



The Library
UC SAN DIEGO

**Artist interviews: Buzz Spector, Mario Lara, Barbara
Sexton**

1994

39 minutes, 12 seconds

Interviewees: Buzz Spector, Mario Lara, Barbara Sexton

Transcribed by: Samantha Muñoz

[inSite Archive](#)

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Time	Transcription
0:00	[inSite_Archive_94 / Artist interviews / Chris Burden / Rimer Cardillo / David Jurist / Mario Lara]
0:10	[Dennis Oppenheim / Pepon Osorio / Graciela Overjero / Patricia Patterson / Barbara Sexton / Ernest Silva / Buzz Spector / Susan Yamagata. Produced by SDSU: The Production Center for Documentation and Drama / English / 39 min.]
0:23	[Marc Phillips Presents] [music]
0:26	[inSite 94]
0:36	[inSite94 is a binational exhibition of installation and site-specific art]
0:48	[inSite94 is a collaborative project of 38 nonprofit institutions in San Diego and Tijuana collectively sponsoring new works by more than 100 artists at 37 locations on both sides of the Mexico/United States border.]
0:58	[Site #24]
1:03	[University Arts Gallery, San Diego State University]
1:06	[<i>Unpacking my Library</i> by Buzz Spector]
01:11	<p>Buzz Spector: The idea was simply to take all the books in my library and arrange them, not in an intellectual order. The order of categories reflecting my interests, or my tastes, or my desires but to simply order the books as objects. From the tallest to the shortest at the spine. The way we're doing it is unpacking all the different crates of my books and arranging them on the floor of the gallery in the right order. Once we're relatively sure that the books are properly arranged according to size, then we can begin the process of stacking them on the shelf. It's much easier to be moving books around on the floor than it is to be moving them around once they're installed on that shelf. But as you can see already -- I think there's ten feet of books here and there's something like an alluvial plain being created, you know, to use a geological metaphor. There's the really visible distinctions between the tallest books in the library and then gradually things begin to level out into very slight decreasing increments. And that same sort of-- very slight decrease will continue all the way around the room. Each book infinitesimally smaller than its neighbor until you move from that oh, that very large portfolio of Georgia O'Keefe prints down to the smallest book I have which is one inch tall at the spine. I think the process of transforming my entire library into a purely formal gestalt will will hide me. I'll disappear. I'll disappear into the library. But that-- that thought is the same thought that Walter Benjamin brings out in his essay on book collecting called "Unpacking my Library".</p>

02:59	<p>Buzz Spector: That's the source for the title of this installation. I'll disappear into my books as is only fitting. But, the books themselves don't disappear. They will be there for you to remember having read. To recall to you the desire to read some of them. To make you ponder why anybody would read such and such a book. And, in that sense, the library becomes a part of the experiencing of almost anybody who visits the installation. Here-here's the image I have in mind. You've made a friend. And, say -- he invites you over and while you're standing in the hallway your new friend goes to mix the drinks. And you're left alone and so, while you're alone you'll indulge in the most socially sanctioned form of voyeurism -- you'll check out all the books on the bookshelf in the hallway and you'll find some books that you read or a lot of the books that you've read and by the time the drinks comes back, you've bonded. Or conversely, you'll discover that your new friend has an unsettling taste for the life stories of mass murderers and the evening is shot, maybe the whole friendship is ruined. And why were the bookshelves in the hall in the first place? Because, to some degree we use our libraries or the books we might leave on a coffee table or anywhere in our private space as a way of announcing an experience we've had to other people. As a way of getting over the small talk and down to how it is we always seek contact with other people. The bliss of great friendship.</p>
04:48	<p>Buzz Spector: Through understanding the workings of a mind. There's no more concrete object to illustrate the workings of a mind than a book known to have been read by that person. See, it's not just-- it's not just what I read in the books, it's the circumstances of them. Like this -- forgive me. This Donald Judd catalog. I got this catalog from Judd. I was teaching in Texas and two friends of mine in San Antonio said, "Let's go visit Judd". They were friends with him and we hopped in the car and drove 600 miles to Marfa and found him in home and crabby. But after he kept us waiting for fifteen minutes outside in the sand, in the dust then he got dressed and he invited us in and then he took us around. I was absolutely thrilled to meet the man who I think is in some ways the most important sculptor of the second half of the century. So it's a little more poignant now because Judd died earlier this year. And, now the book for me is his memorial as well as a souvenir of that— of that meeting.</p>
6:18	<p>Speaker 2: Must've been so hard?[books rustling]</p>
6:33	<p>[Site #23] [music]</p>
6:38	<p>[Centro Cultural de la Raza]</p>
6:45	<p>[<i>You Can't Get There from Here</i> by Mario Lara and Barbara Sexton]</p>
7:06	<p>[art installation piece with toy banging a drum]</p>
7:10	<p>Mario Lara: I'm Mario Lara.</p>

7:11	Barbara Sexton: I'm Barbara Sexton.
7:12	Mario Lara: We're collaborating artists at the Centro Cultural de la Raza. We're doing an installation for <i>inSite94</i> the title of which is <i>You Can't Get There From Here</i> . We were doing a lot of tongue-in-cheek parodies on the notion of what trophies and plaques were all about. They tend to commemorate and celebrate in some way identify a person in their achievements, and we wanted to do it in a very Dada-esque kind of a way-- a sort of a counter to all of that authority, all of that celebration. In turn, the idea of plaques and trophies into pretty much a parody. And the whole concept of receiving these kinds of things. And the-the value that society places on these kinds of awards. So we wanted to serve as subvert them, try to round into kind of a comment.
8:02	Barbara Sexton: I really enjoyed building things and having you know charms and kind of using elements in an excessive way that, again, we're parodying you know what plaques are about. I think as far as the room, you know creating the room we immediately agreed on what kind of room we wanted to develop and you know— again, kind of a parody on the den, the me-room, the parlor room. You know to kind of pull all of these things together into some kind of special place.
8:33	Mario Lara: Essentially, “paradiso” meaning paradise used sort of the Latin, which is the root for Italian and Spanish, the concept of paradise which basically is the overriding sort of concept that drives this particular installation is the idea of what we all strive for. I think in our individual lives and collectively as a society we pursue-- we're always in pursuit of seeking paradise. And that can be achieved in many different kinds of ways. Some people seek it spiritually, other people seek it materially-- seeking money, seeking power, whatever. But in essence at the heart of that is all of us are striving for our own personal paradise of some sort.
9:17	Barbara Sexton: Yeah, I also think that you know we chose the billboard symbol because that's such an American symbol, such a symbol for advertising. And again, it's a way of--I mean that's what the plaques are, it's like a personal advertising of your achievements. So it kind of went well and fit with the concept in the room is carried in the outside with the billboard.
9:42	Mario Lara: In essence these trophies and plaques represent a struggle towards a kind of a seeking of paradise for the individual and then collectively as a society the billboard representing a much broader concept of America as paradise, in the myth of America as paradise. And as a result, what we have in the room: a window that looks out into a little sort of rolling mountain-scape with the words floating over the horizon that says, "You can't get there from here". Which basically the idea of paradise being something that's always going to be outside your reach. Something that we're all struggling and striving for. But the idea of, "You can't get there from

	here" can be different for everybody. So that's pretty much what sort of the overriding concept-- it drives the entire installation.
10:29	[<i>Apacheta</i> by Graciela Ovejero]
10:33	Graciela Ovejero: My name is Graciela Ovejero, an artist from Argentina. Though I live here, I've been living here for about eight years or so. This piece I'm doing for <i>inSite94</i> , it's an installation formally in the outside, it deals with the juxtaposition of land, art, and technology. I'm particularly interested in juxtapositions and everything that deals with intermixing of cultural elements and methods of doing things. In the inside what's going on in the tv monitors are two videos. The video diptych -- two videos that run parallelly. They're about twenty minutes long. [loud pounding] With narration, a voiceover that develops more -- the semantic aspect of the imagery. And thematically I'm dealing with myth. Myth because I think that terrain is very rich in terms of the construction of identities in the social and in the intimate aspect.
11:58	Graciela Ovejero: In this installation I'm particularly focusing on the myth of Huachamama. It's a myth from the North West regions, — the mountainous regions of Argentina. That's where I come from and Huachamama— it's a very ancient deity that -- it represents the earth, the primal feminine spirit of the earth. And the way the TV monitors are set in this sort of mound imitates somehow the altars that people make with rocks to honor Pachamama and those altars are called apachetas. And that's the name of the piece, Apacheta. [loud pounding] In this piece committing myself to explore this ancient myth that still survives technology and-and this so called globalization and postmodern times where history was supposed to die. And we're focusing on this myth that -- it's so ancient and yet perhaps, it's on the verge of being reconstituted or being continued or being exhausted.
13:33	[<i>Public Hearing</i> by Pepon Osorio]
13:41	Pepon Osorio: My name is Pepon Osorio and as an artist I'm interested in working with installations that are-- confront people's and challenge people's notions of art and also that brings in social comment to it. <i>Public Hearing</i> , this specific installation for the <i>InSite94</i> , is an installation that deals basically with people's concern, and people's frustration, and also the lack of interest with people in the community to attend public hearing. And it is called <i>Public Hearing</i> basically because I'm interested in confronting the audience and the viewer when she or he comes into the space to look at how empty it is and how it's set up for public hearing to take place. Which is actually what happened in a lot of the cases in our communities is that we are ready to take care of a situation or we are ready to bring out a concern of the entire community and a public hearing takes place and not many people show up.

14:42	<p>Pepon Osorio: What I've been doing is basically with this installation <i>Public Hearing</i> is making parallels between my community in the South Bronx and many different other Latino communities around the United States, and looking at what are the parallels and what are the common ground similarities that we have in the Bronx and how much of that is that is very similar in many different other states. So, for example in Philadelphia, I did a table of young Puerto Rican a man who was killed by a group of men in Philadelphia. And how he was killed was that he happened to be crossing — not his neighborhood, in other people's neighborhood and these people decided they were going to massively kill him. There was about seven of them, they grabbed bats--baseball bats and they hit him and hit him to death.</p>
15:39	<p>Pepon Osorio: And I think that is a concern. That it deals also with discrimination and it deals also with prejudice and it deals with a lot of ignorance in our communities here in the United States. With that intention in mind is how I'm expecting to continue this installation. It's a non-ending installation in every community that I go, every community that I present this specific installation, I add a new table to it. For example I came here and the current and present issue in the Latino community is the proposal 187 and I'm very much interested in finding out what it is. And so what I did is that I came up with the idea, which I added a table that hopefully I will take that table to all of those communities and inform them what's going on here in San Diego. And so hopefully this is like a non-ending until I probably either get tired on continuing this installation or I die, but it's an ongoing installation that will hopefully, I keep adding more and more as time progresses.</p>
16:34	<p>[<i>A-ncestro D-ividido</i> by Rimer Cardillo]</p>
16:40	<p>Rimer Cardillo: My name is Rimer Cardillo. I am originally from Uruguay. The piece that I am exhibiting at the Center de Cultura de la Raza are made basically of skins, wild-cat skins that I collected in different countries in Latin America. Like I'm using two wild-cat skins I found at a street fair in Uruguay. I'm using some wild-cat skins from the Orinoco River, some of them from Venezuela, some of them are from Ecuador. And basically the piece deals with the destruction of those species but also with the destruction of the original culture from those areas. The way that I present the skins, the way that I stretch those skins, also is related to the way that those cultures prepare the skins for ritual purposes or for clothing purposes. I found the skins very roll up, in you know very bad conditions, some of them. So I decided to stretch them with materials that I have in the place that I decided to work with them. Like some of them I did in the basement of my apartment in Manhattan, and I didn't have the right tools, and I did not want to go to the hardware store to find that piece or screw or find that piece of material, I just use material that I have around.</p>

18:14	<p>Rimer Cardillo: So the power of the construction of those pieces are present there, too. And each one and each individually one is an object. Even though that this piece takes the form of an installation and is for me, the lighting, the space, is as important as the object but I use the projection, the shadows on the wall, the shadows on the floor. And I actually draw on top of those shadows. Some lines, some areas, I rub them. So the whole environment is like a ritualistic environment for me. You find in the comments made by the first Europeans who arrived in Uruguay in the River Plate area that those tribes were wearing some of those wild-cat skins, in particular the jaguar. In the heads, and they used that as a mask too. So none of those cultures exist any longer in the area. There are a lot of connections with what happened to that animal. To what happened to those cultures.</p>
19:38	<p>Susan Yamagana: My name is Susan Yamagana. I'm here at the Center de Cultura de la Raza to talk about the exhibition, my installation entitled, <i>A Silent Shame</i>. And the basic idea behind this piece is to discuss what happened in my family that I feel has affected me as a third-generation American. During World War II, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, there was concern that Japanese first generation— who were not allowed to become citizens of the U.S, and so therefore considered aliens and also their children who were American citizens, that they would be willing to help the country of Japan in the war effort. There was a decision made that would be best if they rounded up people with Japanese blood regardless of the amount, and move them off the West Coast into what they would call "relocation centers." So, it was a really strange thing because during the entire time I was growing up, we used to hear references to people that my mother knew in camp and different little anecdotes about things that happened there, but I never really understood what camp was. For the longest time I thought I associated it with summer camp or someplace you went to have fun.</p>
21:08	<p>Susan Yamagana: And because a lot of the stories they told us had a humor side to them, and it wasn't until I was eighteen and I was taking a special studies class in high school that my social studies teacher suggested that I do my report on the internment camps. And I said, what are internment camps? He said, "Go home and ask your mother." And there was a silence about this thing that happened and perhaps that's why I never knew about it until I was eighteen. And it was a shameful thing, I remember when first talking to my parents about it my mother said, "Well, why didn't you tell us about this? Why didn't you ever explain what camp meant." And it was like, "Well, you know it's kind of an embarrassing thing, it's a shameful thing and I just want to forget it." So it's a silent shame on both parts. On the people's experience and on the country's memory as a whole. The reality is it can happen again. And even when the Persian Gulf War was happening here about two years ago, there was a thing in the newspaper it talked about rounding up all the Iraqis and sticking them in camps. I was like, here we go again. Fifty years later, it's still something that can so easily be done because</p>

	people do think that way. And during a time of hysteria, actions are taken that in hindsight maybe are incorrect.
22:38	[Site #18] [music]
22:47	[Patricia Patterson union market island front]
22:51	Patricia Patterson: My name is Patricia Patterson and I'm standing in front of the Children's Museum which I've been working on the exterior and the interior as well for about a year and a half now. Having been commissioned by the Children's Museum to give a visual identity and coherence to the whole city block that the museum is on. Before starting to work on the museum, the situation was that all four of these buildings on the whole city block were covered with the same paint. A kind of very dull beige that went from the ground all the way up covering everything, no matter what the surface of the building was. What I felt to be the most important thing that I could do would be to give a voice to the different elements of the building, which I thought were so extraordinary. So I wanted in a sense to-to give life back to the building and using color to do that.
23:56	Patricia Patterson: To me, the whole block had elements of humor to it because it had these funny structures like the air-vents sticking up on top. And then, in that section, on top of what are now the offices for the Children's Museum people are kinds of architectural things that reminded me of 50's coffee shops style you know with those circles up there with the poles. And the very names of the block: Island, Union, Market, and Front seemed to suggest what kind of a place this would be, where things would come together. All of the various aspects of the project started to come together in the sense that this would be a place for children and the fact that the museum had a very strong commitment to making this a place where all the peoples of San Diego would come together. And so I really did feel I had to choose colors that would treat with greater respect. These very interesting buildings, mostly-most of them about fifty years old. So, I think not only the great architectural structures but ones like this are important to take care of and fix-up and it's made a very lively place for the museum to carry out its various projects. And I'm very happy that things are proceeding the way they are.
25:39	[Chris Burden <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>]
25:44	Speaker 1: The <i>[A] Tale of Two Cities</i> is a big city is taking over the little city. And it's kinda like, maybe like, San Diego and Tijuana but they're more like just fictitious cities, like cities in your head.
26:02	Speaker 2: One thing one of the beauties about this piece by Chris Burden is the closer your look the more there is to see. It's just full of visual data here.

26:10	Speaker 3: What I like the most about it is even though it's supposed to be a war - - it's supposed to portray a war scene or a war between two cities is like the paradox that it's so pristine. It's a pristine state.
26:24	Speaker 4: The world is just right on the brink of disaster. Everybody's just right about to war with each other at all times. Nothing is ever totally perfect. There's always a war somewhere in the world. I think that's about what he's trying to say with this.
26:40	Speaker 5: The attention to detail that's put in it, it's just amazing. If you some spend time looking, you know at just some small area of it. Many people would like to— to go in-- go in inside. And that's how I tell -- that's the way you can go inside is with the binoculars.
27:00	Speaker 6: <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> is cool to look at with your naked eye, but it's better to look at with binoculars. Binoculars, you can really see a lot of detail.
27:12	Speaker 5: But I like the fact that the pieces that have been used are not from one particular time period or anything. That you have the Indians, you have Napoleon, you have skyscrapers and robots. So it looks like a city but then again, you know it's not -- not exactly the way we know it today.
27:35	[Ernest Silva <i>Cora's Rain house</i>]
27:40	Earnest Silva: I'm Earnest Silva and I'm here outside the Children's Museum. And I'm here to introduce <i>The Rain House</i> . <i>The Rain House</i> is a project that's in construction. It's for the box show at The Children's Museum and it's also part of <i>inSite</i> . I've been working on the project for several months and the project really grows out of a response to the Children's Museum and also wanting to create a space in the Children's Museum that would be a kind of protected place where children and families could go inside <i>The Rain House</i> . There'll be a rain that'll fall on the rain house, hit a metal roof. <i>The Rain House</i> will also be connected to the programming that'll take place at the Children's Museum.
28:26	Earnest Silva: In the art studio here children are working on stories and poetry and paintings that will be documented on video tape and played inside <i>The Rain House</i> . And in a sense it's a place where children and families come together to share stories. And the project is also connected to a similar rain house at the Casa de la Cultura in Tijuana, which is an art school that teaches painting and dance and drama and video and photography. And children at the Casa de la Cultura in Tijuana have been invited to make paintings and stories about the same themes. And the creations of the children will be exchanged from Tijuana to San Diego. I call it a gift from one house to the other. So the project in a way is an invitation for children and for families and adults to share stories and feelings.

29:30	[David Jurist, <i>Maiz-Maze</i>]
29:33	David Jurist: My name is David Jurist and the name of my sculpture is <i>Maiz-Maze</i> . And what it is is a field of corn grown in the shape of a floor plan that's from a condominium from one of the local condominium residences that's in this area. And what I wanted to try and do with this piece is to tell a story, and that story is how architecture is formed and the influences of architecture. I'm very interested in the way that a space is created architecturally, so I thought in this case I could define a space by growing plants to form the walls. I'm hoping that people will get a sense that this is architectural once they're inside it but they may not be able to read it as a floor plan because it's been expanded by 300%. It's really a continuation of the general concerns that I have regarding what it takes to make a space for people to gather in and what kinds of qualities make that a comfortable space.
30:47	David Jurist: This- this piece is linked to Children's Museum of San Diego, who is the sponsor of the piece along with <i>inSite</i> and the Loma Santa Fe Group. What I did in order to tie them together was to make a pyramid at the Children's Museum that had corn growing in concrete blocks. So I set up concrete blocks in a kind of Aztec or Mayan step-pyramid shape and then filled those holes with soil and corn is coming-- growing out of those. So, the idea or the experience is one where you see at the Children's Museum a more ancient architectural form and then from the center of that pyramid there is a video image that shows you this floor plan but taken from a high vantage point on top of the building in the background that lets you read the shape as a floor plan. But once you get here, you're faced with something you can't get a vantage point over, so it's not quite clear if this functions as a traditional labyrinth or if this thing actually has an architectural form that you would be able to recognize. So, in that sense, the whole thing kind of reflects inside is a temporary festival of sculpture. This being a temporary sculpture in terms of the material, it has a life cycle. And at the end it'll all be plowed under and left just the way it was.
32:20	[Dennis Oppenheim, <i>The Last Dance</i>]
	Dennis Oppenheim: This work is called <i>The Last Dance</i> and it's a installation which includes four or five elements. The first being these humanoid cacti configurations made out of Styrofoam and fiberglass which will hang from turntables and slowly turn in couples as if they're embracing dancing and some kind of dance mode.
32:54	[loud rhythmic drums]
33:14	Dennis Oppenheim: The other elements are sound and some mechanical which includes these two very large, carved Styrofoam hands which are actually gloved holding radios and sound equipment.

33:33	[overlapping speech and music]
33:43	Dennis Oppenheim: And scattered around those two gloves is a bass drum which - incorporates a mechanical device that activates it. A strobe light which pulses on the wall.
34:00	[overlapping speech and music, loud rhythmic drums]
34:32	Dennis Oppenheim: And the third element is a marquee which involves— it says Sunny Dormitory. It's ground-based and in front of it are a bank of lights which reflect these words which are made out of transparent plastic, on to the wall kind of turning them around the room. The front parts of the words Sunny Dormitory have fallen off and they spell the Spanish word "sudor" which means sweat. So, essentially these letters have kind of sweated off the lines from English into Spanish. And sweat is kind of a-- I mean it's sort of a subtitle for the work which is this kind of last embrace. These figures laced with protruding needles allegedly as an embrace are silently attacking one another perhaps, permanently. So what we have is this condition. Or I think more specifically what we have is a incident.
35:52	[overlapping speech and music, loud rhythmic drums]
36:25	[music] [Camera on "Buzz Spector" - Chris Bishop / Audio on "Chris Burden" - Jennifer Huggins / Audio on "Mario Lara & Barbra Sexton" & "Graciela Ovejero" - Ted Purvis]
36:33	[All other segments were filmed and edited by Marc Phillips]
36:40	[Original music written* & composed by Edwin Masters / Engineered by Alan Duffy]
36:45	[Special thanks to the artists, museum staff, SDSU Department of Telecommunications and Film, Jack Ofield, and the crew at <i>inSite</i> for all your time, help, and consideration.]
39:12	[End of video]
	*Spelled as written. Written may have been misspelled.