

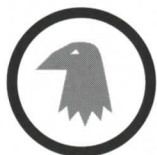
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αζτλάν

San Francisco Art Institute 1994 Adaline Kent Award Exhibition

ARMANDO RASCÓN

Regresamos
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la
Cima
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Aztlán

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Armando Rascón

Adaline Kent Award Exhibition

March 31 – April 30, 1994

WALTER / McBEAN GALLERY

San Francisco Art Institute

THE SPIRITUAL PLAN OF AZTLAN • In the spirit of a new people that is
conscious not only of its proud heritage, but also of the brutal "gringo"
invasion of our territories, we, the Chicano, inhabitants and civilizers
of the northern land of Aztlán, from whence came our forefathers, reclaim-
ing the land of their birth and consecrating the determination of our
people of the sun, declare that the call of our blood is our power, our
responsibility, and our inevitable destiny. We are free and sovereign
to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land,
the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those that
plant the seed, water the fields and gather the crops, and not to the
foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the
Bronze Continent. Brotherhood unites us, love for our brothers makes
us a people whose time has come and who struggle against the foreign
"gabacho" who exploits our riches and destroys our culture. With
heart in our hand and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence
of our mestizo Nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture.
Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers
on the Bronze Continent, we are a Nation. We are a union of free pueblos.
We are Aztlán. To hell with the nothing race. All power for our people.

**1994 Adaline Kent Award Committee
San Francisco Art Institute
Artists Committee**

In these confusing times, when much of our culture is in flux and pluralism is the standard, it is a difficult task for a group of artists to select just one of their peers to represent a certain moment in the life of a community. However, we feel we have done justice to this moment and our community by selecting Armando Rascón as the recipient of the 1994 Adaline Kent Award. The quality and integrity of Rascón's work speaks with critical eloquence to issues of the 1990s. The intelligence and generosity of Rascón's life work as artist, activist, curator and theoretician exemplify the ideals of our collective efforts.

RUDY LEMCKE
EMMANUEL MONTOYA
KEVIN RADLEY



Armando Rascón

Armando Rascón has been selected for the 1994 Adaline Kent Award. In doing so, the San Francisco Art Institute Artists Committee acknowledges Rascón's work in installation and conceptual art, his curatorial contributions to the arts and to the community, and his social activism. It is with great satisfaction that we honor Rascón with this award.

The Adaline Kent Award was established in 1959 in recognition of the support given to the San Francisco Art Institute by sculptor Adaline Kent and her husband Robert B. Howard. Including an honorarium and a solo exhibition in the Walter/McBean Gallery, the award is presented annually to a "talented, promising and deserving California artist." Previous awardees have included David Cannon Dashiell (1993), Carrie Mae Weems (1992), Mildred Howard (1991), Mike Henderson (1990), Terry Allen, Joan Brown, Bruce Conner, Jay De Feo, Roy De Forest, Robert Hudson, David Ireland and Manuel

Neri. Rascón was selected by Rudy Lemcke, Emmanuel Montoya and Kevin Radley, the 1994 Adaline Kent Award Committee of the San Francisco Art Institute Artists Committee. We would like to thank these people for their careful and sensitive dedication to this task.

Armando Rascón has been a major factor in the artistic and cultural life of the Bay Area for more than 13 years. He has curated many important exhibitions, including the recent San Francisco projects *Object at Intersection* for the Arts and *La Moda* at Galeria de la Raza. As the founder and codirector of Terrain, a renowned gallery devoted to contemporary art, Rascón has presented the work of numerous emerging talents over the past six years.

Born in 1956 in Calexico, California, near the border with Mexico, Rascón was a young participant in the Chicano civil rights movement of the 1960s. As a teenager he worked as a United Farm Workers Union volunteer distributing informational materials. A member of the second generation of politically conscious Chicano artists, Rascón's recent work has used contemporary methods of research and analysis to examine the

institutional construction of cultural repositories, archives and information systems.

Rascón's work is widely acclaimed. He has participated in group exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Paris, Cologne, Copenhagen, Stockholm and elsewhere. His solo work has included projects for INTAR Gallery in New York, the Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum, the Randolph Street Gallery in Chicago, and San Francisco's Southern Exposure and New Langton Arts galleries. In short, Rascón is a recognized and admired creative force.

For his Adaline Kent Award Exhibition, Rascón has created *Occupied Aztlán*, a multimedia installation comprised of new material and elements from his previous work. Incorporating textual material, an interactive computer station, video and photography, *Occupied Aztlán* examines the historical representation of Chicano/as in the US. The installation challenges the role of the US public education system in the construction of cultural, historical, economic and political institutions. Framed school work from the 1960s reveals the rhetoric and legacy of colonization, which

is presented as a normalized feature of the indoctrination process. A video component presents cultural artifacts in the context of recent jurisprudence affecting the Hispanic community. A slide projection room presents and contrasts historical and contemporary images and audio recordings from the US-Mexico border.

A project such as this requires the efforts of many people. We would like to thank Loida Sorensen, assistant director of exhibitions, for organizing the entire project; Norma Alarcón for her insightful catalog essay; Wayne Smith for the design of the announcement and catalog; Patricia Quill, director of communications, and Paul Dorn, assistant director of communications, for supervising the production of the exhibition catalog; and Bruce Brodie and student gallery staff members Peter Cole, Christina La Sala, Connell Ray Little and William Wellington Wallace for their assistance with the installation.

JEAN-EDITH WEIFFENBACH
Director of Exhibitions

KEVIN RADLEY
Chair, Artists Committee, 1993-94

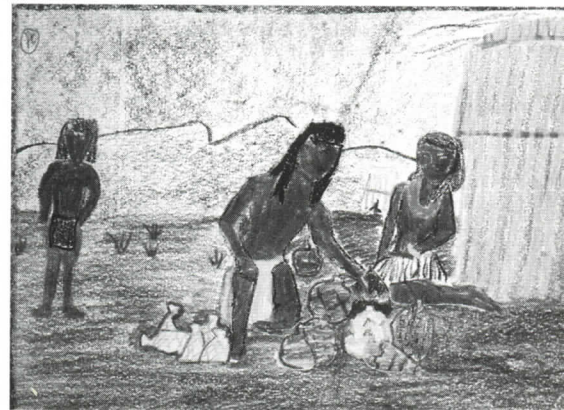


In Consideration of Certain Artifacts Contained in the Exhibition

(Elements That Make Reference to the Institution of Public Education)

There are some 85,000 public schools in the United States, each with particular agendas and strategies addressing the multiple components comprising the basis for a K-12 public education. Guaranteed by the Constitution to all children under 16 years of age, this educational provision is a requirement, not an option, as mandated by State and Federal Law. In preparing for this project, I attempted to (re)view the complex experience of the K-12 experiment and its attendant conflation of imperatives: from "low" culture and "high" culture, from intellectual/academic to "community based" and "spoken word" systems/methods of knowledge, from generic "nationalist" discourses to the highly "radicalized" ideologies inhered in, for instance, the Chicano civil rights movement in the United States in the years 1965-71. I (re)viewed the source material analytically, as though

through the lens of cultural anthropology, with some critical distance, with as little personal affect as is possible under the circumstances. And, given the fact of tried and true educational modus operandi in the system, such as "drill-n-skill," the "three R's" and "good old fashioned discipline," I am left to consider the fact that in California: (1) only 48 percent of Chicano/as graduate from high school every year; (2) some 90 percent of all prison inmates never completed high school; and (3) that a vast majority of Chicano/as have lost faith in the political process and, therefore, do not vote. At its most ambitious, the installation segment comprised of fourth grade artifacts could be seen as a rejoinder — 28 years after the fact — to all of the empty



NAME

Armando Poson

DATE

Nov. 2, 1966

A HISTORY pp. 34-6

Answer the following in complete sentences.

1. What were the duties of the chief of the tribe? Make a list.

The chief had to be very wise. One of his jobs was to see that every one obeyed the rules. He needed helpers to run the government fairly. fine, food, hunt, trade, dances.

2. How were the tribal laws made?

The set of rules or laws were given by council.

3. How did Indians send invitations to their friends?

-1 They sent the invitations by sending a messenger boy. Card with letter.

In the blank write the word from the list below that fits the definition.

council
chief

calendar
government

fine
laws

fairly
punish

laws rules made by a country, state, or tribe

government the ruling of a country

Chief head of a tribe; a leader

fairly in a fair manner; justly

council a group of people called together to give advice and to discuss and settle question

punish cause pain, loss, or discomfort to one who has done wrong

calendar a table that shows days, weeks, and months

fine an amount, such as money, that a person must pay to make up for a wrong that has been done

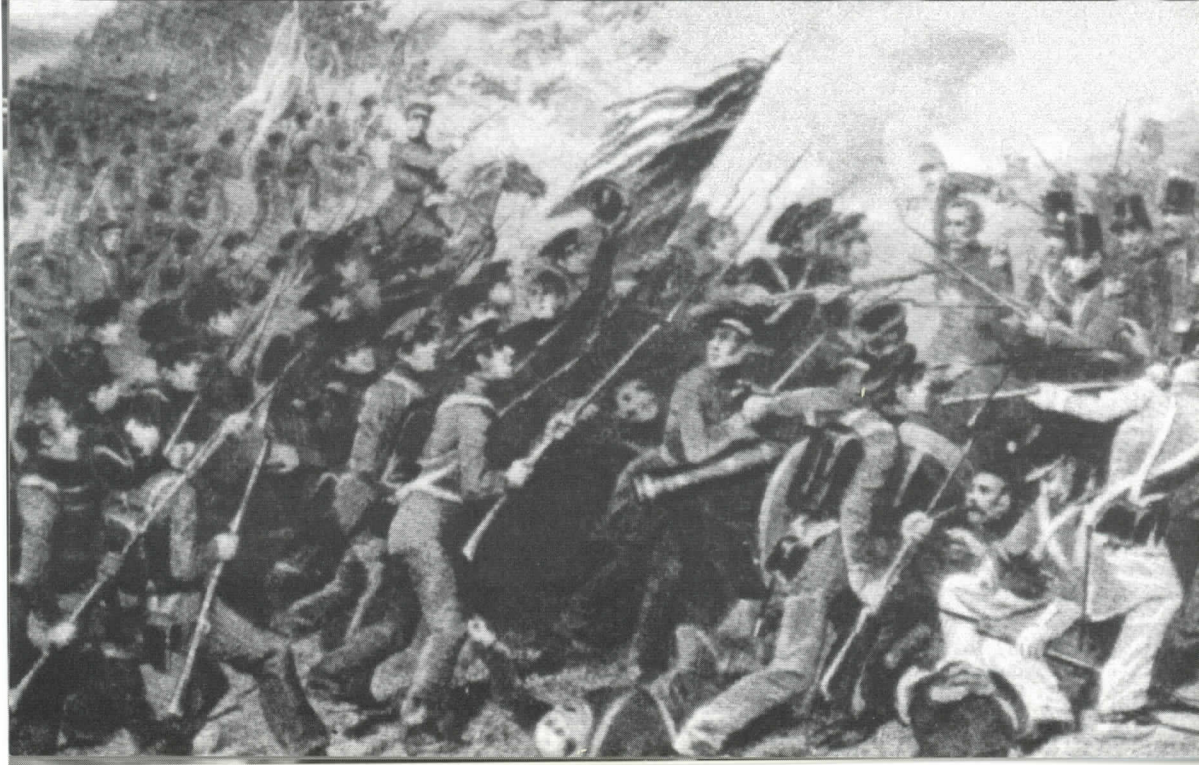
spaces floating between red orthographic
ink and blue mimeographic phrasing,
latent spaces framing questions about
truth, justice and the effects of a higher
doctrine, a systematic programming that
could carry the discourse of colonization
well into the 21st century. Insofar as the
overall project, *Occupied Aztlán*, interro-
gates the space of Postmodernism in its
given format as a (re)presentation of
these issues and social constructions,
and, by extension, functions as a rein-
statement of my own lived HISTORICAL
REAL, consider *Occupied Aztlán* as con-
stitutive of itself — within the tenets of
political agency — as a site for inquiry
within which the audience may participate
as the ultimate catalyst.

ARMANDO RASCÓN

San Francisco

1994





The Work of Armando Rascón

T(r)opographies for a Critical Imaginary

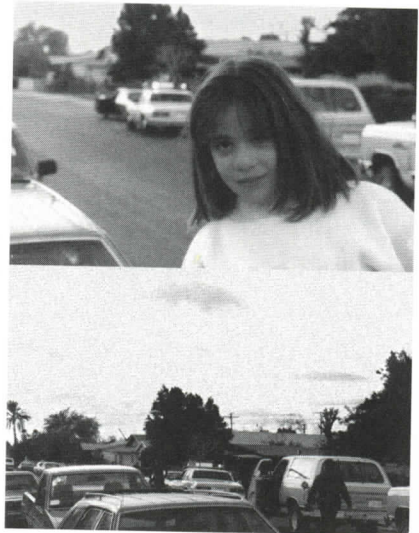
ESSAY BY NORMA ALARCÓN

In an era when political analysts are truly bewildered by the large-scale apathy of the citizenry, and in turn the citizenry is inundated by data and bereft of the tools for the production of knowledge, it is truly refreshing to encounter an artist, such as Armando Rascón, who believes the structure of knowledge is politics and that political art can disclose a reconfiguration for knowing.

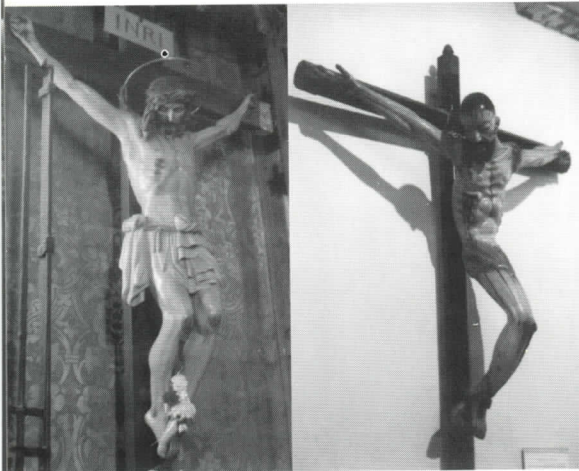
Since the publication of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*,¹ it has become increasingly evident that intellectuals, writers and artists who hail from the US-Mexican border offer a unique vision of the political economy and its conjugation with cultural production. Faced from early childhood with lines of geopolitical separation that fail to separate, such otherwise innocuous questions as "what is your name?" and

"where were you born?" lead the way to a relentless inquiry of the economies of relations of difference.

In the US context, there are few among people of Mexican descent, other than intellectuals, writers and artists, who continue to adhere to the twin terms "Chicano/Aztlán," which indeed assist in the mediation of economies of relations of difference. In 1981, José Limón had already cautioned that such an "identity" was rejected and questioned by people of Mexican descent in the US.² What was misunderstood then as now, is that



deterritorialized populations often reconstruct an Imaginary (i.e. *Occupied Aztlán*) to mediate a critique of geopolitical nationalisms, as well as a "third space" through which to situate the critique that alleviates the "us vs. them" syndrome produced by geopolitical nationalisms. The "us" are not all Mexican and the "them" are not all Angloamerican, a factor well understood by both Gloria Anzaldúa and Armando Rascón. Local and global decolonization can strike out in a different direction, walking the interstice between the lines. As such, Rascón's photograph of the space cutting through the border fences between Calexico/Mexicali is emblematic of a critical vision that is



situated elsewhere. (See *Surveillance Water Tower with Border Fence, Calexico/Mexicali, October 12, 1991*, opposite.)

In 1994, virtually every Latino/Chicano/Hispanic Californian is a breath away from criminalization as the current inappropriate Other in Wilson's California, and every other Californian is a breath away from "turning in" his/her neighbor. Only historical amnesia would lead us to forget that the current xenophobia is only the most recent instance of "immigrant" scapegoating in the racist nation-making process of the United States. Isn't imperialism racist by historical definition and example? On the eve of the 21st century, we have an urgent need to overhaul our political vocabulary and grammar, to create a t(r)opography for a new world knowledge.³

In the contemporary world decolonization has meant a move toward "capitalist democracies" whose monological rationalism is a mandate to make the world "safe" for capitalism, not democracy as is often claimed. If the phrase appears as an oxymoron, it is so because the reader may have in mind a different democratic desire,



aspiring to another understanding of communities. Rascón's most recent work goes back to the future, to our first years of schooling. He implicitly asks: What is the student-teacher relation? In *Occupied Aztlán*, his newest installation, the "ready-made" objects that govern most of his work are graded exams from his fourth grade history classes. Through this exercise we are called to again ask innocent-sounding questions: Why was the war between Spain and Mexico important to California? We are dared to engage that question and simultaneously compelled to recollect the exam questions of our own history classes. Why is that question important, why the answer, what is your name, where were you born? What is the required answer?



As in most exams there often is a required answer, especially in the fourth grade where students may be treated as passive consumers. When is an answer correct or incorrect? A question is not quite ever merely a matter of fact — where were you born, what is your name — the "facts" are concatenated, analyzed and interpreted. How? Is the intentionality of the question revealed through the required answer? Through this ideological thicket are the economies of relations of difference disclosed. Can a fourth grader cope? It depends on our pedagogical practices — and this is the core of Rascón's work — what are our pedagogical practices? The despair and cynicism of youth in schools today may well arise from the blatant discrepancy between the world as everyday experience and the educational system's curricular and pedagogical practices.

In earlier installation work such as *The Socio-cultural Reading Room: Center for Research and Information* and *Existential Monochrome*, Rascón has already laid out a format to incite an interlocking vision of micro/macro political t(r)opographies. In the first the library is reconceptualized as

the critical imaginary of difference. The restructuring of the Dewey system through the patron-participatory installation effects a community that crosscuts individualized and solitary reading selections to produce a different group reading practice. Given the fact that in an era of cutbacks libraries are being closed or dismantled, we are forced to re-view and re-read the installation as the site of a potential loss. The double gesture of gain through renewed reading practices and loss through the disappearance of the space prompts us to ask questions and make choices. Moreover there is a suggestion as well that the installation may soon be moved from the library to the museum. Were such spaces ever equivalent? Has the video displaced the book as the written displaced the oral? In this light *Existential Monochrome* challenges us to choose between spectatorship and participation in the construction of a new world knowledge.

In all his work Rascón questions whether the state, regardless of its status in the global political economy, represents its constituency; asks if the sloganeering utopian movements of the 60s have

collapsed for good with nothing to take their place; points to the absurdity of laws that fail to deliver justice as leaders abuse power and authority; and wonders if we will be intrepid enough to derail the "existential monochrome." In doing this Rascón, as do many contemporary political artists, points to the degradation of our current political milieu in which the citizenry's only choice is to withdraw. Artists like Rascón give a hand and ask that we restructure the loops of historical politics and the contemporary circuits of signification for the new world knowledge which may disclose economies of relations of difference for a novel participatory action, a political grammar for the 21st century.

¹ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

² Limón, José. "The Folk Performance of 'Chicano' and the Cultural Limits of Political Ideology." In *And Other Neighborly Names: Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*; ed. Richard Bauman and Roger D. Abrahams. Austin University of Texas Press, 1981.

³ By the composite word "t(r)opography" I mean to suggest the relationship between "topos" — place or region; and "trope" — the figurative use of a word or expression.







