

Postcolonial Califas is a new site-dependant photographic inter-cultural installation project by California artist Armando Rascón.

A rich, if ironic, cultural discourse is resonant with Chicana/o discourse at the end of the XX Century. Perhaps most visible of all is the phenomenology of the US/Mexico border, a 2,000 mile expanse that has served to separate both countries since the border demarcation was established along with ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. *Latina Postcolonial Photobureau + 7 related media installations* is an exhibition that attempts to define the space of the contemporary postcolonial subject after a long --and enduring-- legacy of colonization that has affected the resident population both north and south of the border in the aftermath of the US war with Mexico 150 years earlier (1846-48).

As the northernmost territories of Mexico were ceded into the Union, and English was imposed as the official language of the frontier, new cultural and political parameters were drawn that have ultimately spawned a new social order. With the passing of time the *colonized* learned English and became versed with the numerous attendant codes of the *colonizer*, appropriating elements from the dominant culture while retaining the codes of the mother culture; thus becoming a productive element of the *colony*, an ethnic mirror-image of the *other*, a *postcolonial*.

Latina Postcolonial Photobureau + 7 related media installations is intended to serve as a kind of status report, challenging any simple attempt to codify the cross-cultural richness that informs the psyche of the average contemporary Chicano/a. From cholos/as to preppies, skateboarders to gangsters, from real estate agents to college professors, gas station attendants to Speaker of the State Assembly, *Latina Postcolonial Photobureau + 7 related media installations* is a carefully edited multi-media installation project that has chosen the format of *here and now* to create a timely cultural unity --Us equals Them-- that proposes empowerment models for youth and collaborative partnerships as part of a larger rubric of proactive engagement with the issues that confront the Chicano/a community throughout the Southwest: education, employment, self-representation, and access to economic ownership and cultural enterprise.

To this end, the project draws from imagery and sound that was recorded and appropriated from media as well as stock material that I produced and compiled during the current decade.

--Armando Rascón
San Francisco, California

Some thoughts on postcolonialism from the perspective of border citizenry
by Armando Rascón, copyright 1998

For those of us who have lived there for any significant amount of time, our sense of the border is one of a semi-porous point of entry/departure that is more or less a street furniture vernacular of cyclone fencing and barbed wire. Its visual and physical markings proclaim a lone neo-colonial folklore of abrupt yet navigable civic space(s). It's a question of practicality: how quickly and efficiently can one cross from one side to the other to conduct simple errands --to visit relatives, to browse bookshops, to investigate new independant cd releases from Mexico City, to grab a quick meal, to buy the day's newspapers, to get a shoeshine, to purchase groceries and supplies, to experience the moments zeit geist on the street-- or to arrive to work on time. The archetype of the border as open space still exists in the minds of those whose livelihood is tied to the political economy of binational trade and consumption on a daily basis. This could be the naval cadet on leave wandering Tijuana's Avenida Revolución late Saturday night, or, the Mexican farm laborer returning home via Mexicali's Avenida Madero in the late afternoon.

The distinction between the syncretic nature of a binational metropolis and the regulation of immigration policy beyond range of border city limits is sometimes obscured by politics that cast 'border walls' as black and white. The perception of the border as a partisan 'us versus them'

Armando Rascón, *some thoughts*, continued:

civic space is simple-minded to the extreme given today's model of bicultural integration and economic interdependency. The seven-lane one-hundred seventy-five car length queue northbound at the Tijuana/San Ysidro *aduanas* is distinct from the road block on Interstate 5 at San Onofre, California. In other words, this architectural model of manageable interdiction at point of entry is distinct from the postmodern political apparatus of high tech detection/security systems deployed elsewhere in the interest of national security. At the civic scale, the mindset of the average citizen whose livelihood rests on binational mobility is usually the simple matter of when best to attempt crossing in order to avoid a four hour long quarter mile commute. Pretty much, since 1848, the social history of the border has been the question of crossing: when and how.

Increasingly, the locus of commercial exchange at the border presages unprecedented enterprise and economic growth for municipalities on both sides of the fence. Mobility and transport of the binational body politic and workforce from one side to the other speaks to the historical imperative of the border as a fluid navigable civic space. How a site that is largely dependant on human resources and interchangeable international markets for its economic basis can continue to manage the flow of moving bodies in either direction --North or South-- in a logical and efficient manner is a question of function put forth to the urban planner and social architect of our day. At the turn of the Century, the spectre of functionally gridlocked international port(s) of entry posits a real threat to the quotidian goodwill and long-lived lore of bicultural heritage shared amongst communities on both sides of the border fence.

But is the border really only ever located at the point of demarcation set forth by physical barriers regulated by the US Border Patrol? Is the point of entry really all that porous to those who do not possess the proper credentials? Do populations on the north side of the metal barrier share in the mindset of populations to the south? At what distance from the border fence does an individual's identity become subject to change and acutely aware of *difference*? Is it merely the sheer force of a concentrated commercial presence in the region --defined: factory workers / consumers of imported manufactured goods-- that holds the bicultural body politic together? Is use of language an element of resistance, or rather, just merely a side effect of the political economy of the sign? Do contemporary colonialisms promote the status quo or is it a simple matter of insularity that casts persistent perceptions of the region as a rural underserved? How is it that in the aftermath of the colonial era, the colonial subject continues to be divided --and conquered-- from within the center of its own cultural locus, as though by virtue of some strange caste system of inherently socialized behaviour?

In the book *Anti-Oedipus*, the example is given of the impossibility for social change if the individual is unable to change from within --as an individual-- to the extent that his/her example might come to bear against the very criticisms raised against the state. A similar syndrome is apparent in the colonial subject who may be unaware of the social history of his/her past, remaining strapped to the narrative of limitations and self-fulfilling prophecies of economic blight and victimization. Decolonization is a violent phenomena (Marcuse) in the sense that much is required from anyone choosing the path of resistance in carving out a unique and self-regulated design for living.

For the southwestern colonial subject of the past several hundred or so years, the process of decolonization is very unlikely given ongoing doses of cultural amnesia, deployed through the system over many generations. Unaware of his/her true history, a colonial may very well adhere to the only knowledge readily available: victimization discourse. A postcolonial, on the other hand, though explicitly aware of *difference* is more apt to navigate the channels of popular culture in the interest of remaining critically distant from the disfiguring syndrome of *colony* and *colonization*. In the late Nineties the new power differential of the pan-ethnic space embraces a communication model: Language as a form of resistance positions itself at the core of postcolonial critical practices.