

My first exposure to network engineering was attendance to INTEROP, a vast yearly industry expo at the Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco. It was there that I was able to learn of the development and use of global corporate networked environments and top-of-the-heap industry standards —company best practices for building and running large scale connectivity environments (blades, routers and the multiple technical advances and uses of the internet connectivity during the 80s that are now known as server farms and data centers). In my cold water space on Folsom Street, and later again in the Jessie Street studio downtown I ran cat4-6 cable to connect external modems/routers/gateways to the pc desktops and laptops on premises on both floors of the building —on the Folsom studio 1988-1993...on the Jessie Street studio thru 2005; THEN when we vacated the space and moved to Calexico in October 2005, I stripped the cat-6 cables and repurposed them to tie down the cargo in the moving trucks).

The Well based in Sausalito, CA was my first entry to the web, starting in 1989. The WELL (Whole Earth Electronic Link), an online community was founded in 1985 started as a dial-up Bulletin Board System (BBS) and was one of the earliest internet communities and ISPs.

My handle at the Well was ‘**xicano**’ and it served to establish myself on the web and for meeting other like-minded individuals. Soon I met ‘**maya**’ a homie that was also raised in the Imperial Valley (Brawley, CA) and had family in Mexicali, as I did. As a host on the Well Maya was running various conferences on the web circa 1993-94.

In March 1994 I had set up **Occupied Aztlán** at the SF Art Institute, and installed a computer terminal using a very small Toshiba (one of my two twin laptops,) a monitor and modem/router to deploy **Occupied Aztlán Database** (non-html) in the space, the electronic component of **Califas Paralegal Station**. Maya and I launched the ***Institute for Xicano Relations: Center for Research and Information*** as an internet conference hosted by the Well to be accessible from the SF Art Institute and elsewhere. The intention was for the installation to serve as a hub for web interactivity both in the gallery as well as offsite on the web universe beyond the art gallery walls.

Then I brought in ‘**matisse**’, a member of the nascent Electronic Frontier Foundation, one of my virtual friends from the Well who provided me with a copy of the NCSA Mosaic (for Windows), the first popular web browser —a pirated shareware that allowed our database use of what was then called the Graphic User Interface. This is where things got interesting for the **Occupied Aztlán Database**. We broke into the very beginnings of what would become html. MOSAIC is said to have kicked off the dot-com boom later in 1995. We were web 1.0, on the verge of web 2.0. LOL

An intention of the **Occupied Aztlán** project was to advance the use of the internet to further the goals of “El Movimiento,” to incite interest in gaining visibility and access to distribution of information through smart high-tech means. Most gallery guests were getting a first exposure to the web courtesy of a “Chicano Art Show,” an art category that had been excluded from contemporary art institutions and limited to cultural centers and the like in 1994. A good number of guests were also having a first time exposure to a “Chicano Art Show” period. As I was staff at the Mission District’s RAP High School (Real Alternative Program was a continuation high school for primarily Latinx youth dropouts), it was amazing bringing the kids to the SF Art Institute for a field trip. My student’s favorite element was the ***Institute for Xicano Relations: Center for Research and Information*** viewed on the Well online, interactively inside the *Califas Paralegal Station* element of **Occupied Aztlán**.

SF ART INSTITUTE Guest processing instructions:

1. A gallery guest sits down and begins to read the welcome language on the monitor, and are queried to join the *Institute for Xicano Relations newsletter*.
2. Secondly, they are invited to log into the *Institute for Xicano Relations: AKA Occupied Aztlán Database* on the Internet.
3. The guest formally requests to be logged into the conference by gallery staff and provided 30 minutes of navigation use on the site. Most users would never have been on the internet yet.

In the late 80s and early 90s TELNET, VT-100 and ASCII were the three languages required to operate/navigate the web—I trained staff at the SF Art Institute on the protocols and use of the internet, as it was necessary to use these languages (especially ASCII) and keyboard codes at the time, (ie, in today’s parlance “alt 161” on a keyboard with the ALT key produces the “á”, and I had to publish a printout legend of the most commonly used codes for use by the the SF Art Institute staff when assigning 30 minutes use of the terminal to gallery goers, as most guests had never experienced the internet yet.....this would have been their first time. When the gallery would close at 5:00pm, staff would remain and explore the web as the interface was available to them 24/07.

Reference:

ASCII

>Text was encoded using ASCII characters (0-127)

>Everything you typed—commands, navigation keys, messages— was just ASCII.

>No graphics, no mouse, no markup like HTML.

TELNET

TELNET was the primary protocol for remote access.

You connected from a terminal to another computer

Navigation was entirely keyboard-based

Commands depended on the remote system (Unix, VMS, etc).

VT100

Special escape sequences (controlled cursor movement, screen clearing, text formatting)

Arrow keys, function keys, screen updates were handled through these codes.

Generally, these were “keyboard codes.”

Within months following close of ***Occupied Aztlán***, the co-author of MOSAIC at University of Illinois NCSA department, Marc Andreessen, left the U of I, and joined the founder of Silicon Graphics in forming Netscape (a Silicon Valley startup) to distance itself from the university’s ownership of MOSAIC, and called it Netscape (the browser was Netscape Navigator, now commonly credited for starting the dot-com boom). The internet entered use of the GUI, visual navigation, color monitors, a browser that was usable by “non-technical” people. At about the same time the WELL, began to experience problems from the government, as when it was invaded by the FBI, and everything FROZE for several months.....zero traffic, and the results were super unsettling for the community as its concept of privacy had been shattered and prior notions of privacy banished forever now that it would be regulated.

After the Well, I launched xicano.com. Working with my friend Frank Leahy, a first generation Apple engineer in the early days of Steve Jobs, he and I set up xicano.com by acquiring the domain name and then building the site from scratch. Frank hosted it on his home server during the first years of development (1994-97). I provided the content and Frank and I built the interface. I completely credit Frank for teaching me how to build a website with HTML (hypertext mark-up language) before there were commercial tools available for public use (Dreamweaver came later in 1998). We completed the site in 1996, and launched it publicly with ***Institute for Xicano Relations: Postcolonial Califas*** a dual-institution project at both the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego and the Centro Cultural de la Raza (1997). **Xicano.com** was shared at both venues and electronically on the web (in lieu of a printed catalog). I had written the CEO of Silicon Graphics and obtained loan of one of the Silicon Graphics servers for use at Centro Cultural de la Raza in order to project the html on the gallery wall, simultaneous with xicano.com running online. Use of technology in venues required to author specific instructions to staff —via an exhibition tech rider for management of the technology in situ as part of the installation’s daily run in the gallery.

The *Occupied Aztlán Database: Institute for Xicano Relations* was transmuted in 1998 for use in the show *Aztlán Hoy*, at the Santa Isabel II, a photography satellite space of Madrid's Reina Sofía Museum for a major exhibition organized by the Reina Sofía's media curator Berta Sichel. The piece was hosted on xicano.com and renamed ***Institute for xicano relations: portable chapel juan soldado*** and included a running photo-documentation tour of the Juan Soldado chapel (located in the old cemetery in Tijuana), the patron saint to would-be undocumented border crossers from Mexico into the USA coupled with extended data research exploring the status of immigration between 1993 through 1998 as evinced by major media sources, such as the Los Angeles Times, the New York Times, the Economist and other print media journals and sources. (from 1993 through 1998). Tour of the Juan Soldado chapel required navigation of the research language in search of random hyperlinked words that would prompt a deliberate image sequencing that could be determined at the viewer's pace, no matter where they would be located —whether inside the Canal de Isabel II or elsewhere on the planet, a tour of the Juan Soldado chapel also provided the viewer with a substantial focus on immigration reality and a deep dive into the statistical realities of the undocumented populations on both sides of the US/Mexico border. A third subject was the borderlands as a binational site that had evolved a third space and bicultural breed of human, the transborder culture.

In 2002 another piece that was projected/broadcast on xicano.com was **AztlánLifeExtensionFoundation**, a dual facing work that operated as an information site online, the site explored Malverde, the distinct folk hero and emblematic icon often work as protective amulet signage on keychains and the necklaces of would-be undocumented border crossers (as well as smugglers) from Mexico to the USA. The piece served as a PSA for Mission District Latinx residents in the Mission District, a community facing displacement of its long term residents by an invasion of tech bro newcomers from the Silicon Valley during the dot-com boom. A featured program of Galería de la Raza was the running Digital Mural series, and **AztlánLifeExtensionFoundation** operated as a massive public-facing billboard on the external walls of Galería, as well as the html site online of the same name hosed on xicano.com.

After 2003, Rascón continued running xicano.com as a compendium of all of the legacy digital projects that he had authored onto CYBERONIC Internet Communication, Inc. a to-the-trade managed service provider. In an effort to stand with the queer and gender-neutral online community, in 2016 he dropped xicano.com and launched it's twin sister xicanx.net.

xicanx.net currently serves as a satellite resource for invited guest contributors for the forthcoming book *Proof of Concept: a survey of the ephemeral work of Armando Rascón*, 2006.