

# ARTS SPACE

PHOTO BY TOMMY HULTGREN



BY JOHN EWING

**P**unch the keyword *postcolonialism* into an Internet search engine, and the resulting list of web sites connects with universities and publications around the world. This “hot button” topic sparks debate among historians, religious leaders, politicians, and artists alike. At the head of the pack are conceptualists like Armando Rascón, a San Francisco artist and gallery owner.

Rascón’s graceful and ingenious meditation on postcolonialism is currently showing at Blue Star Art Space in conjunction with the Downtown UTSA public forum, “Postcolonialism at the Millennium.”

“Latina Postcolonial Photobureau + 7 Related Media Installations” reflects Rascón’s experience growing up in the California border town of Calexico. As a child, he witnessed the political and cultural organization of the Chicano movement. Not content to “cherry pick” one isolated theme or event, Rascón paints with an almost impossibly broad brush.

## RE:VIEW

Armando Rascón’s “Latina Postcolonial Photobureau + 7 Related Media Installations”

WHERE: 116 Blue Star  
WHEN: through Feb. 5  
INFO: 227-6960,  
www.bluestar-art.org

## Beyond borders

*Armando Rascón tackles the postcolonial frontera*

Pulling references from Pre-Columbian Mexico to present-day skate culture, his critical vision locates the border within a historical continuum.

“Latina Postcolonial Photobureau” is a collection of large photo-portraits of Latinas, including Rascón’s mother, a farm worker, California Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez, a Border Patrol agent, and acquaintances from community education projects. A photobureau is a functioning repository of images used by news and media services. Here, the artist has assumed social responsibility by personally gathering the materials used to define cultural identity and community in the age of information.

“KarmaBo(A)rder” simulates a trade-show booth for a fictional skateboard company. The clothing and skateboards displayed are silkscreened with the colors of the Mexican and U.S. flags, in a pattern that mimics metal fencing along the nation’s border. The display’s focal point, however, is a video Rascón created with the Jefferson High School Skate Team. Skating demonstrations in the Blue Star complex are edited with student interviews, and the revealing discussions cover a wide range of topics: equipment and skating styles, police confrontations, skate industry celebrities, student art practices, and silkscreen techniques. Designed to empower youths, “KarmaBo(A)rder” attempts to connect the local practitioners of skate culture with the multinational business apparatus that profits from it.

“Postcolonial Califas Diction(ary)” and “Olmec Lightpiece for XX Century Fin de Siècle” are additional repositories of cultural and historical

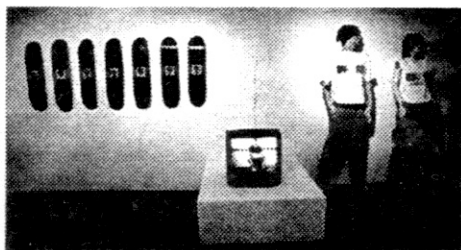
See Beyond, page 36

# Beyond borders

From page 13

data. The first is an audio recording of a Rascón family gathering in Calexico. The convivial, anecdotal voices code-switching from Spanish to English reverberate in a room painted entirely black. Set into opposing walls are two tiles depicting mid-century stereotypes of Mexican male and femaleness. The stark room is a jarring contrast to the richly varied rhythms and tones of the recording. "Olmec Lightpiece" is a slide show with similar contrasts. Casual photographs of friends, graduation ceremonies, and family gatherings are interspersed with older, sepia-tone portraits and media images of police brutality.

"Holy Faith (Santa Fe)" and "Stations of the X" work together to unify the entire exhibition, both spiritually and historically. In the first installation, a video projection of sun-speckled water slowly rotates above a row of plastic buckets filled from the San Antonio River. A straw hat with an old snapshot of Rascón's mother tucked into the brim is suspended from the wall above the buckets. It hovers, Magritte-like, amidst the video waves. Eventually the video image changes to another exhibition in California of the same installation. In this scene, a reverent Rascón performs a methodical blessing of each bucket, while the image zooms in on the hat, growing larger until the actual hat on the wall sits comfortably next to Rascón's mother in the



now monumental photograph. The almost imperceptible changes in the rotation of the water, and the

circularity of the hats, gives the piece a timeless, meditative quality. As with the video and audio portions elsewhere in the exhibition, it is impossible to experience them quickly or easily. Like history, or the march of time itself, they challenge our attention span and defy byte-sized summaries.

"Stations of the X" features a television broadcasting noisy static. From the base of the monitor, photographs of an exquisite Olmec jade pendant flow out along the gallery floor in repeated rows. Almost 3,000 years old, this Mesoamerican carving of a human head is incised with a design of the Olmec man-jaguar deity. Rascón updates the man/god duality with photographs of his own bare torso. Written over the images in Caló script are prayers collected by his grandmother and portions of a socio-political text by the postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Both the Olmec head and the "graffiti" script are repeated elsewhere in Rascón's exhibition, reasserting a historical and cultural continuum presumably interrupted by the arrival of Columbus. At the heart of postcolonial border culture, these dual forces of continuity and interruption still struggle. They are also what infuse Rascón's art with such compelling relevance. ■