

SANTA FE, NM

SITE Santa Fe Biennial

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In lieu of a single theme, curator Lance M. Fung laid out several structuring principles for the seventh SITE Santa Fe Biennial, titled “Lucky Number Seven”: The participating artists would be winnowed from recommendations made by widely dispersed art-world professionals; they would visit Santa Fe well before the exhibition and respond to



Nick Mangan, *A1 Southwest Stone*, 2008, dirt, stone, shed, archaeological tools, found objects. Installation view.

the environs with newly commissioned work; and all materials, where possible, would be recycled after the exhibition had closed. (Additionally, the artists could exhibit anywhere in the city, but those who opted to show in SITE’s warehouselike space would have to contend with a sharp-angled ramp—designed for the show by architects Tod Williams and Billie Tsien—that cuts through the galleries.) These open-ended prescriptions, and in particular the

assurance that nothing would be for sale at a later date, held out the possibility of great experimentation; in theory, all the artists could have collaborated to create one artwork. Some engaged with these novel precepts productively, while others retreated to familiar methodologies. The result is a very uneven exhibition.

Much of the art relies heavily on models of artmaking familiar to those who have experienced site-specific projects, including documentary-style video, audience participation, and research documentation. *The Fourth Ladder* (all works 2008), a two-part video installation presented in SITE’s building by the Italian collective Studio Azzurro, is one example of this tendency and essentially serves as a computer-enhanced, idiosyncratic tourist guidebook. The piece consists of an interactive video projection depicting local citizens who, ascending a long ramp, recite directions to nearby locations of personal significance when visitors “pause” them by touching the wall. Shown on an adjacent wall, a second video combines interviews with some of the same subjects with footage of the sites they discuss. *Kaeru/T*, one of Hiroshi Fuji’s two saccharine contributions, hangs above visitors’ heads at the Museum of International Folk Art. It is made of donated toys that have been creatively recombined in collaboration with local children. Like Studio Azzurro’s installation, *Kaeru/T*’s earnest engagement with a portion of the local population comes across as flat-footed, akin to a neat after-school craft project.

Part of Luchezar Boyadjiev’s *Off-SITE(s)* deploys whiteboards around town on which passersby can write their own responses to the biennial. But his presentation at SITE itself, part of the same artwork, proves somewhat cannier. Boyadjiev has affixed to the wall seventy-seven ten-dollar bills, each labeled with a name drawn from the phone book; visitors who prove themselves one of the chosen can claim their money and read a message Boyadjiev has written on the wall beneath their bill. Interestingly, because Santa Fe is so small, the piece has a viral effect—visitors identify and inform friends of their selection. Of the artists who engage with the domineering intervention by Williams and Tsien, Piero Golia does so most forcefully: He has cut the ramp short about twelve feet. After signing a waiver, visitors can leap from the edge onto stunt landing pads arranged on the floor below.

SITE Seventh International Biennial

Lucky Number Seven

June 23, 2008–January 4, 2008

Two installations provide more unconventional riffs on the show’s site-specific mandate. *A1 Southwest Stone*, by Australian artist Nick Mangan, is located at a former stone-supply yard and consists of a realistic but entirely contrived archaeological dig. Accompanied by newspaper notices aiming to recall, for research purposes, stone that had been purchased from the shop, the work’s three-tiered excavation beds refer perhaps too neatly to the foundational layers (indigenous, Mexican, and Spanish) of local culture. But the installation should nonetheless be credited for being sited in an off-the-art-path residential neighborhood. The other, *The Abduction* by French duo Fabien Giraud and Raphaël Siboni, creatively redeploys clichés about New Mexican culture—namely, that it is dominated by Roswell alien-abduction stories

and schlocky “Wild West” art. The work consists of a bronze sculpture of a family on a horse bolting downhill—given to the artists by a tourist-friendly Canyon Road gallery—that has been melted and reconfigured to depict the subjects deposited back on earth after a visit to the mothership. It is displayed as it would be at its usual location—in a gray-carpeted room on a spotlighted, rotating pedestal—alongside a photograph of its original incarnation. After the exhibition, the sculpture will be melted down again and returned to its original design. Many artists seem to have approached this exhibition by attempting to graft a few site-specific characteristics onto their usual practice, or by jettisoning tried-and-tested tactics altogether in an embrace of the curatorial mandate. By engaging with Santa Fe’s culture instead of didactically interacting with its citizens or merely rehearsing its history, Giraud and Siboni’s wry sculptural intervention both stays true to their conceptually oriented practice and surpasses the rest of the show.

—Brian Sholis