



▲ House made with the backs of television sets, 2005 (digital photography).

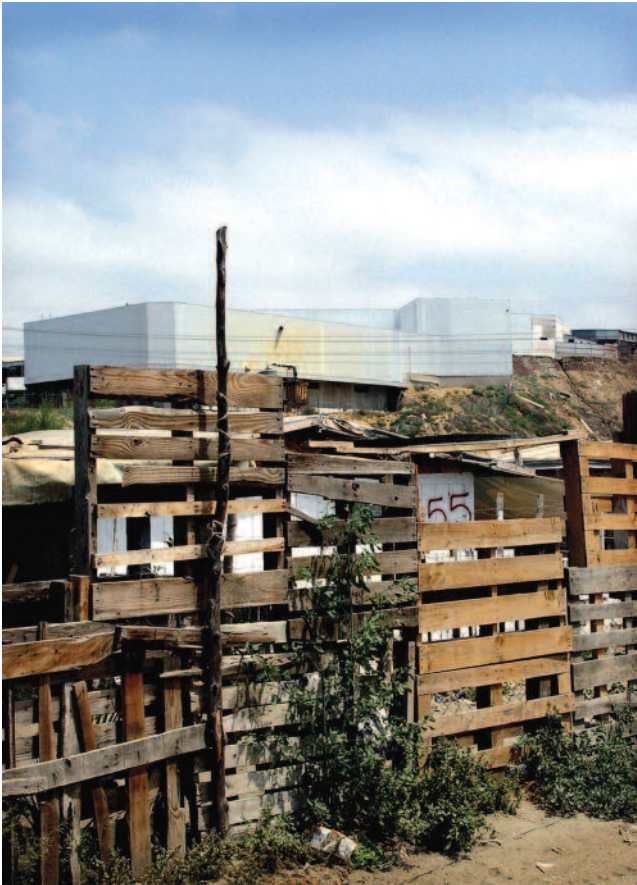
The City Takes the Lead

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Wandering through the city is what guides my work. Going off the beaten path to explore its labyrinths has allowed me to meet up with “the other” and “the others” that I then capture in photographs..

Tijuana’s urban landscape is characterized by a lack of planning and its many irregular settlements. Demographically, different cultural groups from the rest of the country who have brought with them specific cultural baggage and their own history all co-exist together. Observing the diversity that emerges from this convergence is geographically easy in a city that has developed as a kind of organized chaos: public housing projects border on shantytowns (whose houses are born from the imaginative recycling of waste materials), in turn surrounded by blossoming maquiladora plants.

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◀ Maquila plant and Nueva Esperanza shantytown, 2005 (digital photography).



▼ Syphoning off electricity, 2005 (digital photography).

On one of my “trips” through the city, I discovered a shantytown called Nueva Esperanza (New Hope); from the government’s point of view, it is illegal. This shantytown was born because of the constant arrival of migrants mainly from Chiapas and Veracruz, but it is also home to people born in Tijuana who have settled in the bed of the Alamar River and built their houses with materials they have collected from the area in the best of cases, or purchased in the market that sells waste materials.

The first encounter with the place has a big impact. The contradictions of the border area are right on the surface. It is impossible to understand right away or design methodologies to simplify its study and comprehension.

The space exhibits the constant conflict, disturbances and tension present in the city. The waste materials from the country next door acquire a new meaning as a result of that exaltation of the imagination produced by the struggle for survival. They are evidence of the capacity for resistance of those who give them new uses.

Tijuana is visually violent, a friend once told me. The houses provoke the observer in a sharp, rough but also playful and emotional way. Here, industrial canvas used as insulation in the roofs.

There, the backs of television sets turned into building materials for walls and roofs. Everywhere, pallets become fences and walls; tires are shoved into the sides of hills used both as stairways and containing walls; walls made with garage doors. These are such popular building materials that on the outskirts of the city, signs advertising “walls for sale” abound, in reference to garage doors.

For me the challenge has been avoiding a simplified, stereotyped reading of the images I come across, images that are so aesthetically overloaded, images that are not static, but constantly acquire new configurations, as ephemeral as the questions and answers that arise when you see them.

You cannot go through the city without thinking about it. This chaotic, intense urbanization is what enriches the experience of its being this city and no other. It is impossible to deny the complexity of the space and the heterogeneity of Tijuana-borderland. Useless.



▲ Entrance to a house, 2005 (digital photography).



▲ Entrance to Nueva Esperanza shantytown, 2005 (digital photography).

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My work is not voyeurism but involvement. In fact, all creation is involvement. I try to apprehend the space and its dynamics using the camera as a tool for intervention. That is why I go through the city losing myself in its geography to prompt encounters that I keep as a record.



▲ House made with platforms, 2005 (digital photography).

I do not try to take portraits of its inhabitants, but to show the alternative use of objects and spaces. Guided by chance and the flow of relationships, I find in the images that I show here the particularities of this new semantics of space and the materials that is born of these spontaneous urban installations.

I also aspire to transcending the limited perspective of the look of the outsider to show the playful, ironic, hilarious and creative side both of these installations and of the intangible element derived from the encounter of this story's actors with space and objects. **NMM**