

Michael Menchaca

*The Codex Silex Vallis*  
(*The Silicon Valley Codex*)

Sept 21 - Dec 22, 2019

Michael Menchaca  
*The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)*  
John M. O'Quinn Gallery

In *The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)*, Michael Menchaca visualizes how the growing tech industry—largely based out of Silicon Valley—is infiltrating traditional Latinx family customs in the United States. In large scale, Menchaca explores the imagery and themes from his eponymously-titled series through a variety of media, including a site-specific wallpaper installation, new paintings, drawings, screen and digital print, videos, and virtual reality.

**Public Program**

**Silicon Valley: The Seduction of Racial & Surveillance Capitalism**

A lecture by Michael Menchaca

Saturday, October 19, 2019

1 – 3 PM

A lecture by Michael Menchaca on his research for his National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures Fund for the Arts grant project, *The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)*. Topics explored include how Silicon Valley tech giants have impacts the social fabric of Latinx families in the United States and how Silicon Valley corporations utilize Surveillance Capitalism and Radical Capitalism to monopolize human behavior in the 21st century.

Michael Menchaca  
*The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)*  
Bios

**Michael Menchaca** (b. 1985 in San Antonio, TX) received his BFA from Texas State University in 2011, and his MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 2015. He has been an Artist-in-Residence at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (ME), Vermont Studio Center (VT), The Wassaic Project (NY), The Segura Arts Studio (IN), and The Studios at MASS MoCA (MA), among others. Exhibitions include The Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (AR), The McNay Art Museum (TX), The Davis Museum (MA), North Carolina Museum of Art (NC), The Chrysler Museum of Art (VA), The Gilcrease Museum (OK), The Contemporary Austin (TX), and the IPCNY (NY). He was a Visual Arts Fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center from 2015 – 2016 in Provincetown, MA, and is a recipient of the 2019 National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures (NALAC) Fund for the Arts Grant. Through 2020, he is co-curating the New York/San Antonio exhibition *Xicanx: New Visions* with Suzy González. Menchaca lives and works in San Antonio, TX.

**Claudia Zapata** is curator, writer, artist, and doctoral candidate in Southern Methodist University's RASC/a: Rhetorics of Art, Space and Culture: Ph.D. Program in Art History. She received her BA and MA from the University of Texas in Art History, specializing in Classic Maya art. Her research interests include curatorial methodologies of identity-based exhibitions, Chicanx and Latinx art, digital humanities, people of color zines, and designer toys.

***Digital Harbinger: Michael Menchaca's The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)***  
**An essay by Claudia Zapata**

Michael Menchaca's *The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)* series featured in the eponymously-titled Lawndale exhibition continues the artist's transmedial interplay between fine art print, painting, virtual reality, animation, and installation. Steeped in continued legacies from the Chicano movement's graphic posters and Mexican printmaking, Menchaca initially embodied his political practice in the longstanding tradition of printed graphics. Early works reflect the zeitgeist of Menchaca's environment in South Texas and the increasing effects of the drug cartels and the struggles of the immigrant.

However, his created iconographic, pictographic, and ideographic lexicon within his oeuvre differentiate his approach from his predecessors. Seemingly anachronistic fusions and inspirations define Menchaca's visual language: ancient Mesoamerican iconography, colonial Latin American painting, contemporary U.S. cartoon animation, medieval bestiaries, Japanese isometric video game design, and social media and ecommerce logos. These multivariate inspirations make up Menchaca's exhaustive overlays, creating a maelstrom of visual space. Looking to ancient Mesoamerica, Menchaca relies on the graphic communication tradition of the indigenous codices as well as painted books and manuscripts. These documents act as the primary source for indigenous knowledge, detailing historical records and tales of the spiritual world. Pre-Columbian scholar Elizabeth Boones states these divinatory books "are windows into the future that allow one to see dangers and successes ahead."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Menchaca interprets the Silicon Valley's codex as a comparable resource of premonitory caution. Using the transmedia exhibition design and its various nodes of viewer interaction, Menchaca presents *The Codex Silex Vallis* as a digital harbinger, proselytizing the dangers of Silicon Valley. This hub of technological industries in southern San Francisco is primarily made up of what economists refer to as "The Big Five:" Apple, Amazon, Facebook, Google/Alphabet, and Microsoft.<sup>2</sup> These companies' effect on consumers' behavior is globally expansive and multi-generational.

Through a semiotic analysis, Menchaca appropriates Silicon Valley corporations and their ubiquitous proprietary language to unveil theorized adverse effects on human behavior. Reminiscent of the panopticon, Shoshana Zuboff claims younger generations are now modifying their "IRL" (in real life) behavior as a result of their connection with online "imagined audiences" in a form of surveillance capitalism known as the "extended

chilling effect.”<sup>3</sup> Menchaca contests this overwhelming shift in the zeitgeist throughout *The Codex Silex Vallis* as he does in his online personal manifesto condemning Silicon Valley corporations.<sup>4</sup> Amazon’s role in developing and supplying beta test technology to Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Facebook’s mining personal user data for ad revenue are but some examples Menchaca cites in his manifesto as Silicon Valley’s complicity in surveillance and racial capitalism.<sup>5</sup> Despite these critiques of digital networks, Menchaca incorporates an immersive virtual reality component as the centerpiece to *The Codex Silex Vallis*. By doing so, Menchaca advocates for digital technology and its ability to provide alternative visions and self-reflection. There is an ambivalence to this approach: while critiquing big tech corporations, Menchaca still engages with its products, thus reflecting a tension of polemical tech advocacy and reflective interpretation of the tech-immersed culture that Menchaca is historicizing in this exhibition. Using the concept of a codex, Menchaca beckons users and consumers to question and reflect their prospective futures based on the present.

Will we gain a concerted consciousness, or have we uniformly accepted a fugue state of existence? *The Codex Silex Vallis* is just the beginning of our auspicious redemption.

*Essay copyedited by Emily Fens.*

1 Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Cycles of Time and Meaning in the Mexican Books of Fate* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 2.

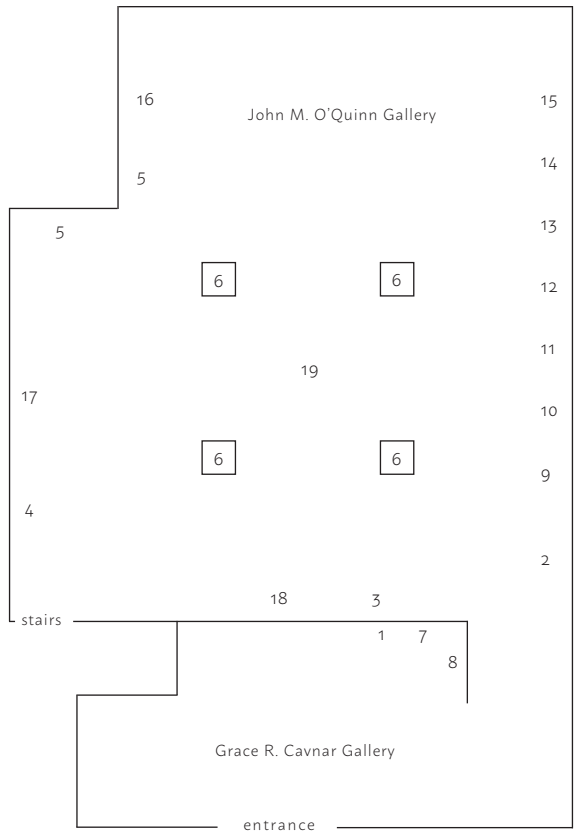
2 Margaret Pugh O’Mara, *The Code: Silicon Valley and the Remaking of America* (New York: Penguin Press 2019), 1.

3 Shoshana Zuboff. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London: Profile Books, 2019), 489.

4 “Michael Menchaca, “Statement on Social Media,” michaelmenchaca.com, accessed August 20, 2019, <https://michaelmenchaca.com/artwork/4596979-Social-Media-Statement.html>

5 Ibid; Karen Hao, “Amazon is the invisible backbone of ICE’s immigration crackdown,” MIT Technology Review, October 22, 2018, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/612335/amazon-is-the-invisible-backbone-behind-ices-immigration-crackdown/>; Alexis C. Madrigal, “Facebook Didn’t Sell Your Data; It Gave It Away,” *The Atlantic*, December 19, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/12/facebooks-failures-and-also-its-problems-leaking-data/578599/>.

Michael Menchaca  
*The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)*  
Exhibition Checklist



Wallpaper

- 01. *La Raza Cosmica*, 2019  
Acrylic screenprint on butcher paper  
Dimensions variable
- 02. *The Great Wall of 'Likes' (South Wall)*, 2019  
Acrylic screenprint on butcher paper  
Dimensions variable
- 03. *Cloud Penalties (West Wall)*, 2019  
Acrylic screenprint on butcher paper  
Dimensions variable
- 04. *Data is the New Oil, (North Wall)*, 2019  
Acrylic screenprint on butcher paper  
Dimensions variable
- 05. *Digital Escapism (smaller North Wall)*, 2019  
Acrylic screenprint on butcher paper  
Dimensions variable
- 06. *Eagle Feather Pattern (4 Columns)*, 2019  
Acrylic screenprint on butcher paper  
Dimensions variable

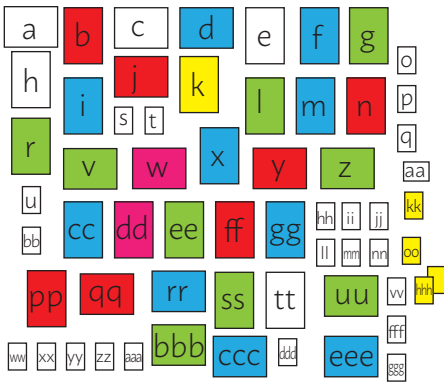
Paintings

- 07. *Bizarre Love Triangle*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
4 x 4'
- 08. *Data is the New Oil*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
20 x 25"
- 09. *The Used (Digital Natives)*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
4 x 4'
- 10. *Enjoy Diversity*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
4 x 4'
- 11. *Digital Chismosx*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
4 x 4'

12. *Guardian of Inequality and the Latinx Chilling Effect*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
4 x 4'
13. *The Right To Be Forgotten*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
4 x 4'
14. *AOC And The Minority Report*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
4 x 4'
15. *Predictions of Raza Behavior*, 2019  
Mixed media on canvas  
30 x 48"
- x. *The Great Transformation*
- y. *Racial capitalism 2*
- z. *Data is the New Oil*
- aa. *TLS Handshake*
- bb. *Ya Dije!*
- cc. *Screen Time*
- dd. *Help!*
- ee. *Personalization is the opposite of Privacy*
- ff. *The Dictatorship of no Alternatives*
- gg. *Mulattx (Afro-Mestizx)*
- hh. *The Few vs. The Many*
- ii. *El Malcreado*
- jj. *Nationalistic Myths*
- kk. *Tony Flags*
- ll. *A Revolution of Guilty Masters*
- mm. *White Revolutionary Rhetoric*
- nn. *Innocence and Exceptionalism (Abraham Lincoln)*
- oo. *Signal Heard Around The World*
- pp. *Help!*
- qq. *Mira Mija*
- rr. *The right to be forgotten*
- ss. *Fraud City*
- tt. *Instasham*
- uu. *The Ultimate Predator*
- vv. *Middle class utopia*
- ww. *Helicopter Sharenting*
- xx. *Tweeting the Ammunition*
- yy. *Internet Athiest*
- zz. *BlueToof*
- aaa. *I just dropped my phone in...*
- bbb. *Raza Capitalism*
- ccc. *Suenos de Milagros*
- ddd. *Not Safe for kids*
- eee. *More Screentime = More Lies*
- fff. *Venus de Wi-Fi*
- ggg. *Smug Thug*
- hhh. *Claudia Patricia Gómez-González*

## Works on Paper

16. *Works on Paper Series*, 2019  
Dimensions variable



- a. *A solution to the third modernity*
- b. *Location Vocation*
- c. *InfinLike*
- d. *Racial capitalism 1*
- e. *General Data Privacy Regulation please*
- f. *Afro-Latinx*
- g. *Colonial genes*
- h. *Live Free or Die*
- i. *Free Will vs. Race*
- j. *Invisible Digital Architecture*
- k. *Bandera or Bust*
- l. *Android*
- m. *Border Patrol Arrests*
- n. *San Antonix*
- o. *Not Today Satan*
- p. *More democratic future*
- q. *Lo Que Me Da La Gana*
- r. *Android Fingers*
- s. *Minority Report (ICE, ICE, maybe)*
- t. *Nuestro Tercera Raiz*
- u. *Good Morning son (Pink Nails)*
- v. *Digital Escapism*
- w. *Historical Amnesia*

## Video

17. *La Raza Cosmica 20XX*, 2019  
Mixed media video installation  
Dimensions variable

## Prints

18. *La Raza Cosmica 20XX*, 2019  
Screen print on paper (#1 - 6)  
Digital print on paper (#7 - 16)  
Dimensions variable

## Virtual Reality

19. *Minority Report*, 2019  
Virtual reality installation  
Dimensions variable



Image courtesy of Michael Menchaca from *The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)* series.

### Exhibition Acknowledgements

Special thanks to The Studios at MASS MoCA, Elida Bocanegra, Kevin Menchaca, Suzy González, Lucy González, Manny González, Lucy González, and Claudia Zapata; Lawndale staff Stephanie Mitchell, Emily Butts, Emily Fens, and Andrea Allen and Advisory Board Members Pete Gershon, Nick Barbee, Andy Campbell, Jamal Cyrus, Natilee Harren, and Autumn Knight and interns Pilar Emiliani, Hannah Grunwald, Sumin Hwang, Courtney Khim, Caroline Sharpless, and Celia Tran; installers Michael Bhichitkul, Juan Castillo, Jonathan Clark, David Cobb, and Angel Lartigue; and volunteers Kabir Abiose, Ana Arbelaez, JJ Baker, Jim Brown, Gustavo Eduardo, Karen Eisele, Sarah Fisher, Michelle Gude, Ana Fajardo Hector, August Lewis, Benji Stiles, and Linda Wu.

### Mission

Lawndale is a multidisciplinary contemporary art center that engages Houston communities with exhibitions and programs that explore the aesthetic, critical, and social issues of our time.

### About

Lawndale believes in the role of art and artists to inspire and inform the world around us. By serving as an intimate gathering place to experience art and ideas, Lawndale seeks to foster connections between communities in Houston and beyond. Lawndale presents a diverse range of artistic practices and perspectives through exhibitions and programs, including lectures, symposia, film screenings, readings, and musical performances.

Through exhibition opportunities, the Artist Studio Program, institutional collaborations, and the engagement of an advisory board comprised of artists, curators, and scholars, Lawndale seeks within its mission to support all artistic and cultural communities of Houston.

### Support

Lawndale's exhibitions and programs are produced with generous support from The Brown Foundation, Inc./Nancy O'Connor; David R. Graham/Felvis Foundation; the John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation; Houston Endowment; Kathrine G. McGovern/The John P. McGovern Foundation; The National Endowment for the Arts; the Texas Commission on the Arts; The City of Houston; and The Wortham Foundation, Inc. Additional support is provided by Benjamin Berg/Berg Hospitality, Illuminations Lighting Design, Lindsey Schechter/Houston Dairymaids, Saint Arnold Brewing Company, and Topo Chico.

*The Codex Silex Vallis (The Silicon Valley Codex)* is supported in part by the National Association of Latino Arts and Cultures, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Southwest Airlines, and the Surdna Foundation through a grant from the NALAC Fund for the Arts Grant Program.

# LAWNDALE

4912 Main Street Houston, TX 77002

[www.lawndaleartcenter.org](http://www.lawndaleartcenter.org)