

FRONTERA/BORDER: 7TH Concurso Internacional ARQUINE

A Border Crossing at Anapra , Ciudad Juarez / Sunland Park , New Mexico

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An international competition to design a pedestrian crossing at the US-Mexico border led architects from 34 countries into a vibrant discussion of the contested political terrain of the border. This is a place where first and third worlds collide, a place that I believe is a microcosm of our future, as the world becomes one, within a globalized economy. Sponsored by *ARQUINE: Revista internacional de arquitectura y diseno*, Latin America's premier design journal, this was a 7th annual "ideas competition" held for architects, academics and students world-wide. Held in Mexico City, the mission of *ARQUINE's* design competitions is to elevate and foster the investigation of contemporary design themes confronting architects throughout the world.

The border theme of this year's competition was based upon investigative design studios I have led for the past eight years. During this time, I have taken students from the US and from Mexico to the border region, and introduced them to the difficult human predicaments and guerrilla urban form there. Participants have been architecture, landscape architecture and planning students from Auburn University, the University of California at Berkeley, the University of New Mexico and the Instituto Superior de Arquitectura y Diseno in Chihuahua, Mexico. I have also had numerous conversations about the border with Miquel Adria, Editor of *ARQUINE* and Professor at the Universidad de Anahuac in Mexico City. At this moment of intense interest in issues relating to sovereign boundaries, national security, immigration, and the impact of NAFTA, Miquel and I felt that the topic of the border might stimulate investigations about architecture as a political or economic gesture. Though the formal design problem for this competition was complex, with an even more charged overlay of socio-political exigencies,

our primary goal was simply to introduce architects to the critical issues and human community at the US-Mexico border today.

The pressures on the political boundary between the United States and Mexico have never been so palpable as today. More than just a line between two countries, the border has today become a shared economic zone, thoroughly transformed through maquiladora programs implemented on both sides since the adoption of NAFTA policies. As a result of this developmental shift, there has been a consistent mass migration of Mexicans in search of work into the border region. This maquiladora phenomenon has made the region of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas, with a population of over 2.5-million, the largest border community in the world. This community continues to grow at a rate of over 5% a year. Until a few short years ago, most in the United States were willing to overlook the estimated 500,000 illegal immigrants who entered the US each year, recruited during this recent economic boom by US employers desperate for workers, regardless of their legal status. Tragically, everything seemed to change after September 11, 2001 as the United States government embarked upon an epic frenzy of legislated xenophobia and a reinvigorated mission to close its southern border. In reality, only the attitude of the US government has changed at the border today. The tightening of homeland security since 2001 has not effectively stemmed undocumented immigration. The growth in illegal immigration has kept perfect pace with the rising US economy. The tremendous demand and desire to cross remains the same, still entirely for economic and not, terrorist motivations.

The Mexican village of Anapra literally crashes into the line of the border and is met by a 10-foot tall INS fence. A few hundred yards to the north, on the other side of the fence, is the town center of Sunland Park, New Mexico, with stores such as Target, Wal-Mart and Neiman Marcus, which Anaprans can all see, but cannot reach, at least not legally. Anapra is a ramshackle squatter settlement of roughly 30,000 residents located on the remote outskirts of Ciudad Juarez, in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Anapra is one of the fastest growing colonias of Juarez and it is also one of its poorest. It is physically isolated from the urban center of Juarez by a large hill and is bounded to the south and west by a series of mesas. Anapra and Sunland Park sit together in a natural bowl and share the same stark wind-swept Chihuahuan desert landscape. For years, before the artificial barrier of the fence was installed, these two communities had been socially and economically connected as cultures that knew no borders, and this has likely been the case since before the time Columbus first brought Europeans to this land in 1492, and probably since before the great Mayan, Aztec and Mogollon empire networks dominated this land. Presently, the Governors of the states of Chihuahua and New Mexico are again actively pursuing an agreement to implement a border crossing here, as this is the only contiguous point in the state of New Mexico with Ciudad Juarez. Primarily, the Governors believe that a crossing here would benefit and stimulate economic opportunities for both sides while alleviating mounting socio-political pressures.

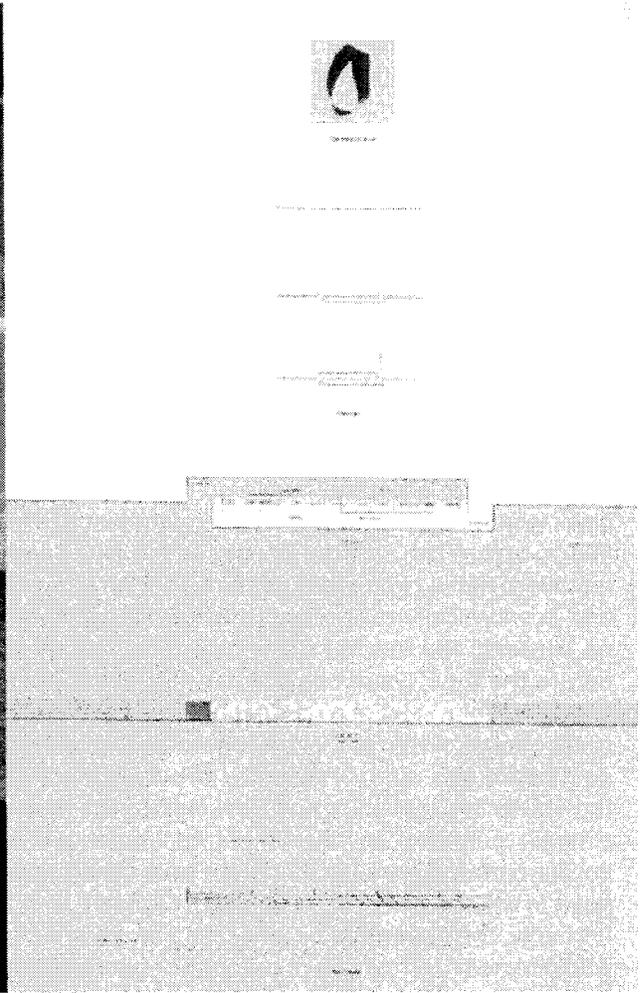
In this cooperative spirit, the competition brief for FRONTERA/BORDER called for the design of a facility which would encompass all of the programs for both countries in one comprehensively designed project. Unlike most border crossings which include massive infrastructures to service cars and commercial vehicular traffic, this station would only serve pedestrians. This pedestrian crossing station was to be located where the international line met with the main thoroughfare of Anapra. Immigration and customs control would be located on both sides in order to provide secure legal passage across the border. Specifically, the program called for the equivalent accommodation of US and Mexican Immigration and Naturalization Services (Department of Justice), Customs (Department of Treasury), shared waiting areas, rest rooms, employee services and most significantly, a defined

route of passage. Additionally, a bus station and parking area would be located on each side of the border. Though the competition brief specified these minimum requirements for the pedestrian border crossing, participants were encouraged to also consider other programs that might naturally land at this international crossroads and that would further an agenda for economic, social and cultural exchange.

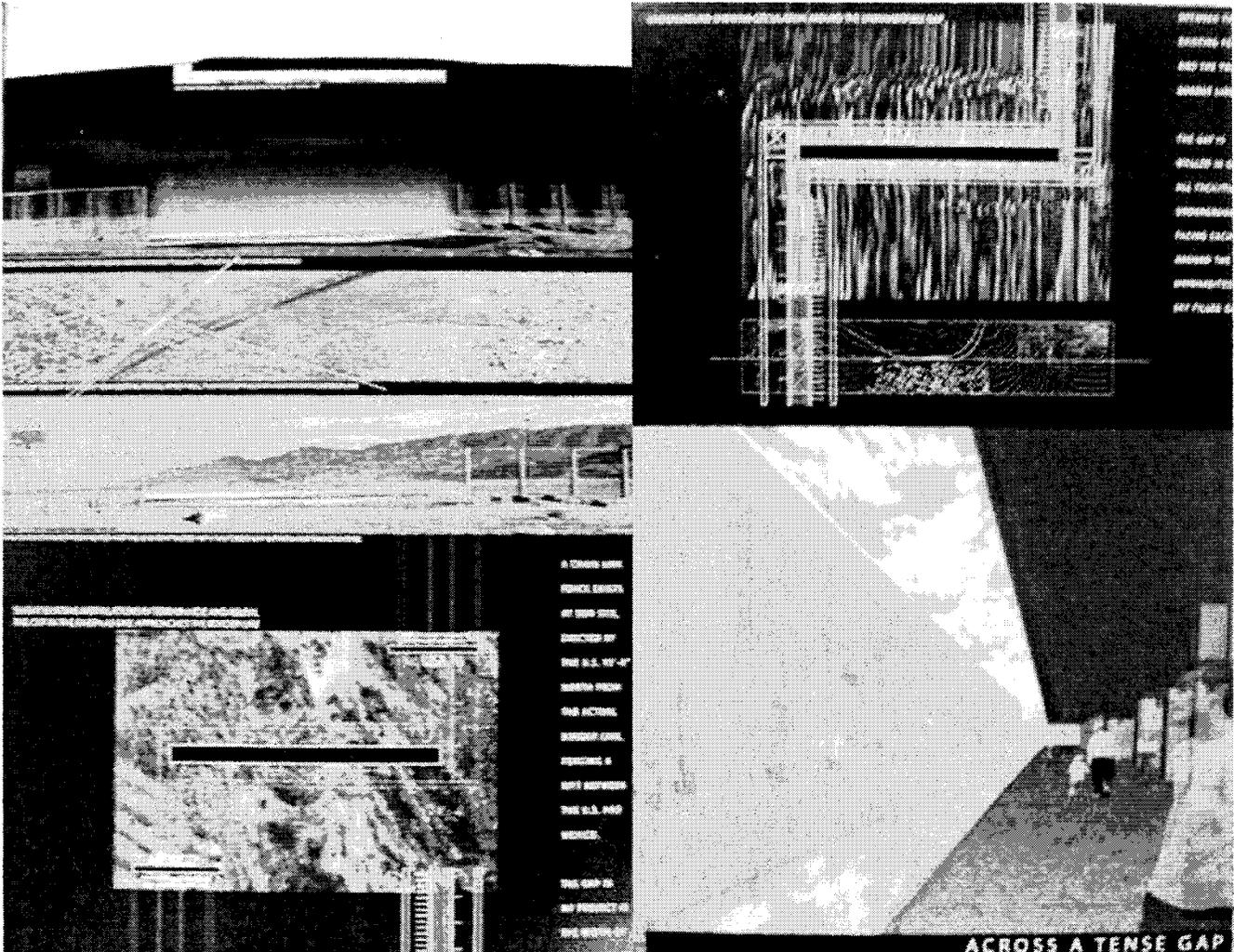
The competition attracted 467 entries from 34 countries, with roughly 56% of the entrants coming from Mexico and 21% from the United States. Other countries represented included France, Italy, China and Iran. The jury was composed of myself, Mexico's elder statesman architect Francisco Serrano, renowned Barcelona architect Joan Roig, and Rozana Montiel, an exciting young Mexican architect and ARQUINE Editorial Board member. A single project was selected as a First Prize with five others selected for equal Merit Prizes. Although no parameters were placed on the jury, the following criteria were aggressively discussed in the selection of the winning projects:

- We sought solutions which appeared to understand the social, cultural, economic, political and physical realities of the border but which would not agitate these important considerations.
- We sought approaches which appropriately recognized the scale of this program, its participation in this landscape, and which rejected overbearing, singular expressions of architecture.
- We sought projects which explored the manipulation of the fence or the line and their revelation through border passage.
- We sought transformative proposals which suggested the accommodation of other programs at this place.
- Conceived as a bi-national facility in the competition brief, we tended to seek approaches which united the cultures and societies at the border.
- We sought simplicity, clarity and elegance in concept and design.

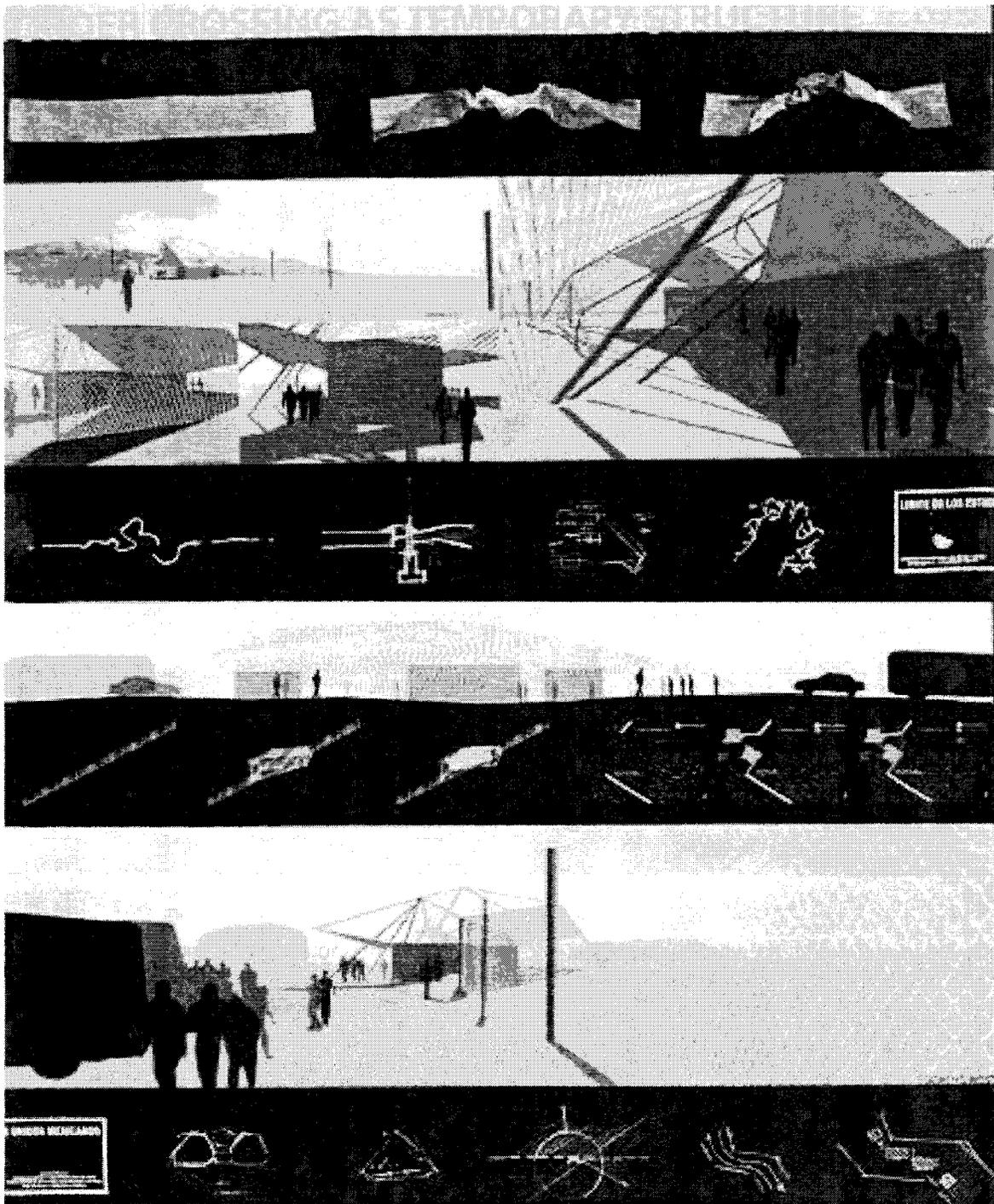
THE PROJECTS



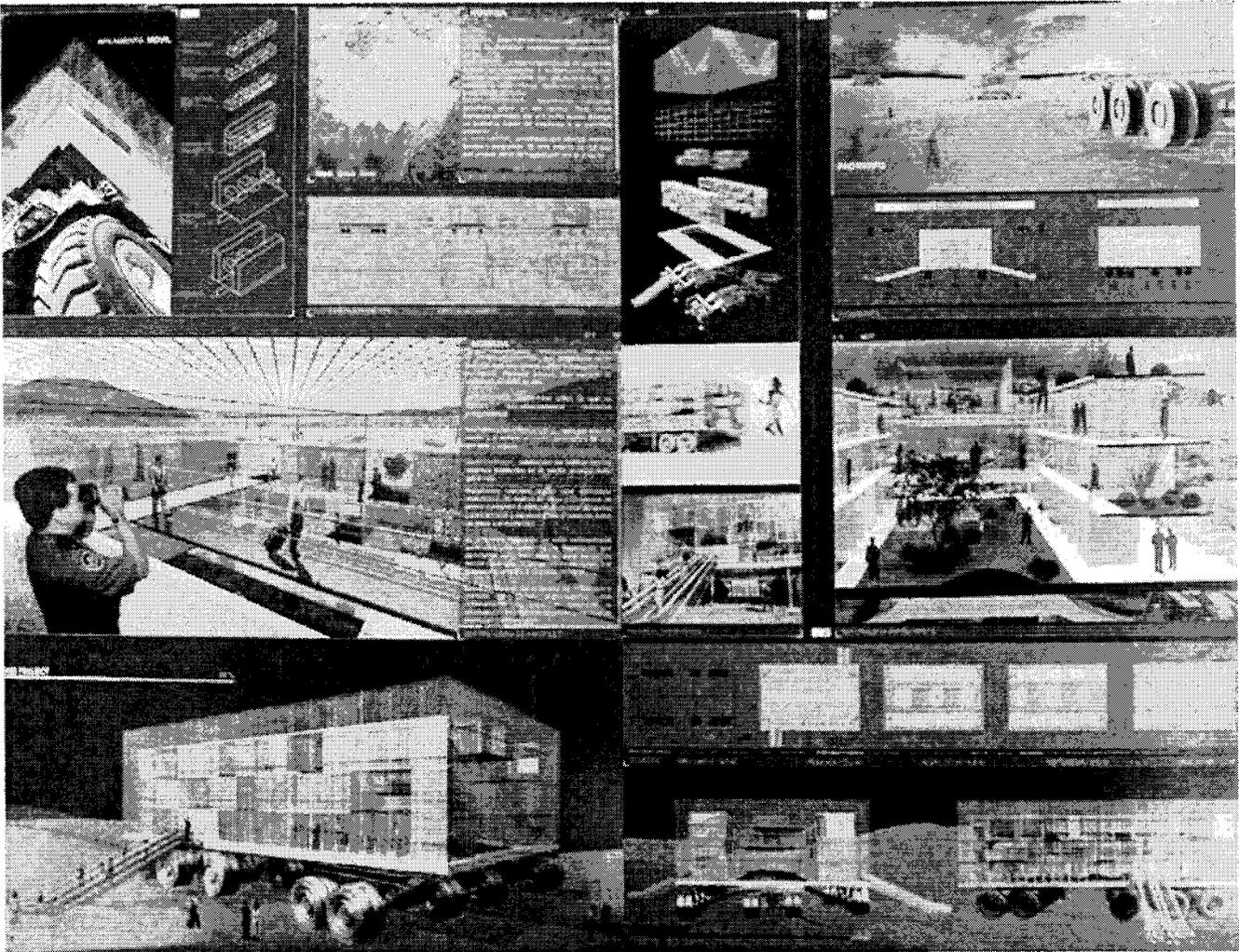
Changing Fence: At the same time, an ephemeral intervention both heightens and diminishes the experience of the fence and the line through materiality and light with a circulation diagram for passage effortlessly achieved. *Entrant team was from Hong Kong.*



Absent Fence: A breach and absence of the fence creates the shared space of the sky marking the line of the border beneath. *Entrant was from the United States.*



Twisted Fence: A provisional strategy, this proposal re-fashions only what is now present at the site to emphasize the “temporary reality” of the border. *Entrant was from the United States.*



Mobile Border Truck: Its wheels straddling both sides of the boundary fence, a mobile truck-building "patrols the border", stopping at various locales to become a bridge for border passage and a service providing station. *Entrant team was from Mexico.*

As in all competitions, the winning projects selected for FRONTERA/BORDER reflected the intellectual concerns of the jury. The winning projects avoided furthering divisiveness and did not aim to pose political resolutions between nations. Instead they reflected the pedestrian, human scale of the program. Four of the six winning projects had a "land art" bias. They tended to acknowledge the boundary, fence or line, as temporal and abstract. The First Place project, a more aggressive strategy, proposed Utopia in the form of a walled garden. Another more aggressive winning project was a parody of the Border Patrol, ironically transformed as a bi-national community support unit. These two projects courageously challenged governments, architects and planners to conceive of more proactive means to engage the border's future.

When I first began investigating the border region with my students over eight years ago, no issue seemed to me more important, nor more compelling than our complex relationships with our neighbors to the south. The border region, where cultures, nations, languages and economies are constantly rubbing up against each other, makes for opportunities to create something truly new, something we cannot yet fully imagine. This is a tremendous opportunity for architects and planners to take part in shaping social infrastructures, housing and cultural

spaces for a new borderland population that numbers over 50 million people in the US and Mexico. However, every day, the building continues, and mostly without the involvement of design professionals or academics. It is only in the process of working in my own architecture and urban design practice in New Mexico, that it has become evident to me that the complex condition of the border has already impacted the trajectory of cities in the southwestern United States.

In the words of Martin Heidegger, "a boundary is not that at which something stops...the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing." I am here to tell you that the presencing has long already begun, at the US-Mexico border. If I am right about the border being a place that tells us about our future, issues of social justice and urban form currently so important at the US-Mexico border, are the issues of the future, for us all. The projects submitted for FRONTERA/BORDER, the 7th *Concurso Internacional ARQUINE*, constituted in my opinion, an appropriately polite initial discussion of much broader issues than simply the US-Mexico border.