over 1,500 on the dome wall of CECUT.<sup>338</sup> Ten families in Maclovio Rojas painted their houses with colors and patterns symbolic of their regional and cultural heritage, and at least one participant went on to improve her house on her own.<sup>339</sup>

Arts and cultural events are especially important for children and youth. Arts programs can help children enjoy and enhance their learning, by providing opportunities for hands-on, active participation using creative skills. For example, at Ecoparque, which offers environmental education classes, children's workshop includes crafts with recycled newspaper.

Similarly, children and adults with special education needs are learning necessary life skills through arts and crafts. In Tijuana, Asociación Pro-Autismo, A.C., a nonprofit organization founded by parents of children with autism in 1994, uses arts and crafts as a part of their educational activities. At Taller Pro-Discapacitados, A.C. (Workshop for the Disabled), which works with all disabled youths and adults including those with Down Syndrome to promote self-sufficiency, one of the programs is to learn to assemble Piñatas.

Another benefit of arts programs for children and youth is that these programs offer safe and fun outlets for the youngsters who might otherwise be at risk of being drawn into illicit activities such as substance abuse, gangs, or criminal rings. One such program is offered by the previously-mentioned Border Art Workshop, which has brought artists from both sides of the border since 1984 to promote awareness for the arts and diverse points of view of life in the border region. In one of Tijuana's colonias populares, Maclovio Rojas, the Border Art Workshop has been active since 1996, organizing visual art and literary workshops. It has also constructed a cultural and performing center in the colonia, and has helped visual enhancement of the Women's Center, children's playground and sports area.<sup>340</sup> Another project in Tijuana that can benefit children is El Trompo-Museo Interactivo, a planned interactive museum for children. This plan to construct the best interactive museum in Northwestern Mexico in the city of Tijuana is estimated to cost more than \$1 million, and unfortunately funding has not been sufficient to date.

### Cultural Preservation

While much of the arts and cultural activities in the binational region is inspired by the region's dynamics today, some artists have taken leadership in preserving the cultural heritage of the region. One of the leaders in the conservation efforts, Save Our Heritage Organization (SOHO) in San Diego, has been working

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<sup>338</sup> Wodiczko, in inSITE (2002), pp. 74-77.

<sup>339</sup> Nador, in inSITE (2002), pp. 86-88.

<sup>340</sup> Border Art Workshop, in 1997 inSITE catalog, p. 182.

on cultural preservation in San Diego since 1969. SOHO has expanded its activities to include cultural preservation in the binational region. For example, it is working together with two Mexican organizations and two California organizations to preserve the Tecate railroad station.

Of all the cultural heritage sites, missions have attracted most attention both in California and Baja California. California Mission Studies Association (founded in 1984) and California Missions Foundation (founded in 1998) are both dedicated to preservation of missions in California. Founded in 1997, the Mexicali-based Camino Real Misionero de las Californias (CAREM) Foundation works on saving old mission sites and sites of archeological significance in Baja California. Although these institutions focus their activity on the same regional cultural assets—missions—and there is an agreement between California and Baja California government agencies to create a binational heritage corridor, as of 2003 there was no formal cross-border collaboration between these non-profit organizations.

### The Challenges in Promoting Binational Arts and Culture

#### **Funding**

Tijuana's arts world is rich and dynamic, but it remains under-funded. Unlike San Diego, where private foundations and individuals are the main financial patrons of the arts and culture, in Mexico the general concept is that the government is responsible for promoting arts and culture. Hence, many of Tijuana's arts and culture programs are under-funded while little in the way of government investment is occurring to promote the region's thriving arts scene in spite of international interest. Still for many artists, government funding is viewed as a double-edged sword as such funding has the danger of tight controls, depriving or inhibiting spontaneous creativity of individual artists who participate in government-sponsored art events. Here San Diego has served as an important creative outlet and source of funding for budding Tijuana artists.

#### **Access: Border Security and Its Impacts on the Free-Flow of Cultural Exchange**

One of the unfortunate causalities of the post-9/11 tightening of the border has been the marked decrease in the level of cultural exchange between San Diego and Tijuana. In part this has been attributed to the growing border delays that have served as a deterrent to would-be border crossers. To others it has been the "fear factor" of crossing an international border given the post-9/11 heightened concern over terrorism. Still, some of the decrease in cultural exchange has been attributed to the elimination of "humanitarian visas" for Tijuana schools children and youth that have traditionally crossed over to San Diego with their classes to take advantage of the arts and cultural events. Even within San Diego, access to arts and culture, especially for school-age children, is not easily available. The ArtsBusXpress, a collaboration of the San Diego-

Tijuana Sister City Society, San Diego City Schools, the San Diego Arts Education Partnership, City of San Diego Commission for Arts and Culture, and Community Council for Music in the Schools, attempts to address this need by providing bus transportation for K-12 school programs. Although initial funding is limited for schools in the City of San Diego, the long-term goal is to make the buses available to schools throughout San Diego County and Baja California.<sup>341</sup>

### Priorities in Arts and Culture

As noted, Tijuana's thriving arts culture remains one of the most important, yet least understood civic assets of the San Diego-Tijuana region. Properly leveraged, Tijuana's thriving artistic community can help stimulate the regional economy by enriching the cultural climate on both sides of the border. Our region's arts community also has a potentially important role to play in helping to bridge the current divide that exists between our two sister cities by re-connecting San Diegans and Tijuanaenses through artistic expression.

Unfortunately, regional funding for the arts remains limited, especially in Tijuana. Here the following philanthropic initiatives could be undertaken:

- Provide active financial support for InSITE-2004/2005
- Invest in arts-related educational enrichment program in both Tijuana's under-served communities as well as San Diego's under-served Latino communities.
- Support construction of El Trompo-Museo Interactivo
- Promote advocacy for a re-introduction of humanitarian visas for Tijuana school children and youth so as to increase their cultural enrichment opportunities.

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<sup>341</sup> Information obtained from ArtsBusXpress website, <http://www.artsbusxpress.org/> (last accessed 2/17/04).