

ARTS SPACE

Photographers picture September

Connecting San Antonio to global arts

BY JOHN EWING

Rounding out a stellar celebration of the media arts, Fotoseptiembre Internacional 1998 will take place in more than 15 venues across the city, from the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center to the airport. Ours is just one component in this biennial conference of over 700 events worldwide promoting the photographic arts.

A decade ago, Fotoseptiembre would have sounded lunatic to Mexican artists who watched

PRE:VIEW

**Fotoseptiembre
Internacional 1998
photography exhibits**

INFO: See Current
All Day/All Night listings



"Untitled" by Pedro Isztin

their programs crash and burn with the economy. The '90s, however, have seen a rejuvenation, with Centro de la Imagen in Mexico City rising out of the ashes. Offering workshops, exhibits, and publications, the Centro has quickly developed into Latin America's foremost photographic institution.

Inspired by conferences in other nations, Centro de la Imagen's director Patricia Mendoza proposed the idea for a month-long celebration of photography. The first Fotoseptiembre occurred in 1994. Her long-time friend Michael Mehl has helped to broaden the international scope of Fotoseptiembre. "The first conference had 300 events, mostly in Mexico," says Mehl, a San Antonio artist and associate coordinator for Fotoseptiembre. "In 1996, there were over 500 events."

The growing participation is primarily Mehl's doing. For the '98 conference, he sent out 70 invitations to gallery owners and institutions, drumming up the same grass roots involvement that characterizes the conference in Europe, Asia, and Australia. Mehl provided support at whatever level was needed, from matching artists with gal-

leries to curating a number of exhibits himself.

Mehl mentions also that "Oracle," an international society of photographers, held their meeting last year at the Centro and realized what was happening when they saw the scope of activities. "No other photographic institution has that kind of outreach in Latin America, or in the United States," he notes. While praising New York's International Center for Photography, Mehl laments the New York/Los Angeles loop which still excludes other areas of the country from major markets and serious artistic consideration.

"Fotoseptiembre gives many San Antonio artists an occasion to exhibit and allows them a modest international exposure, certainly in terms of Latin America," Mehl comments. It's an opportunity to bypass the usual market pathways and, as Mehl puts it, "jump into a larger arena." ■



"Suspended Effect of a Presence" by Ramin Smandari