

El otro lado de Anne Wallace

This project, commissioned by a San Antonio gallery, is a journey along the Mexico-United States border which reflects the desires and fears evoked by a rapidly changing region.

By Gabriel Rodriguez-Nava

An artificial wall divides the gallery where *El otro lado* is playing, a multimedia art installation by artist and Texan, Anne Wallace. A journey along the metal and wire fence marking the border between Tijuana and San Diego plays on a video screen in the center of the wall. On the other side of the wall the same video images appear but from that side. Everything is inverted, everything happens just the same, but in reverse.

Accompanying this tour of the wall, which reveals improvised homages to those who have died trying to cross the border, we hear the voices of immigrants, people who live on the border and even members of the Border Patrol.

Many of them describe what this wall means to them: "it's the line, the line of suffering", says one voice. Another speaks of how her job as a waitress on the other side turned out to be a job of prostitution. And another voice boasts about the traps installed in the desert in which a box with a button that says help alerts 'la migra'.

But perhaps the most heart-rending sound in the piece is the one produced by a knife slicing through plastic water bottles. In a separate space, Wallace arranged rows of bottles she gathered on her trip along the border during which she was able to interview people who left empty bottles behind in the desert as well as people who search for water bottles to destroy them.

The border is a theme which Wallace, who comes from Galveston, knows well. During the 80's, she worked with Amnesty International in Laredo, receiving refugees who were fleeing the horrors of the wars in Central America. There, she helped to found the Refugee Assistance Council, a group that offered legal assistance to immigrants who were seeking political asylum in the United States.

This experience on the border had a profound effect on Wallace: images of a place which, far from being on the margins, is in fact in the center of what defines us. This year, Wallace took advantage of her residency at the San Antonio gallery, Artpace, to travel the entire border by car.

Accompanied by photographer, Wayne Dow, and in consultation with Norma Cantu and Elvia Niebla, two professors at the University of Texas in San Antonio, Wallace returned with more than 60 hours of interviews and 30 hours of videotape. *El otro lado* is the first fruit of that journey.

Although Wallace's raw material is journalistic in nature, her work and the ultimate experience

of the piece transcend documentary. In *El otro lado*, we never see the faces of those who speak to us; their voices seem to arise like mirages in the desert. They are the voices of the border itself which address the spectator not with the voice of the journalist but with the voice of the artist who communicates with symbols and metaphors.

In this way, Wallace is able to reveal (in only 14 minutes) not only the physical aspects of the border, but also the philosophical ones: the border as a mental construction where we will only answer our own questions; the border as a backdrop where we project the theater of our fears and desires; the border as a place where the speed of globalization intersects the mortal slowness of crossing the desert on foot; the border as the line which delineates our I, but it is necessary to cross over in order to see that same I, see it completely, from the outside, from the other side.

This kind of experience is what separates Wallace's art from political art. In other words, Wallace takes politics from the corridors of institutions and returns it to the intimacy of personal dialogue, the type of dialogue that allows us to see the other side of the coin.

Gabriel Rodríguez-Nava

Editor U.S. & International

RUMBO (Meximerica Media Inc.)

115 E Travis - 8th Floor

San Antonio, TX 78205

(210) 581.3634 - office

(210) 863.1661 - mobile

(210) 581.3679 - fax

gabriel.rodriguez@diariosrumbo.com

www.diariosrumbo.com

Translation by Anne Wallace