

Casa Refugio Posada: *Intervenciones Divinas para los Indocumentados* *o la Arquitectura de los Milagros*

(Divine Interventions for the Undocumented or the Architecture of Miracles)

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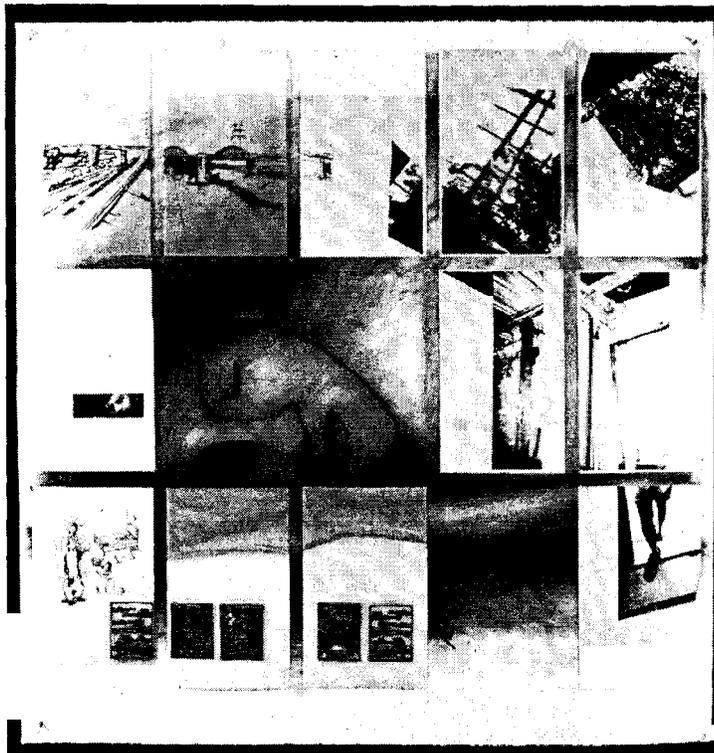
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The father of a working class Mexican family was very ill and as a last resort the mother embarked upon a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City to ask the Virgen for a miracle that would cure her husband, offering in return to do something for people in need. She offered a *manda* or "offering" — her East L.A. home and use of a portion of her property (the backyard) to build a shelter for homeless undocumented Latino youth. The religious cultural genesis of the "*manda*/offering" provides a point of departure to explore the dynamics of extended family structures, popular belief, culture and vernacular expressions in relation to architectural practice. In addition it proposes new strategies for rethinking social space, challenges legal/illegal zoning and building regula-

tions, and expands the notion of "public/private." "Casa Refugio Posada," a "spatial story" turned reality, is one of the many stories that gives testimony to the everyday diverse cultural expressions which construct the panoply of contemporary Latino social geographies. The link between religious belief and current social uses of space is an example that gives evidence that L.A. is a city of simultaneous multi-temporal heterogeneity and socio-spatial hybridities (understanding hybridities as permeable spaces between two conceptual polarities: tradition and modernity).

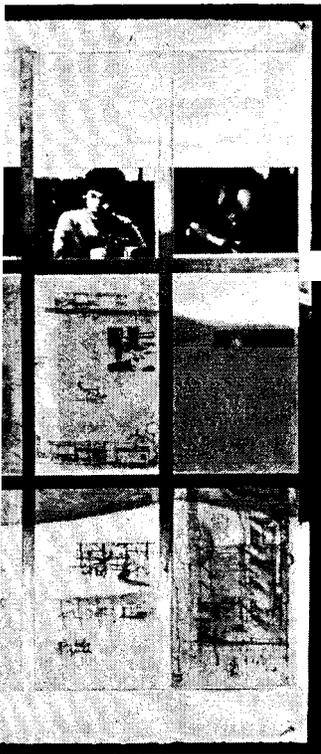
The project challenges pre-conceived ideas of the "institutional homeless shelter" and focuses on a more personal use of space and on relationships of trust and compassion.

The city comes to life, "legal" papers tell daily stories, reflect everyday activities, crossing the First Street bridge, over the L.A. River.

A grid, a calendar of events, morning to night, left to right.

Real images of homeless youth, oneiric references, memory, real views of daily rituals, rooms of healing
in many homes in South Central and East L.A.,

Rebuilding a city that, only accepts legal papers, restricting city functions,
broken pinatas , spilled treasures...



(e.g. neighbors communal use of space — lavaderos/washbasins, tendederos/clotheslines, the gate along the internal property line and workspace.). The lavadero (wash basin) and *tendedero* (clothes-line) act as focal points to bring the youth outside transforming the back yard into a social space for both neighbors and youth. Interior rooms open up onto terraces for social activities, and to allow the youth to see events taking place in the yard below. *Tinglados* (canopies) are added for family events such as weddings, birthdays, festivals or posadas (a singing nativity event).

The design process began with several meetings with homeless youth and staff of the existing shelter where shared ideas about journey and home were discussed. In these

discussions, perceptions of urban/cultural spaces were expressed in stories of the youth's experiences while on their journey/migration northwards. The group utilized the experience of the meetings, as well as the photographs and video taped interviews that were gathered as resource materials. "Casa Refugio Posada" brings new narratives to the discourse of architecture and allows these often "invisible" stories to take a concrete form—a form in architecture and education that questions negative media-based perception of immigrants in Los Angeles. Instead, it leads to issues regarding social space, the public, socio-economic class, cultural aesthetics, and rather than architectural theory leading to design practice, leads to theorizing architecture as a cultural practice.