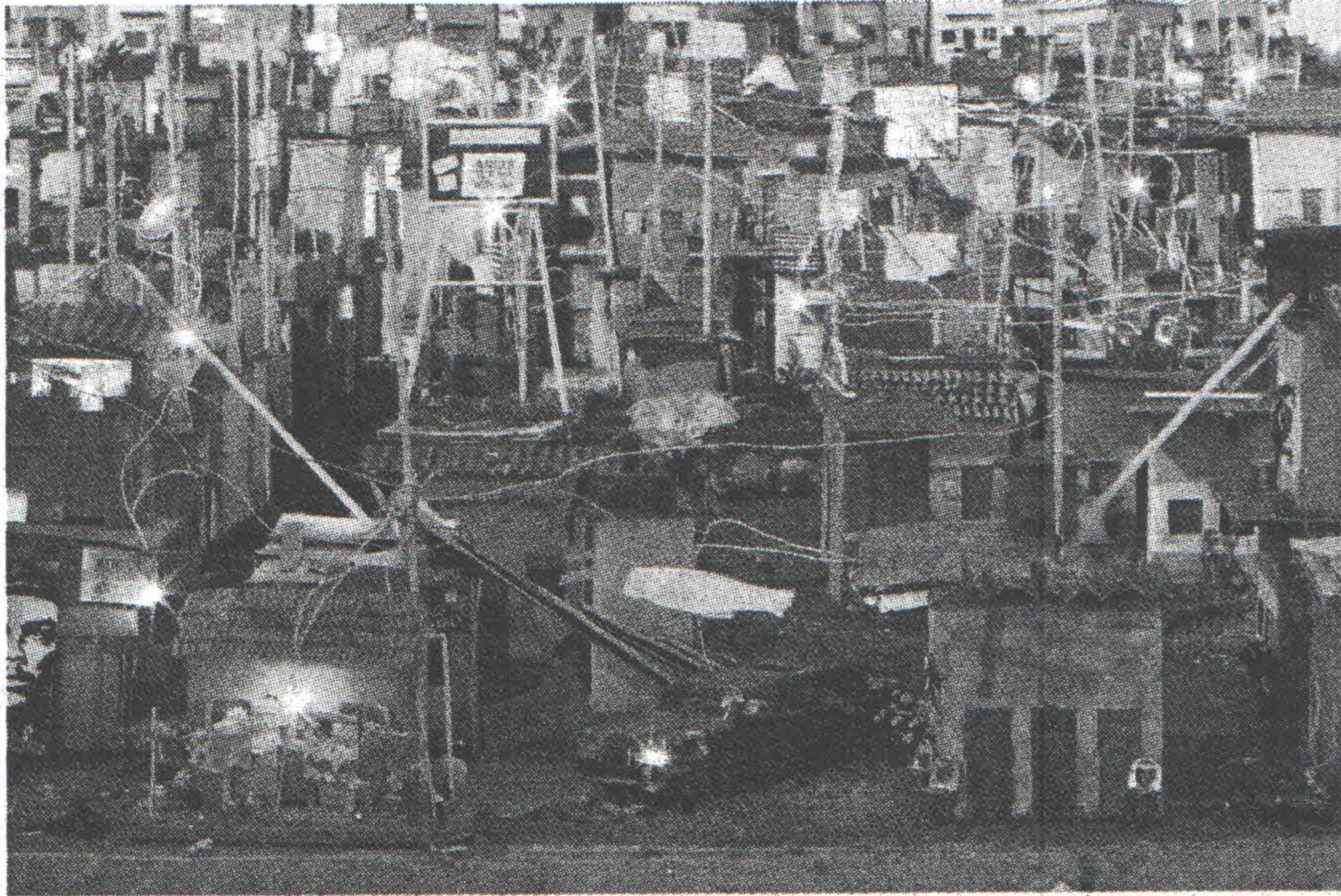


NEWS HOUSING

Favela modelling

Brazilian artist Sérgio Cezar recreates Rio's labyrinthine slums at this year's État d'Urgence



ITTY-BITTY SHANTY: Cezar model

by **MICHAEL-OLIVER HARDING**

With another arctic winter right on our doorstep, Montreal welcomes the 11th edition of État d'Urgence, Action Terroriste Socialement Acceptable (ATSA)'s five-day festival designed to shed light on homelessness and social exclusion. This large-scale urban intervention officially got underway last night, Wednesday, Nov. 25, bringing together the homeless, citizens and artists from here and abroad to share stories of survival with Montreal's displaced people.

"Each year, we try to reach out to the international community to open up the predicament of homelessness on a much larger scale," says État d'Urgence co-founder Annie Roy. "We want to remind people that it's not just a local issue but a global one, and it's great for our own itinerant community to be exposed to different perspectives and realities."

This year, the festival welcomes both German intervention artist

Hans Winkler and its first South American guest, Brazil's Sérgio Cezar. Known on home turf as a popular former soccer player but first and foremost as the "paper architect" or "arquiteto do papelão," Cezar reproduces well-known Rio favelas like Rocinha and Vidigal by way of colossal, intricately detailed scale models with accompanying soundscapes, creating veritable miniature cities out of cardboard, batteries, beer cans, paint, glue, powdered coal and just about anything that has been discarded.

"I've always been reusing materials," says Cezar in an e-mail interview with the *Mirror*. "My father was a caretaker in an upscale Rio building, and I lived with kids who were much more affluent than I was. I always wanted the toys they had, so I learned to take what they were playing with and make my own toys out of them. They ended up being much more interesting than their original form, and my

friends wanted the toys that they had thrown out and I had just recycled."

Cezar, whom ATSA organizers first encountered at the 2009 Havana Biennale, never formally studied architecture. He teaches his brand of "cardboard architecture" to impoverished kids in Brazil and founded a non-govern-

mental organization that seeks to achieve better social integration through art and recycling. So it comes as no surprise that his art is both informed and imbued with an activist's urgency. "As Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros once said, 'Everything that serves for the trash serves for poetry.' That's my work," says Cezar.

Beyond the sheer aesthetic beauty of his pieces, they're also raw and visceral, hinting at powerful stories of adversity. "For those who don't know the slum, it can seem like a lot of cardboard houses stacked upon one another, with a lot misery,

poverty and waste," says Cezar. "But you'd be mistaken. Today's slums often have basic sanitation, bus lines and even government. The big problem is the issue of drug trafficking. Its streets are poorly designed, and with many narrow alleys, it is the ideal place for illegal trade."

Cezar, who currently travels with a production team shooting a documentary about his work, is operating out of a heated tent at Place Émilie-Gamelin every day between noon and 8 p.m. until Sunday, Nov. 29. You'll find him there collaborating with artists from Montreal's St. James Drop-in Centre to build his scale models.

"I know the realities of Brazil and Canada are very different," he says. "To me, Canada is first world. I don't see slums in Canada, and if there are any, I'm not aware. I think the Canadian government can give people at least the bare necessities, like health, food, school and a place to rest."

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