
October 4-22, 2005

Artist's Bio Insuaste has exhibited at the Chicago Cultural Center (2005), Bucket Rider Gallery (2005), the Hyde Park Art Center (2004), and Polvo Art Studio (2004), among others. She is a recipient of several art and research grants that have funded her artistic and academic pursuits, including the recent 2004 Richard H. Driehaus Emerging Individual Artist Award, an Illinois Arts Council Visual Art Award, and the Vermont Studio Center Full Fellowship Award. Insuaste received her MFA in 2003 from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Writer's Bio Morse is an art historian and independent curator constantly working in Chicago.

Gallery 400 is supported by the College of Architecture and the Arts, University of Illinois at Chicago and a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency.

The Daryl Gerber Stokols and Jeff Stokols Voices Series Fund provides generous support to Gallery 400 programs.

At the Edge: Innovative Art in Chicago series showcases new works by Chicago artists that push the boundaries of art experimentation and that are notably difficult to show in commercial spaces. Six artists or artist collaborations have been selected to present projects expressly made for *At the Edge* exhibition that include curated exhibitions/projects, solo gallery exhibitions and, new to the program last year, public projects. An essay commissioned from a local critic, writer or historian accompanies all *At the Edge* projects.

Gisela Insuaste
caminando inesperadamente



at
the edge

innovative art in chicago

University of Illinois at Chicago
GALLERY 400
College of Architecture and the Arts
School of Art and Design

Space/Travel

Tangling spindly dowels and stiff black wire, twisting perspectives to her purpose with appropriations of scale, Gisela Insuaste creates landscapes of possibility and peril.

It might seem an overstatement to include peril as a characteristic of an exhibition; what danger could lie here? But be careful, as you walk through this land. Accidents occur, and if you have not seen one of Insuaste's installations fall, you have not yet experienced all that contemporary art can offer. Horror mingles with a kind of existential *schadenfreude* as the pieces tip, touch, and

"Horror mingles with a kind of existential *schadenfreude*"

finally fall earthward with the soft sound of fire catching hold. In disarray the work lies like an elegant, enormous game of pick-up-sticks, and Rumpelstiltskin himself could not spin this mess back into the gold Insuaste mined.

If this installation at Gallery 400 at the University of Illinois at Chicago seems irresistibly inspired by the city skyline to the east, that skyline is not the only source. Chicago is simply one stop in a long series of wanderjahrs during which Insuaste has traveled, looked at things and places, and taken stock of her relation to them. Born in the United States to Ecuadorian parents, Insuaste eludes easy ethnic identification. Is she an immigrant or a resident? A native American or a Native American? How deep do roots go when one is encouraged, if

graphic works are echoed in the accumulations of binding wires that Insuaste integrates in the final work.

Caminando inesperadamente may be loosely translated as "walking unexpectedly," but its roots lie in *esperanza*, or hope. When speaking with Insuaste, one is bombarded with ideas and interrogations. It is this questioning that provides hope: as long as there are answers still to be found, then the fragile structures on which we depend for understanding will provide support as the imagination makes its ascent.

Annie Morse
October 18, 2005

"In my recent travels, I have experienced things and places that hinge on the relationship between the man-made and the natural architectural forms that exist in our everyday landscape—and our emotional response to these forms which emphasize the precariousness of our own existence and interconnectedness with people, places and things.."

their inherent instability. During the exhibition of *caminando inesperadamente*, Insuaste has continued to amend and embellish her installation, acknowledging the transitory nature of physical properties and the additive imperative of experience.



Drawing plays a central role in Insuaste's work, whether as a line inscribed with ink on a wall or page, or in the mass of shadow lines cast on the walls and floor by sticks and wires. These immersive environments recall both the city and the forest, forcing us to move as carefully and attentively as an explorer in unknown territory. The acid green and yellow palette of her works on paper and board gave way to pink, turquoise and aquamarine elements in previous multimedia installations; here, the severity of the white-walled room is defied by steel-colored wrappings and the pale froth of wood shavings collected in a pile. Insuaste is influenced by the Surrealists de Chirico and Tanguay. Giacometti, too, is present in her works, his elongated human figures suggested by the legs and heads of the gigantes, while the obsessive, reiterated lines of his later

not always permitted, to range the world at will, traveling throughout North and South America, taking in sights, climbing mountains, traversing deserts, looking over the canopies of jungles. Can one achieve that sense of common humanity that everyone espouses but so few embody?



Working on site and like a fiend possessed, Insuaste fits wood with wire ganglia, constructing bodies and buildings from materials found in the echoing aisles of the hardware store. A compact, trim figure herself, Insuaste's sculptures act as extensions of her body and our own, allowing us to imagine life as seen from a very great height. While the lookout towers above our heads may suggest surveillance and control, Insuaste also reckons them as sources of inspiration and diversion, calling to mind

distant locations from which great tracts of land or opportunity may be seen and comprehended. Do we hold what we can see, if only in our mind's eye? Insuaste offers us dominion over interior worlds, but it's no picnic traversing them.

The landscape in which these towers figure is both real and imagined. In works completed as a graduate student, the human presence was implied through ramshackle communities of fragile dwellings, outbuildings and refuse, crafted on a dollhouse scale and linked with kinks of wire. These past installations provoked ambiguous responses that were wholly intended: were we to coo over the smallness of the structures, or fear crushing them with a false step? The Quichua deity known

“Do we hold what we can see, if only in our mind's eye? Insuaste offers us dominion over interior worlds, but it's no picnic traversing them.”

as Pachamama asserts herself in this connection. An earth goddess recast by 17th century Europeans as an understudy for the Virgin Mary, Pachamama wields power of both creation and destruction. While her role in the perpetuation of both the human race and its agricultural crops is manifested in her female form, Pachamama also controls that fertility of the imagination that gives rise to human industry and endeavor. It is this imagination that causes us to work, to wander, and to seek out the unexpected. It seems, too, that the imagination is stronger when it relies less on the concrete and more on flexibility and resilience.

As Insuaste's work has developed over the past few years, she has turned the tables on herself

in constructing her gigantes—towers bearing platforms that rise high above her head. Balancing two feet above the ground on industrial stilts, she links the towers with wire, and from this vantage point she then draws the structures with pencil high on an adjacent wall. Insuaste has become the performer, as well as the author, in her narrative. While she determines where the towers stand and how tall they will be, in seeking to tame them she is also humbled by their size and, on stilts, shares

